

Educational Leadership/
Service

#12

Canton Middle School

A Professional Development School
Promoting Educational Change and Systemic Reform

School Reform At Work In An Urban Setting

A Baltimore City Public School
in Collaboration with
the University of Maryland, Baltimore County
and the Maryland State Department of Education

Dr. Craig E. Spilman, Principal

What Others Have Said About Our Program

"The information we received was invaluable and will go a long way to helping the 1,000,000 adolescents in Texas Middle Schools."

*Senior Director,
Division of Middle Schools Education
Texas Education Agency*

"As Principal, the facilitative leader of Canton Middle School, you have helped to create an environment that focuses on improved school/student performance, supports and encourages shared decision making, and manages change as part of the continuous school improvement planning process."

*State Superintendent of Schools
Maryland State Department of Education*

"It is our hope that we can move the entire school system in the direction Canton Middle School is taking."

*Superintendent of Public Instruction
Baltimore City Public Schools*

"Your presentation on the models developed to address teaming, multi-age heterogeneous grouping, inclusion of special education students in the regular classroom, the drop-out prevention Canton Project, and the implementation of technology for improved instruction and communications provided the Texas delegation with 'more information than a college course on school reform.'"

Texas State Carnegie Project Director

"Other schools in the Baltimore City Public School System and throughout the state need to learn about the Canton success story."

Challenge Schools Office

"Thank you for your thorough and vigorous preparation for our visit. I am very interested in how you have moved from a hierarchical model to an authentically collaborative one."

*Educator
Ypsilanti, Michigan*

Canton Middle School

Background

Canton Middle School, located in southeast Baltimore, is an urban school with a racially mixed population of 760 students (approximately 60% white, 35% African-American, and 5% Native American or Hispanic). Most students at Canton come from historically working class families, many of whom have been adversely affected during the last twenty years by economic and technological changes in the workplace. More than 84% of Canton students qualify for the federally funded free lunch program. A majority of them live in single-parent homes. Many have significant learning problems. Canton students come to school with a wide range of emotional, social, medical, and academic needs, all of which must be addressed if they are to achieve success in high school and become productive members of American's future work force. Since 1992 Canton Middle School has been engaged in an ambitious school improvement project. This initiative, supported by the Carnegie Corporation and the Maryland State Department of Education, is designed to

create a rich and diverse middle school environment with a broad-based foundation of child-centered programs and services to promote student learning. The project has enabled Canton to become a school-based systemic change model and teacher training site for other schools throughout the state. During the first phase of the project (1992-1993), Canton formed a School Improvement Team composed of teachers, administrators, parents, and other support staff. The Canton School Improvement Team, with input from the entire staff, assessed student needs, developed schoolwide priorities to address these needs, and developed a 5-year plan to implement priorities. This plan, which has become a school restructuring blueprint, links the findings and recommendations of two major studies - Carnegie's Turning Points and Maryland's Middle Learning Years Report - to the Maryland School Performance Program (MSPP). The plan, which is revised and updated each spring, addresses several major objectives including multi-agency collaboration, teacher decision-making, focused curriculum development, inclusion for students with special needs,

alternative programs for high risk students, year-round professional development for teachers, and the utilization of technology for evaluation, instruction, parent communication, and program management.

The implementation of the plan is being monitored and evaluated locally by the Maryland State Department of Education and nationally by the Carnegie Corporation of New York, the Council of Chief State School Officers, and the University of Illinois Center for Prevention Research and Development (CPRD). The primary outcome of the project will be to create a contemporary school program which meets the newly established Maryland School Performance Program standards for all students.

Teacher Empowerment

Teachers have been empowered to assume major leadership roles and responsibilities. They are the driving force of the Canton School Improvement Team, the school's primary decision-making body. This team, which meets once a week, develops the school improvement plan, monitors its implementation, and evaluates the outcomes in terms of student achievement. In addition, the team makes organizational and operational decisions and analyzes student data for further program changes.

Canton's school-based decision-making model differs from that of most other schools in that the principal is only one of twenty participating members of the School Improvement Team rather than its chair. This has instilled in team members the sense of trust, independence, and integrity critical to the health of the school reform process. Canton's principal, having relinquished traditional decision-making power, has taken on the roles of enabler, supporter, and facilitator while also maintaining a firm grip on those leadership responsibilities necessary to provide a safe,

structured environment in which effective teaching and learning can take place.

