



MID-MICHIGAN LEADERSHIP
ACADEMY

EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM REVIEW
September 23-24, 2008

PURPOSE OF THE EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM REVIEW

On September 23-24, 2008, The Center for Charter Schools (“Center”) conducted an Educational Program Review (“EPR”) at Mid-Michigan Leadership Academy (“Academy”). The Review Team consisted of Mark Weinberg, Director for the Office of Performance & Accountability, Sandra Hryczyk, Team Leader and Office of Performance & Accountability Analyst, Elizabeth Herron-Ruff, Office of Performance & Accountability Analyst, and Tom Kreiner, Special Consultant. A complete biography of team members can be found at the end of this report.

The purpose of the EPR is to examine the Educational Program as presented and documented in the Academy’s Charter Contract. The Charter Contract, issued by the Central Michigan University Board of Trustees and adopted by the Academy’s Board, specifies the governance, financial and academic features of the Academy and defines the accountability and oversight responsibilities of The Center.

The Educational Program section of the Charter Contract reflects the Academy’s mission statement, educational beliefs, and educational philosophy. It specifically outlines the instructional methods, to be used in implementing the Academy’s curriculum, that enable the school to achieve its educational goals. It is not the Academy’s curriculum. In preparation for the visit, the EPR Team reviewed the Academy’s progress toward achieving its educational goals reviewing norm referenced assessment data and Michigan Educational Assessment Program (“MEAP”) data. The written curriculum was also reviewed by the EPR Team prior to the on-site visit. In the process of preparing for the review, components of the Educational Program were identified and during the course of the review, verification of implementation was sought. The Review Team members visited all core subject area classrooms and interviewed teachers and administrators to collect evidence supporting the implementation levels of the Educational Program. At the conclusion of the visit, the Review Team Leader presented a brief verbal report to the School Administrator on the findings of the visit. This document serves as a detailed final report for the Academy.

The EPR report that follows describes the implementation levels of the written, taught, and tested curriculum through instructional strategies documented in the Educational Program as observed by the Review Team on the date of the visit. It is assumed that this report, although it is a snapshot in time, is generally reflective of the extent to which the Educational Program has been implemented at the Academy.

IMPLEMENTATION OF EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM

The Review Team conducted a number of planning meetings prior to the visit to determine which observable components of the Educational Program and the Academy’s newly published program brochure would be selected. The Review Team identified nine key observable components from Schedule 7-c of the Charter Contract. These components are considered by the Review Team to be essential to the successful implementation of the program as described. The key components are identified below, followed by narrative that indicates areas of consistent implementation, areas that are partially implemented, and areas lacking evidence of implementation.

1. The Educational Program states: *“The Mid-Michigan Leadership Academy’s educational program is focused on the four basic core curriculum areas with the integration of technology, health and physical education, art, music, Spanish, and character development in a safe and nurturing learning environment.”*

September 2008 Finding: Consistently Implemented

The Center's Feedback: From classroom observations and staff interviews the Review Team determined the Academy does focus on the core content areas. The Academy, by design, reserves the mornings for English Language Arts ("ELA") and mathematics instruction. All staff members of the Academy have been provided with a copy of Robert Marzano's *Classroom Instruction That Works*. Using the text as a guide, the Academy has developed pacing guides for ELA and math that indicate alignment with strategies discussed by Marzano. Furthermore, the Academy is actively engaged in the Curriculum Review and Development process. Presently, the Academy, through professional development, is reexamining its science curriculum to align to the recently released science grade level content expectations. The Academy has established leadership teams aligned with Michigan's School Improvement strands to effectively evaluate curriculum and data affecting student achievement. During the on-site visit, the Academy was completing the Performance Series Testing window. As results were becoming available, the Academy administration was beginning to interpret their data. Interpretation of the data by the administration as well as staff members is one way the Academy is monitoring student progress in the core content areas of ELA and math.

The Academy provides a safe and nurturing learning environment. Overall the school culture and climate are very positive. Academy students and staff members begin the day by attending a school wide morning assembly. During the assembly, announcements are made and character traits are discussed. Character traits are evident in the classroom environment as all staff members model and students strive to achieve the Academy's Values.

