

## **Personalization**

Mason Elementary School personalizes learning to educate the whole child ensuring academic, social, and emotional success. Small class sizes and paraprofessional support allow for individualized instruction. As a staff we recognize and appreciate the specific academic strengths and challenges of our students. We are afforded a more intimate teacher and student relationship that extends beyond the classroom walls. Having a strong bond with each child helps our teachers excel with classroom management. Our dedicated teachers invest their time beyond the contracted hours in order to prepare engaging lessons that incorporate multiple learning styles to embed the instructed curriculum. These lessons embrace the interests of our students as well as incorporating real-life experiences.

The safe and nurturing environment that the dedicated staff have produced encourages students to feel success within their academics. The personalization of each child's education is due to the process of the Response to Intervention model. This process begins with pre-assessing student's prior knowledge across all content areas thus avoiding repetition of mastered skills. Students who have mastered the skills are given an opportunity for more project based learning in which they can demonstrate a deeper understanding of the assessed standard. Students with little to no prior understanding receive support through the use of small group instruction, paraprofessional support, Title 1, special education services, incorporation of technology, and hands-on activities. Along with interactive whiteboards in every classroom each student is fortunate enough to have their own personal chromebook or iPad. This one-to-one ratio allows all students to use programs such as: IXL, BrainPop, TenMarks, Read Theory, among others. Through the use of these multiple strategies students strive for and experience personal success.

Our school is unique because we offer a wide range of after school activities at free or affordable prices. These after school activities are administered by school staff through a specially designed program known as "career ladders". For the kinesthetic learners we provide Mason on the Move, Yoga, and Girls on the Run. BrainiArts, Destination Imagination, Puppetry, Drama, and Movie Nite tap into the interest of visual learners. Students with musical aptitudes often choose to participate in Chorus and Instrumental lessons. During recess hours students can be found attending a Lego Club or identifying themselves as real authors during Writer's Club. When students are given these special opportunities they demonstrate the willingness and the drive to become successful at school, home, and within the community.

## **Data**

Mason schools have always been known for their academic success and high achieving students as far back as the 1800s. In 1873, School #6 was report as a "school of high rank" and was recognized as a "model school". Once we made a complete split from the Mascenic District, we knew we had a great deal of work ahead to maintain and grow Mason's success. Knowing we would be tuitioning our students to a new town and district, we wanted to ensure both our

students' readiness and success. We began putting many new initiatives and systems in place including daily Writer's Workshop, Guided Reading groups, RTI, and enrichment groups. For educators, we successfully implemented monthly curriculum meetings to collaborate and bring our best practices to light in a shared setting. We also held whole school monthly data meetings to use test scores to drive our instruction. After looking at our data for this application process, we are happy to report that all of our hard work paid off!

2014-2015's outgoing class of 5th graders was our first class that went from Kindergarten through 5th grade with Mason as its own independent school district. Their results on the Smarter Balance testing were amazing. Overall we had 94% of students in 5th grade score proficient or higher in ELA/Literacy, eleven of the sixteen students (69%) received a level 4 (exceeding the achievement standard and demonstrating advanced progress), four of the sixteen (25%) received a level 3 (meeting the achievement standard.) The remaining 6% scored at Level 2 (nearly meeting the achievement standard) and none of the students scored a level 1 (needing substantial improvement.) Our Math testing showed similar results with 63% of our students scoring at level 4, 18% scoring at level 3, and the remaining 19% scoring at level 2. Again, we had no students at Level 1. Mason Elementary School outgoing 5th grade students experienced great success on the NWEA testing as well, with all students scoring above the 50th percentile and 63% of the students scoring above the 90th percentile. We firmly believe that we are preparing our elementary students for a successful transition to middle school life.

## **Innovation**

When our school was remodeled seven years ago we "went green" and were awarded the Certified High Performance School (CHIPS) status. As a staff we knew we needed to do more and at that time the school committed to educating our students about environmental awareness and fostering community involvement in the process as well. Mason Elementary School established a school recycling program in 2009. This program was created with support from the NRRA School Recycling Club. Fourth Grade students learn about the importance of recycling to our Earth, community, and school. They then use a combination of songs, stories, or plays to educate the rest of the school on how to properly recycle.

In 2010, our school began using the Paper Retriever program to recycle paper. We reached out to the townspeople and they too take advantage of the retriever to recycle their paper. In 2011 we sent our first shipment of juice pouches to Terracycle for the drink pouch brigade. We have juice pouch collection bins throughout the school and families also collect the pouches for us at home. In addition to collecting juice pouches, our school also has classroom bins for plastic, aluminum, and glass. Our facilities manager oversees the proper disposal of other recyclables such as plastic bottles, cans, and cardboard.

Since its inception, the program has expanded to a whole school commitment to recycling including community involvement. Events such as the recycled art projects, the recycled instruments band and the annual magazine drive build enthusiasm for our recycling program. This program continues to expand each year. Our newest initiative is the School Garden Club.

This program was introduced in 2015 and financial support for this program came from the Mason School Club. The facilities manager helped the program get up and running by constructing two raised garden beds, assembling cold frames and the compost tumbler in the school courtyard. Community members donated the materials to make the cold frames to extend the growing season. A local business donated seeds and free delivery of garden materials. The program kicked off its first season with students in grades 1 through 4 completing the task of filling the garden beds with soil and organic fertilizer. The Garden Club will be growing greens and vegetables that will be served in our school cafeteria. The Club will assist the cafeteria by utilizing our compost tumbler to recycle organic waste into soil. We have future plans to extend the program to include planting ornamental flowers and shrubs throughout the school grounds, creating a place for outdoor learning experiences to be enjoyed by students and staff alike.

