

Innovative District Application

Description of Education Programs

The McPherson Unified School District 418 is not just recognized as one of the leading school districts in Kansas, many outside of McPherson are calling the school district a model for the country. McPherson students routinely outperform academically students in public and private schools across Kansas and the nation. Whether it is in academics or extra curricular activities, McPherson USD 418 is one of the best school districts in the nation.

The district operates an early education center, four elementary schools, a middle school, a high school, an alternative high school program, and is also the sponsoring district of the McPherson County Special Education Cooperative. Enrollment (Pre-K-12) in the McPherson schools is approximately 2400. The four neighborhood elementary schools—pre-kindergarten through 5th grade—have an average regular education class size of 19 students. Each of the McPherson USD 418 elementary schools offers a comprehensive program, including library services, art, vocal and instrumental music, computer-assisted instruction, and special education. McPherson Middle School, grades 6-8, offers a broad program of academic and elective exploratory courses, including the only middle school in central Kansas to provide a Pre-Advanced Placement curriculum. Middle school regular education classes average 22 students. Activities in drama, student government, and athletics are provided for students. McPherson High School, grades 9-12, offers a strong college preparatory program as well as vocational education and career planning services. The average regular education class size at McPherson High School is 22 students. A wide selection of co-curricular and extracurricular programs is available for students. McPherson High School offers 16 Advanced Placement courses.

Throughout 2008 and the spring of 2009, the McPherson Board of Education held a series of retreats to define the district goals. Three goals came from those sessions:

- 1. We will engage parents and the community in serious discussions about the education of our children.**
- 2. We will provide staff the training, knowledge, skills and resources necessary to assist children to grow to their fullest potential.**
- 3. We will work to hire and retain the best people to serve our students.**

To further these goals, the Board and administration held several more retreats in the late summer and early fall of 2009. The purpose of these retreats was to look at research, the goals adopted by the Board and to examine what we, collectively in USD 418, wanted for our students. The Board specifically looked at the research on student achievement and the role that a strong functioning board should have to ensure strong student learning. That research lead the McPherson USD 418 Board of Education to establish not only the Board goals, but a deeper commitment to redesign our schools to ensure that all students, upon graduation, were citizenship, college and career ready.

The Board asked administration to start to put into practice a system that reached well beyond anything being asked for in the current NCLB system. They asked staff to think broadly and boldly in scaling new challenges. Thus, the work began to implement an entire new system of accountability in USD 418.

In May 2010, the McPherson school board, after two years of discussion with the community and retreats, released their plan entitled, ***C³ – Citizenship, College and Career Readiness***. This plan was a non- negotiable position for the school board and one that through collaborative goal setting, the entire McPherson staff and community supported. In June 2010, that plan was submitted to the Kansas State Board of Education and subsequently to the United States Department of Education.

In late February 2011, the United States Department of Education informed McPherson that they were granting a waiver to the district to enact the locally designed, **C³- Citizenship, College and Career Readiness** initiative. The department called the McPherson initiative bold, challenging and one of a kind in the United States.

The C³ initiative has three major components – Citizenship, College and Career Readiness. All parts of the district’s initiative are equal partners.

Description of parent and community support

The McPherson school district has a long history of strong ties to parents and our community. This is evident by the following statistics and events:

- School parent/teacher conferences in the elementary schools average over 98% attendance at each grade level over the last five years.
- Attendance at our College and Career sessions has averaged over 95% attendance by parents at grades 6-12 for the past two years.
- McPherson just celebrated the 100-year anniversary of All Schools Day. This is a community celebration of schools that has turned into a local holiday to celebrate the students and teachers in McPherson.
- In researching and discussing with our public the initial development on what would become C³, we held focus groups with a variety of publics. We asked the following groups what they wanted for our graduates when they graduated from high school: Board of Education, Curriculum Coordinating Council, faculty meetings, school site councils, PTO groups at schools, Rotary Club, Optimist Club, Senior Center. Lions Club. Kiwanis Club – morning and lunch club. Cedars Retirement Village and public input sessions (three total). It was the input of all of these groups that lead to the development of C³.
- Finally in April 2013, the public voted, with 82% approval, additions and renovations to three elementary schools, renovations of science classrooms and a new technology center at McPherson High School. This indicates broad, public support for the McPherson schools.

