

A DECLARATION OF BELIEFS AND VISION
By the 2003 Mason Consolidated Schools
April 2003; Revised August 2003

FOREWORD

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The 2003 Declaration of Beliefs and Vision of the Board of Education outlines the direction of the school district and the expectations we hold for all students and employees of Mason Consolidated Schools and other members of our school community. By defining our organization's purpose, we define what we are. Our core values define who we are, and our strategic intent and goals define what we intend to do to achieve our purpose. This document provides the foundation for all we strive to do to ensure the highest quality education for the children of Mason Consolidated Schools.

Each one of us in the Mason Consolidated Schools family should have an understanding of our purpose, core values, strategic intent and goals, and conduct ourselves accordingly. By putting them into daily practice, everyone can help Mason Consolidated Schools truly make a difference in the lives of the children and the community we serve.

FOREWORD

The Board of Trustees of Mason Consolidated Schools is aware of the increasing linkage between the effectiveness of our schools and the well being of all the citizens of our community. We are also aware of the important need to improve student performance in Mason schools. In response to this need, the Board of Trustees seeks to improve student performance by transforming our total school district into a high performing system. As a starting point for planning our school's transformation, the Board issues this Declaration of Beliefs and Vision.

The Board has strong confidence in, and appreciation of, our school system's personnel. The need to transform our schools has its roots in the rapid changes in our society and the escalating educational needs of our economy. We believe that our greatest challenges and problems lie in the system's structure, not in the people. If we are successful in creating an improved system, we will have created better results.

It should not be concluded that by releasing this Declaration of Beliefs and Vision that the Board feels that the school system alone can address successfully the education problems of our community. Far from it, the Board realizes that in order to be successful in its transformation effort, a new coalition of support for our public schools is needed – one that joins business, labor, and civic leaders with students, parents, educators, and the school board.

To significantly improve the performance of Mason Consolidated School students, we, the trustees of Mason Consolidated Schools, commit ourselves to fundamental changes within the school district.

We acknowledge the effective work of the talented, dedicated teachers, administrators, and other educators who have made Mason Schools a school district of choice in Southeastern Michigan. We

believe, however, that our school district's performance can and must be improved.

We also realize that the serious problems, which characterize most of America's towns and cities, also exist in our community and spill into our schools. We realize that many of our students' educational needs present special challenges and that our schools are not performing at world-class levels.

We further realize that Mason School students require flexibility to achieve improved learning, and that our present system cannot meet students' needs.

We believe that:

- The overall achievement level of our students must be improved.
- The dropout rate is unacceptably high.
- The level of parental involvement is too low.
- Communication is inadequate.
- Teacher/student relationships need to be improved.
- The overall image of Mason Consolidated Schools must be improved.
- The use and maintenance of facilities and grounds must be improved.

We do not believe that we can respond to these challenges without significant changes to our educational system and that a common core of values must serve as the foundation for future change. The Core Values of Mason Consolidated Schools, developed by the Board of Trustees, are incorporated in the Vision Statement listed below:

The vision of the Board of Education for Mason Consolidated Schools is a high quality educational system that requires:

- High levels of performance and accountability for all;
- Management by fact;
- Learning-centered education;
- A systems approach to continuous improvement; and
- Public responsibility and citizenship.

Our Core Values describe best practices for all employees and board trustees and will serve as the foundation of performance excellence. The best practices serve also to build and integrate a results-oriented framework. Integration of the core values into daily actions of the school district is essential for performance excellence. The Board desires for the total educational system to demonstrate these best practices.

I. HIGHEST LEVELS OF PERFORMANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY FOR ALL:

Ensuring highest levels of performance for all students is everybody's business. Parents, students, educators, business and community leaders and the Board of Trustees must take an active role in raising student achievement in Mason Schools. Mason Schools will work towards alignment of support that is focused on student success and characterized by passion and persistence for learning at high levels.

A. What is it? The focus of the school district is on high performance and on driving results that reflect and balance the needs and interests of students, staff, and all other stakeholders.

B. Why is it important? The expectation of high performance and use of multiple measures offer an effective means to communicate requirements, monitor actual performance, and ensure broad-based support for improving results. Measured and reported results must be aligned to the core values and vision of the school district and must be used to guide our work.

C. What does it look like?

All people within the total educational system (students, teachers, administrators, school board trustees and support staff members) will consistently achieve high levels of performance and accountability. School district employees will encourage performance excellence by engaging members of the total school community in support of this value.

Parents: One of the biggest factors in children's success in school is the degree to which their families are involved in their education. The more parents understand about the knowledge and skills their children need to be successful, the more effective they will be in helping their children learn at high levels. When parents and families get involved, their children do better in school.

