

**Kentucky Department of Education
Program Review**

**McDaniel Learning Center
Laurel County School District
May 4, 2012**

Dr. Lynn McCoy-Simandle and Lonnie Watts served as the Alternative Education Consultants for KECSAC (Kentucky Educational Collaborative for State Agency Children) and submit this report to the Department of Education.

Introduction

The Alternative Education Consultants from KECSAC, acting on behalf of the Kentucky Department of Education, conducted a review of McDaniel Learning Center (MLC) on May 4, 2012. The purpose of the site visit was to review MLC to determine if its program could be considered as a 2012-2013 Alternative Education Best Practice Site, which was nominated for Best Practices in Academic Performance, Learning Environment and Efficiency.

The McDaniel Learning Center is an A-5 high school program located in the recently-renovated former site of the Laurel County Board of Education serving students from North and South Laurel High Schools. MLC provides an alternative setting for students who might benefit from an individualized credit-recovery instructional program. Currently sixty-eight (68) students are enrolled in grades 9-12, forty-four (44) are boys, and twenty-four (24) are girls, predominantly (97%) white. MLC does not serve students identified with disabilities. MLC employs four full-time teachers. The current teaching staff is certified in Mathematics, Science, English, and Business Education. Additional staff includes a school administrator, a guidance counselor, one Para-educator, and one administrative assistant.

In August 2010, the Secondary GED program was moved to MLC from North and South Laurel High Schools to serve students who are two or more years behind the class in which they entered high school. Twenty-one students have received a Secondary GED since August, 2010.

Students are referred to MLC by principals, counselors, teachers, parents, and even self-referral. Students enter MLC on a voluntary basis with the understanding that they may return to their school of origin at the end of the semester. Students who choose to stay can return to their home high school at a later date, or they may opt to remain at MLC to complete graduation requirements.

Students attend from 8:15 a.m. – 3:00 p.m. daily. Attendance is recorded daily and maintained at the A5 School. Students' state test scores are sent to the

student's A-1 School. Students earn credit towards graduation and can participate in a graduation ceremony at either North Laurel or South Laurel High.

Review activities included:

1. Review of the program questionnaire
2. Interviews with school administrator, guidance counselor, Laurel County deputy and assistant superintendents, school board members, instructional supervisor, teachers and students
3. Review of the school's curriculum materials and samples, discipline and safety plans, test data, professional development offerings and other pertinent documents
4. Walk-through observations
5. Observation of supervision practices and procedures during lunch and student transition times
6. Classroom observations

The Program Report was based upon the examination of the documents provided by the program, as well as the consultants' experiences and observations. The specific findings and recommendations are organized under the heading of Academic Performance, Learning Environment, and Efficiency. Each of the nine standards for success in Kentucky schools is addressed in the following pages:

Academic Performance

The following Academic Performance Standards address curriculum, classroom evaluation/assessment and instruction.

Standard 1: The school develops and implements a curriculum that is rigorous, intentional, and aligned to state and local standards.

Standard 2: The school utilizes multiple evaluation and assessment strategies to continuously monitor and modify instruction to meet student needs and support proficient student work.

Standard 3: The school's instructional program actively engages all students by using effective, varied and research-based practices to improve student performance.

Learning Environment

The following Learning Environment Standards address school culture, student family and community support and professional growth, development and evaluation.

Standard 4: The school/district functions as an effective learning community and supports a climate conducive to performance excellence.

Standard 5: The school/district works with families and community groups to remove barriers to learning in an effort to meet the intellectual, social, career and

developmental needs of students.

Standard 6: The school/district provides research-based, results-driven professional development opportunities for staff and implements performance evaluation procedures in order to improve teaching and learning.

Efficiency

The following Efficiency Standards address leadership, school structure, resources and comprehensive and effective planning.

Standard 7: School/district instructional decisions focus on support for teaching and learning, organizational direction, high performance expectations, creating a learning culture and developing leadership capacity.

Standard 8: The organization of the school/district maximizes use of time, all available space and other resources to maximize teaching and learning and support high student and staff performance.

Standard 9: The school/district develops implements and evaluates a comprehensive school improvement plan that communicates a clear purpose, direction and action plan focused on teaching and learning.