The Review Team found this component of the Educational Program to be consistently implemented.

<p>Recommendation: The Center commends the Academy on delivering an academic program which is focused on instruction of core content areas.</p>
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2. The Educational Program states: *"The Mid-Michigan Leadership Academy uses varied instructional strategies (including an emphasis on direct instruction, collaborative groups, thematic and project-based instruction) with the understanding that every lesson taught has a linkage to the real world."*

September 2008 Finding: Partially Implemented

The Center's Feedback:

At this juncture in the school year, the Review Team primarily observed the instructional strategies of whole group or direct instruction. Collaborative groups were only observed in the early elementary grades. Through classroom observations, the Review Team found that teachers did not employ project-based learning strategies during instructional time nor were examples provided in lesson plans. Project-based learning as a methodology is a comprehensive instructional approach that engages students in sustained, cooperative investigation. At the time of the visit, the Academy was engaged in MEAP review and preparation in which project-based learning strategies were not established.

The Review Team did observe that the physical organization of the classrooms would lend itself to multiple instructional strategies such as differentiated learning. Additionally, observations illustrated a transition of instructional materials from Kindergarten to eighth grade. In the lower

elementary, instructional resources were supported more with hands-on materials. Conversely, at the middle school level, instructional resources tended to be textbook derived. The Review Team did not observe real world application in the core areas. However, through discussions with staff and students the Review Team was informed that real world applications are taught through activities outside the core curriculum, specifically within the MicroSociety program. Evidence was demonstrated through photographs and examples of past activities.

The Review Team found this component of the Educational Program to be partially implemented.

Recommendation: The Center recommends continued sustained professional development for teachers in the area of instructional strategies. In particular, the Center recommends that the Academy define project based learning and thematic instruction in terms of how this strategy will be implemented in the classroom. Further, the Center recommends the Academy revisit the Educational Program - particularly the concept of project-based learning. To incorporate a school wide project-based learning environment, the Academy is encouraged to participate in strategic planning that will outline specific strategies and teaching methodologies, including higher order thinking skills.

3. The Educational Program states: *“Through group work and hands-on application, individual students develop deeper understandings of the core curriculum.”*

September 2008 Finding: Partially Implemented.

The Center’s Feedback: The Review Team found the instructional strategies of group work and hands-on applications used more commonly in the early elementary grades. On several occasions, the Review Team observed early elementary classrooms making use of small groups and hands-on activities to enhance the lesson. For example, a small group activity observed engaged students in learning vocabulary words. Students were paired with partners and chalkboards. The students took turns quizzing each other and it was noted that students were provided with different words to study, thus modifications, depending upon their ability, were made. In the primary grades, the Review Team observed a range of activities from the simplicity of students snapping their fingers in rhythmic patterns to the use of Saxon math materials. During the on-site visit, the Review Team did not find use of group work and hands-on applications evident in the delivery of instruction to middle school students. The main element of instructional delivery to middle school students appeared to be textbook based.

The Review Team found this component of the Educational Program to be partially implemented.

Recommendation: The Center recommends that the Academy engage in professional development activities that focus on the development of diverse instructional methods including group work and hands-on applications.

4. The Educational Program states: *“It is the expressed intention of the Mid-Michigan Leadership Academy that each instructor develops assessment tools to identify the multiple learning styles within each classroom, and then instructional strategies which are tailored to those styles.”*

September 2008 Finding: Partially Implemented

The Center's Feedback: Teacher created assessment tools, both formative and authentic, were observed in some classes, but not all. In regards to formative assessments, the Review Team found evidence in the early elementary grades as instructors provided constant feedback as they monitored student progress. In particular, staff members created and utilized assessments tailored to support student mastery in the acquisition of sight words or Dolch words. Additionally, evidence of running records and writing samples demonstrated student progress to determine challenging areas that merit individualized student instructional support.

