

Lloyd G. Blanchard Middle School

School Improvement Plan 2008-2009



Respect for everyone and everything

Oppportunity for everyone to succeed

Cooperation between students, teachers, and parents

Kindness to and for everyone

Service to the Blanchard community and Westford

Dear Westford Community,

The State of the Blanchard Middle School is very good. We continue to perform at high levels in terms of accountability testing. However, it is our hope that this school improvement plan becomes the roadmap towards beginning of a journey that takes the Blanchard from Good to Great.

Every Blanchard school council member read two books in an effort to develop a shared base of knowledge that guided our work as we crafted this year's plan. These books, *A Whole New Mind*, by Daniel Pink, and *The Global Achievement Gap: Why Even Our Best Schools Don't Teach the New Survival Skills Our Children Need*, by Tony Wagner, framed our discussion and provided a common reference point. Anyone with an interest in education should read these books. As a school council, we sat down at the very beginning of our time together and set some criteria for our plan. This criteria was put in the form of questions that we would keep referencing to ensure that purpose and focus in our work. We continually asked, *Is our plan aligned and cohesive? Is it narrow and focused enough to ensure fidelity of implementation? Are there mechanisms in place to measure progress? Is the focus on the core of instruction? And, Is the vision of where we are going clear?*

The School Advisory Council identified areas of strength at the Blanchard Middle School. The school is characterized by a good climate for learning, where education is valued in the home. The school is safe, comfortable, and a happy place for teaching and learning. In addition, there is collaboration between parents, school and community. There is a sense of collegiality amongst the staff, and many resources and programs are offered to students.

The council identified some areas of weakness, including missed teaching opportunities due to test preparation (MCAS, Common Benchmark Assessments, etc.) As a result, sometimes instruction is curriculum-driven, not student-driven. In addition, scheduling poses a challenge and some courses are not taught in the most educationally sound manner. More personalized attention to students individual needs is also an area of continuous improvement. Anxiety and stress are on the rise with students. There is a need for better, more purposeful collaboration around teaching, learning, and data analysis. Finally, there is too much teaching to the test and not enough development of the skills students need to know and be able to do to be successful in the 21st Century.

In the development of this plan, we referred to our reading and listed aspects of research that stood out to us to help us determine the focus of our improvement efforts. These included the development of a strong advisory program, emphasis on developing active learners versus passive learners, and fostering students who can see the big picture while synthesizing large amounts of information. We want motivated, curious students who can communicate effectively, collaborate with their peers, and lead by influence. We are interested in developing students who find root causes of problems and determine solutions by knowing how to ask the right questions

and challenge status quo thinking is important, as well as ensuring their positive social and emotional development. We want to take them beyond the paper and pencil tests and teach them to think like a mathematician and scientist, not just to do math or science, while building relationships and a true community of learners.

Finally, our council discussed the obstacles to achieving this vision of Blanchard Middle School. Fears, time constraints, mindsets of parents, teachers, and students, budget constraints, capacity-training, and lack of knowledge on how to illicit this type of Teaching, Learning, and Assessment, and competing commitments will pose some challenges.

To begin the process, we developed the following strategic improvement plan with goals that focus on collaboration and community relations to improve teaching and learning. We hope to develop and grow as a collaborative community and see a change in relationships, language, and practice. We believe that building a strong foundation is essential to the work of school improvement. By establishing a vehicle in the form of a Professional Learning Community, whose cornerstone is collaboration, in partnership with the Westford Community, we believe we will be able to lead Blanchard to the next level.

Sincerely,

The Lloyd G. Blanchard Middle School Advisory Council

Blanchard Middle School School Advisory Council Members

Principal

Jessica Huizenga

Parent Representatives

Suzanne Welch

Diane Baker

Jasmine Lombardi

Stephanie Sullivan

Community Representative

Sandra Habe

Teacher Representatives

Erik Ruhmann

Timothy Hislop

Leslie Doerr

Jodie Voutselas

David Lussier

1. The climate's conducive to high expectations and performance

The Blanchard Middle School consistently performs in the top quarter of the state on the MCAS test. This past year, four of seven categories tested were in the top ten. This is an exceptional accomplishment for the teachers and students of the Blanchard Middle School. The commitment to ALL students achieving at their highest level and providing the necessary supports to do so is an essential reason for our success. Some of the supports we have in place are Academic Coaching, Developmental Reading, and smaller math classes for students who do not respond well in the mainstream environment. Additionally, the Title I math program for eighth graders was a success last year, and this year we are shifting the focus to sixth grade students.