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Summary Findings in: **Academic Performance**

Standard 1 **Curriculum**

Based on interviews, classroom observations, and inspection of pertinent documents and materials, it was concluded that the curriculum for grades 9-12 consists of computer-assisted instruction with individualized teacher assistance aligned with district/state standards and including Common Core Academic Standards. The curriculum is performance-based and self-paced for credit recovery. A variety of curriculum resources is used to meet the needs of a diversified multi-age, multi-ability level classroom for core curriculum, credit recovery, and general education development (GED) needs. The computer based *Compass Learning Odyssey*® program makes up the majority of the curriculum. Teachers utilize Jefferson County packets and other supplemental materials to provide individualized instruction to ensure the rigor necessary to prepare students for EOC (End of Course) and benchmark exams.

The Performance Level was found to be: **Fully Functioning**

Standard 2 **Assessment**

Based on interviews, classroom observations and inspection of pertinent documents and materials, it was concluded that assessment of student learning is frequent and aligned to Kentucky's Core Content.

Formative and summative assessments are used to guide continuous improvement at both the individual and program level that are designed in the *Compass Learning computer program*. Students participate in all state testing: PLAN, ACT, K-PREP-On Demand Writing and EOC exams. In addition to the mandated state assessments, students are quizzed and tested throughout courses. These on-going spot-checks and MAP testing alert teachers to specific skill deficits and instructional gaps. Students must take and pass school-made (from the student's home school) final exam for each course. Classroom formative assessments may include group presentations, Power Point presentations, or speeches on classroom topics.

The performance Level was found to be: **Fully Functioning**

Standard 3 **Instruction**

Based on interviews, classroom observations and inspection of available documents and materials, it was concluded that teachers at MLC are more facilitators of learning than traditional classroom lecturers. Pullout sessions are utilized to teach certain concepts, for the most part learning is self-paced with enhanced opportunity for one-on-one instruction. Teachers are well versed in the requirements for 21st Century learning, so they hold students accountable in mastering essential skills for success in today's world such as critical thinking, problem solving, communication and collaboration. MLC offers flexible scheduling, small classes, individualized instruction, and a positive learning climate.

All McDaniel Learning Center teachers meet the requirements to be considered highly qualified and they supplement their instruction with computer-based software, supplemental teaching materials, current textbooks, and other teaching manipulatives. All teachers participate in sustained, classroom-focused professional development, as well as use technology as an integral part of instruction in all content areas. All teachers are trained in characteristics of Highly Effective Teaching and Learning. This training has reinforced many of the practices the staff has been implementing.

The Performance Level was found to be: **Fully Functioning**

Summary Findings in: **Learning Environment**

Standard 4 School Culture

Based on interviews, classroom and facility observations, and inspection of pertinent documents and materials, it was concluded that there is leadership support for a safe, orderly and equitable learning environment. There is evidence of school board support for this program by fully-renovating the former site of the Laurel County Board of Education with internet connection, restrooms, adequate classroom space, offices, a mini-kitchen, and conference room. Located adjacent to South Laurel High School, students have access to a cafeteria, library and gymnasium. There is a perception among the students and staff that MLC is a safe school. Entrances are secured throughout the school day and the facility is equipped with an electronic surveillance system. The administrative staff and teachers set high academic and behavioral standards for all students and support a climate conducive to performance excellence.

The physical structure, policies and procedures of MLC provide a safe and orderly learning environment for students and support a positive school climate and culture. School climate, how students and staff feel about their school, is determined by the school's culture, the values, behaviors, and attitudes of those inside the school. According to student interviews, students enjoy going to

school at MLC and the staff enjoys teaching at MLC. The school faculty has a close working relationship and this provides consistency and structure for the students.

MLC implements Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) under the guidance of the Kentucky Center for Instructional Discipline (KYCID). MLC proudly displays a banner they received at the 2011 Annual KYCID Summer Conference recognizing them for Exemplary PBIS Program Implementation. KYCID six P's (Prepared, Prompt, Polite, Participate, Procedure, and Positive mental attitude) posters are displayed in the hallways and each classroom. Plaques are displayed in the entry way of the school recognizing students for exemplary character traits.

The fifth period of each day is dedicated to the Discovery Program, which is a concrete skills-based character education curriculum that creates positive changes in the students. An aspect of this program that has been particularly beneficial has been the "circle up." During this exercise students have the opportunity to relate to their classmates and receive positive feedback. Teachers assure the students that what is shared in "circle up" time stays in "circle up" time.

