

Deeper learning, caring relationships, personalized choices mark District 112's new secondary program

It's been a remarkable journey. Since starting the challenging process of redesigning District 112's academic program for grades 6-12, administrators and teachers have researched, evaluated, discussed, debated, planned and selected the skills, characteristics and values they believe will foster the best possible learning experience for students in the 21st century.

When students open their registration materials in January and February, they'll find changes as well as the "tried and true." The changes reflect the recommendations of the 60-member Secondary Design Team, a group of teachers, administrators, parents, students and community members. The School Board challenged them to examine educational research and assess ways in which to re-design the academic program for grades 6-12. The goal? To ensure District 112 students graduate with the knowledge, skills and personal attributes necessary to succeed in post-secondary institutions and throughout life.

Core teams of teachers representing each middle school and high school used the Design Team recommendations as a foundation for a new look in a student's day-to-day school experience. The changes included a complete review of classes offered in every subject area and a new direction in teacher-student relationships. The new secondary program will offer more depth within subject areas, more intentional relationship-building with students and, recognizing the importance of harnessing student interests and passion in the learning process, more personalization.

Few school systems have the opportunity to look at grades 6-12 as a whole. One of the most important outcomes of the secondary redesign is the creation of a seamless seven years of instruction. Schedules, course development, relationship building, instructional strategies, counseling goals and curriculum now align between the middle school and high school programs. Here are some examples.

Schedule – All secondary schools will use a 7-period modified block schedule. This schedule creates year-long, content-rich classes and more time to build relationships with students. It also allows flexible blocks of time to support labs and projects.

The goal? To ensure District 112 students graduate with the knowledge and skills necessary to succeed in post-secondary institutions and throughout life.

Credit Requirements – Middle schools will join our high schools in requiring students to earn credits before moving on to the next level. The credit requirement ensures mastery of course material.

Counseling – District 112 will update the counseling program to reflect the standards of the American School Counselors Association. Students will experience a renewed emphasis on creating plans to chart a course for success in high school and beyond. Middle level counseling will help students prepare



for high school. A \$100,000 grant from the state in association with the University of Minnesota will allow counselors to create a system that lights a path to post-secondary education for students who may not believe post-secondary school is an option.

Behavior Expectations – Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) is a program developed by universities and aimed at creating positive school climates. The idea is to teach desired behaviors, reinforce them school-wide and use data to track student progress. Our goal is to decrease time spent dealing with unacceptable behaviors and increase time spent on learning and achievement. District 112 received a grant from the state of Minnesota to begin implementation in 2008-09.

Middle School Program: Preparing for High School Success

When District 112 opens three middle schools in September, 2009, each school will be implementing an academic program designed to prepare students for success in high school.

The redesigned middle level program maintains the district's long-standing commitment to addressing the unique learning needs of 12-14 year olds through the middle school philosophy. That philosophy stresses positive relationships between adults and students, exploration of emerging interests, use of interdisciplinary instructional teams and high expectations for both achievement and behavior.

In September, 2009, the middle level program will include these features:

Trimester System – The trimester will support the ability for students to explore emerging interests beyond core academic subjects.

New Schedule for All – All grade levels will be on the same schedule which allows greater flexibility for instruction. The new schedule will support more time in relationship-building advisory groups, too. The schedule requires music students to choose between band, choir and orchestra for the first time, however, they will have the opportunity to choose music electives as well.

Looping – This instructional strategy, in which teachers move to the next grade with their students, is used successfully at the elementary level. Beginning in 2009-10, it will be used at the secondary level with advisory groups remaining together in 7th and 8th grade and the advisor working with the students for two years.

Grade 6-8 Curriculum Supports High School Program – All math, science, English and social studies classes for grades 6-8 will be redesigned with the goal of supporting the academic program of the high schools. Teachers are searching for any holes that



could delay student success as they transition to grade 9. The middle school curriculum uses the state's "Foundation, Knowledge, and Skills" as the content organizer along with national content standards. Elective classes will support the high schools' four Interest Areas: Arts and Communication; Health Science and Human Services; Global Studies; Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM).

