

CHATTANOOGA SCHOOL FOR THE LIBERAL ARTS

The vision of CSLA, a Paideia Magnet School, is to create a thoughtful, caring learning community where diversity is valued and all students can develop intellectually, personally, socially, and physically into lifelong learners.

Our focus for the 2006-2007 year is to move all our students to a higher level of achievement. The goals we specified in this year's School Improvement Plan mirror those of our MSNS plan. As a K-8 school, we see this reform as a vehicle to transform our entire school, not just the middle school grades, so that we continue to develop as a community where students, teachers, and families grow and learn together. We are a "sister school" with Chattanooga School for the Arts and Sciences, a K-12 magnet school that also operates under the umbrella of the Paideia philosophy. Our graduates are automatically accepted as high school students at CSAS. Our program includes:

- Strong parental involvement, with a staff position for parent volunteer coordinator
- Exploratory, or "choice" classes during the first period of the day
- Related arts classes including art, music, physical education, and technology
- Foreign language (French or Spanish) for all students
- One-track curriculum
- An intellectually, socio-economically, and geographically diverse population of learners
- A school-wide discipline plan
- Peer mediation
- Professional Development School (PDS) of UTC students
- A plan of interventions for struggling students
- Instructional strategies including coaching and Socratic seminar
- Before and after school tutoring
- College and career planning
- Critical Friends Groups
- Academic Portfolios

Our recognition as a 2005 Blue Ribbon School indicates that many of the strategies we already have in place are important to the success of our students. The MSNS reform is an opportunity for us to improve and expand what is already working, to put some new structures into place, and to build the capacity of our teachers.

To identify the needs of our school, we used test data and we went to all the stakeholders. Parents held a forum, with 92 families represented. Students and faculty members responded to surveys. We used Socratic seminars with all middle school students to discuss the goals of MSNS and the how it could improve our school. Realizing that many of our students have never experienced a "traditional" school, we exchanged 12 CSLA students with 12 Hunter Middle School students for the day. The students met at the end of the day and discussed the differences and surprises they found at each school. We also examined the TVASS scores, as reported in part II.

Using the data collected, we determined the following goals of our MSNS plan:

- *To move greater numbers of students who are proficient in reading and math into the advanced subgroup in literacy and math.*
- *To eliminate the gaps between blacks and whites and economic disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged students in the advanced subgroup in reading and math*
- *To develop a plan to ease transitions from grade to grade, for new students entering our program, and for our 8th graders moving to CSAS*
- *To provide greater opportunities for student voice and personalization.*

How will we make it happen?

- *Hire a change coach and Paideia consultant to provide support and training for teachers in using Paideia instructional strategies and assessments while aligning the curriculum with state and HCDE standards*
- *Use assessment programs to quickly identify the needs of new students and to track the ongoing progress of all students*
- *Strengthen the bridge to CSAS by collaboratively developing transitional activities for students and their families, and by sharing curriculum ideas, academic expectations and Paideia strategies.*
- *Examine the schedule and curriculum for greater flexibility and more student choices and input*
- *Form study groups to explore and share the latest research about adolescents and best practices*

Hiring a change coach is the first step in our MSNS plan. This person will be responsible for bringing the plan to life by organizing professional development, mentoring and providing support to teachers, and maintaining the budget and records of meetings to show accountability. The change coach will articulate the goals of MSNS and oversee its implementation.

The MSNS goals for rigorous curriculum and professional learning community are the paths through which we will see gains in student achievement. We believe that improving student performance in literacy and math and closing the gaps between groups of our students will be accomplished by strengthening our understanding of the Paideia philosophy and how it translates into action in the classrooms. One of the greatest challenges for our teachers is how to individualize instruction to meet the needs of each student while still maintaining the one-track curriculum dictated by the Paideia philosophy. Our inclusion teachers as well as classroom teachers struggle to meet the instructional dictates of IEP's within the one-track Paideia curriculum. Our staff is not "on the same page" in their understanding of the philosophy that guides the school, and many teachers lack confidence that the strategies they use are really "Paideia". We see an increase in traditional instructional strategies, as teachers new to Paideia rely on what they know from their experiences in traditional classrooms.

