

# **SOUTH PORTLAND SCHOOL DISTRICT OVERVIEW OF COMPREHENSIVE EDUCATION PLAN AUGUST 2017**

Through a yearlong strategic planning process involving students, staff and the community, a new vision and beliefs were developed for the South Portland Schools. This vision, which was adopted by the Board of Education in June 2013, serves as the basis for the District Comprehensive Education Plan. The mission of the district, “Enriching Lives through Quality Learning for All” is grounded in the following beliefs:

- ***We ensure that all learners meet or exceed rigorous content standards while developing the skills and habits of mind necessary for future success.***
- ***Our methods of instruction inspire and challenge learners to grow and prepare themselves for a lifetime of educational, career and personal fulfillment.***
- ***Every staff member demonstrates a commitment to creating a fulfilling school experience for all learners.***
- ***The schools and community share a responsibility for creating and maintaining a rich and expansive environment for student learning.***

## ***Mission and Goals:***

To support our work toward the beliefs highlighted above, we continue to reflect on our mission and goals each year. The mission of the South Portland School Department continues to be **“*Enriching lives through quality learning for all.*”** To realize this mission, our goal continues to be Improving Student Achievement. Serving as a cornerstone for our work toward Improving Student Achievement are the principles of Relationships, Relevance and Rigor.

**Relationships** – Strong learning relationships are essential to improving student achievement. We believe students are more likely to make a personal commitment to engage in their own learning when they know that teachers, parents and other students care about them. It is our aim to create a learning environment that supports the core values of respect, compassion, responsibility, honesty, fairness and courage. With a firm grounding in relationships, relevance and rigor are more likely to flourish.

**Relevance** – Relevance refers to learning in which students apply core knowledge, concepts, or skills to real-world situations. Relevant learning is interdisciplinary and contextual and realized through authentic problems, tasks, simulations, service-learning, connecting concepts to current issues and teaching others. With a strong foundation in relationships and relevance, students are ready for rigorous learning

**Rigor** – Academic rigor occurs when students demonstrate a thorough in-depth mastery of challenging tasks through reflective thought, analysis, problem solving, evaluation, or creativity. In identifying rigor it is important to remember it is the quality of the thinking involved in the task, not the quantity.

We have identified four strategies for achieving our goals.

Teaching – We will continue to build capacity to more fully implement our Proficiency-Based Learning system. During the 2017-18 schoolyear we are beginning to integrate 21<sup>st</sup> Century Essential Learning Targets into our instruction. We will continue to focus on identifying and developing “Best Instructional Practices” with all staff. In addition, we are continuing our work on deepening the understanding and implementation of student self-assessment, which research has demonstrated leads to stronger student achievement. Technology has a role in our work, providing us with an opportunity to not only engage students, but also assess and track evidence of student proficiency. Improving staff knowledge and skill continues to be a focus area. As part of our work we continue to refine the Professional Evaluation & Professional Growth (PEPG) system, which directly ties into our Proficiency-Based Learning system. Our goal is to clearly demonstrate the connection between PEPG and Proficiency-Based Learning.

Learning – We continue our work on implementing the content, 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills, and Habits of Work Essential Learning Targets. Teachers are collectively engaged in discussing evidence of understanding and mastery of the targets. As part of this work we are deepening staff and student understanding of rigor levels. Refining our Response to Intervention (RTI) to support student success, while strong at the elementary level remains a work in progress at the middle and high school levels. Designing a process that incorporates the use of a feedback cycle, coupled with additional instruction/support will ensure that we are moving all students towards mastery. Beginning in 2017-18 all students in grade K-11 will be in the Proficiency-Based Learning system. Our learning goals also continue to support the integration of technology with the addition of a 1:1 netbook program for all 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> graders after a successful pilot in some grade four classrooms.

