



Schools Transforming Learning
Scott Johnson Middle School
McKinney, Texas



Overview and Background

Scott Johnson Middle School (SJMS) in McKinney, Texas serves over 1340 students in grades 6 - 8, with approximately 40% of our students on free/reduced lunch, 17% have special needs, and 20% are in the ESL program. We have approximately 100 dedicated staff members with over 800 years of experience combined, and more than a third of our staff has 10+ years in education. All students in grades 6 - 8 are enrolled in the four core content areas: Math, English Language Arts and Reading (ELAR), Science, and History. Advanced pathways are offered in each subject, including opportunities in 8th grade for Algebra I, Spanish I, Professional Communications, Health, and CTE (Career and Technology Education) which award high school credit. In addition to these academic opportunities, students have access to a robust electives program including Art, Band, Orchestra, Choir, Theater, AVID, Engineering, Broadcast, Teen Leadership, Cheer, and Athletics. Enrichment options include advanced classes in each of the fine arts, the PALS program, Partners PE, STEAM club, NJHS, UIL, Student Council, Spelling Bee, Yearbook, and more. This wide array of offerings ensures that every student can pursue academic and personal interests while preparing for high school and beyond.

Focus Areas

Our focus area at SJMS is Article V, because, as a campus, we wholeheartedly believe in the very basis of Organizational Transformation. We believe that a learning organization can create the conditions and capacities most conducive for leaders, teachers, and students to perform at high levels and meet the expectations of new learning standards.

Work

At SJMS we constantly strive to transform learning through higher-level teaching that keeps our students engaged, all the while still maintaining our campus culture. We were redesignated as a Schools to Watch campus earlier this year, certified as a Level 3 Marzano High Reliability School last year, and are currently focusing on the NASOT (New Art and Science of Teaching) Model of Instruction on our campus. Common practices at SJMS that ensure student-centered learning include incorporating various Kagan strategies, collaboration, cross-curricular and vertical teaching, and really digging into and applying the NASOT strategies in several design areas. This year our teachers are focusing on the following NASOT design areas: Using Engagement Strategies, Conducting Practicing and Deepening Lessons, Conducting Knowledge Applications Lessons, Providing and Communicating Clear Learning Goals, and Using Assessments. Teachers and Team Leads are also allowed and encouraged to do learning walks to visit other classrooms of teachers that do a stellar job at utilizing NASOT strategies so they can turn them around in their own classrooms or model with their teams. We have had some great examples of this higher level of teaching and learning. Our 6th and 8th grade GT ELAR teachers have partnered this year to have their students perform socratic seminars together, which provides opportunities to deepen understanding for our 8th graders while exposing our 6th graders to socratic seminars at the middle school level. Our 6th ELAR team collaborated with our Library Media Specialist to incorporate the

Maker Space into a poetry lesson to help teach inferencing skills. And our 6th Science team is reinforcing student learning by building water filtration systems with students through a partnership with the 6th ELAR team's novel study of *A Long Walk to Water*.

While we are incredibly proud of the transformational teaching and learning that is taking place on our campus, we are also equally proud of our culture! Inclusivity is a huge component at SJMS. Johnson Gives Bach, Partners Art, Partners PE, and scheduled storytimes are all programs that allow our students with special needs to be a part of the electives and library programming. We also provide comprehensive support for our Emergent Bilingual learners. Teachers utilize Ellevation, a platform that communicates students' instructional and linguistic levels, and provides student-centered activities aligned to language objectives. Instructionally, we implement sheltered instruction strategies that integrate ELPS and TEKS, by using visuals, modeling, cooperative learning, and structured academic talk. Flexible, data-driven small groups target language domains of reading, writing, listening, and speaking.

Our campus also loves to have student choice and voice in many avenues! Just a few of those include a very active Student Council program, a Principal Panel for our principal to get to know and garner feedback from students, and we have a student panel that speaks to our teachers during back to school professional development to give insight on what they want/need from us as educators. One of our favorite ways to involve students, parents, and the community is through our annual Culture Night! On this night we offer students and their families the opportunity to showcase their culture. This includes anything from displays about countries to sampling traditional cuisines to even song and dance performances. Participation in this night has grown significantly over the last two years with over 48 countries represented last year! We LOVE the camaraderie, spirit, education, voice, and joy the night brings to our students and families!

Results

SJMS has been working on organizational transformation and transformational learning for more than five years through all of the various ways seen above, and while we are seeing success in many areas (e.g. campus culture, student voice and choice, collaboration, inclusivity, etc.), we want to be even better! So, after analyzing various data points, we decided to start the second semester with what we call the "PLC Pivot" and focus on really unpacking the standards at the most basic level to fully understand the depths of knowledge that we want our students to attain. In order to do this, our Principal, Assistant Principal, Instructional Coach, and Library Media Specialist turned around a training session with our leaders to take back to their teams. This session focused on really breaking down the basics of the standards - the verbiage, depth of knowledge, and the four main questions of PLCs. These veteran leaders will then not only help their teams learn how to truly break down the standards, but then model and collaborate on how to teach and assess those standards to a high level of rigor and engagement. During these PLC sessions, our teachers also partner with campus professionals such as the Instructional Coach, Library Media Specialist, 504, ESL, SPED, AVID, and administration to help with lesson design and student needs or concerns. We know that we are doing great things at SJMS for our students through the work our staff is already doing. But we know that through this "PLC Pivot," not only can we grow our students to a higher level but we can also grow our teachers! And, ultimately, this will continue to help us to transform learning at Scott Johnson Middle School!