Students: Students need to see how high levels of academic achievement in school can position them for success in the future. They must have a clear understanding of what they are expected to know and be able to do – whether they are going on to college or directly into the world of work. When students know what they are expected to learn – and why it is important – they learn more and achieve at high levels.

Educators: Research clearly shows that quality teachers are key to increasing student achievement. However, teachers cannot do the job alone. We must help teachers understand Michigan's new academic content standards and provide them with research, data, tools and training that support their efforts to help all students achieve at high levels.

Business and Community Leaders: Michigan's business competitiveness and its future economic prosperity depend on the knowledge and skills of today's students – who will become tomorrow's workforce. With such high stakes, Michigan's business and community leaders must continue to play an active and integral role in educational improvement efforts focused on raising student achievement.

Board of Trustees: School board trustees play a critical role in the success of schools. Education policy must reflect the crucial alignment of academic standards, instruction, assessment and accountability to ensure that all schools show improvement and all students achieve at high levels. The trustees ensure that the following strategies are implemented district-wide:

- Key indicators of student performance and district support processes, ranging from standardized test scores to efficiency measures of support services, are tracked, evaluated, and consistently used to inform the decision-making process.
- Charts and graphs, indicating progress towards district performance goals, are posted and/or published to maintain information flow to all stakeholders.
- On-going communication and public reporting of results in critical performance areas enhance stakeholders' abilities to focus on goals.
- Trustees review district performance quarterly and reports progress to all staff and public.

II. MANAGEMENT BY FACT:

A. What is it? Decision-making based on measurement, data, information, and analysis of results applied to the management of the school district.

B. Why is it important? Decisions made in the absence of measurement, information, data and analysis

may result in random acts of improvement, which are both costly and time consuming.

C. What does it look like?

Mason Schools will collect, analyze, and use data that is relevant to continuous improvement of performance at all levels of the organization. Data will drive decisions at all levels.

Parents: The school district provides valuable information for parents, including standards and expectations for their children at each grade level, and for each content area. Parents are provided regular reports, throughout each academic year, regarding their children's progress toward established goals and standard benchmarks.

Students: Mason Schools provide valuable information for students, regarding standards and expectations for their grade level and for each content area. The data is personalized to provide each student with an understanding of his/her own academic achievement in relationship with standard benchmarks and progress towards personal goals.

Educators: Mason Schools provide important data to all teachers and administrators on a regular basis. The achievement and other student data, including state proficiency test results, attendance, drop-out rates, discipline infractions, etc. provides valuable information educators use to focus and adapt instruction for improved student learning.

Support Staff: Mason Schools collect, analyze, and use data to create improved efficiency and effectiveness of all its systems (food service, building and grounds maintenance, transportation, business management, etc.), which promotes high performance of all employees.

Business and Community Leaders: Mason Schools provide regular communication of its progress towards excellence to all members of the greater community. Two-way, multimedia communication is implemented to ensure that information is accessible to all stakeholders.

Board of Trustees: Mason Schools collect, analyze, and use important data, regarding student achievement and other student data (attendance, drop-out, discipline infractions, etc.), as well as data related to all resources within the school system (business management, transportation, building and grounds maintenance, utilities, technology, food service, administration, staffing, etc.) to inform their decisions as a governing board. Trustees ensure that the following strategies are implemented:

- Trustees dedicate district resources to the establishment of a system-wide information system.
- The information system enables everyone to access the disaggregated key information needed to support improvement efforts.
- The district departments use data collected from the system to identify needs and to design professional development and/or training for employees.
- Student achievement data are timely and routinely disaggregated to examine specific student groups and schools.
- Trustees routinely use data for decision-making and require schools and departments to do the same.

III. LEARNING-CENTERED EDUCATION:

A. What is it? Learning-centered education places the focus of all district activities on the real needs of schools – classrooms and students. A learning-centered system sets high expectations for all students and staff, and is committed to system redesign that supports performance excellence for all students. The emphasis is on all students taking active responsibility for their learning and all school district staff and the School Board taking responsibility to support student learning.

B. Why is it important? A clear focus on actively supporting schools and classrooms, as opposed to compliance and monitoring processes is required to assist schools in achieving performance excellence in learning.

C. What does it look like?

Mason Schools' administrators, faculty, staff, and the BOE build and maintain a focus on learning, rather than teaching; on performance, rather than compliance.

Parents: Parents are involved in the goal-setting process for their children. Parents are provided specific suggestions for how they may help to improve their children's total development, and how they might become more involved in the learning process. Parents readily engage in open, two-way communication with school personnel, regarding their children's progress towards established goals.