We plan to hire a part-time Paideia consultant to work with our staff one day a week. This person will have the role of teaching partner and coach who will help teachers transform the philosophy into classroom practice. Each week she will meet with a different grade level team to model Paideia strategies and observe teachers in practice. Then substitutes will be used to allow teachers to meet with the Paideia consultant and the change coach to debrief, discuss, and plan. The change coach will then continue to provide the support needed to help teachers imbed their learning into their daily practice. In addition, we will provide all teachers with a *Paideia* Portfolio, which includes materials and organizational tools that will help them bring the philosophy to life in their classrooms. We are also seeking other funding sources to allow us to send our staff to the National Paideia Institute for further training. As a result, we expect to see less didactic instruction, more classroom seminars, more individualized coached projects, greater attention to learning styles and interests, and increased use of rubrics, authentic assessments, and demonstrations of learning. We expect that students will be more engaged in their learning and that all students will continue to grow and achieve at high levels, moving more students into the advanced subgroups and reducing the gaps between groups of students.

Along with Paideia training, we see the need for more individualized instruction and regular use of assessment tools so teachers know the progress of each student and adjust instruction according to the needs of each child. We plan to add two programs for literacy and math that are self-paced and track the achievement of each student. *Bridge to Algebra*, funded by PTA, will be used in the seventh grade pre-algebra classes. This program will start students at their own level of achievement and move them at their own pace, while giving teachers a daily record

of growth. We also plan to add instructional materials that will improve critical thinking skills and be used for extension activities.

ThinkLink assessment program will be used school-wide to complement the *Padieia* assessments and assure that students are on track for the state tests. *Balanced Assessment* will be used in each math class. These assessment programs will not only provide information for teachers about the academic growth of each child, but will be valuable tools for transitioning new students by identifying quickly their academic achievement and needs. As teachers incorporate the use of these assessment tools, classroom instruction will become more focused, better aligned to the standards and curriculum, and more individualized to meet the needs of each student.

The MSNS personalization goal mirrors our school's vision for creating a caring community where each member's individual needs are addressed and diversity is valued. We propose changes to exploratory classes and schedules in order to respond to students' requests for different classes and opportunities. We plan to better use the student forum to give students a voice in decision-making about school policies and more responsibilities for promoting a positive school climate and community service. In addition, we will use professional resources for study groups who will explore and share the latest research on topics such as developmental needs of adolescents, multiple intelligences, and appreciation of diversity, differentiated instruction, literacy and math strategies.

Transitional activities are an important part of personalization. Our goal is to strengthen our relationships with the CSAS staff by working together on curriculum, articulating expectations for students in both buildings, planning joint field experiences for students, and transitional visits for parents and students. Our students and families at each grade level will participate in transitional activities that will help them understand the expectations for the next grade. We will use *ThinkLink* and *Balanced Assessment* to quickly identify the academic needs of new students while easing their transition to a new school and new instructional philosophy with a buddy system and mentoring.

The MSNS flexibility goal reflects our school's vision for developing learners intellectually, personally, socially, and physically. We plan to re-examine the daily schedule to assure the best use of instructional time, as well as the use of before and after school for learning opportunities. Professional development will also help us improve collaboration and integration of content, using flexibility in the curriculum to improve learning. A faculty retreat at the beginning of the school year will enable us to develop these plans and the route to implementation.

What will our middle school look like in 2006-07? Exploratory class choices will include topics requested by students. The student forum will be visible and actively working to represent the student body. Teachers will be working collaboratively to improve the curriculum and how it is taught, and meeting in groups to study and share new ideas. Peer observation, modeling, and reflection will be common professional practice. Students will be creating projects, discussing their ideas, and demonstrating their learning. Students' needs will be identified quickly and their growth monitored regularly. The MSNS leadership team and change coach will be well under way with the implementation of the three year plan that will result in higher student achievement and a strong professional learning community at CSLA.