



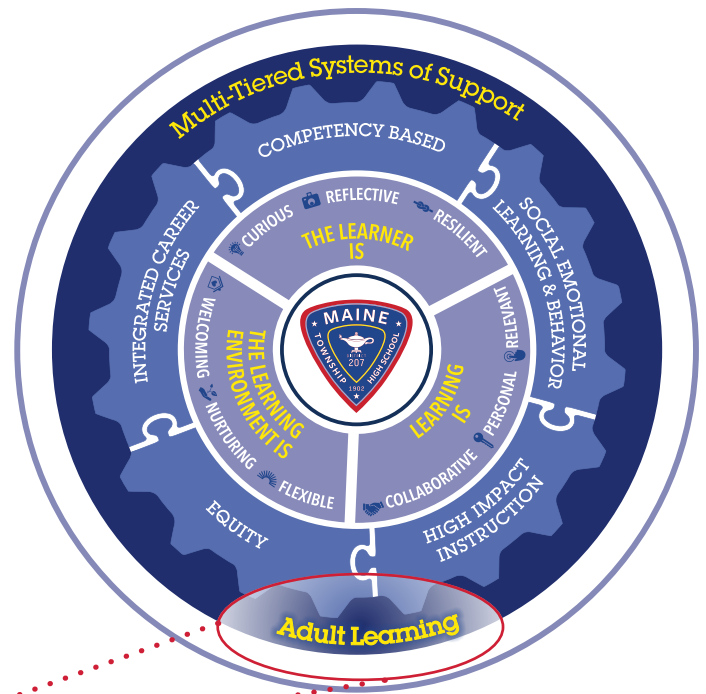
FALL 2022

A Systems Approach to Enhanced Learning

District 207 recently welcomed administrators from across the country and the Virgin Islands to showcase the innovative practices being utilized at Maine East, Maine South, Maine West and Frost Academy.

The educators were at the schools as part of the School Superintendents Association’s Innovative Districts Empowering All Learners (IDEAL) Cohort which aims to foster school leaders to collaboratively research, inspire, empower and amplify educators’ work to create student-centered, future learning, equity focused education.

District 207 shared many of its innovative approaches during the three-day event that are outlined in the pages of this newsletter. That work in the school district is interconnected and each part of the system’s wheel is integrated and connected to each other to elevate service to students.



Our Foundation: Adult Learning

To be a true learning community, the teachers have to practice and model the learning. Each District 207 teacher has a personalized annual instructional coaching plan and works with a peer coach. Each new teacher is part of a four-year cohort and is trained in the use of high impact strategies designed to elevate student performance. There are five instructional coaches in each school. By design, coaches coach half time, and teach half time, which means they are practicing the skills and dispositions that the district values. These are also the skills the teacher evaluations are based upon.



A key design element of the district’s adult learning model is to create leadership opportunities for all teachers. Specific pedagogy area trainers (assessment literacy, cooperative learning, academic vocabulary) are all led by teachers, and coaching plans include opportunities for teachers to coach student teachers, providing a leadership opportunity that greatly enhances the practice of not only the teacher being coached, but also the teacher doing the coaching. District 207 is in its 9th year of an “All-In” coaching model, and it has been the most powerful force to improve the culture as a learning organization.

Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS)

District 207 is continuously working to build out these systems of support for students. Overall, MTSS involves using data to target student needs and monitor outcomes, identifying proactive and responsive practices (strategies, instructional routines, interventions) to address needs and developing systems to support good implementation of those practices.

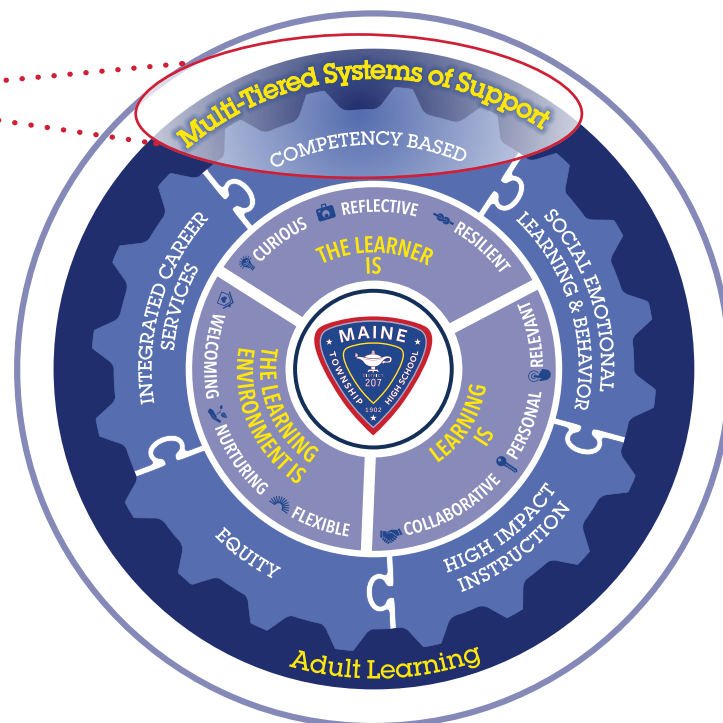
This starts with proactive Tier 1 procedures and strategies, such as establishing clear expectations for behavior, teaching those behaviors consistently by using common language and implementing research based instructional routines with students.

This approach utilizes multiple assessments, surveys and referral systems to screen for students who may need more support in specific areas, such as reading skills, behavioral skills and mental health needs. The aim is to support students with the right group and/or individual support to match their particular set of needs. A second and/or third level of support can be added in addition to Tier 1 strategies and core curricular experiences. For example, students in need of an intervention to boost their reading skills are assigned support in an elective course or study period, in addition to their typical English class.