We also have the support of a “broader” community in our state and country. Here are some quotes regarding the work that we are working on in McPherson.

“Citizenship, College and Career is a pioneering plan that will help students reach their full potential. I fully support USD 418’s efforts to prepare students for life after high school.” – Jerry Moran, U.S. Senator

“McPherson is being seen as a model for the country. Your decision to request the waiver was courageous.” – Arne Duncan, U.S. Secretary of Education

“McPherson has set the standard for other districts to follow and shown a commitment to educational excellence that far exceeds the ordinary.” – Sam Brownback, Governor of Kansas

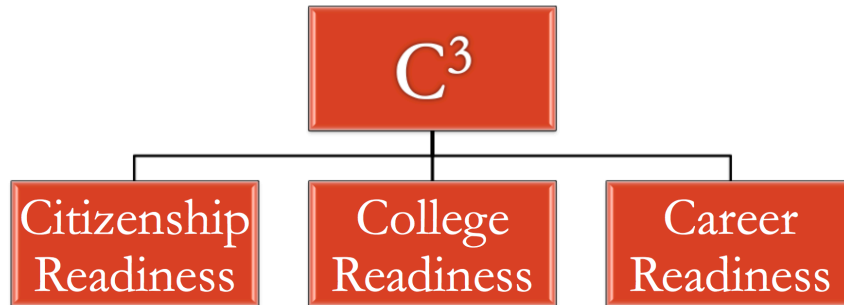
“The Kansas State Board and I are excited about the model of meaningful assessments and a higher standard articulated in the district’s initiative. What everybody else is doing in a traditional manner, they’re taking a more innovative approach.” – Dr. Diane DeBacker, Kansas Education Commissioner

“McPherson’s C³ initiative reflects the district’s persistent commitment to educating all students well and reflects a realization that a student’s education is not only about learning material but about preparing for citizenship, higher education, and a career.” – Dr. Andy Tompkins, CEO Kansas Board of Regents

“Ideally, more schools throughout Kansas and around the country will follow McPherson's lead.” – Hutchinson News

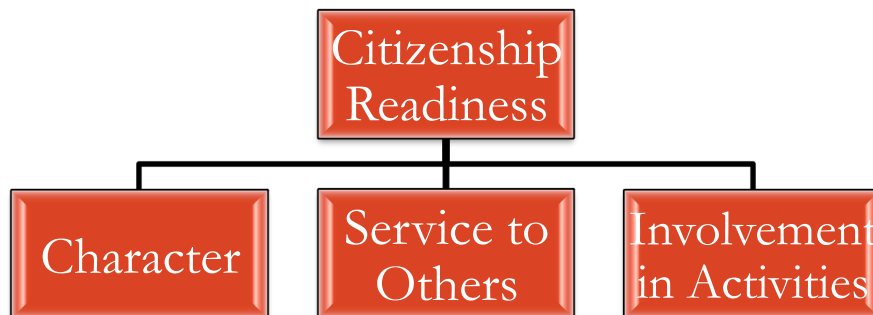
“The McPherson district correctly sees a high school degree as merely one step in life's journey. As a result, it wants its assessments to make sure students are prepared for what comes after graduation, whether that is a job or college.” – Wichita Eagle

“The overall picture is called "Citizenship, College and Career Readiness," or C³. It involves revamping the entire school system around making sure students graduate ready for college, or technical school, or a job right out of high school. They'll also be ready to make a positive contribution to their community. This is refreshing in education circles. – Salina Journal”



Specific Goals and outcomes to be obtained

McPherson proposes to look at nine different areas of success/achievement for every student and individualize a plan to work toward success. Our goal is simple, to produce a student that is on target and track to become a successful adult. We know that is MUCH more than a single reading and math score. It involves soft skills, hobbies, a passion, serving others and yes, academic skills. By looking at nine distinct areas of a student, we are able to get a complete view of a student' strengths and areas of growth. Specifically, McPherson will take a look at the following areas:



Citizenship ready is segmented into three overlapping areas: (1) Character Education, (2) Service to Others and (3) Involvement in activities. These three areas are very important to becoming a successful adult. With all the attention being paid across the United States on “college and career readiness”, we feel that the teaching, measuring and developing of citizenship skills are essential to producing students who are on the path to becoming successful adults. It is not enough to measure academic skills and believe that those skills are the only ones necessary to be successful in life.

