

# **Part One**

## Academic Excellence:

Medea Creek Middle School has continued successful practices in striving for academic excellence while always looking for continuous improvement. In the past five years, Medea Creek has raised its API scores 50 points from 879 (2007) to 929 (2011). This was done in conjunction with a dramatic raise in enrollment during the same period; from 870 to 1135. MCMS has continued to add or develop successful programs focused on authentic learning, differentiation of instruction, and Response to Intervention.

One program that has continued to have a tremendous impact and improvement of academic instruction is the “21<sup>st</sup> Century Classrooms”. This program is in its fifth full year. Through a local bond measure, our teachers receive training, interactive digital white boards, laptop computers and peripheral hardware and software. All of our teachers are “21<sup>st</sup> Century Teachers.” The technology implementation has focused on integrating the technology into the curriculum, presentation, assessments and student demonstration. The resulting instruction has been dramatic, powerful and transformative. Along with three computer labs, we have also added ten sets of Computers On Wheels (C.O.W.s), mobile laptop labs that connect to the wireless network on campus. MCMS teachers are also designing Project-Based Assignments and “flipped” instruction using video delivery of direct instruction. The PE department has implemented a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Classroom with the addition of Polar Fitness Station/heart lab technology for students to track fitness progress. Our updated interactive website has allowed more teachers to truly use their site for powerful learning and communication: e-invitations to events, showcasing student work, “tours” of projects, class notes, assignments, schedules and blogs.

MCMS has continued to develop more authentic learning experiences for students. Each grade level continues to have experiential learning through Science-oriented trips; 6<sup>th</sup> grade Outdoor Education, 7<sup>th</sup> grade Catalina Marine Camp, and 8<sup>th</sup> grade AstroCamp. Our students are participating in challenge competitions in the Idea to Impact Challenge, MathCounts, and History Day. They are learning to see the world through the lenses of various professions, for example conservationists and naturalists, by producing assemblies on global pollution and assisting elementary school children on their trip to Santa Cruz Island. Our elective program continues to provide excellent authentic learning opportunities. Advanced Computers, Teen Entrepreneur, Robotics, and Sketch Programming introduce students to technical career skills. Our Art program

and our Music program are simply outstanding. Our Leadership and Mass Media classes involve a wide variety of authentic learning experiences, centered on planning, organizing and executing events. Further examples of classroom authentic learning are 6<sup>th</sup> grade “House” projects (connecting mathematics and seismology), poetry readings in English, History Day presentations in Social Science, lab experimentation and dissection in Science, and “Math Basketball” at the pre-Algebra level. To best support learning within a meaningful framework, our curriculum requires that students make connections across the disciplines. In P.E., math and science skills are implemented in charting heart rates and target goals, and in Social Science and English, core literature is connected to the history units. MCMS has expanded its program for GATE students to create ongoing digital portfolios for authentic assessment. Each student puts together examples of specific work and will have a presentation night to demonstrate their work.

This framework of connected and authentic learning leads directly to the goals, standards and methodologies being implemented with the Common Core Standards and Assessments. Professional growth trainings have focused on differentiation of instruction within each subject area as well as mastering technology. Monthly staff meetings, departmental meetings and grade level meetings have teachers collaborating for implementing differentiation. One particularly effective example of differentiation has been the 7<sup>th</sup> grade Humanities teachers creating flexible groupings between classes and assignments for several units. Other departmental teams have moved beyond their classrooms with coordinated instruction such as the 6<sup>th</sup> grade “Rock Cycle” lessons, Pi Week curriculum across disciplines math lessons, and the Health and Fitness Week in PE and core classes.

Students are frequently given the opportunity to revise their work based on the feedback from the teacher, emphasizing working towards mastery of standards. Teachers noted this year that integrating more study skill techniques within the curriculum has helped in students’ improvement. One area of relative weakness in our self-analysis was the students’ need to have a clearer understanding of why they are learning a concept; a focus of Relevance will be discussed as a goal this year.

