

Mobilizing for Change: Handy Middle School

Bay City, Michigan

When district leaders in Bay City Public Schools (Michigan) began reopening their doors post-pandemic shutdown, they realized that they needed to critically analyze the impact of school closures on their children. In response, Bay City Public Schools leaders established the Learning Recovery Task Force, a task force of teachers and school administrators to evaluate how to best serve its students once schools reopened. "School closures and remote learning impacted our students in dramatically different ways in regards to inequities," shared Bay City Public Schools Chief Academic Officer Patrick Malley. "We wanted to be really intentional with how the task force analyzed these impacts, and we looked at what other communities were doing in terms of best practices. That's where the conversation about Handy Middle School surfaced."

Handy Middle School is a 6-8 grade school with an annual enrollment of approximately 700-800 students. According to Malley, the school's students experienced a more profound impact from the pandemic and had historically suffered challenges

in the past, including frequent changes in school leadership.

Beginning August of 2022, Handy Middle School will have officially implemented the New Tech Network Model with its 6th grade students, with whole-school implementation (all grade levels) planned by year three.

The district's process for evaluating a school redesign was exceptionally efficient, thanks to a number of distinct structures.

Create Transparent Goals and Communication

The district's sense of urgency made it critical to establish a stringent timeline and structure, and district leaders leveraged this momentum to propel the task force towards change. During the task force meetings in the redesign analysis for Handy Middle School, the group created a Key Takeaways document as a tool to communicate to the community what they learned in each meeting. "It was encouraging how involved our community was during this process," said Jake

Voisine, task force member for the school redesign. "It helped us establish the question around what it means to be practicing 21st-century education, and how we align with that in regards to the future of learning." The Key Takeaways document started as a resource that the task force shared with the school community, but the task force members quickly recognized it for the learning tool it was – a record of key learnings from the group and a roadmap for how they planned to address their findings.

Involve the Critics

Malley shares that the task force group was created very intentionally, since the group's ability to make timely decisions was paramount – but they made sure to incorporate their community's critics, as well as their champions, to understand the process and recommendations. "I knew we couldn't pick people to go on school tours that would just support our vision outright," said Malley. "We invited some of our more historically skeptical community members, including teachers and business leaders on our trips." Malley shared that by incorporating them in the process, their concerns were heard and questions answered, and were represented in the redesign. The task force included initially tentative teachers who throughout the process became confident in the impact of the NTN Model. These teachers presented to the board alongside the group on their findings after a school tour, which helped showcase how the district's vision for Handy Middle School might be achieved. "There's no 'magic fix' when it comes to this work," shared Voisine.

"It's reasonable to be a little skeptical about a big change – change is scary. But this is the right move for our school and community, and I think the experience will speak for itself, and change a lot of minds."

Find a School Design Partner

Malley's team conducted a landscape analysis of different school models that focused on deeper learning, and created a checklist for the specific needs in Bay City that a partner needed to fulfill. "New Tech Network (NTN) was selected as the partner for this work because of the depth in expertise in not just the instructional practices, but in the classroom culture, and that's what we really wanted to address," said Malley. After connecting with NTN's School and District Development team, Handy Middle School was on track to implement the project-based learning classroom model in the Fall of 2022. "Handy Middle School leaders are eager and committed to making a change for their students," said NTN School Development Coach Missy Saldana, who conducted the leaders' NTN Residency training in May of 2022. "These leaders are determined advocates for their students and are 'all in' moving forward in implementing change."

A Fresh Outlook for the Future

"Joining New Tech Network provides us an opportunity to reframe many things about the school, not just project-based learning," said Malley. "Eliminating the deficit mindset about kids is the first step to establishing a culture that makes sure everyone in that school is focused on next-level readiness for these kids." As the sixth-graders at Handy Middle School start a new learning experience this year, they'll have the opportunity to take these deeper learning methods with them when they enter an implementation in seventh and eighth grades and beyond.

Contributors to this profile include Patrick Malley, Chief Academic Officer, Bay City Public Schools, Jake Voisine, Task Force Member, Handy Middle School, and Missy Saldana, New Tech Network School Development Coach.

262

6th Grade Students

220

7th Grade Students

263

8th Grade Students

745

Total Students