Schools – Our goal is to provide all South Portland faculty and staff with quality professional development that addresses their areas of need. This includes, but is not limited to, increasing understanding of the concept, instruction, and assessment of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills. We have a continued commitment to build the capacity of our teachers as instructional leaders, providing training and support that allows them to build their skills and help lead the district work. Strengthening the district technology infrastructure to support teaching and learning also is key to our using technology to support learning. We continue to focus on the development of Responsive Classroom strategies throughout the elementary schools and Restorative Practices in the Middle Schools and High School.

Community – A focus of our work is to expand opportunities for meaningful connections between students and community members through internships, mentoring, and community integration both inside and outside of the walls of the schools. We will provide consistent on-going communication with the community to highlight school activities, launching a new website to improve communication and access to information. We will work with all stakeholders on a State approved Middle School project

South Portland Schools are guided by a commitment to ongoing improvement and research-based decision making. Through the process of examining data to review our progress toward goals, we will determine cause and effect, examine pertinent research, and make the revisions we need to improve that progress. To ensure a process for school improvement that is thoughtful and sustainable rather than fad-driven and temporary, staff members answer the following questions when planning a change:

- What is the problem that needs to be solved?
- How and by whom will the decision be made regarding whether or not to undertake the change?
- What is the proposed solution?  
(What research supports the proposed solution?)
- What are the anticipated results of the change?
- How will we evaluate the success of the change?
- Do we have the capacity to do the work?
- Who are the stakeholders and how are they involved in the process?

Our four beliefs serve as the framework for the District Comprehensive Education Plan. Throughout the district, grade span school improvement plans guide the day-to-day work toward realizing our goals and ongoing data examination is the process by which we measure our achievement of the goals.

***Belief: We ensure all learners will meet or exceed rigorous content standards while developing the skills and habits of mind necessary for future success.***

The Maine Learning Results/Common Core Standards, the ESSA Every Student Succeeds Act, and the State's requirements to Proficiency Based Graduation standards support this belief. The MEA scores have shown that we continue to struggle in closing the achievement gap for students of low socio-economic status, English Language Learners and Special Education students with IEPs. In order to lessen this achievement gap, we need to provide additional opportunities for at risk students to receive academic support. At the same time, we need to ensure that no student will be required to relearn already mastered material; each student needs to be challenged at her/his highest level. This requires a commitment to provide diverse and equitable opportunities for our more than 3,000 students.

Current evidence of our commitment to equity of opportunity for our students can be found in:

- Sustaining the support of teacher integrators specializing in literacy to build capacity in teachers to help them meet the needs of the continuum of learners.
- Strong support of Early Childhood development through the expansion of Preschool programming for 4-year olds.
- Commitment of the Academically Gifted program to screen all third, fifth, and eighth grade students in order to be sure that all students have the same opportunity for their giftedness to be identified and addressed.
- Provision of a strong and growing level of support for students who are English Language learners.
- Increased opportunities for all high school students to access college classes, the increased number of Advanced Placement classes and in the work being done to raise aspirations through whole class administration of the PSAT and sophomore class college visits.
- Steady movement toward Proficiency Based Graduation Standards.

All of our schools are committed to improving student achievement by engaging our 21<sup>st</sup> century learners in rigorous, relevant learning. To this end, our elementary schools have identified core academic standards in all curricula, as well as personal skill development areas. Developing relationships, student aspirations and community involvement are goal areas for targeting student engagement at the elementary level. Additionally, our elementary schools are providing flexible groupings, which allow students to move in and out of supportive services as needed. Much attention has been given to providing supports for students identified as being “at risk” of not being successful in school. These supports coupled with the identified essential learning targets at each grade level in each content area help to determine individual student needs.

At all levels, instructional support staff are working closely with general education staff to provide the support that enables all students to access our rigorous curriculum. The district is committed to providing professional development to help teachers differentiate curriculum, instruction and assessment in support of this work. Title IIA funds will continue to support this effort. Additionally, the district has targeted resources toward providing additional staff to support teachers and students.