Each classroom has selected a student to serve as the ambassador for that room to welcome visitors and to share about the class. This aspect of MLC has proven to be most successful especially with students who were hesitant to be an ambassador due to a lack of confidence in their ability to perform these tasks.

The Performance Level was found to be: **Fully Functioning**

Standard 5 **Support**

Based on interviews, observations and inspection of pertinent documents and materials, it was concluded that MLC is involved in significant ways to remove barriers to learning. The community is an active partner in the educational process and work together with the school to promote programs and services for all students. MLC extends classroom experiences to include various outside resources/service learning projects (i.e., dual credit courses through Somerset Community College, guest speakers at least twice monthly, military service recruiters, police officers, school nurses, college admission staff, legislative office field staff).

On Friday, the director holds a weekly conference with each student to discuss progress made during the week. The full-time guidance counselor provides invaluable guidance and counseling services for the students through her efforts with admission of students into the program and transition of students back to their school of origin, college preparation, maintaining transcript records, ACT prep, administering ACT and state mandated assessments and many more.

All students participate in Discovery, a social skills-based character education curriculum.

There is evidence that the Laurel County superintendent and board provide invaluable support for the students and staff at the MLC. This program is fully supported by general funds.

The Performance Level was found to be: **Fully Functioning**

Standard 6 **Professional Development**

Based on interviews, observations and inspection of pertinent documents and materials, it was concluded that professional development is ongoing with an emphasis on sustained and continuous growth. MLC staff members are included in professional development sessions with other Laurel County teachers. Recent professional development opportunities have included Kentucky Core Academic Standards, ELA and Math curriculum alignment, formative assessment strategies, Seven Strategies of Assessment for Learning, EOC (End of Course) assessments, and using technology to enhance instruction. The director and counselor attend conferences and workshops that address topics such as drop-out prevention, transition to post-secondary education, and crisis/grief counseling.

The principal is responsible for evaluating the staff and provides meaningful feedback to teachers as an integral part of the evaluation process to challenge teacher thinking and to change behavioral and instructional practice. Each teacher is required to have a growth plan which is an integral component of the evaluation process. MLC teachers and staff evaluations comply with the Laurel County Schools' policies.

The Performance Level was found to be: **Fully Functioning**

Summary Findings in: **Efficiency**

Standard 7 **Leadership**

Based on interviews, observations and inspection of pertinent documents and materials, it was concluded that effective leadership exists at all levels (district office personnel, program director, and guidance counselor). The program director, Mr. Wright, conducts classroom observations, evaluates staff, maintains records and contacts with students referred and not placed, develops budgets, coordinates professional development, oversees purchasing, and oversees day-to-day operation of the center. The guidance counselor is vigilant about maintaining student records and especially transcripts for the high school students.

MLC maintains a strong relationship with the Superintendent and School Board of Laurel County Schools. District leadership visit and offer assistance and support on a regular basis. Mr. Wright is included in all administrative activities in the district.

The Performance Level was found to be: **Fully Functioning**

Standard 8 **Resources/Organization**

Based on interviews, observations and inspection of pertinent documents and materials, it was concluded that the program equitably allocates resources to encourage high student and staff performance. Students have equitable access to all classes necessary for credit recovery and these electives (Arts and Humanities, Geography, Business Math, Psychology, Computer Application, Physical Education). The six hour day is structured to achieve maximum instructional time for the students. Students have the opportunity to attend summer school at North or South Laurel High School. All MLC teachers meet the requirement to be highly qualified. This program is fully supported by Laurel County Board's general fund. The board provided funding for an additional teacher this school year. Central office personnel indicated that there would not be any cuts of funding for the 2012-2013 school year.

The Performance Level was found to be: **Fully Functioning**

Standard 9 **Planning**

Based on interviews and inspection of pertinent documents and materials, it was concluded that the school engages in a yearly planning process that includes collecting, managing and analyzing data to define programmatic strengths and weaknesses. A program review is completed annually by the director and staff to assess the current school year and make plans for the next year. This review is presented to the school board during a monthly meeting.

The Performance Level was found to be: **Fully Functioning**

Conclusion:

Based on interviews, observations and inspection of pertinent documents and materials by the Alternative Education Consultants for KECSAC, it was concluded that McDaniel Learning Center is recommended as a Best Practice site for Academic Performance, Learning Environment and Efficiency for the 2012-2013 school year.