Re-created Encore Classes – Classes formerly called "applied arts" have been renamed "Encore Classes;" they include art, music, computer technology, personal wellness, FACS and industrial technology. Teachers in these classes have revised and updated current course content to reflect 21st century skills that education research identifies as crucial. Departments are taking time to evaluate real student needs and to ensure classes are relevant for the future.

Project Lead the Way Expands to Middle Schools – Chaska High School's very successful pre-engineering program, Project Lead the Way, will expand to all three middle schools as budgets allow. It will emphasize both engineering and biomedical science. This hands-on program addresses the national focus to

increase student interest in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM). The program may be phased-in due to the cost of implementation.

6th Grade Flex Class – This program identifies information and skills 6th graders need for success in middle school and high school. The class takes a look at important media and literacy skills, works on key boarding and computer competencies, and also introduces important study skills like organization. The goal is to ensure 6th graders have the foundation they need to succeed.

World Language Expansion – Seventh and eighth graders will have the option to take a full year of French, Spanish or German for possible high school credit or sample several languages through exploratory classes.

The 8th Period/Advisory – The new schedule will allow an 8th period as a time for important school initiatives like the PBIS behavior model; career/post-secondary planning; literacy; service learning; test preparation; and support for students needing extra help or extensions. The 8th period will be one block each week.

High School Program: Paving the Way to Post-secondary Education



A high school diploma is no longer enough. The 21st century demands more if students dream of success in a rapidly changing global economy. Understanding this new reality, Chaska High School and Chanhassen High School will both offer a redesigned high school curriculum that reflects a commitment to rigorous academics, relevant application of what is learned, and positive relationships between adults and students.

When school begins in September, 2009, the new program will be implemented with the freshmen class, expanding each year as the Class of 2013 goes through school. They will graduate as the first class to experience the redesigned high school program in its entirety.

Until that year, both high schools will offer parallel programs to ensure that students beginning the 2009-10 school year as sophomores, juniors and seniors can continue to operate under the graduation requirements with which they started their high school careers. The total number of credits required for these students has been reduced due to the change in schedule and the challenge of fitting the old requirements into a new schedule.

The program for students beginning the 2009-10 school year as freshmen at Chaska High and Chanhassen High will include these changes:

Freshmen and Sophomores Will Be on Interdisciplinary Teams – The interdisciplinary teams of teachers will focus on helping freshmen and sophomores get off to the best possible start in their high school careers. Creating a Personalized Learning Plan, each student will begin high school understanding the impact of the choices they make on their success in high school and beyond. Students coming from our middle schools will be familiar with the interdisciplinary team model already in place at grades 6-9. They will learn within teams similar to the “families” in place at our middle schools.

Looping – At the high school level, the interdisciplinary team that welcomes freshmen will remain with those students through 10th grade as well. Looping offers greater opportunity to build relationships with students over time, one of the important elements noted in educational research. Feeling known and valued within a school directly impacts a student’s ability and desire to achieve.

Personal Wellness Credits Required Every Year – Acknowledging the importance of healthy lifestyles to a successful future, the redesigned secondary program requires two credits of Personal Wellness. Personal Wellness combines Health and Physical Education under one umbrella. Students will be required to take a one-semester Personal Wellness class each of the four years of high school to ensure that students stay aware and informed about healthy choices.

World Languages Now Required – All District 112 high school graduates will be expected to demonstrate competency in a second language at graduation. Chinese will be added to the high schools’ current language choices of Spanish, French, German and American Sign Language. Two world language credits have been added to the list of graduation requirements.

Rigor in Every Class – All high school classes are being re-designed to increase rigor. In addition, courses will include opportunities for acceleration

for students needing even more challenge. Both high schools will continue a broad selection of classes designed for students to earn college credit while still in high school. Classes include Advanced Placement and Project Lead the Way programming.

Concentrated Studies Relevant to Interests/ Aspirations – Education research challenges high schools to better engage learners by making classes relevant to their interests and aspirations. Chaska High and Chanhassen High will organize learning at the junior and senior levels to allow students to concentrate their studies within broad interest areas.