Interventions for High-Risk Students

The Canton School Improvement Team's first priority was to address the needs of high-risk pupils. With over 80% of Canton's population eligible for the federal free lunch program and with daily student attendance in 1991 averaging only 79%, it became evident that a holistic approach to treating the early adolescent was required. Following recommendations set forth in the Carnegie Corporation's Turning Points, Canton has designed and implemented a multi-agency collaborative model containing a comprehensive health care delivery system designed to provide students and their families with on-site physical and mental health treatment as well as off-site services at a variety of clinics. As part of the model, Canton uses third-party billing to fund a full-time on-site, mental health therapist from Johns Hopkins Hospital. Baltimore Medical Systems, a non-profit community health provider, maintains a school-linked health clinic which places a full-time nurse at the school. The Primary

Assessment Committee (PAC) facilitates student access to these and other school-based resources, such as school counselors, psychologists, and a social worker. This committee, composed of school and agency representatives, constitutes the main focus for the various components of the multi-agency model and meets on a weekly basis to review referrals, assess and recommend treatment, meet with families, assign case loads, and evaluate outcomes.

Another program developed for the high-risk population is the Canton Project, a dropout prevention initiative for over-age students with poor attendance. The Canton Project evolved from a partnership between the school and the Sheraton Inner Harbor Hotel in downtown Baltimore. The Sheraton provided one-day-a-week paid job-shadowing experiences for students in the project. In return, students signed a contract in which they agreed to attend school regularly and improve their academic performance on the other four school days. Impressed by the project's initial success, the state awarded the school a modest grant to increase the number of job sites within the community. In addition, the Canton Project has been expanded to include younger students who perform community service jobs in

school and at a nearby nursing home and day care center.

In September, 1995, Canton established a Diagnostic Assessment Center (DAC) to provide educational and related services to students who demonstrate severe behavior problems. The center, which serves Canton and other city schools, offers a highly structured program that is tailored to meet the behavioral, social, and emotional needs of each student. The related service team works closely with the students in the center to assess their needs and develop an individualized prescriptive plan. After nine weeks, the teacher from the sending school visits the center to receive training on how to handle the child in the regular classroom. The child is then transitioned back to his home school.

Through a joint partnership with the Family Preservation Initiative (FPI) and Baltimore City Public Schools, in cooperation with the Maryland State Department of Education, the Transitional Educational Model Program (TEMP), was developed to work with severely emotionally disturbed children who are normally placed in non-public Intensity V institutions. TEMP is a long-term program which supports both child and family through a wide range of services such as case management, psychological services, social work,

expressive arts, and pediatric consultation. This program provides the structure to enable each child to develop the necessary skills to function successfully in a regular school environment.

School Organization

In an effort to ensure and enhance instruction for all students, Canton has restructured its organizational model to provide inclusive ungraded multi-age classrooms characterized by heterogeneous groups of children, 10 to 14 years of age. Each classroom contains students who work at a wide range of ability levels extending from special education through highly able. According to the schools-within-a-school concept, management has been decentralized into two smaller schools (houses) under the authority of a house principal delegated to manage each school.

General and special education teachers are clustered into interdisciplinary academic teams, each of which has been assigned a population of multi-age students to be grouped heterogeneously using flexible blocks of time. Teaching teams meet daily during a common planning period for the purpose of integrating curriculum, adapting and modifying

instruction, regrouping students for instruction, and meeting with parents.

Special Education

Canton Middle School provides quality special education programs that adhere to all compliance regulations. Canton is committed to educating students with special needs in the least restrictive environment. To accomplish this, Canton has organized its student population into instructional classes containing students of all ability levels including special education children. To support and implement Canton's full inclusion model, special educators are assigned to each team to collaborate, co-teach, adapt and modify lessons, and provide in-class support. Using a case management system developed at Canton, special educators ensure that Individual Education Plans (I.E.P.) are met and that the curriculum is presented to students in a way that meets their unique needs.

The related service team, which consists of two psychologists, a speech/ language pathologist, a social worker, and a mental health therapist, works collaboratively with teachers, students, and parents to plan and implement a program that enables all students to be successful in the least

restrictive environment. As a result, students with special needs have met with great success at Canton Middle School. The inclusion model has been so successful that many students with special needs are able to pass their functional tests before reaching high school. To assist other schools with the development of their inclusion programs, staff from Canton Middle School provide professional development and on-going technical assistance to numerous Baltimore City public schools and other schools throughout the state. As part of the K-12 Citywide Inclusion Project, Canton staff provide in-depth training during the summer and school year to administrators and teachers in six other city schools.