Character Education - USD 418 is partnering with Quantum Learning to use their 8 Keys of Excellence to measure character. "Recent research findings show that effective character education supports and enhances the academic goals of schools: good character education promotes learning. It is clear that just as we cannot avoid character education, we cannot afford to implement it half-heartedly or wrong-headedly. We need to take character education as seriously as we take academic education." - What Works In Character Education: A research-driven guide for educators (2005)

Quantum Learning has been a terrific partner in our work with citizenship and character. They helped us design rubrics and assessments at all grade levels. What we have experienced is truly remarkable. Not only are our students using the language of character education developed for them, but also they are using it daily when they have conflicts or when they fall short of being "above the line." Administrators are using the character education program when students are sent to the office and throughout the emotionally disturbed room. This work has been coupled with our MTSS behavior model that has moved our discussions toward helping young people understand their wrong decisions and to help them "make it right."

Service to Others - Whether someone lives in a large city or a small rural town, we feel it is important as a citizen to "serve" those communities. By partnering with churches, 4-H and other organizations, USD 418 proposes to have students who demonstrate "service" to their school and others every year that they are in school. This will require students to "serve" in at least one area yearly during their Pre-K-8 years and two areas yearly in their 9-12 years. Research conducted by American Counseling Association shows that having a service emphasis in Pre-K-12 education, shows that service gives students a sense of purpose, service has a positive impact on grades, service can shape the direction of a student's life and change the way he or she views the world, and service has a positive impact on college acceptance. High School students organized the Big Event, a volunteer day throughout McPherson. The event turned out to be a huge success and it is an annual part of student service to the McPherson community. We have received tremendous, positive comments from the community about the Big Event.

At all elementary schools, teachers will choose class or grade level service projects to expose and generate enthusiasm with students to learn the concept of service to others. In the middle school and high school, students will continue to be involved in group type of service hours through school wide projects like the Big Event, service projects through athletics and activities and individual projects. Recommendations to the school board from a study group of staff ask for a requirement that all students in grades 6-8 participate in a minimum of five hours of service yearly, while students in grades 9-12 participate in a minimum of 10 hours of service to others yearly. The McPherson Board of Education will take up this request in the 2013-14 school year.

Involvement in Activities - For a number of years there has been research that indicated that students who participated in 2-5 activities in high school had better graduation rate, better attendance and higher GPAs. Last year, ACT reported that students who participate in 2-5 extracurricular activities during high school had a 15-17% increase of staying in and completing college. This research is compelling that students need to be involved in activities outside of the classroom.

Staff has discussed ways to increase the number of students involved in meaningful activities. First students in pre-k-5 are more strongly encouraged to join activities in the community. The challenges for some students will be cost and transportation. Counselors and teachers at elementary schools will be working with families to make sure that they are aware of no-cost and low-cost options for participation in activities. Also, they will help ensure that parents know other parents and help with car-pooling and getting students to the activities.

In addition, we are exploring academic competitions at the elementary level that would encourage students to participate in academic competitions in intramural, intermural and across the state

competitions. The first of these is now in its third year, Destination Imagination. This year staff will explore, Lego, chess, scholar bowl and other competitions. The goal at the elementary level is to encourage more students to get involved at a younger age, thus changing the pattern in middle and high school.

At the middle and high school level, we are looking at cost effective activities that could be added which would result in more students becoming involved in activities. Hunting and fishing clubs have been discussed and there seems to be some interest in those areas. ROTC has also been discussed, but the cost of implementation may prohibit the district adding this activity.