Interest Areas – Interest Areas form the framework for learning in 11th and 12th grade. Students choose to focus their studies within one of the Interest Areas.

Arts and Communication – the creative process through various mediums including visual, performing, music, drama, and the written word

Global Studies – the interplay of people, systems and cultures

Health Science and Human Services – understanding and serving people through medicine and the social sciences

Science, Technology, Engineering, Math (STEM) – investigation and application of science, technology, engineering and math.

Programs of Study – Each Interest Area supports several Programs of Study. A program of study is a series of elective classes designed to allow students in-depth exploration of their interests. The curriculum builds understanding and skills by requiring students to complete prerequisite classes before moving on to more complicated material. A partnership with business and community will enable students to apply what they learn in real-world settings. Programs of Study are designed to engage and motivate students while supporting achievement.

Personalized Learning Plans - Students will develop a personalized learning plan to guide their choices, assuring that what they study in school prepares them to achieve their goals after graduation.

Capstone Project – Seniors in the Class of 2013 will be the first required to produce a capstone project. The purpose of the project will be to apply what students have learned in their program of study to an activity that both demonstrates what they know and improves the school and/or community in some way.

8th Period – The 8th period, one 90-minute block a week, will be used flexibly to connect students to activities and preparation for service and success in school, the community and the world. A portion of some periods will offer “Options” for students to meet with tutors or study groups, attend club meetings, or check in with teachers. The 8th Period will also feature “Connections,” a program with a distinct curriculum for each grade level. **Freshmen**, will “connect” to their school, looking at their own experiences, identifying issues, learning how to advocate for themselves, and selecting a service learning project for the high school. **Sophomores** will focus on “Connections” with the community, looking for their role in a community, developing skills to resolve conflicts and selecting a service learning project to benefit the community. **Juniors** will “connect” to their role in the world, preparing for testing, creating resumes, and investigating post-secondary opportunities.

Seniors will “connect” their personal passions with “real-life,” creating a portfolio of their school experiences, and move forward with preparations to make the most of their post-secondary experiences.

New graduation philosophy, expectations form foundation for redesigned secondary program

The new secondary program redesign took shape from a realization that student success after high school requires new thinking and higher expectations. The work of the Secondary Redesign Team includes these expectations for graduates.

District 112 graduates will:

- ▶ Meet or exceed District 112’s high standards for quality work with demonstrated knowledge, understanding, skills, and character.
- ▶ Complete personalized, rigorous, and relevant programs of study planned to meet individual goals.
- ▶ Serve their communities through activities

that apply what they learn to real world needs. Recognizing the importance of integrating skills and understanding across the curriculum, Chaska High and Chanhassen High will embed within all course-work elements of reading, writing, technology and information literacy, global awareness, critical thinking/problem solving, communication/collaboration, life skills, and the District 112 Community Values.

All District 112 graduates will be:

Globally concerned citizens who demonstrate:

- ▶ Cultural awareness and understanding
- ▶ Competency in a world language other than

the student’s first language

- ▶ Recognition and understanding of interrelationships among individuals, groups, organizations, and countries across the globe

Innovative problem solvers with skills in:

- ▶ Analysis
- ▶ Creativity
- ▶ Evaluation
- ▶ Metacognition
- ▶ Understanding interconnection among systems

Fluent users of technology and information with skills in:

- ▶ Reading and media literacy
- ▶ Responsible use of technology and information
- ▶ Technology use
- ▶ The research process

Productive individuals through the following life skills/attributes:

- ▶ Ethical decision-making
- ▶ Personal financial management
- ▶ Flexibility, resilience, and persistence
- ▶ Initiative and self-direction
- ▶ Leadership and responsibility
- ▶ Self-awareness in identifying interests, strengths and goals
- ▶ Work ethic

Strong communicators and collaborators with skills in:

- ▶ Interpersonal communication
- ▶ Multi-media
- ▶ Speaking
- ▶ Writing