



## Middle School Learning Pilot Summary

Salem Public Schools

**EQUITY. BELONGING. OPPORTUNITY.**

Over the past two years, our schools have endured unprecedented challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Salem Public Schools has worked tirelessly to support students and our community throughout, and we are proud of that work. We are setting strong foundations in elementary school and working on our high school redesign plan. What we are also seeing is that our middle schoolers need more. Across the district, we are working on ways that rethink learning for our young adults - they deserve learning experiences that build their skills, confidence, character, and passion for who they want to become. This work is taking place across our middle schools. To enable deeper innovation on a faster timeline, we will also **launch a middle school pilot program that creates even more hands-on, student-led, and community-based learning where our students are able to take advantage of all Salem has to offer.**

**WHY:** The need to better serve our young people has never been clearer or more urgent. As the COVID-19 pandemic recedes, parents and teachers alike see students struggling to engage with learning and to establish purposeful connections with each other and with school itself. Across the district, our educators and leaders are digging deep to create the learning experiences our students need. Amid these challenges, we see an opportunity to expand our thinking about what is possible and be creative about where, when and how learning happens. Harvard Graduate School of Education and education design thinker Jal Mehta cites three foundational pillars of redefining school that deeply resonate with us as a district and will guide our middle school work:

### Learners

whose **agency** is respected, whose **diversity** is embraced, whose selves are deeply **known**, whose **joy** is cultivated, and whose holistic **growth** is the paramount concern

### Learning

that is **purposeful, authentic**, and **connected** to the broader human domains of which those learners are part

### Learning Communities

that enable deep **relationships**, cultivate democratic **values** and dispositions, and **model** the kind of **society** and **environment** we want to create.

Mehta, Jal. "Possible futures: Toward a new grammar of schooling." *Phi Delta Kappan*. January 22, 2022. <https://kappanonline.org/possible-futures-new-grammar-of-schooling-mehta/>

**WHAT:** The pilot is an innovative pilot that seeks to accelerate the district's work around the experience of middle school. Beginning in the 2022-2023 school year, Salem Public Schools will offer an opportunity for a small cohort of 8th grade students to co-design this work with us. The pilot will be rooted in a whole-child approach to education. It will respect the diversity and agency of learners; cultivate purposeful, creative and authentic learning experiences; and embrace the whole city as a laboratory for students' learning.

**WHERE:** Consisting of two homerooms (44 students), their core teachers, and support staff, the "learning hub" will increase access to the cultural, historic and natural resources of Salem. Flexible spaces and schedules will support collaborative, immersive and impactful learning experiences. The hub lives inside Collins Middle School, and goes into the community regularly..

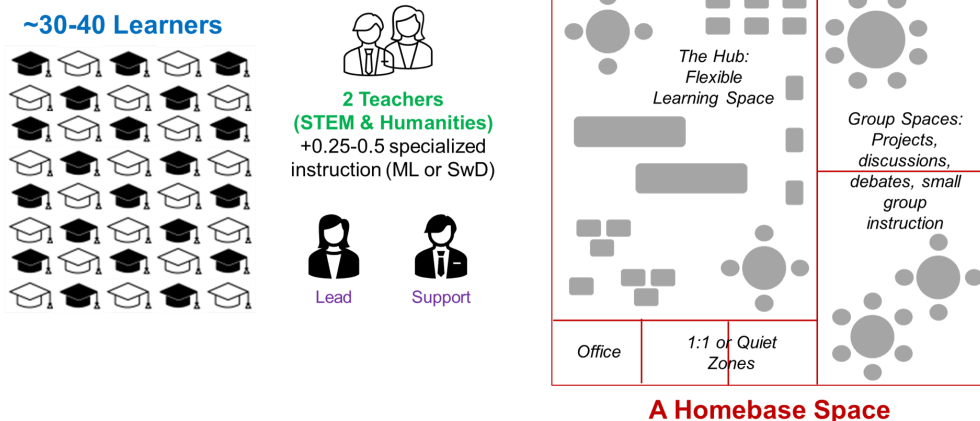
### **HOW:** We envision that students will:

- Work together to create their learning community, supported by social-emotional rituals such as morning circles, self reflection, and other restorative practices
- Engage with Salem sites and institutions through immersive experiences that help students learn from and in the community (e.g. project-based learning, residencies)
- Work collaboratively on interdisciplinary projects that develop their agency and reflect their interests, and receive feedback from authentic audiences
- Engage in service, civic action, or internships
- Access curated technology to support personalized learning

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## Educators involved with the pilot will:

- Engage in professional development about learner-centered, experiential models of education
- Participate in a creative design process to co-develop the pilot with other stakeholders
- Collaborate and share mutual learning with other professionals from the Salem community
- Facilitate a student-driven learning environment as guide, coach, and mentor
- Develop learning explorations that are purposeful, authentic, and connected
- Enhance a city-wide learning ecosystem
- Have the opportunity to shape a model that could influence the direction of middle school in Salem and beyond

## Desired Outcomes for all Salem Middle Schoolers:

- Improve student attendance and decrease chronic absenteeism
- Improve student engagement and sense of belonging, as measured by the student Panorama survey
- Improve student agency and ownership of learning, as measured by the student Panorama survey
- Improve student relationships and conflict resolution, as measured by a decrease in student disciplinary actions
- Improve student growth and overall performance, as measured by the STAR assessment, MCAS, and student work
- Increased family engagement and satisfaction with their students' learning
- Replicable model for learner-driven, community-embedded learning at the middle school level (that can be scaled across the district, region, and state)
- Robust partnerships between Salem Public Schools and leading local institutions

## Frequently Asked Questions:

- The two teaching positions are now posted, and anyone interested are welcome to apply. The roles will follow the STU CBA for CMS; in addition, the role requires opting-in to a significant summer planning stipend and the equivalent of the pilot ILT as part of the role. We are working on the details of the support role.
- All rising 8th grade students and families will have the chance to learn about this opportunity this summer and "opt-in." If more than 30-40 students opt-in, there will be a lottery with seats allocated to represent the full 8th grade student body. If students from Saltonstall opt-in and get a seat in the lottery, they would transfer to CMS.
- The details of the plan will be built with the partner foundation and the team this summer.
- We will be working with Principal Colantouni and the CMS team to figure out how the details will work, including partnering to provide student services & access to the robust programming of middle schools.
- There will be additional and more robust communications coming this summer! We hope that you will occasionally check your Parent Square messages.