Teachers, parents and students report continued satisfaction with the modified block schedule supporting the academic program. This schedule allows the in-depth time needed for 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade science (dissections and other labs), while providing daily rigor and practice in subjects like Spanish I, Chinese I and music (Bands and Chorus). Other successful systems supporting high achievement in academics is the collaborative teaming within grade levels and departments. Each department has four full release days for collaboration days. The teachers use

these days to coordinate curriculum, share lessons, strategies and materials and also allow articulation between the high school and with the elementary schools.

#### Developmental Responsiveness:

Students are supported in a nurturing environment in which everyone--teachers, counselors and administrators are approachable and available to provide students with extra tutoring, problem solving, peer issues and discipline. Supervision has been an increased focus with the administration and counselors. However, one of the identified goals for the past two years has been to find more ways for students to connect to adults on campus, particularly through activities, clubs and organizations. It is recognized that having many additional students, without additional staffing, creates a gap in this connection.

Three years ago, MCMS undertook the design and implementation of a comprehensive anti-bullying plan. In addition to counselor meetings with classrooms and assemblies regarding anti-bullying, we have implemented Safe School Ambassadors, Character Counts lessons, and small group interventions. Specific training has been provided for students to learn how to recognize and act when harassment was taking place. We focus on having students be "first responders"; having skills in deflecting, intervening or reporting harassment situations. In addition, we have held the Rachel's Challenge assembly, Kaiser-Permanente's "Someone Like Me" program, internet safety assemblies, and drug and alcohol prevention assemblies. We also have an anonymous reporting system "Medea Report It" through our school's website. There will be additional programs in the next few years, including an 8<sup>th</sup> grade mentoring program to 6<sup>th</sup> graders and coordinated lessons across the disciplines for character education. The goals are to have significant "culture change" towards the reduction of bullying and harassment. This culture change has been embedded into our curriculum. Last year, our Humanities Department instituted a Tolerance and Acceptance Project, where students take on an issue on campus and propose an action plan in helping to solve the problem. These projects have already been implemented, for example, having groups of students welcome new students on the first day of school.

Our Student Handbook delineates how students may go about changing or adding a school rule. Our students recently utilized this processes to propose new rules regarding gum chewing, wearing sandals, and use of iPods on campus. On each issue, students presented proposals to the administration and School Site Council. The proposals iPods and sandals have

been formally adopted on a permanent basis. Additionally, our District adopted new technology use rules, making it easier for students to use laptops and other technology from home on campus.

Each year MCMS adds new, innovative clubs that are a direct response to student interest. Over the last few years these have included Tech/Robotics, Juggling, Music Theater, Walking, Environmental, Animal Care, Animae, Movie Making and iClub (basically multi-media scrap booking). These are in addition to the MCMS staples, like Chess, Friendship, and Art Club. ASB has begun an annual student Talent Show, also in response to student interest.

MCMS has a tremendous volunteer support from our parents and our community. Parents are involved in almost all co-curricular events and support work in the offices and on campus on a daily basis. In addition, special events and speakers have been available for classrooms; for example, MCMS invited veterans to speak about their experiences on Veteran's Day. Community businesses and families have participated and supported our charity benefit drives (i.e. Book Drive for underprivileged schools, recycling shoes, Food Drives, Toys For Tots, as examples), and our fundraising events. Community members have been "expert speakers" in robotics, technology, and we have hosted Holocaust survivors to tell their stories. The students participate in community beautification events such as the "Big Sunday", working to clean up the community and working on projects on campus, and hundreds of our students annually participate in the Heal the Bay Coastal Cleanup.

MCMS has expanded the transition programs that are offered to incoming 6<sup>th</sup> grade students and to culminating 8<sup>th</sup> graders to the high school. Prior to the first day of school, incoming 6<sup>th</sup> graders have an information night and a campus tour during the spring. Many students take a summer school course, "Keys to Middle School" in preparing the 6<sup>th</sup> graders. Along with a "New Student/Parent Tea" prior to registration, the incoming students have multiple opportunities to be on the campus. This year, we implemented a separate Back To School Night specifically for 6<sup>th</sup> grade students and parents the first week of school. The 8<sup>th</sup> grade students start meetings with high school counselors mid-way through the school year. They attend "Future Freshmen Night" and are introduced to co-curricular opportunities at meetings during the spring.