2. As assessment of student/teacher ratios

This year, Blanchard expanded its eighth grade staff by adding a two-teacher team. We are able to better accommodate a larger class with the addition of our Green Team. Class sizes average about 20:1 across all grade levels. The number of students in Integrated Arts is a continued safety concern with small room facilities and equipment for the hands-on nature of these courses. We are looking to increase Physical Education staff by 1.0 to further address this need. Furthermore, the increasing numbers of Special Education students call for an increase in staff by one 1.0 FTE teacher to best support the needs of these students.

3. Professional Development Plan to meet the school's goals.

Over the course of the 2007-2008 school-year, teachers examined teaming, which has been an essential piece of the middle school model. During common planning time, teachers have the opportunity to meet with teammates, Guidance, Special Education, and Administration to assess progress and the unique needs of the middle school child from a variety of lenses.

This year, the Blanchard community is deepening an understanding of collaboration at the middle school level. With a common reference point, *The Collaborative Teacher*, the faculty will engage in dialogue focused on the

ways we can continue to work together to best meet the needs of the Blanchard students. Further, through Professional Development, we have begun to learn more about Critical Friends Groups, which provide a forum for teachers to engage in structured collaboration around student work, enhanced by the use of specific communication protocols. During the summer, three Blanchard teachers will be trained as CFG facilitators to lead groups of staff members as they begin implementing this collaboration on a regular basis. We are hoping these tools, coupled with staff training and scheduling, will afford our teachers the opportunity to tap into the talent of their peers as they tackle problems of practice and seek solutions together. CFG groups increase student learning, contribute to teachers' professional growth, and strengthen the school and district's capacity to function as learning communities.

In addition, beginning in January, teachers will have bi-monthly meetings built into their five-day cycles designated for content-area collaboration. During this time, teachers in the same grade level and discipline will work together, focusing on critical aspects of teaching and learning including assessment, looking at student work and data, and identifying essential understandings.

4. Enhancement of parent involvement.

At Blanchard Middle School, we know that partnerships with parents are essential to student success and value their contributions to our school. We believe communication is a cornerstone to parental involvement. This year, we have already begun to expand our use of the webpage as a vehicle to communicate from school to home. Teachers have been posting curricular updates to the team pages on the Blanchard website at least once per month and posting homework nightly. *Newsnotes* from the principal are sent out via email and are posted on the website each Friday, and more teachers are utilizing the Daily Announcements feature offered by the website. Parent coffees were held to introduce parents to our new principal, and new teachers are introduced to the community via the *Teacher Feature* of the webpage. A focus of our school improvement is reaching out to parents to solicit their feedback and create more opportunities for parent and community participation in the school.

4. Health, Safety, and Discipline

Of course, we strive to make Blanchard a place of learning where physical and emotional wellbeing of our students are protected. Health, wellness, and safety are a continual priority at the school. The cafeteria is serving healthier foods per the district nutrition committee guidelines. Through the efforts of Janet Dubner, the Westford Public Schools' School Psychologist, we are working on providing teachers with more information and training on issues of student mental health. This year the focus will be working with Guidance, Health, and Physical Education staff at both middle schools.

A Crisis Team is trained and in place at the school and available to respond to incidents where safety is a concern. Surveillance cameras and locks are in place. All visitors at the main entrance are under surveillance and must check in and receive a Visitors badge before moving throughout the building.

Our Emergency Plan has been revised in recent years and we would like to begin looking into lockdown and containment drills a preventative safety measure.

6. Welcoming school environment characterized by tolerance and respect

A major focus of our School Improvement Plan this year is the review of the current B.E.S.T. program. The purpose of these groups is to foster connections between teachers and the larger communities and offer an opportunity for relationship building and discussions of important school and global issues. These topics include bullying, local and national history, world events, tolerance, community service, and respect. Blanchard is committed to using this valuable time to its most effective potential. To this end, we will begin to assess and revise our advisor/advisee program.