Similarly, the Review Team was able to observe evidence of authentic assessment. Authentic assessment is the ability to evaluate students' strengths in "real world" contexts. Through observations and staff and student interviews, the Review Team determined the Academy's MicroSociety program to fully engage students in applying their skills to authentic tasks and projects. The MicroSociety program promotes students' analytical skills, the integration and connection of real world concepts, and working individually as well as collaboratively. However, the Review Team did notice through classroom observations and interviews, that several staff members use only what the textbook provides for assessments. In a few classes, the Review Team did not find any evidence to support the use of tailored instructional and assessment strategies to meet the multiple learning styles of the students within the classroom.

The Review Team found this component of the Educational Program to be partially implemented.

Recommendation: The Center recommends the Academy engage in professional development with a focus on authentic and formative assessments.

5. The Educational Program states: *"The Academy has embraced the MicroSociety comprehensive school reform model and will have successfully implemented that program across all grades when the comprehensive school reform grant expires at the end of the 2005-2006 school year."*
6. The Educational Program states: *"The Mid-Michigan Leadership Academy's MicroSociety program, along with the character development strains within the Michigan Model, both contribute significantly to the development of student leaders."*

September 2008 Finding: Consistently Implemented

The Center's Feedback: The Review Team found evidence to support these components of the Educational Program. The Academy's staff, students, and parents have embraced the opportunities presented by MicroSociety. The Academy staff is actively engaged in the preparation of "Micro" lessons and on the facilitation and oversight of the program. The Review Team understands the purpose of the program is for students to create an environment that mirrors the real world. Through discussions with Academy staff and students, the Review Team ascertained that students are being provided with lessons that generate creative, independent, and motivated learners. By establishing "Very Hype City", students plan, prepare, produce, and respond to real world applications.

In conversations with students who attend the Academy, it was evident they find the program beneficial. The students expressed that they each have a participatory role in "Very Hype City". The

students communicated to the Review Team, that they prepare resumes, apply for jobs, and are interviewed for the position they seek. In addition to the real world connection of seeking employment, the citizens of “Very Hype City” take part in creating a governmental structure. In keeping attuned to real world government, the students will actively campaign and vote for elected offices. Additionally, the Peace Keepers will be on hand to carry out and enforce the rules of the community. As with the American system of government, the students are able to mediate their disputes through the judicial process. Academy students further shared that the MicroSociety assists in developing entrepreneurial skills. The entrepreneurs produce goods and services and market to potential customers. The buying and selling of goods and services promotes the concept of a banking system and an economy that guides and supports students in their understanding of fiscal responsibility.

The Academy has successfully executed the MicroSociety program across all grades. The Academy further supports the MicroSociety by designating a staff position dedicated to the oversight of the program. By incorporating the program school-wide, the Academy is engaging students to demonstrate higher order thinking skills. The acquisition of these skills will lead to strong student leaders.

The Review Team found this component of the Education Program to be consistently implemented.

Commendation: The Center commends the Academy on its pursuit of the MicroSociety program and the resources it has dedicated to it. Furthermore, the Center supports the Academy in the continuation of the program and recognizes the tremendous impact of rigor and relevance the MicroSociety program brings to Academy students when making connections to the real world.

7. The Educational Program states: *“The Mid-Michigan Leadership Academy uses a variety of assessment tools to measure the success of our school and our students....Through an analysis of those results, and the results of teacher-derived assessments, the individual teachers can develop individual learning plans for each student.”*

September 2008 Finding: Partially Implemented

The Center’s Feedback: The Review Team found evidence to support certain aspects of this component. It is evident the Academy utilizes results from its standardized assessments such as the MEAP and Performance Series Test (“PST”) to measure student success. During the on-site visit, teachers and administrators discussed the usefulness of the Skills Connection tool. Many staff members indicated that they use the targeted objectives provided by the site to assist in preparing lessons for struggling students. In addition to the MEAP and PST, the Academy has implemented Study Island, a web-based prep tool for the state assessment.

The Review Team observed teacher-derived assessments in the early elementary classroom settings but not in the upper grades. From the perspective of the Review Team, it is apparent that the assessments utilized in the upper grades are textbook generated or traditional in nature as opposed to teacher created or authentic assessments.

