

Minnesota Principals Academy - Action Learning Project

Wade Mathers

How We Learn – What I Learned

Abstract

Little Falls Community School District is becoming a personalized learning or learner-centered district. We are changing culture verses adding programs, tweaking systems, and taking on initiatives. Every effort will be made as we move forward to use current research and embrace the foundations of learning as we make our cultural shifts.

Vision:

Little Falls Community Middle School will become a personalized learning/learner centered school empowering students in their learning, giving them voice and choice, transforming instruction into something we do *with* rather than *to* learners.

Background/Context:

Little Falls Community Middle School has been a “traditional” or Teacher-Centered vs. Learner-Centered School. We “look” and “feel” like what many would envision for an outstate, rural school. Teacher centered vs. learner centered. This however is starting to shift.

- o LFCMS: Grades 6-8 with an enrollment of 585 students
- o 86% Caucasian
- o 16% Special Education
- o 8% ELL
- o 36% Free and Reduced (Actual numbers likely in the upper 40’s to lower 50’s)
- o Below state average on accountability assessments.

Program Rationale:

“The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again, but expecting different results.” *Einstein??*

We are not meeting the needs of all our students. In reality, we are “failing” some of them. Knowing this, we would be negligent in not addressing it.

What We Will Do/Have Done:

The leadership team has been discussing personalized or learner centered learning for four years. Information has been shared with staff. Site visits have taken place. Research has been studied. Committee’s have been formed. During the 2018-2019 school year, real, concrete, visible action has taken place at the classroom level. Movement has been made towards standards based learning and grading. Classes/standards have been combined and new classes created. “Learner Stations” have been created in classrooms (Conference, individual flex, group flex, seminar), WIN Time has been implemented in the MS utilizing an online Flex Scheduler allowing students to schedule themselves. We are working with James Rickabaugh and Modern Teacher to bring our work to scale. Our evolution in becoming a Personalized Learning or Learner Centered system is not about adding a program, changing a schedule, standards based grading, etc. Our evolution is about changing our culture. Our evolution is about meeting the needs of all.