Finally, staff at the middle and high schools discussed having a mentor program that encourages participants to invite a friend to join them in an activity. This would hopefully increase participants without any additional cost to the district.



USD 418 is committed to having every student “college ready” when he/she walks across the stage at graduation. College Readiness refers to the level of student preparation needed to be ready to succeed—without remediation—in an introductory level course at a two or four-year institution, trade school or technical school. To achieve those goals, college or post secondary readiness involves three areas: 1) Academic Readiness, 2) Academic Behaviors and 3) Academic Rigor

Academic Readiness - Scores on ACT’s academic achievement assessments from the College and Career Readiness System (EXPLORE, PLAN®, and the ACT® test) are reported on the same scale, allowing educators to assess students’ progress toward college readiness during middle school and high school in a meaningful way. This scale will be changing to ACT ASPIRE. Research shows that students who hit the ACT benchmarks do much better in post secondary education, get larger scholarships and sustain to graduation at higher rates than those students who do not obtain these benchmarks. A student who hits all four benchmarks has a 75% probability of graduating in six years. When compared to a student who hit none of the benchmarks, that probability drops to only 44%. Empirically derived, ACT’s [College Readiness Benchmarks](#) are the minimum scores needed on the ACT subject area tests to indicate a 50% chance of obtaining a B or higher or about a 75% chance of obtaining a C or higher in corresponding credit-bearing first-year college courses. In the elementary schools, we will be starting measure ACT Benchmark readiness in the spring of 2014. This will be done with the new ACT ASPIRE. ACT ASPIRE will be given in grades 3-10 and predict a student’s readiness to handle the academic demands of post secondary education. From grades pre-K-3, the primary method of assessing academic readiness is the AIMSWEB system.

Academic Behavior - The factors that are important for college and work success go beyond cognitive ability and academic readiness. In order to assess students' progress over time related to academic behavior, ACT has developed a set of scales called ENGAGE that provides assessments of specific behaviors that are critical to academic success. McPherson uses the ENGAGE assessment to compliment our cognitive measures of ACT Explore, PLAN and ACT. ENGAGE Grades 6–9 is designed to identify youth at academic risk by augmenting standardized achievement testing with measures of important psychosocial indicators. It is a low-stakes, self-report inventory made up of scales (106 items) that can be generally organized into three broad domains that have been shown to be predictive of academic performance and persistence:

- **Motivation** includes personal characteristics that help students to succeed academically by focusing and maintaining energies on goal-directed activities.
- **Social Engagement** includes interpersonal factors that influence students' successful integration into their environment.
- **Self-Regulation** includes cognitive and affective processes used to monitor, regulate, and control behavior related to learning.

ACT developed ENGAGE Grades 10–12 to help educators evaluate students' psychosocial attributes, determine their levels of academic risk, and identify interventions to help them succeed in their transition from college into postsecondary studies. ENGAGE is composed of 108 items that form ten scales: Academic Discipline, Academic Self-Confidence, Commitment to College, Communication Skills, General Determination, Goal Striving, Social Activity, Social Connection, Steadiness, and Study Skills.

Academic Rigor - We are tracking the number of students in Pre-AP, AP, and dual credit courses. For students who are planning on attending a four-year college, these courses are critical to be ready for the rigors of college. Also, within these classes, we measure the GPA of students in these courses. GPA, in conjunction with the rigor of the courses, is a strong indicator of future success. The chart below shows that students with a high GPA, but a lower ACT score can still have great college success. That is why it is so important to look not only at ACT scores, but the courses students are taking and what their grades are in those courses.

The percent of students taking Math II in grade six has increased from 23% in 2009-10 to 66% in 2012-13. This is important because by taking Math II in sixth grade, students are on track to take Algebra in 8th grade. This puts a student on the path to taking Pre-Calculus as a junior in high school. This does several things for a student. First it puts them on the path to consider STEM careers post high school. STEM careers are in high demand and pay very well. Secondly, our own research in USD 418 has shown that students who take Pre-Calculus as a junior significantly increase their ACT scores in mathematics. Finally, by being on this path, a student in their senior year has the choice of AP Calculus or College Algebra, knowing that they have the skills to be successful.