This fall, the Blanchard community took part in "Mix It Up Day" a national program sponsored by the Southern Poverty Law Center and was featured as one of four national model schools for the program. The day was an opportunity for students to engage in workshops, led by teachers and Westford Academy students, focused on

leadership, tolerance, social justice, communication, and breaking down social barriers that separate us from one another.

7. Extra curricular activities and academic support

There is a wide range of after-school activities at Blanchard. Last year, we successfully expanded our offerings with the addition of new clubs, including Sign Language, Mock Trial, and Yoga. This year, we are continuing these activities, as well as adding National History Day. In addition to our sport teams, intramurals are offered each month. Our Student Council is nationally recognized with the “Difference Maker Award” and offers leaderships and community service experiences.

Our Academic Coach supports students in need of extra help with study and organizational skills and extra practice across content areas. This year, the Academic Coach hours were increased to five days per week, a goal that was met from last year’s plan.

8. Means for meeting diverse learning needs

Many teachers are learning about curriculum planning using the Understanding by Design model that centers on enduring understandings, focused and measurable objectives, essential questions, and teaching with the end in mind. In addition, courses such as Differentiated Instruction and the required Skillful Teacher course are offered and taken by many teachers. The inclusion of technology is an ongoing means of allowing students with diverse learning needs greater access to the curriculum.

Massachusetts Education Reform Act School Improvement Goal: The climate’s conducive to high expectations and performances. Means for meeting diverse learning needs.
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Westford Public Schools Vision and Core Values:
 Pursuing Excellence in a Learning Community.
 Promoting Individual Growth and Development.
 Supporting Creativity and Innovation.
 Fostering Connections with Local and Global Communities.
 Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment.

School Improvement Plan Goal:
 To improve problem solving, critical thinking, inquiry, leadership and collaborative working skills of students.

Action(s) for Accomplishing Goal	Funding or Resources Needed	Fiscal Year
1. Collaboratively develop curriculum focused on an enduring understanding/skill that spirals between grade levels and scaffolds in cognitive complexity.	1. Professional Development	1. FY2008–2010
2. Craft a common, authentic assessment to measure the aforementioned skills.	2. Professional Development	2. FY2008–2010
3. Maximize opportunities for students to utilize technology in meaningful ways		3. FY2008–2010
4. Organize a public school-wide exhibition of unit-based student work	4. Materials, supplies, planning time, and training.	4. FY2010
5. Create a student/teacher panel to review and recommend improvements to the BEST Program.		5. FY2008–2009
6. Provide opportunities for students to develop leadership, collaborative, and conflict resolution skills and understandings (i.e. Mix It Up Day)	6. Substitute Coverage for Planning.	6. FY2008–2009

Indicators of Accomplishment Qualitative and Quantitative Data	Additional Information	Person(s) Responsible
<p>1. Creation of one unit for each grade level for one skill/essential understanding.</p> <p>2. Creation of one authentic assessment correlating with each unit.</p> <p>3. 80% participation in a school-wide exhibition of student work.</p> <p>4. Submission of teacher Technology Integration Plans</p> <p>5. Committee of three students and six teacher representatives is organized to review changes to the BEST program</p> <p>6. Data/recommendations collected from panel review of BEST program</p> <p>7. 90% Successful participation of students and staff in Mix-it-up day.</p>		<p>1. Curriculum Coordinators and faculty</p> <p>2. Curriculum Coordinators and faculty</p> <p>3. Principal, Assistant Principal and faculty, students</p> <p>4. Technology Integration Specialist, teachers, Principal</p> <p>5. Teachers, students, Assistant Principal</p> <p>6. BMS Administration</p> <p>7. Guidance, Academic Coach, teachers, and Administration</p>

Massachusetts Education Reform Act School Improvement Goal:
Professional Development Plan to meet school's goals.

Westford Public Schools Vision and Core Values:
Pursuing Excellence in a Learning Community.
Personnel and Professional Development.

School Improvement Plan Goal:
Employ collaborative practices to achieve consensus among faculty in: identifying problems of practice and areas of improvement, development of solutions, and accountability of action verified by the measurable results.

