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Higher expectations in Jackson Schools

The Modern Red Schoolhouse is excellent because of the higher expectations set for the students," says Douglas Scott, principal of **Clausell Elementary School**, located in a neighborhood of modest homes and commercial buildings in Jackson, Mississippi.

Faculty at Clausell implemented the MRSH design last fall with the help of six task forces and a leadership team. They are pleased with the progress the students have made in only one year's time.

The main goals achieved during the year include:

- higher expectations for students,
- improvement in students' work,
- increased use of technology by students and teachers,
- increased hands-on learning by students as teachers have become facilitators,
- weekly newsletter to keep parents apprised of progress.

"Students not only receive the state and district standards, but a bonus," says Scott. "Modern Red goes beyond those standards, creating an atmosphere where all children can attain higher achievement standards. Students are allowed to vary in the time they need to learn the material and are allowed to learn in ways they learn best."

Lester Elementary School also set new and meaningful goals last fall. Achievement is particularly impressive in:

- developing a high-standards curriculum scope and sequence for every subject area,
- developing and updating outlines for foundation units,
- improving students' test-taking skills.

Principal Elizabeth Jenkins points out that the most significant accomplishment has been the raising of expectations for all children. "Children have begun to take responsibility for their own learning rather than expecting the teachers to do the learning for them," says Jenkins,

"and parental involvement in all areas of the school's life has increased.

"Teachers are showing a renewed, invigorated attitude and a strong sense of camaraderie," Jenkins reports. "They are more open to trying new teaching strategies to meet the variety of learning needs among the students. The Modern Red Schoolhouse model has energized our entire school!"

At **North Jackson Elementary School**, Principal Joyce Pully stresses the Modern Red Schoolhouse model has been "not just another program, but a whole new way of life for the school. Everything had to shift or change, including our uses of time, expectations, parental involvement, and much more."

Teachers have collaborated to integrate the curriculum and to perfect teaching strategies that will tailor instruction more closely to the learning needs of the students. The curriculum promotes the mastery of high standards in reading, writing, and mathematics. Areas of strength in the first year of the program include:

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Webber's eighth-grade class performs puppet show at Mace's Lane

The editors of the STANDARD thank Lynn Webber of Dorchester County, Maryland for this article.

Modern Red Schoolhouse design and strategies were new to me this past school year. I am delighted to say that they have opened up for me a whole new way to look at teaching. The comprehensive design is both demanding and rewarding, but I find the most exciting part to be the work we've done here in Dorchester County on performance-based assessment. This innovative approach has helped my kids do some wonderful work this year.

Laying the groundwork

We laid the groundwork last summer when the district's language arts team developed several performance-based assessments to use at different grade levels. Working on these projects was a major highlight of our summer, as my colleagues and I persevered to devise exciting, engaging assessments that the students would have as much fun learning as we would have teaching. Included among the activities we prepared were a puppet show, a board game, and a newspaper. At no time during this process did the words "My kids can't do this" pass our lips. We were caught up in performance-assessment bliss — and, perhaps, naiveté.

Bring on the kids!

September finally rolled around. The young scholars for whom we had created these assessment opportunities arrived. As we began to realize that our young charges were about to be asked to take on some heavy-duty work and that we might be in for some tough days, one colleague posed the question that was on all our minds: "Were we out of our minds last summer when we decided to put on a puppet show as the culmination of a study unit on China?"

But as time passed and the kids displayed enthusiasm and profound interest in the subject matter, we knew that what we were accomplishing was worthwhile and that we were also "raising the proverbial bar" for our students.

China on stage

Our students launched an in-depth study of China, including a careful reading of Pearl Buck's *The Good Earth*. Students were given the assessment's rubric at the start of the unit and enough time to design and construct their puppets. I must admit that I needed a few days to adjust to the increased activity in the classroom — far more talking than normal, and considerably more moving about. I calmed myself by muttering under my breath, "This is good; this is productive," and just hoped that my supervisor would agree if she happened by. All my concerns were washed away and all our united efforts paid off when the students put on their puppet shows.

At first I had a hard time convincing my students that a "puppet show" would, in fact, be their "test." They knew that they would be expected to identify Chinese customs and analyze how these customs impacted male/female relationships in that culture.

Excitement and enthusiasm built as performance day approached. A dramatic tension gripped my students, as well as me. They were about to put on the line all that they had learned about Chinese customs, characters from Pearl Buck's Nobel Prize-winning novel, and the author's craft.

It was superb! The kids outdid themselves! The *piece de resistance* was a videotaped performance that we all proudly reviewed at the conclusion of the year. In addition to the traditional teacher assessment, students assessed each others' performances. Their analysis was a confirmation of how much they had learned throughout the process. I don't believe that a more traditional assessment method would have achieved such impressive results.