Curriculum and Instruction

The curriculum at Canton Middle School is a direct result of teacher empowerment. Canton teachers met in curriculum departments and in interdisciplinary teams to rewrite the traditional grade-oriented curriculum into a three year cycle. The curriculum, focused on broad academic themes, was reorganized so that all students receive the same course of studies in any given year. For example, World Cultures is taught every

third year to the entire student population. During the summer, each discipline (department) develops and revises its own curriculum. As guidelines for writing an integrated curriculum, all disciplines utilize the Maryland State Performance Standards, the nationally recognized Dimensions of Learning strategies, and specific materials designed to promote thinking skills. Canton has also developed a comprehensive writing-across-the-curriculum strand, supported by every discipline, for each year of the three-year cycle. All curriculum, aligned to state outcomes, is mapped on a timeline to ensure that the skills taught in one discipline are reinforced in the others. Since each classroom contains a diverse mixture of student abilities, adaptations for special needs students and tiered assignments for highly able students are integrated into the planning and implementation of long-term units and daily lessons. In addition, students who are poor readers are given supplemental reading instruction based on the Orton-Gillingham phonics program. Academically gifted students are provided opportunities for exploration, research, and enhanced learning outside the normal classroom setting.

Professional Development Model

Teacher empowerment has provided the impetus for Canton's professional development model which plays a critical role in the continued restructuring of Canton and is a major component in creating a school culture which embraces positive change. The linking of student achievement, school climate, and instructional practice is continually reassessed and adjusted to provide optimum conditions for teaching and learning. An extensive range of professional development experiences provides Canton's teachers with opportunities to:

- ✓ collaborate in designing strategies to enhance school climate;
- ✓ discuss/learn effective methods for differentiating instruction in heterogeneous classrooms;
- ✓ share best practices with each other;
- ✓ engage in professional dialogue to improve teaching and learning;

- ✓ design performance assessment activities to be integrated into the non-graded curriculum;
- ✓ utilize technology to help teachers learn to analyze and interpret data for the purpose of modifying curriculum and instruction.

Professional development is not limited to in-house training sessions. Staff members have participated and presented at local and national conferences sponsored by the Carnegie Corporation, the Maryland and National Middle School Associations, the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, the Learning Disabilities Association, and the Maryland State Department of Education. New teachers at Canton are mentored by both a designated teacher mentor and their department head. Many opportunities are provided for them to observe and critique other classes, participate in peer sharing, plan instruction with members of their department, and receive coaching and feedback on their development as an instructor and classroom manager.

To strengthen Canton's staff development component, the School Improvement Team (SIT) reorganized into four Research and Development groups which continually analyze school achievement data and climate surveys to identify critical areas for future professional development.

Study groups, both interdisciplinary and departmental, meet regularly during the school year. The content and objectives of the sessions are determined by goals of the school improvement plan, SIT recommendations, and student achievement data.

Full faculty training sessions are conducted on a regular basis to help staff members develop effective team-building skills for collaborative decision-making. For example, the staff benefitted from a three-day seminar (Leadership for Increased Productivity) in Salisbury, Maryland, sponsored by Perdue Farms, Inc. and the Maryland Business Roundtable.

Professional Development Partnership

The University of Maryland at Baltimore County (UMBC) and Canton Middle School have become partners in establishing Canton as a Professional Development School. The partnership was the result of a grant awarded by the Maryland State Department of Education. It includes:

- ❖ an internship program to train UMBC graduate and undergraduate education students for the teaching profession. Undergraduate interns spend one-half day every week on a teaching team while five graduate interns work full time, each as a member of a teaching team, for the entire school year.
- ❖ graduate courses conducted by the department heads of Canton Middle School and a professor from UMBC based at Canton. The courses teach classroom management, instructional methods, and curriculum planning to new teachers to help them become successful educators. Participants receive three university credits for completion of course requirements.
- ❖ collaboration between the mathematics and science departments of the two institutions to strengthen curriculum and instruction. Canton and UMBC faculty attended national conferences and met with experts in mathematics and science to learn about effective instructional practices in the two disciplines.