Students: Each student receives assistance in setting his/her personal academic goals each academic year that promotes his/her highest possible level of achievement. Each student is actively engaged in the learning process, will take responsibility for his/her learning and will take advantage of interventions designed specifically for him/her, as needed. The overall achievement levels of our students ARE improved. Relationships between students and teachers, students and their peers, and between students and all adults in the school community are improved. Students feel safe, secure, respected and supported in the school environment. Students consistently receive individualized attention and confirmation of learning, and are recognized for achievement towards established goals.

Educators: Teachers create effective learning environments, where every child achieves high levels of success in reaching established standards and benchmarks. Mason Schools provide high-quality, sustained professional development for all faculty, administrators, and staff to ensure that all educators have the knowledge, skills and support they need to support high performance of students. Excitement (passion) for learning and teaching is a cornerstone in every school and every classroom. Teachers consistently provide students with individualized attention and confirmation of learning is a consistent element in the teaching learning cycle. The total school environment is centered on and committed to continuous learning. Life-long learning is a treasured value for all children and adults within the system. Each school is characterized by positive relationships among all teachers and their students.

Board of Trustees: Trustees make it a priority to support the learning environment. All decisions made are to facilitate improving conditions for learning in the classroom. All policy and decisions are judged based on how they will benefit learning. Trustees insist on district-level services being student focused.

IV. A SYSTEMS APPROACH TO CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT:

- A. What is it? The management of the overall organization will use a systems approach to continuous improvement. Mason Schools will improve its image through building and maintaining a standards-based approach to learning and a strong system of accountability for all levels within the organization.
- B. Why is it important? Achieving performance excellence requires consistent synthesis and alignment of core values and the key elements within a system (faculty and staff, information systems, strategic planning, leadership, stakeholder focus, performance outcomes/results, etc.) that serve as the building blocks of the system.
- C. What does it look like? The cornerstones of Mason Schools' educational system are:
1. Clear, Rigorous Academic Content Standards: Mason Schools clearly define expectations for what students should know and be able to do to be successful in school and beyond. Mason Schools insist on high standards – when we expect more from students, they achieve more.
 2. Support to Improve Teaching and Learning: Mason Schools ensure that all employees of the organization have the training, professional development and tools they need to be effective in their respective positions, with focus on helping all students learn and achieve at high levels.
 3. Fair and Effective Assessments: Mason Schools regularly assess student achievement to monitor student progress, help teachers target instruction more effectively, and ensure that all students acquire the knowledge and skills they need to be successful.

4. Accountability for Results: Mason Schools hold schools accountable for results, with celebration for schools that show progress and achieve at high levels, support for schools that need help, and appropriate consequences for schools that fail to improve over time. Individuals within each department in the district are accountable for their performance, as measured by assessments aligned to established goals. Each school and department uses assessments that are aligned to the district goals to analyze and improve its contribution to district performance and accountability, and to ensure alignment of systems within the organization. A support team, comprised of key district staff, school staff and business partners, is trained and provides consultation and technical assistance to schools and departments using the self-assessment process. Schools and departments that have achieved a high standard of performance excellence are recognized annually.

V. PUBLIC RESPONSIBILITY AND CITIZENSHIP:

A. What is it? All people within the educational system will serve as role models in their operation as members of the community.

B. Why is it important? Practicing good citizenship shifts the emphasis from compliance to commitment, to being a contributing member of the community, and adding value to society.

C. What does it look like in action?

- Mason Schools infuse the values of service to others, informed citizenship, democracy, and moral leadership throughout its learning system.
- Mason Schools hire and retain high quality administrators, faculty and staff members. High quality is defined as having passion, sense of purpose, strong integrity and moral values, and the capacity to ensure success of all students.
- Schools are responsive to their communities and ensure that all stakeholders (parents, students, faculty and staff, and all other members of the community) have structured opportunities to give input into school governance.
- Mason Schools strive to prepare ALL students with skills, knowledge and motivation to make a difference at the individual, school, regional, and societal level (The Moral Imperative of School Leadership, Michael Fullan, 2003), so that they may achieve the “American dream.”
- Mason Schools continually seek partnerships with other stakeholder groups to foster collaborative support of total student development.
- Mason schools encourage responsible citizenship, and student engagement in charitable an/or community improvement efforts, by engaging students in Service Learning (meaningful community service projects appropriate to the developmental age of the child.) Minimum standards for annual student community service learning projects are:
Elementary school students – one (1) hour;
Middle school students – five (5) hours; and
High school students – 10 hours.