A colleague recently asked me how I gauged the effectiveness of this assessment. After a reflective moment, I answered: "The students learned the material, applied it in a creative manner, and demonstrated remarkable retention — and we all had a splendid time." 📌

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Four new MRSH sites come on board in Georgia

Georgia's comprehensive school reform initiative has resulted in four new Modern Red Schoolhouse sites. "Representing elementary, middle- and high-school levels, these schools add to the growing number of small-town and rural schools in the MRSH family," says Tim Gaddis, associate vice president.

Much more than delicious onions

J.R. Tripple Middle School in Vidalia, Georgia, home of those famous onions, is housed in a new building that was designed specifically to address the needs of middle school students. Bright team banners, flexible meeting areas, and a large media center reflect the latest thinking about what a middle school should be. Teachers from the school investigated a variety of reform designs before selecting Modern Red Schoolhouse as the design that can help them coordinate their school improvement efforts into a coherent, unified approach. Key among their goals is aligning instructional practices to assure student success in mastering Georgia's Quality Core Content Standards.

Walker of Ludowici

In June, the Leadership Team of Walker Elementary School in Ludowici spent two days learning about the MRSH design, creating a shared vision for the school, and identifying opportunities and challenges for the year ahead. The staff will focus its first year's work on raising ITBS scores, improving community and parent relations, and finding ways to make challenging content engaging and meaningful for all students.

Southern history, antebellum homes, and Modern Red

Randolph County Elementary School is located in Cuthbert, a small South Georgia town boasting beautiful antebellum homes and historic Andrew College. In June the entire staff attended a day of MRSH training in which they learned about the design, created powerful visions for the future, and explored the Core Knowledge Scope and Sequence. Staff members of the school have had the opportunity to participate in lots of excellent professional development in the past few years, so a major goal of their

MRSH work will be to pull all they have been learning together under one umbrella.

Block scheduling across the curriculum

Crawford County High School, in Roberta, makes use of a block schedule with ninety-minute classes in order to allow students the time necessary for learning in various disciplines. Staff members have participated in "Writing Across the Curriculum" and "Learning-Focused Schools" training and have worked to align Georgia's Quality Core Content Standards with their instructional practices. Goals for Crawford County's first year with MRSH include improving instructional practices, expanding the use of technology, and establishing improved ties with parents and the community. 📣

Jackson schools ...

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- completing on schedule the work of the leadership team and the task forces,
- launching eight new teacher workstations equipped with the latest computer technology to enable customized instruction to meet each student's strengths and weaknesses.

"Student response has been positive," says Pully, "and parents are now actively engaged in their children's activities, expressing particular satisfaction with the emphasis on high standards and mastery of subject matter." 📣



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South Dorchester offers exciting challenges

MRSH welcomes this article by Rob Cooper.

South Dorchester Elementary and Middle School, a small school located in Church Creek, Maryland, is determined to help students achieve success. I recently moved to Dorchester County from Long Island and joined up with this dedicated group of middle-school teachers.

Dorchester had already made tremendous improvements in its elementary school program of instruction by incorporating Core Knowledge. Because I teach in a Pre-K-8 school, I was aware of all the hard work and endless hours the elementary teachers put in to write and implement this new curriculum. Then the rest of us got the news: the middle school teachers were going to plunge into the same challenge.

I confess that I was apprehensive at first, concerned about the “how?” and the “who?” and the “what did I get myself into?” part of the deal.

But then Carol Sleeper, my principal, and Ruth Clendaniel, my supervisor, asked me to serve on several task forces that support the Modern Red Schoolhouse Middle School Redesign Program at three of the county’s middle schools. My apprehension changed to excitement and pride that I would be asked to help meet the challenge.

Within the middle school team, there are only three curriculum-content teachers, two special area teachers, and a special education instructor. All of us were involved in the redesign process in some manner.

Community commitment

It was during my second year of teaching that my daily life became particularly challenging. First, I teach three different grade levels (remember that we are a small school) and several different subjects, but I also decided to volunteer with our local fire company, coach youth wrestling, and work 12 hours a month as an EMT with the local rescue squad. Community involvement, a strong principle for schools in the Modern Red plan, is also an important part of my own values.

Once the Modern Red project was up and running, I began pouring my energy into the project. I’m sure that it will come as no surprise to other MRSH teachers out there

that I learned a tremendous amount about education and excellent teaching. I also learned what it takes to complete a project as large as redesigning the middle schools in Dorchester County.

Meeting the Modern Red staff

We began this whole process of revitalization with a series of meetings with MRSH staff, where we adopted Core Knowledge and began aligning the Maryland Learning Outcomes —our standards— with the new curriculum. Even before it was all done, teachers and administrators began to celebrate because we quickly realized that we were going to challenge our students in new ways. Moving ahead with the design, we developed new performance assessments that would help prepare students for Maryland’s eighth-grade MSPAP and would teach our students to display what they had learned in a performance-based environment.