Canton's professional development model is the essential ingredient in effecting educational change and supports all aspects of school reform.

Canton Day Care Center

Many Canton teachers are also parents concerned about finding quality day care for their children. A benefit of working at Canton Middle School is that high caliber on-site day care is available at competitive rates. Canton boasts its own professional day care center (the first to be established in a Baltimore City Public School) which is administered by Play Centers, the largest non-profit day care provider in the state. Children of teachers and staff at Canton receive first-rate care as they "Play and Learn," only steps away from their parents.

Parents enjoy reduced traveling between school and day care, increasing the amount of time that they may remain in the building to complete work and participate in extracurricular activities before and after school. Teachers enjoy peace of mind by having their children close at hand. They are also able to respond to a call about a sick child without leaving the job!

Additionally, having young children in the building provides a laboratory setting for middle school students to learn babysitting and child care skills.

The Canton family is enriched when we include the children of our faculty and staff.

Technology

Canton possesses the following broad-based state-of-the-art technology to support student achievement:

- ✓ 250 networked workstations in every classroom and office provide students and staff with easy access to a wide variety of educational and managerial software applications. This network provides Canton students and staff with internet access to reference materials and information at libraries and universities throughout the United States.
- ✓ A interactive fiber optic distance learning classroom has been designed to link student, staff, business, and community participants with users from other sites throughout the United States. The distance learning classroom is also used to access educational programs from around the world via satellite and to

facilitate professional development through teleconferencing.

- ✓ CD-Rom technology in the library and in social studies classrooms gives students and staff access to interactive, full motion video applications to support school curriculum and fosters student research and independent learning.
- ✓ A telephone with internal and external dialing capability has been placed in every Canton classroom. This telephone system allows teachers and staff to effect immediate contact with parents and facilitates communication with every office and classroom throughout the school.
- ✓ Parents are kept informed of schoolwide activities by calling the 24-hour Homework Hotline. Teachers record homework messages on the telephone every day. After school hours, students and parents call the Homework Hotline for evening assignments as well as daily activity updates. Parents may also leave messages in teachers' voice mailboxes.

Student-Centered Activities

Canton students participate in many activities to foster their academic, social and creative development. These activities are held before, during and after school. Students may attend special "clubs" which are designed to provide middle school youngsters with diverse learning opportunities. Clubs are attractive to students because of their stimulating, high interest content areas. Some of the club projects include making a school year book, collecting and analyzing water samples from the Chesapeake Bay, developing a school newspaper, and tracking NASA space shuttle flights. The following is a partial list of other student-centered activities:

- City-wide athletic leagues
- Intra-mural sports
- National Academic League
- Club Read
- Sign Language Club
- Women's Issues Group
- Girl and Boy Scouts
- NASA Space Exploration
- Police Athletic League

Service Learning

Canton embraced the concept of hands-on values education long before the state mandated service learning as a requirement for high school education. Students leaving Canton for high school will now have earned credits toward meeting the 75 hours needed to graduate from Maryland public schools.

Canton students have numerous opportunities throughout the year to earn community service hours through participation in Boy Scout and Girl Scout projects, ecology programs, canned food drives, and holiday gift-giving activities. Students also volunteer at community day care centers, nearby nursing homes, and community ethnic festivals. In addition, students may perform in-school service learning activities by assisting in the library, offices, or classrooms.

Business and Community Partnerships

An essential component of Canton's model is its relationship with local businesses and community

organizations. Many programs have been initiated at Canton through the generosity of its partners. The Abell Foundation provided the funding to initiate the Parent Homework Hotline, the Mentoring Project, the K-8 Mathematics Curriculum Project and Attendance Incentives. Baltimore Medical Systems maintains a school-linked health clinic and, in partnership with the Baltimore City Health Department, places a nurse at Canton Middle School. Numerous businesses, including the Sheraton Inner Harbor and Hyatt Regency Hotels, provide paid part-time job shadowing experiences for 14-year-old students in the Canton Project. The East Baltimore Kiwanis sponsors several high risk students in the Living Classrooms Foundation Program at the Maritime Institute in Fells Point. The foundation provides team-building and woodworking activities for these students at their waterfront site. Prime Retail, Inc. funded the design and printing of Canton's brochure. Richardson, Myers and D'Onofrio (RM&D), a Baltimore-based national advertising agency, provides an instructor for an after-school advertising club and advises Canton on ways to promote the school.