District 207 also runs a daily “Early Warning” system to provide a responsive system to meet the academic, social, emotional and/or behavioral needs of individual students in real time. Grades are monitored, as well as attendance and behavioral patterns, to identify students who may need Tier 2 or Tier 3 support. In addition, there is a referral system used by staff in order to alert school officials of concerns they discover from students or parents that may not have been found through our screening data.

High Impact Instruction

Over the course of many years, researchers have identified teaching strategies that yield the highest impact in student learning gains. Therefore, those



areas are the focus for the district. That emphasis starts during the onboarding process for teachers, each of whom is part of a four-year cohort designed to provide a foundation in evidence-based teaching strategies.

The peer-led trainings are embedded in the staff’s work day, which make internal district trainings easily accessible to teachers. The topics include:

- High impact instructional routines such as Cooperative Learning to increase student engagement and collaboration
- Academic Literacy to increase student academic vocabulary knowledge and engage more deeply with texts
- Differentiated Instruction to help teachers tailor their courses to a wide range of learning needs
- School-wide literacy routines help all students develop more independence with tackling challenging texts

Equity

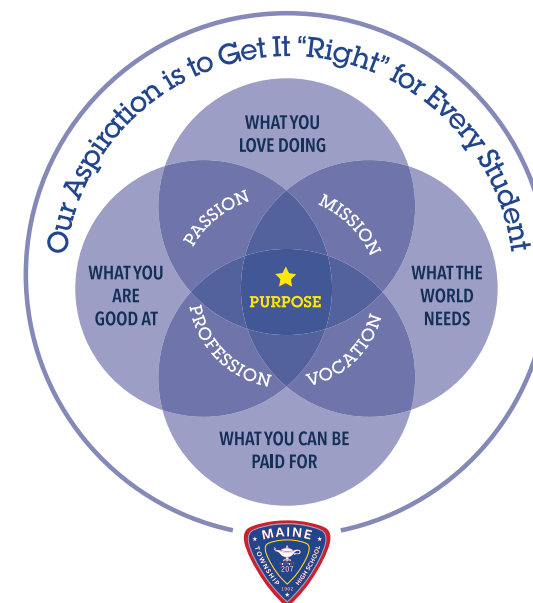
The district’s equity statement is central to how the schools identify and organize the equity work. It reads as follows:

We recognize, embrace and defend the identities, abilities and voices of our diverse community. We value these multiple and unique identities, abilities and voices as assets. We commit to an equitable and inclusive learning environment.

The district equity team is tasked with identifying and meeting needs to ensure the work remains focused on the goals of this statement. The team plans adult learning opportunities for staff, makes recommendations on how to better meet the needs of families and examines data to ensure that the focus remains on closing gaps that may exist in that data. Each school in the district has a building equity team and those teams develop equity focused lessons that are completed with students in Advisory (a weekly meeting of students with an advisor). The building based equity teams also surface needs that are specific to the school and make recommendations on how to best meet those needs. In addition, students have become involved in our equity work by participating in student focus groups to inform our curricular audits, as well as forming organizations such as SOAR (Students Organized Against Racism).

Integrated Career Services

Just as each District 207 teacher has an individual coaching plan, each of our students



has an individual career plan. The career and post-secondary focus in District 207 is based upon ensuring every student has meaningful career experiences in high school in order to improve their decision-making process about post-high school choices.

Those decisions might include a certification program, an apprenticeship, a path directly to work out of high school, a two-year degree or a four-year degree. District 207 has connected with more than 700 business partners and uses analytical career tools and courses to provide opportunities to improve students’ likelihood of finding career paths of high interest leading to livable wages and growth potential in a responsible “Return on Investment” framework.

Social Emotional Learning & Behavior (SELB)

Students must develop strong skills in the area of SELB in order to succeed in high school, as well as any path they choose for their postsecondary plans. District 207 targets the skills outlined by the Illinois State Board of Education (developed in conjunction with the Illinois Children’s Mental Health Partnership and the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning): self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision-making. Additionally, as part of MTSS, the schools explicitly teach and encourage behavioral expectations for all students. There are targeted lessons in these areas through the Advisory program and teachers are also expected to teach and reinforce these skills in conjunction with the classroom activities. At times, community building circle discussions are used as an opportunity to practice and develop these skills, and other times it is woven into academic instruction. When students need additional help with their SELB skills, support is provided that emphasizes learning new skills, and repairing harm (if applicable). SELB skills must be taught and practiced, so staff have multiple opportunities to engage in professional development in this area.



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Competency-Based Education (CBE)

The predominant educational model in the United States is based on age, number of days in school, the length of the school day (seat-time) and learning at least 60% of what is taught. In a competency-based educational model, the educational program is based on reaching proficiency in a determined set of competencies in and across disciplines with focus on all students learning 100% of the curriculum at a satisfactory level. In CBE, learning is the constant, not time. CBE is the framework which allows teachers to maximize a suite of best practices to personalize a student's learning experiences.

Seven principles guide competency-based learning:

- Students are empowered daily to make important decisions about their learning experiences, how they will create and apply knowledge and how they will demonstrate their learning
- Assessment is a meaningful, positive and empowering learning experience for students that yields timely, relevant and actionable evidence
- Students receive timely, differentiated support based on their individual learning needs
- Students progress based on evidence of mastery, not seat time
- Students actively learn using different pathways and varied pacing
- Strategies to ensure equity for all students are embedded in the culture, structure and pedagogy of schools and education systems
- Rigorous, common expectations for learning (knowledge, skills and dispositions) are explicit, transparent, measurable and transferable ■

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