The Counseling department has expanded their connections with students in regards to college planning and career paths. We have adopted the Naviance software which will assist us in incorporating career curriculum into our academic program. State programs such as implementing SB 1802 counseling as well as classroom presentations and connections to the high school have focused on "steps to success" as they look towards their careers. We are also implementing small group counseling, one for boys, one girls and one for social skills. One goal this year will also be to implement our Opportunity Program for 8<sup>th</sup> grade students who are not meeting culmination

requirements by the end of the second quarter. We are designing the intervention to give these at-risk students a goal for college and career options.

### Social Equity:

The academic pathways for students are accessible to all students. All classes have differentiated instruction allowing for more challenging instruction as well as interventions as necessary. MCMS has implemented some general education intervention classes for student struggling in a particular curricular area. For example, students having difficulty in reading may have access to the READ 180 class, giving students practice in reading fluency and comprehension before being placed into the Language Arts classes. We have also implemented an “Algebra Readiness” course designed for students struggling at the pre-algebra level in 8<sup>th</sup> grade, and a “Math Intervention” before school class for 6<sup>th</sup> grade. Each of these classes is designed to have the student caught up to grade level by the end of the year, thereby not keeping them in a ‘low track’. Additionally, we are implementing RtI approaches to identifying at-risk students. Any staff member can refer a student to the Principal or Assistant Principal; they work with the student’s counselor and teachers. After a thorough Cumulative File review and ‘fact finding’ from a variety of school sources, an action plan (sometimes including a parent meeting or SST) is developed to assist the student succeed in in a targeted area. The administrator/counselor follow up to measure improvement or need for further action. All of these efforts are geared toward student success in a rigorous academic program during the developmentally challenging middle school years.

Each of our teachers has been trained in differentiation techniques and students are able to demonstrate their mastery of skills in a variety of ways. Students who are demonstrating high achievement are able to do “Exemption” assignments; project-based and often technology based research and presentation designed by the students. All students have access to “Honors” designations in 8<sup>th</sup> grade classes in all academic areas, as well as Technology, Art and Music as the extended assignment requirements are available to any student, not just those placed in an accelerated class. All curricular trips are open to all students.

MCMS renewed its focus on the “next best answer” for curriculum and instruction. There are systems for professional growth to motivate teachers to have new training, new materials and new technology. All of our teachers have spent at least one year training and

implementing the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Classrooms with new technology. These trainings have energized teaching, ideas and innovation.

Students have a variety of elective courses to choose at the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade, with 6<sup>th</sup> grade students placed in exploratory courses. MCMS has a phenomenal Art program, progressing from beginning skills to highly advance “Art Showcase” that has students presenting their projects formally. Technology courses have included, New Media Art, Digital Media, Tech Investigations, Teen Entrepreneurs and Robotics. For the past three years, the Oak Park Unified School District has implemented a Foreign Language grant, giving the middle school several courses in Chinese (Mandarin) language and culture.

### Organizational Structure and Processes:

Shared leadership is a hallmark of the Oak Park Unified School District. Teachers, counselors, office staff and administration are all part of decision making. Goals are formulated each year at the site levels and developed through to the district. MCMS has several structures of shared leadership ingrained in our culture.

Teachers regularly meet and collaborate in both curricular departments as well as grade level teams. Issues, concerns, new ideas, and solutions are discussed at these meetings and then brought to the Leadership Council on a monthly basis, where representatives discuss and make agreements with each other and the administration. There is a strong and open communication between the administrators and the faculty. In addition, there are full staff meetings once per month, though the focus of these is often further collaboration, lesson sharing and staff development. In addition, teachers work in teams, allowing almost daily collaboration, observation, team teaching and even flexible grouping situations. Classrooms are clustered together by grade level and subject area, wherever possible, to assist with both teacher and student collaboration. To support site technology at various levels, the District lends technical support and some staff development; at the site, teacher leadership is evidenced in our site Webmaster and Tech Mentors, working with fellow teachers on integrating our new technology into the curriculum.