Parent Involvement

Canton Middle School provides numerous opportunities for parents to get involved in their children's education. Parents are invited to PTA meetings where they have the opportunity to meet their children's teachers, pick up report cards, and find out about after-school clubs and activities.

The PTA sponsors Health Fairs, presentations by students, workshops on topics such as "How To Communicate With Your Teenager," and an annual community parenting conference.

Parent advocacy is strong at Canton. Parents are represented on the School Improvement Team and the Parent Advisory Board. This Board meets monthly with the school principal to discuss issues concerning the school and students. Canton Middle School hires a cadre of parents to serve as substitute teachers to support daily classroom activities.

Two-way communication is a key component of Canton's parent involvement. Each month, parents receive "The Connection," a newsletter which informs parents about testing dates, release days,

after-school programs, fund raising activities, and PTA meetings. The Homework Hotline is used by parents to retrieve their children's homework assignments. Parents may also leave voice mail messages for their children's teachers.

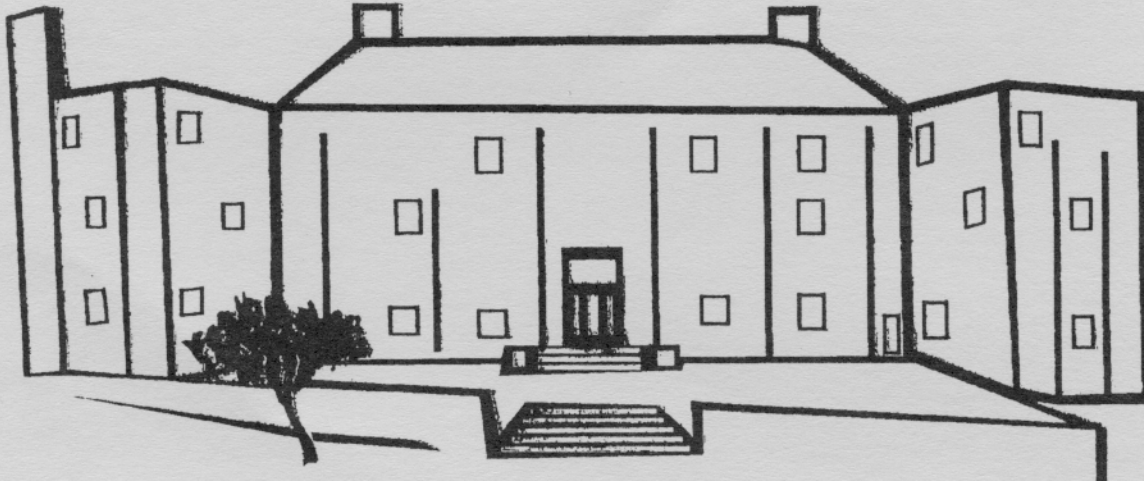
Results

Data analysis has provided concrete evidence that school reform at Canton is having a powerful, positive effect on a high-risk urban population. Attendance has increased every year for the past five years. Results of the Maryland state-mandated testing program, which is a leader among states in establishing nationally recognized standards, reveal that Canton has made significant gains in student achievement in the areas of writing, reading, and mathematics. An analysis of the Maryland State Performance Assessment (MSPAP) test scores shows that Canton's 17.3 percentage of improvement ranked first among all of Baltimore's middle schools over the two year period - 1993-1995. On the Maryland Functional Mathematics Test, as reported on the MSPP Report Card, Canton students improved from 29.4% in 1994 to 56.2% in 1996. On the Maryland Reading Test, Canton's scores increased from 86.2% in 1994

to 92.7% in 1996. On the Maryland Writing Test, Canton's scores increased from 63.4% in 1994 to 78.1% in 1996. An often overlooked statistic which shows the effect of programmatic changes on the culture of a school, is that, over the five-year span of the school's reform initiative, Canton students' suspensions have fallen from an annual rate of 47 to an average of 11 over each of the past three years.

Increased attendance and improved student achievement are indicators that Canton's long range school reform program is working and that an urban school with a predominately disadvantaged population can indeed make progress. Canton's dedicated staff fully expects to achieve its ultimate goal of providing students with the necessary skills to meet the rigorous standards of the Maryland School Performance Program.

Contact Canton's Professional Development School To Support Your School Improvement Efforts



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