We also have increased the percent of students taking a pre-AP course in English or social studies at the middle school over 20% in the last three years. At the high school, 697 students will take 668 pre-AP, AP and dual enrollment courses this year. This ratio is one of the best in the nation and shows that our students are taking rigorous courses in high school.

At the elementary level, we want to strengthen our core curriculum to make sure that the number of students who need assistance in tier 2 or tier 3 activities are diminished over time. This work is especially important in our pre-K and kindergarten classes.



It is essential, in today's world, to produce students with the skills necessary for great job and movement in to the middle class. Many of the skills and attributes gained in our citizenship and college domain will assist students in being career ready, but we propose to partner with the Workforce Centers of Kansas, KansasWorks, Kansas Career Pipeline, and the National Career Readiness Network, to produce students that have the necessary skills to have a quality work career in Kansas.

The need to produce students who are have the skills necessary to obtain a great job which can lead to the middle school class is essential in today's world. Studies from Georgetown University indicate that Kansas will need 67% of workers to have post secondary skills in order to be qualified for the available jobs and to move into the middle class. Being career ready involves having students explore their interests with interest surveys each year, from a variety of different types of surveys. In McPherson we currently use interest inventories from ACT EXPLORE and PLAN, along with interest surveys embedded with our college and career software, Naviance. After looking a "paper" interests with surveys, students will be provided job shadowing, internships and work-study directly tied to their career interest. Finally, through the WorkKeys system, all students will gain a National Career Readiness Certificate PLUS, noting their success in academic and soft skills for being ready for careers in Kansas and across the United States.

Workplace Academic Skills - In order to help students have the skills necessary for vibrant careers and good paying jobs, USD 418 requires each student starting in the Class of 2016 to achieve the **Silver** level on the National Career Readiness Certificate PLUS. Below are the results from the past four years at McPherson High School. As we move to 100% of our students obtaining the **Silver** level, we are working hard to move more students to the **Gold** level. Our goal is to have 50% of our graduates obtaining the **Gold** level within five years.

The new ACT ASPIRE not only will give students a college ready score starting in 8th grade, but also a career readiness score. This will allow the district to track the growth of students toward the NCRC PLUS starting in 8th grade. Any student, who falls off the track, can be assisted early on, thus allowing them to graduate with full credentials.

Workplace Soft Skills - As a compliment to measuring academic workplace skills, students need to have workplace soft skills. Therefore the district measures those on the ACT Talent assessment. ACT Talent is combined with ACT WorkKeys to produce the ACT National Career Readiness Certificate PLUS. The "PLUS" component measures the following skills:

National Career Readiness Certificate PLUS

- Work Discipline: Productivity and dependability
- Teamwork: Tolerance, communication, and attitude
- Customer Service Orientation: Interpersonal skills and perseverance
- Managerial Potential: Persuasion, enthusiasm, and problem solving

In addition, attendance is a powerful predictor not only to future higher education success, but also to workforce success. Research has shown that students in the elementary grades who consistently miss more than 10% of the days within a month are likely not to graduate from high school, attend post secondary education or hold a good paying job. Our schools and counselors work hard to impress on students that they need to attend school on a regular basis. Currently the daily attendance in our schools is approximately 97%.

Career Match with Interest Passion – Based upon research conducted in the last few years, finding out a student’s passion and matching that to their future field of study, work or lifestyle, is very important to future success. Consider this research: “The third and final core condition is the ability to identify and commit to a plan of study that is congruent with interests and abilities. The attrition landscape is filled with students who entered academic programs where their choices were based on inaccurate information, inappropriate advice, or simply unrealistic expectations. Students will succeed if they connect to a plan of study that fits with their interests and abilities.” Habley, Wesley R.; Robbins, Steve; Bloom, Jennifer L. (2012-06-25). *Increasing Persistence: Research-based Strategies for College Student Success* (Kindle Locations 420-423). Wiley Publishing. Kindle Edition.