The Review Team found this component of the Educational Program to be partially implemented.

Recommendation: The Center recommends the Academy research, investigate, and pursue resources and professional development opportunities on the subject of authentic assessment.

8. The Educational Program states: *“These individual learning plans include those strengths and weaknesses as well as individual strategies designed to exploit the strengths and address the weaknesses. These plans are completed and implemented in coordination with parents so that learning is focused and reinforced at home and at school.”*

September 2008 Finding: Consistently Implemented

The Center’s Feedback: The Academy has established Individualized Learning Plans (“ILP”) for its students. Teachers review and analyze student assessment results to establish goals. Included within each plan are the areas identified for student focus or concentration accompanied with an action plan that will provide guidance for student success.

Initially, goals are created during the first quarter with an effort to assess student achievement in each core content area. The teacher addresses the goals they have created for the student with parents during parent-teacher conferences. At the parent-teacher conferences, parents are asked to support and reinforce the established goals at home.

The Academy communicates the progress of the plans on the report cards under the section heading ILP. Thus, progress toward goal attainment is monitored quarterly and upon mastery new goals are created. Additionally, the plans are placed in the student’s CA60 file where teachers can monitor and track progress from year to year.

The Review Team found this component of the Educational Program to be consistently implemented; however, due to the time of year, the Review Team was unable to observe the effectiveness of the plans and the varying instructional strategies implemented to address student strengths and weaknesses.

9. The Educational Program states: *“Through fundraising efforts and through informational newsletters and programs, the Parent Advisory Council contributes to the educational benefit of the students, but also creates a greater sense of unity of purpose for our families.”*

September 2008 Finding: Partially Implemented

The Center’s Feedback:

The Academy provides parents with information and events via classroom and school newsletters. Furthermore, parents may visit the Academy’s website (<http://www.michlead.org>) to learn more about the school. On the website, parents will find useful information including the school calendar, staff member emails, student resources, information on MicroSociety, the school improvement plan, the Academy’s School Performance Report, and the Academy’s Board calendar of meetings and minutes.

During the on-site visit, the Review Team observed two parent volunteers assisting in the library.

The parents indicated that they found the Academy to offer a safe learning environment with smaller class sizes and teachers who provided more individualized attention to their students. The parents indicated that the academics were more rigorous than their child's previous school and MicroSociety is a great marketing tool for the school because "no one else around here is doing that."

The parents did share that the Parent Advisory Council will be dissolving. Parental support and attendance at the meetings is dwindling. As a result of the disbandment of the Parent Advisory Council, Academy administration did share that it will be pursuing other avenues for parent involvement. As research indicates, school and community relations are a strong indicator of student success. As is the case with many schools across the nation, parent involvement continues to be a challenge.

With the disbandment of the Parent Advisory Council, the Review Team finds the Academy has partially implemented this component of the Educational Program.

Recommendation: The Center recommends the Academy continue to maintain its website and to seek parent and community partnerships by including a parent/teacher forum on its website. The Center further encourages the Academy to develop different ways to involve parents.

EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM REVIEW FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Findings

An Educational Program component is rated as “**consistently implemented**” where the preponderance of evidence found through document review, observation, and interviews support the Educational Program component. A component rated as consistently implemented may still be followed by a recommendation.

An Educational Program component is rated as “**partially implemented**” where evidence exists to substantiate that the Academy is consciously attempting to implement the component. A component that is partially implemented will generally receive a recommendation.

An Educational Program component is rated as “**lacking evidence of implementation**” where the Review Team, through document review, observation, and interviews found no evidence that the Academy was attempting to implement the component.

Educational Program Review Recommendations

In summary, the EPR Review Team found that the Educational Program as described in the Charter Contract has been partially implemented. Based upon classroom observations and staff interviews, the Center has made several recommendations.