### **Rubric**

After reviewing the rubric as a staff, we identified multiple areas in which we scored ourselves exemplary. A common theme that came up while discussing how we got there was the trust and support of the school board, the community, the parents, and each other. One of these areas is Empowered Educators. In thinking about why we feel so empowered, we came to the conclusion that it all comes down to trust and connection. First and foremost, our entire staff works closely together. Everyone who works here is involved with the children in some way. Our child-centered philosophy is apparent from the front desk, to the cafeteria, to the classrooms, to the Unified Arts room, to the playground. There is not a person on our staff who doesn't put the child first. We feel personally connected to the students in our care. This is all possible because we have a school board and building administration that trusts us to do what's best for children. They are supportive and encouraging, giving us the freedom to teach in the ways that work best for us and our kids. The faculty's individuality is appreciated and celebrated. We are a staff that believes in continuous self-improvement for the benefit of our students. This is evidenced by our teacher initiated implementation of monthly curriculum meetings as well as monthly professional development meetings. Our entire staff is not only committed to the child, but to our families as well. We believe in personalized conversations with parents and listen to their input. Our parents have a chance to share their ideas and/or concerns at monthly meetings facilitated by our building principal. There is a true circle of trust among all of us.

A second area with exemplary marks is Rigor and Standards. Mason Elementary School has fully adopted the Common Core Standards and has been using them to guide our instruction in Math and ELA for three years now. As for Science and Social Studies we continue to use the NH GLEs. We consider these to be the MINIMUM standards and we go well above and beyond in order to bring our children to higher achievement levels. As a school we have made grade level benchmarks and expectations for the students that exceed those that the Common Core has set for us. For example, the common core standards state that students should be able to produce an opinion, informative and narrative piece of writing. Typically students would produce one to two paragraphs, here in Mason our second graders are producing 3 to 4

paragraphs. We set our reading fluency levels higher than those that are recommended through DIBELS. This year we have also transitioned to Standards Based Reporting and have included a level 4 achievement rating which indicates that students are performing above grade level expectations. On every summative assessment we give students the opportunity to “Reach 4 It” that requires them to perform above grade level and use higher level thinking skills. As seen through our standardized test results whether it be NECAP Science, Smarter Balanced, or NWEA we frequently score above the state and normative levels. When students transition to Milford Middle School many of them are placed in the advanced math and/or reading classes. As Bob Beauprez said “Education is a shared commitment between dedicated teachers, motivated students, and enthusiastic parents with high expectations.” This quote depicts Mason Elementary school perfectly.

### **Inspiration**

As the students start pouring in from the buses and cars each morning, one can see from the smiling faces that each child in our school is happy to be here. Our school is a representation of how hard work and dedication can make a difference in children’s lives. Our teachers and staff care deeply and are excited to be at work every day. We wouldn’t be where we are today if it were not for the community of Mason being such an integral part of our school. Research has shown that the greatest cognitive growth occurs through social interaction and connections to others. We are constantly developing innovative ways with help from our community in which to capture the excitement and love of learning for our students. It is our hope that through our daily pursuit of excellence, that we, in some small way, can inspire others.

One way we are able to excite our students is through the dedicated work of our School Club which consists of parents and staff members. They have developed many incredible programs to serve our students. During our annual Open House, the School Club holds a Scholastic Book Fair with profits providing hundreds of dollars for staff to enrich their programs. On Halloween, students and the community gather for a town parade visiting the town offices, the library, and the police station. The Club also sponsors a Holiday Craft Fair. This magical event takes place in The Mason Town Hall. The School Club and local artists work together to provide inexpensive yet beautiful crafts for the students to purchase for family and friends. This unique shopping experience offers kids not only a chance to buy gifts for loved ones but also a chance to talk with community members and possibly learn a thing or two about money. The School Club opens the Fair on a separate day for the townspeople to come to purchase crafts as well. Finally to end our year, School Club puts on a Spirit week that features not only an outdoor Field Day but special days such as Dress Like the 80’s, culminating with a school assembly where parents put on skits and teach students and staff the dances of that era.

Our school provides opportunities for the community to interact with our students through a variety of events. One such event is our monthly Senior Breakfast. Our beloved professional chef, Chef Deb, is an integral part of the success of this event, providing a healthy, homemade breakfast for the seniors. Each month, a different class hosts the breakfast. While the

children have an opportunity to learn from the senior community members; the seniors also learn what is happening at our school. The children often read stories, play math games, share writing pieces, poems and even put on some plays. This is such a special time for the senior citizens that attend to have a chance to share their knowledge of the world around them and to become a part of our special school. The smiles and laughter heard from our cafeteria are memories that are long lasting. Chef Deb also serves a special lunch on Grandparents' Day and Parents' Day when we welcome grandparents, special friends of our students and parents to join their child for lunch. We hope other larger schools will be inspired to host similar events. Just imagine how many more people a larger school could touch by implementing this act of kindness in their school.

Finally, we would like to inspire other schools to open their doors and see what their local community has to offer. Many local businesses are willing and eager to support schools. The town of Mason supports our school in so many ways. Many local farms and businesses such as Barrett Hill, Babin Landscaping and Mason Brook Nursery contribute to our school by donating many items such as pumpkins for each student, plants and decorations for outside our school along with materials and plants for our courtyard that also serves as an outdoor classroom. We have also been able to provide fresh produce and offer a sort of "farm to school" lunch program. Schools will be surprised just how many businesses and local community members are willing to help support children and the activities within the school year. In conclusion, we would like to revisit the African proverb, "It takes a village to raise a child." It is with this belief that we encourage other schools to reach out into their community just as we have here at Mason Elementary School. Through the connections we have made in our town, we have transformed our small school into something bigger and helped foster a community of civic minded young citizens along the way.