Additional parts of the design came fast and furiously. We struggled to learn IMSeries and adapted a series of standards relating to professional development. On the Curriculum Task Force, we realized that our social studies curriculum did not properly align with new Maryland content standards, but undaunted, we persevered, even meeting after the school year ended, to realign the curriculum with the state outcomes. I was even happy to start working this summer to continue the process.

Dorchester County is not done with its revitalization, but the hard work has already been rewarding and the results worthwhile. All of our efforts have an overarching purpose: to prepare our students for the challenges of the new millennium. I am confident that this school reform project will provide our students a strong foundation for conquering whatever is ahead. 📌

Teachers present “Reconstruction” at National Conference

After Anita Hock of Japhet Elementary and Patricia Salinas of Woodlawn Elementary in San Antonio wrote and taught a unit about the Reconstruction period in American history, they might have thought they were finished with the unit for the year. Not true.

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MRSH summer training programs hit all-time high



Once upon a time, long, long ago, summer was a time for sunny beaches, mountain treks, camping trips, and visits to Grandma's house. Not anymore — at least not for a hearty bunch of Modern Red Schoolhouse teachers and consultants. They spent the past summer working on teaching strategies, standards-driven curriculum, learning environments, leadership techniques, and other such topics geared to pedagogical change and school reform. Time well spent, but no day at the beach.

In July MRSH held 70 training sessions at 14 sites; in August, 200 training sessions at 42 sites. Sessions were held in the “red” states on the map above: Texas, Mississippi, Tennessee, Florida, New Mexico, Maryland, Georgia, New York, New Jersey, Arkansas, Kentucky, Illinois, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Missouri, Virginia, and Washington, D.C. 📍

SAISD reaps awards

Modern Red Schoolhouse Institute hosted a *Recognition and Awards Celebration* on May 27, 1999, at Woodlawn Elementary School in San Antonio, Texas.

The event honored teachers and administrators from the 15 schools that were implementing the design in the San Antonio Independent School District. Dr. Sally Kilgore, Modern Red's president, and Teresa Skeete, site manager for San Antonio, were joined by a representative of the school board, district personnel, school administrators, instructional guides, technology support staff, district media and a local television station.

Dr. Kilgore and Ms. Skeete presented National Achievement Awards to five SAISD schools:

- Lowell Middle School — Exemplary SAISD Middle School
- Woodlawn Hills Elementary School — Exemplary SAISD First-Year School in the implementation of the design
- Japhet Elementary School — Exemplary SAISD Use of Technology
- Woodlawn Hills Elementary School — Exemplary SAISD Leadership Team

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Reconstruction ...

In April the collaborating fifth-grade teachers attended the national Conference of the Core Knowledge Foundation in Orlando, Florida, where they presented the unit before teachers and administrators from all across the United States.

Students enjoyed the activities involved in implementing the unit and expressed the positive opinion that, through the rigors of the unit, they had learned more about the Reconstruction period than they would have in a more conventional and limited textbook study.

Hock cautions that preparing such a unit is no easy task: “Expect to eat, sleep, and breathe the material during the monumental job of researching

and constructing a unit, even when you have the benefit of working with a helpful colleague like Salinas. Fortunately, our strengths complemented each other.”

In the end, both teachers agree that the experience was satisfying and rewarding. “Presenting our unit at the conference was an experience of a lifetime. Those who attended our session were most gracious and appreciative, making our efforts well worth the time spent,” says Hock. “I can't wait to do it again!” 📍

San Antonio ...

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- Maverick Elementary School — development of an Exemplary Learning Environment in SAISD.

Special Recognition Awards were earned by Robert Alfaro, SAISD Instructional Steward, and Cyndi Wells, Regional Director of the Core Knowledge Center in Texas. Mr. Alfaro was charged with overseeing the implementation of the Modern Red Schoolhouse design in San Antonio. His support, knowledge and foresight paved the way for comprehensive school reform. Ms. Wells, a former SAISD instructional guide, provided continual support, resources and training to the Modern Red schools in San Antonio.

Dr. Kilgore and Ms. Skeete awarded Certificates of Appreciation for Exceptional Service to the following staff members, who developed the process for conducting site visits to schools:

- Karen Pankey, Academic Support and Modern Red District Coordinator

Instructional guides:

- Janie Evans – Woodlawn Elementary
- Jackie Ibarra – Foster Elementary
- Virginia Lazidis – Maverick Elementary
- Holly Hensey – Japhet Elementary
- Barbara Dimmick – Knox Elementary
- David Chavarria – Travis Elementary
- Leslie Boriack – Miller Elementary.

These staff members composed a committee that visited schools in their third year of implementing the MRSH design. They gathered information and provided feedback on the schools' levels and quality of design implementation. The information gathered from these visits, combined with additional information to be collected this fall, will be used to analyze and evaluate the implementation process in all MRSH schools. 📌



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