“Seventy years of vocational research has consistently shown, that people gravitate toward occupations that permit them to engage in activities that are congruent with their personal attributes.” Habley, Wesley R.; Robbins, Steve; Bloom, Jennifer L. (2012-06-25). *Increasing Persistence: Research-based Strategies for College Student Success* (Kindle Locations 3084-3085). Wiley Publishing. Kindle Edition

Explanation of how pupil performance in achieving the specified outcomes will be:

- ***Measured***
- ***Evaluated***
- ***Reported***

USD 418 proposes that each of the nine areas in the McPherson C³ plan are measured and evaluated in the following manner:

Grades Pre-K-2	Citizenship Ready – Local assessment of character, service and activities. College Ready – AIMSWEB – percent of students at the College Readiness targets in reading and mathematic skills. Career Ready – Local assessment of career learning experiences.
Grades 3-5	Citizenship Ready – Local assessment of character, service and activities. College Ready – ACT Aspire in writing, science, reading, language arts and mathematics. Career Ready – Local assessment of field trips taken yearly.
Grades 6-10	Citizenship Ready – Local assessment of character, service and activities. College Ready – ACT ASPIRE, ACT ENGAGE, participation in Pre-AP and AP courses, coupled with GPA. Career Ready – ACT ASPIRE, local assessment of interest inventory surveys through ACT and Naviance, and establishing and monitoring of 8-year plans.
Grades 11-12	Citizenship Ready – Local assessment of character, service and activities. College Ready – ACT, ACT ENGAGE, participation in AP and dual credit courses, coupled with GPA. Career Ready – National Career Readiness Certificate PLUS, local

assessment of surveys done on interest inventories through ACT and Naviance, number of students in job shadowing and internships, completion of 8 years plans.

The ultimate evaluation of the McPherson C³ program lies in utilizing data from the National Student Clearinghouse to examine the percent of student graduating with some type of post-secondary credential. Our goal is to have 85% of all graduating classes obtaining post-secondary credentials in the form of certificates or degrees.

These results will be made available to the local Board of Education, the Innovative District participants, the Kansas State Board of Education, the Kansas Legislature and the Governor.

Description of what state laws, rules and regulations from which the district is requesting to be exempt

It is our belief that the power of the Innovative District law lies in the formation of partnerships between the Innovative Districts and their school boards, the Governor, legislature and the State Board of Education. Over time, the synergy, discussion and collaboration of these groups will aid the state of Kansas in examining, not only outstanding programming, but ways to enhance our current system. This will include examining inefficiencies that distract or do not enhance student achievement.

Per the new law, McPherson USD 418 requests using the following assessments in our application, for state and national accountability measures.

Grades Pre-K-2	Citizenship Ready – Local assessment of character, service and activities. College Ready – AIMSWEB Career Ready – Local assessment of career learning experiences.
Grades 3-5	Citizenship Ready – Local assessment of character, service and activities. College Ready – ACT Aspire Career Ready – Local assessment of field trips
Grades 6-10	Citizenship Ready – Local assessment of character, service and activities. College Ready – ACT ASPIRE, ACT ENGAGE, participation in Pre-AP and AP courses, coupled with GPA. Career Ready – ACT ASPIRE, Local assessment of surveys done on interest inventories through ACT and Naviance, beginning and monitoring of 8-year plans.
Grades 11-12	Citizenship Ready – Local assessment of character, service and activities. College Ready – ACT, ACT ENGAGE, participation in AP and dual credit courses, coupled with GPA. Career Ready – National Career Readiness Certificate PLUS, local assessment of surveys done on interest inventories through ACT and Naviance, number of students in job shadowing and internships, completion of 8 years plans.

McPherson has started the process of reviewing all laws, rules and regulations pertaining to the operation of an Innovative District. While we submit the following as CONSIDERATIONS of our

district, the list is not to be construed as to limit the laws, rules and regulations that McPherson may want in the future to request relief from under this law.

Food Service – K.A.R 91-26-1 et seq

Teacher Licensure– K.A.R 91-1-200 et seq

In-service - K.A.R 91-1-215 et seq

Regents – K.A.R. 88-29