The Principal, Assistant Principal, Dean of Students and Counselors have delineated areas of leadership so teachers, students and parents have clear designation as to who to contact for questions or concerns. Faculty, Parent and Student Handbooks detail critical school information. The latter two Handbooks are available on the school Website.

Continuous articulation takes place between the middle school faculty and the elementary and high school faculty. Articulation has been instrumental in curricular implementations in the Language Arts and Math curriculum. The adoption of the Common Core Standards is helping expand the articulation to more cross-curricular focus.

Students have multiple supports in academic areas. Teachers regularly make themselves available for additional instruction, review sessions or tutoring during the lunch hour, before school and after school. MCMS has a "Homework Club" twice a week for an hour after school with two teachers available. In addition, students identified as needing further support are matched with an older student for Peer Tutoring twice a week. Any additional accommodations

are discussed with the teachers, parents and counselors in the Student Study Team process, and, as mentioned in the previous section, an RtI approach is being used to address students at-risk.

MCMS is fortunate to have a faculty that is truly passionate and innovative in their teaching. There is a culture of constant professional growth and teachers are constantly trying to find new strategies, materials and ideas to supplement their instruction, and an organizational structure that supports sharing and innovation. This could be seen in the voluntary implementation of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Classrooms and the constant excitement and sharing of each new lesson or strategy that was developed with the new technology. Teaching teams continue to implement new lessons of authentic learning and project based learning, “flipped” instruction, and cross-curricular instruction supporting Common Core standards.

## **Part Two**

What special recognitions have been awarded to your school or faculty members since your designation as a Schools to Watch three years ago?

### **District Awards**

#### **2012**

California Breathing (ART) Achievements in Respiration Health – Distinguished Achievement Award

Honorable Mention – Ventura County Board of Supervisors Climate Change Action Award

Honorable Mention – National School Boards Association Magna Award – Safe Schools Ambassadors Program

#### **2011**

USGBC California Central Chapter - Green Award

California Green Schools Summit & Exposition – Leadership Award

#### **2009**

Governor's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports – District of the Year

#### **2008-2012**

California Business Roundtable Honor School Award – All District Schools

## **Part Three**

**A description of any research projects, grant awards, articles, and projects of which your school has been the subject or recipient in the past three years (maximum length, one page)**

School Grants/Awards/Projects:

Two teachers awarded a grant opportunity to study the rain forest ecosystems as an “Eco Team”– Northrup-Grumman Grant – Teachers will be presenting their experiences and classroom implementation at a Science Speakers Series at the Discovery Center in Thousand Oaks.

Foreign Language Acquisition Program (FLAP Grant): Federal grant awarded to develop foreign language programs in languages critical to national interest. Oak Park USD expanded its Chinese (Mandarin) Language program to include introduction courses at the middle school. Currently, we have 6 semester classes of introductory Mandarin at the middle school, and approximately 20 of our 8<sup>th</sup> grade students take Chinese I at the high school.

Science Fair: Over the past three years, MCMS has had many 1<sup>st</sup> Place and High Honors awards as the Ventura County Science Faire. In 2012, MCMS was presented an award for having the most award winners overall. Two of our students were selected to the final 300 top Science Fair projects nationally in 2012.

Heal the Bay: MCMS has been awarded 1<sup>st</sup> Place for the group clearing the most litter from the annual Coastal Clean Up Day for each of the last four years.

Edison Challenge/Idea to Impact: MCMS teams have been awarded 1<sup>st</sup> Place in 2011, and Honorable Mention for 2012 for teams’ environmental projects.

Music in the Park, Music Festival Awards: Our music groups, bands and chorus, have been awarded numerous awards at music festivals, ranging from “Outstanding” to “Superior” ratings. Several of our students have been selected for “Spotlight” awards for music excellence.

## **Part Four**

**The identification of several “stretch goals” that will move your school to the next level. Goals may be, but are not limited to, the following areas:**

**Efforts to move from teacher-directed to student-centered classrooms:** Several of our teachers are utilizing project-based instruction, with the projects being done in class and with teacher guidance. In addition, teachers are also utilizing “flipped” instruction with the use of prepared online videos or materials that students watch or read at home, with practice done in class with teacher guidance.