The Center strongly encourages the Academy to allocate resources to develop the following components of the Educational Program:

- Plan sustained professional development opportunities that emphasize instructional strategies and learning styles
- Define the role of project-based learning
- Engage in lessons that promote hands-on or group work
- Investigate ways to promote authentic assessment across all grades and subjects
- Research methods to involve parents

The Center commends the Academy on the allocation of resources and the continuation of the following components of the Educational Program:

- Establishing a curriculum that is focused on the core content areas
- Promoting and providing real world connections through the MicroSociety program
- Investing in its stakeholders with the creation of Leadership Teams
- Implementing ILPs
- Establishing a positive school culture
- Providing learning environments that are safe and clean

The Academy is encouraged to review all recommendations and design strategies that are best practice and research-based with alignment to a written, taught, and tested curriculum.

EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM REVIEW TEAM

Mr. Mark J. Weinberg

Director for Office of Academic and Performance Accountability

Mr. Mark Weinberg is responsible for directing the Center's functions associated with academic oversight, support and performance evaluation.

Prior to joining the Center in 2002, Mark served as the Director of the International Academy of Flint from its founding in 1999. Before being transferred to Flint, Michigan, Mark was the High School Principal at the Internationale Schule Frankfurt in Frankfurt, Germany. Mark also has experience teaching in Switzerland and Canada. Mark holds bachelors' degrees from the University of Western Ontario and Brock University and a master's degree in educational administration from Central Michigan University. Mark is also a nationally certified curriculum auditor.

Ms. Sandra Hryczyk

Contract Analyst for Office of Academic and Performance Accountability

Ms. Hryczyk serves as the primary oversight contact for a portfolio of schools chartered by Central Michigan University. In this capacity, she is responsible for the review and assessment of all charter school documentation, ensuring compliance with Contract reporting requirements and applicable law, in the areas of assessment, educational programs and goal setting, curriculum design and implementation, and charter school improvement planning. With a special emphasis in the area of education, Sandra is responsible for maintaining familiarity with charter school issues, plans and challenges and recommending actions, as appropriate on behalf of the Center.

Sandy earned her Bachelor of Science degree from Michigan State University and her Master of Arts degree from Eastern Michigan University. She is a K-12 certified teacher who has worked as a middle school teacher. For three years prior to joining Central Michigan University, Sandy was involved with curriculum development and oversaw assessment administration, including the MEAP and Scantron's PST, at West Village Academy, Dearborn, MI.

Ms. Elizabeth A. Herron-Ruff

Contract Analyst--Office of Academic Performance and Accountability

Ms. Herron-Ruff serves as the primary oversight contact for a portfolio of schools chartered by Central Michigan University. In this capacity, she is responsible for the review and assessment of all charter school documentation, ensuring compliance with contract reporting requirements and applicable law, in the areas of assessment, educational programs and goal setting, curriculum design and implementation, and academy improvement planning. With a special emphasis in the area of education, Elizabeth is responsible for maintaining familiarity with charter school issues, plans and challenges and recommending actions, as appropriate on behalf of the Center.

Prior to joining the Center in 2006, Elizabeth served as interim administrator and master teacher at Life Skills Centers of Pontiac, a technology-based charter school serving at-risk high school students. Elizabeth also worked for Kuspuk School District, Crooked Creek, Alaska. Elizabeth holds bachelors' degrees from the University of Michigan and William Tyndale College and a master's degree in education with an emphasis on educational technology from the University of Alaska, Southeast. Elizabeth is also a certified coach with the Alliance for Building Capacity in Schools ("ABCS") Coaching Institute as well as an ARCTIC Ambassador (Alaska Reform in the Classroom with Technology Integration and Collaboration), University of Alaska, Southeast.

Mr. Thomas Kreiner
Special Assistant

Mr. Kreiner serves as the contact for High School Development for schools chartered by CMU. Working in the Office of Academic Accountability, Tom is responsible for overseeing the development of new charter high schools, and new initiatives in existing charter high schools. Through his work at the Center, Tom is responsible for researching new developments in secondary education including instructional delivery.

Tom holds a Bachelor of Science degree from Central Michigan University. Prior to joining The Center, he was the secondary principal at West Michigan Academy of Environmental Science, the 2006 MAPSA Charter School of the Year. Tom also has over 14 years teaching high school mathematics in the public school system.