The two Intervention Strategist positions at the middle schools and the Literacy Integrator position at the high school have been aimed toward supporting teachers in developing literacy strategies and differentiating the curriculum to meet multiple student needs. Additionally, the high school and middle schools work closely to create a seamless transition for eighth grade students, to identify at risk students early and to provide programming that will keep them engaged in school. At the same time, South Portland Schools are committed more than ever to

provide a rigorous program, with challenging opportunities for all. A Transition Academy provides additional support for eighth grade students transitioning to ninth grade.

At the elementary schools the three Teachers of the Academically Gifted, the two Library/Media Strategists and the Elementary Literacy Specialist work closely with classroom teachers to differentiate curriculum and instruction to meet the variety of needs present in our classrooms.

Title IA funding through ESSA supports supplemental services for children who need additional instruction because of the gaps in their education or their backgrounds. We continue to focus on K-5 literacy, providing a literacy teacher in each elementary school. In addition to the eleven locally funded ELL (English Language Learners) Teachers and educational technicians, South Portland Schools receive Title III funding to support children for whom English is not the first language spoken at home. That support focuses on professional development of both the ELL teachers and the regular classroom teachers, and provides additional curriculum materials as well.

***Belief: Our methods of instruction will inspire and challenge learners to grow and prepare themselves for a lifetime of educational, career and personal fulfillment.***

Understanding that quality professional development is critical to operationalizing this belief, South Portland is committed to implementing Maine's Quality Standards for Training and Development to include continuous improvement, focus on results, organizational alignment, use of research data, and participation.

The district is committed to a culture of Professional Learning Communities, which research supports as the most successful way to leverage improvements in instruction and student achievement. The Curriculum and Instruction Leadership Team, comprised of teacher leaders and administration, plan the use of professional development times to focus on student work and data in order to improve instruction and student achievement. Because time is always limited, the schedule for elementary specialists is designed to provide common time for grade level teachers in each building. Middle school and high school teachers have a team preparation period in addition to their regular preparation period and the discussions during this time focus on looking at data and determining actions to improve student achievement.

To support teacher learning about best practices in order to enable more students to meet the standards of the Learning Results, the district will also provide courses to enhance teachers' understanding of "Best Instructional Practices" across the content areas. Title IIA supports professional development in the areas of reading across the content areas, information literacy and math.

***Belief: Every staff member must demonstrate a commitment to creating a fulfilling school experience for all learners.***

Throughout the district relationships are seen as the cornerstone for engagement, and grow out of an excitement for learning and working together. To support these relationships, staff and students are engaged in a variety of structures, approaches and programs for developing classroom cultures such as Responsive Classroom, Restorative Practices, KieveWavus Leadership School, Connections and the SPSHS Honor Code.

Additionally the professional evaluation and professional growth (PEPG) system is grounded in the belief that professional growth is continuous. Therefore, all staff continually reflect on their craft and refines their practices to positively impact student achievement. Throughout this process all staff members are engaged in a variety of learning activities that support professional growth and effectiveness.

***Belief: The schools and the community share a responsibility for creating and maintaining a rich and expansive environment for student learning.***

The Board appointed Middle School Building Committee to develop a plan for the renovation/consolidation of our two middle schools.

School Board policies, such as class size, and Personnel Policy Goals, reflect the community's commitment to quality education. The South Portland Teacher's Association Collective Bargaining Agreement offers financial incentives for professional staff who continue their education, and who remain in the system. Lifelong learning is also encouraged through course reimbursement and in-district courses offered by South Portland Schools' staff.

The school district's volunteer coordinator oversees a large volunteer program with more than 800 volunteers K-12. The City's librarians work closely with the school district's library coordinator to plan joint activities for the benefit of students, and parents at the elementary schools provide an array of wonderful enrichment opportunities for students.

As the community embraces its role in providing opportunities for learning outside the walls of our schools, our students engage in meaningful opportunities to shape the future of their community through internships, mentoring programs and real world application of learning.

***Final Words***

Our students live in a world that is constantly changing; therefore we are preparing them for a future we cannot even imagine. As we look toward this future, the Comprehensive Education Plan guides school improvement efforts throughout the district. Relationships, Relevance and Rigor are the cornerstones of improving student learning and "Enriching Lives Through Quality Learning for All."