**Institution of more authentic and varied measures of student progress:** Several unit assignments have moved to more authentic assessments. Our 7<sup>th</sup> grade Humanities team had students prepare a “Tolerance Awareness Program” presentation. After studying the Diary of Anne Frank, students prepare a proposal and action plan to combat current issues of intolerance. History Day projects were presented to panels of guests from the community. These models are being presented at faculty meetings and department planning days to generate more assessments.

**More integrative approach to learning:** Common Core implementation is expanding the articulation between departments. We have also undertaken the goal of balancing high expectations with reduction of student stress. This has in part taken the form of better integration of assignments that connect curricular standards; i.e. Science Fair being partially taught/graded in Language Arts as their research project (Students used to do two separate projects).

**Transitions in and out of the middle school:** We have expanded transition programs this last year, most notably the addition of the 6<sup>th</sup> grade Back to School Night and the extra orientation for new students (“New Student/Parent Tea”).

**Campus Connections:** MCMS has identified an ongoing goal of connecting students to organizations, activities and adults on the campus. Having such a large enrollment growth over the last three years, we grew concerned with having students becoming isolated. We are expanding clubs, small groups for at-risk students, involvement activities (e.g. community service days), and enrichment classes (in partnership with the Rancho Simi Parks and Recreation Department).

**Increased involvement in the arts and humanities:** Our Music program, bands and chorus, have increased dramatically in the last four years. We had only 3 classes of bands (no chorus) in 2008-9, but have expanded to 6 classes, including a chorus of 70 students and a Jazz Band. Enrollment in music increased from 75 students to over 200. Our Art program continues to be outstanding. Our Art teacher has taken on a support role with other departments by helping integrate Art lessons into core academic classes; e.g. Art History, Mathematic concepts in Art. We have a goal of starting a theater program later this year.

Test data: API Scores, target areas, and subgroup achievement are attached below.

Signature and Permission

I am aware applications developed and written solely by consultants will not be considered, and I certify that the Re-designation Application (including narrative) was a collaborative process involving site administrators, teachers and other key stake-holders.

I give permission to the National Forum and the *Schools to Watch - Taking Center Stage* Team to publish the information and materials included in this application on their web sites in order to help other schools move toward high performance. I understand that the *Schools to Watch – Taking Center Stage* members may conduct a site visit to my school and we will gladly host such a visit. Furthermore, if my school is selected for Re-certification as a *School to Watch – Taking Center Stage*, a documentation team may visit the school in order to gather further information for a case study. This case study may include written and photographic and/or videotaped documentation.

My staff and I will cooperate in the data-gathering effort to the fullest extent possible and will assist in obtaining the necessary releases for the case study. I recognize that being selected as a *School to Watch – Taking Center Stage* will result in an increase of outside visitors and publicity. We are prepared to share our knowledge and experience with others in order to accelerate middle-grades reform, and to document these mentorship experiences using simple forms provided by STW-TCS.

I further certify that the Office of Civil Rights (OCR) does not have any outstanding findings of one or more civil rights statute violations by the school or district which may affect the school and that there are no pending suits by the Department of Justice against the district alleging that the school, or the district as a whole, has violated one or more of the civil rights statutes or the Constitution's equal protection clauses.

---

Principal's Signature

Date

---

District Administrator's (Superintendent or Designee) Signature Date

**California Schools to Watch – Taking Center Stage Program**  
in collaboration with  
*The National Forum to Accelerate Middle Grades Reform*

**Re-Designation Application Cover Sheet**

*Type or print all information*

School Name: **Medea Creek Middle School**

School Address: **1002 Doubletree Rd., Oak Park, CA 91377**

School District: **Oak Park Unified School District**

School Phone: **818-707-7923** Fax: **818- 707-7970**

School Web Address: **www.oakparkusd.org/MCMS**

Total Enrollment: **1135**

Grades in school (circle appropriate grades): 5 6 7 8 9

Principal's name (please print): **Brad Benioff**

Principal's e-mail address: **bbenioff@oakparkusd.org**

Additional Phone Contact Number for Principal (mobile): **818-335-7619**

Signatures of Application Writing Team:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Report Deadline:**

**September 25th**