Action(s) for Accomplishing Goal	Funding or Resources Needed	Fiscal Year
<p>1. Implement a faculty-wide study group centered on <u>The Collaborative Teacher</u>.</p> <p>2. Conduct professional development on utilization of collaborative protocols.</p> <p>3. Engage staff in consensus building activities in meetings.</p> <p>4. Provide professional development for teachers focused on utilizing data to guide continuous improvement.</p>	<p>1. \$1100.00 for copies of <u>The Collaborative Teacher</u></p> <p>2. One Critical Friends Group at Blanchard is 6-10 teachers per group. Sub-coverage is \$70 per day x 10 substitutes = \$700 One CFG Coach \$350 per month x 7 months.</p> <p>3. Supplies and Materials</p> <p>4. Professional Development Day and substitute coverage</p>	<p>1. FY2008-2009</p> <p>2. FY2008-2009</p> <p>3. FY2008-2009</p> <p>4. FY2008-2009</p> <p>5. FY2008-2009</p> <p>6. FY2008-2009</p>

<p>5. Develop and administer staff survey to measure effectiveness of collaborative practices.</p> <p>6. Review current teaching practice and conduct action research on a specific area of teaching and learning (i.e. Vocabulary and Reading in the Content Areas, Creativity in the Classroom in a Time of Accountability, etc.)</p>	<p>5. N/A</p> <p>6. Substitute coverage and teacher training (Ron Clark Academy trip- \$13,000 funded through WEF grant and school-based fundraisers)</p>	
Indicators of Accomplishment Qualitative and Quantitative Data	Additional Information	Person(s) Responsible
<p>1. Administration of a staff survey following Professional Development Days</p> <p>2. Increase in subject area planning time by 2.5 hours per month.</p> <p>3. Identification of one SMART goal by each subject area team.</p> <p>4. Training of three staff members to facilitate Critical Friends Group meetings</p> <p>5. 16% increase in staff participation in Critical Friends Group on a monthly basis for 08'-09' School year.</p> <p>6. <u>The Collaborative Teacher</u> will be distributed and read by the faculty by January Professional Development Day.</p>	<p>1. Work on Professional Learning Communities and Critical Friends groups started on 11/4/08 Professional Development Day. Gene Thompson Grove and other CFG coaches brought in to work with the SB and Blanchard Faculties.</p> <p>4. Explore options for training of staff on/off site.</p>	<p>1. BMS Administration</p> <p>2. BMS Administration</p> <p>3. Faculty and Curriculum Coordinators</p> <p>4. Administration and 3 teachers</p> <p>5. Administration and faculty</p> <p>6. Administration and faculty</p> <p>7. Administration and faculty</p> <p>8. School-wide</p>

<p>7. Book discussion groups will be held by each grade level leading up to Professional Development Day.</p> <p>8. School-wide shift in language, practice, and relationships focused on student learning</p>		
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Massachusetts Education Reform Act School Improvement Goal:
 The climate is conducive to high expectations and performances.
 Means of meeting diverse learning needs.

Westford Public Schools Vision and Core Values:
 Student Services.
 Personnel and Professional Development.
 Ensuring safety and well-being.

School Improvement Plan Goal:
 To increase support of all students, especially those at risk and with special needs.

Action(s) for Accomplishing Goal	Funding or Resources Needed	Fiscal Year
1. Increase Special Education Staff by 1.0 FTE teacher. 2. Increase Guidance Staff by 1.0 FTE. 3. Implement Mental Health Initiative: Provide training for all Guidance, Physical Education, and Wellness Staff and implementation of strategies to improve mental health and well being of all students. 4. Implement Peer Mediation program 5. Conduct a self-assessment of current intervention strategies and academic schedule to develop an action plan for improvement.	1. 1 Teacher Salary 2. 1 Teacher Salary 3. Funding for training (Mental Health Grant) and substitute coverage 4. Peer Mediation Training (Title IV Grant)	1. FY2008-2010 2. FY2008-2010 3. FY2008-2009 4. FY2008-2009 5. FY2008-2009

