

**Meany Middle School
ALO Program Description
2007-2008**

Narrative:

The Meany Middle School Community has been working to insure that the teaching and learning that goes on in this building is rigorous and meets the needs of each child. The community has also stated loudly and clearly that in this diverse small school setting it would negatively impact the program to design an exclusive, (pull out) Advanced Learning Opportunity model.

One of the major challenges at Meany is the diversity of students in each classroom: economic, ethnic, cultural, instructional level, learning style, and social/emotional development (Table 1.). It is a major challenge for the classroom teacher.

To that end we asked ourselves the essential question: How do we create a challenging inclusive program that raises the level of rigor and creates a learning environment in which each student moves towards a full realization of his/her potential?

Table 1.	N (%)	Meany Middle School Data as of Oct., 2006	
Total Students	497		
<i>Ethnicity</i>		<i>Cultures</i>	
Native American	13 (3%)	Native American, Alaska Native	
African American	276 (56%)	African American, Somali, Ethiopian	
Latino	67 (13%)	Mexican, Central & South American	
Asian	73 (15%)	Chinese, Korean, Mien, Hmong, Japanese, Samoan, Filipino, East Indian, Vietnamese, Cambodian, Laotian	
White	68 (14%)	Western & Northern European Decent, Eastern European, Russian	
Free & Reduced Lunch	325 (65%)	Not Living with Both Parents	248 (60%)
Primary Home Language Other than English	62 (12%)	Special Education	75 (15%)
Transfers In/Out Student Turnover	26.9%		

At Instructional Council meetings at Meany (I.C. is made up of administration, department heads, & support staff) we continue to keep rigor at the forefront of our work.

In *Teaching with the Brain in Mind* it is stated, “The myth for many years was that only certain gifted and talented students would most benefit from enrichment

programs. Nothing could be further from the truth. The human brain is born with well over a trillion connections. Many new synapses are created with early sensory development, but any excess synapses are later shed. Our brain has a ‘baseline’ of neural connectivity, and enrichment adds to it.

We are designing enriching curriculum in every class understanding that a rigorous curriculum must have one or more of the following characteristics:

- ❖ Complexity: The content is composed of interacting and overlapping ideas.
- ❖ Provocativeness: Engaging students in identifying problems, inquiry and taking a position.
- ❖ Ambiguity: Students are asked to examine content with multiple meanings and sort into patterns of significance.
- ❖ Emotion: Relating to the world the student lives in and challenging their sense of how the world works.

“Choices for Excellence” *

Again this year we have asked each department to create several CFE modules to be used throughout the year and to include the modules in the curriculum maps. In department meetings and study groups teachers will bring student work to be used to assess and analyze rigor. We have agreed upon the following models as appropriate for use this initial year.

Model One: The Extension Model: As its name implies it is used as an extension of a paper or project assigned to all students. The expectation is that students go deeper and show higher levels of skill and understanding.

Model Two: The Separate Project Model: This is what many feel is the “traditional” extra work model. A student will select to complete this project in addition to what is required. A module created using this strategy should be aligned with the regular curriculum

Model Three: The Unit Component: This option adds a component to an existing unit of work. It is designed to challenge students to go deeper into a unit and/or demonstrate a higher level of skill. This might include adding a research component to further explore a book chosen in a literature circle and eliminating another requirement.

* With permission from Madison Middle school, we looked at their “Challenge Program” material and made modifications it to meet our needs.

Regardless of the model chosen each module must meet the criteria for rigorous engagement by answering the following questions:

- ❖ How does the activity involve the students in posing questions, forming and testing hypotheses, and using the evidence to support their findings/conclusions?
- ❖ How does the activity involve the students in posing questions, forming and testing hypotheses, and using evidence to support their findings/conclusions?
- ❖ How does the activity engage students in acquiring and organizing information around concepts central to the topic?
- ❖ How does the activity require students to concern themselves with pressing or problematic issues and use creative thinking to generate solutions?
- ❖ How does the activity provide students with opportunities to speak write and elaborated on what they have learned?

Choices for Excellence Grading

1. An “H” (Honor) designation is available to students who are receiving an “A: in the regular course work.
 - To receive an “H” the student must have successfully completed the majority of the CFE activities for that class: 2 out of 3, or 3 out of 4, etc. This means that if the class has one CFE activity per quarter, a student would have to complete both to receive and “H” for the semester.
 - A minimum of one challenge project per quarter is to be offered in each class.

2. Any student earning a ‘B’, ‘C’, ‘D’, or ‘E’ in the regular course work, may receive a higher grade, up to one grade (i.e. ‘D’ becomes a ‘C’, but not a ‘B’), if that student has successfully completed the majority of the challenge work for the class.
 - The same rules for meeting the majority of CFE assignments apply.
 - Changing a grade is at the teacher’s discretion
 - Students and teachers understand that CFE is not extra credit.

Professional Development

In her forward to *How to Differentiate Instruction in Mixed Ability Classrooms*, Carol Ann Tomlinson describes the promise of differentiation: “Differentiation suggests it is feasible to develop classrooms where realities of student variance can be addressed along with curricular realities. The idea is compelling. It challenges us to draw on our best knowledge of teaching and learning. It suggests that there is room for both equity and excellence in our classrooms.”

In order to study the topic: differentiated instruction and other teaching and learning issues next year, the whole faculty study group process for staff development has

been proposed as a change and inquiry model. It has been demonstrated to yield student academic gains.

We have written a Comprehensive School Reform grant and proposed starting the training in August and begin the study groups in early October. We have planned for twelve two hour “Late Arrival Days” in order to accommodate these groups. This will facilitate the exploration of best practices through the examination of student work.

Study Groups:

Whole Faculty Study Groups are a collaborative process or “professional learning community” for staff development to inform classroom practice for the benefit of students. Research by Susan Rosenholtz (1989), reported in her book *Teachers’ Workplace: the Social Organization of Schools*, included school and classroom observations; interviews with teachers, principals, superintendents, board members, and parents; data collection from teacher surveys; and analysis of student achievement. She determined schools could fall into one of two categories: “moving” (learning enriched environment for both teachers and students) and “stuck” (learning poor environment for both teachers and students). In a learning enriched environment, 80% of the teachers indicated that “their learning is cumulative and that learning to teach is a lifelong pursuit” while only 17% of the teachers in the learning poor environment indicated a sustained view of learning for themselves. (Rosenholtz, 1989) When the teaching staff is engaged in whole faculty study groups, the deep inquiry leading to action research, collaborative planning, and peer coaching leads to the “learning enriched environment” that categorizes a school community as “moving.” The Center for Research on the Context of Secondary School Teaching at Stanford found “that teachers’ participation in a “professional community” had a powerful effect on how successfully they were able to adapt their instructional strategies to meet students’ needs.” (Bradley, 1993) From the work of McLaughlin and Talbert, factors in schools associated with student achievement are summarized in Table 2: (as cited in Bradley, 1993)

Table 2.

High Student Achievement	Low Student Achievement
High levels of collegiality	Low levels of collegiality
High levels of innovation	High norms of privacy (no sharing of resources or materials)
High levels of opportunity for adult learning	No support or opportunity for adult learning
Subject matter seen as dynamic	Subject matter seen as static (canons were not to be challenged)
Commitment to success for all students, publicly declared	Large number of students fail
High expectations for all students	Low expectations for students
High degree of commitment to the school as a whole	Low commitment to the school workplace
More positive views of students	More negative view of students

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