<p>6. Refinement of Child Study Team (CST) process (transition to Instructional Support Team. i.e. development of data drive practices) with intent to move towards Response to Intervention Model (RTI)</p> <p>7. Assess current process for identifying students transitioning from fifth to sixth grade in need of Developmental Reading support</p> <p>8. Develop a clear, data-driven referral process for Developmental Reading</p>	<p>6. Self-Study on CST. Professional Development and Training in RTI</p> <p>7. Substitute coverage for meetings between fifth and sixth grade teachers</p>	<p>6. FY2008–2009</p> <p>7. FY2008–2009</p> <p>8. FY2008-2009</p>
<p>Indicators of Accomplishment Qualitative and Quantitative Data</p>	<p>Additional Information</p>	<p>Person(s) Responsible</p>
<p>1. Fewer students assigned to caseloads of the Special Education Teachers and increased support for classroom teachers</p> <p>2. Increase in access to and time with Guidance</p> <p>3. Reduction in students referred for outside mental health services</p> <p>4. Number of students participating in Peer Mediation</p> <p>5. Assessment of current strategies and recommendations for action steps to improve interventions</p>	<p>Mental Health Initiative funded by grant secured by Janet Dubner.</p> <p>Peer Mediation program is funded through grant money.</p>	<p>Principal, Assistant Principal, Team Chairperson, Guidance, Wellness, Nurse, Teachers.</p>

<p>6. Creation of IST and Blanchard</p> <p>7. Profiles of students referred to Developmental Reading based on set criteria</p> <p>8. Increase in numbers of students referred to Developmental Reading</p>		
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Massachusetts Education Reform Act School Improvement Goal: Extracurricular Activities and Academic Support		
Westford Public Schools Vision and Core Values: Communications and Community Relations		
School Improvement Plan Goal: Enhance academic program by integrating community resources to enable enriching learning experiences.		
Action(s) for Accomplishing Goal	Funding or Resources Needed	Fiscal Year
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Invite community leaders, town government employees, business professionals in to enrich the classroom experience. 2. Organize a career day to connect classroom learning to real-world work environment. 3. Recruit parent volunteers to share areas of expertise, passions, or hobbies to compliment existing curriculum in the spirit of collaboration. 4. Conduct action research on ways to connect Blanchard to the community in innovative ways. 5. Establish partnership with American Heart Association and the Hoops for Heart program 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Principal's newsletter informational article to recruit students 2. Time allocated for planning and implementation 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Spring 2009 2. Fiscal year 2010 3. Spring 2009 4. Spring 2009
Indicators of Accomplishment Qualitative and Quantitative Data	Additional Information	Person(s) Responsible
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Increase in number of community volunteers utilized to enhance curriculum. 2. Career day held. 3. Increase in number of parents involved at 	Consult with Peter Pecorelli on career day implementation and planning	2. Bill Hart and/or Lisa Searl

<p>Blanchard Middle School</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">4. Recommendations for ways to better connect Blanchard to the community5. Hold 3 on 3 Hoops for Hearts basketball tournament through Physical Education classes.		
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Massachusetts Education Reform Act School Improvement Goal: Extracurricular Activities and Academic Support		
Westford Public Schools Vision and Core Values: Communications and Community Relations		
School Improvement Plan Goal: Enhance parent connectedness with the Blanchard learning community		
Action(s) for Accomplishing Goal	Funding or Resources Needed	Fiscal Year
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Educate parents and students to the Blanchard Website content. 2. Student-published newsletter that highlights successes in school and in extracurricular activities. 3. Self-guided website tutorial on computer at open house and conferences. 4. Review Parent/Teacher Conference Format and recommend improvements. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Volunteer to mentor/guide students in newsletter creation 2. Software format to publish newsletter 3. Software and hardware needs for tutorial 4. Parent and Teacher Input about conference format 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Open House of 2009 2. Spring of 2009 3. Open House of 2009 3. Conferences of 2009/2010 4. SIP 2009
Indicators of Accomplishment Qualitative and Quantitative Data	Additional Information	Person(s) Responsible
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Incorporate website tour in whole-group open house talk and other events. 2. Measure increase of website hits. 3. Tutorial is up and running for open house and conferences. 4. Meaningful feedback for alternatives for parent conference formats. 		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Liz Benstead 2. Team Representative or volunteer coordinator 3. Ken Bogacz 4. TBD

Revised 9/10/07

MERA School Improvement