

THE STORY THAT DRIVES MASON CREST

AS A PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITY (PLC)

*It has been said that the culture of every organization is found in the stories its members tell themselves about how the organization operates. These stories typically reflect the unspoken assumptions that drive the work of the school. At **Mason Crest**, if the story were put in writing, our story would sound like this.*

*At **Mason Crest** you are expected to take an intense personal interest in the success of all of our students. You could never help all students learn if you work in isolation, so you will become a member of a collaborative team – colleagues who work interdependently to achieve a common goal for which they are mutually accountable. One of the most important responsibilities of every member of this staff is to make positive contributions to his or her team. Your teammates serve as your mentors as you do to them. You will find the collaborative culture of your weekly team meetings to be a major source of support as you work your way through the daily questions and challenges confronting the educators here at **Mason Crest**. You will be clear as to your understanding of the different formal structures of team meetings that we have at **Mason Crest**, as clarity precedes competence. These team meeting structures are grade level planning meetings (math, language arts as well as science and social studies), Data Discussion meetings, Progress Monitoring meetings and Team Observation and Reflection meetings.*

*Equity is an important issue at **Mason Crest**. You will find that teams work continuously to ensure all students in the same grade level and subjects (**language arts, mathematics, social studies, science, physical education, music, art and library**) have access to the same knowledge and skills and have their work assessed according to the same criteria regardless of*

the teacher to whom they are assigned. During team planning meetings, your team will clarify the most essential learnings for each unit, agree on pacing of the content, and develop common assessments that will be administered to all students at your grade level. You will benefit greatly from this clear understanding of what students are expected to learn and how they will be asked to demonstrate their learnings from each unit you teach.

*Your teammates will solicit your questions and recommendations regarding the curriculum and assessments and will encourage you to become an active participant in their decision-making process. It is your obligation to do so. One of the reasons you were hired to be a part of the **Mason Crest** team was because we felt that you could make a contribution to the work of your team.*

Our commitment to equity also means the issue of what happens when some students do not learn is not left to chance or to the discretion of individual teachers. We have created a systematic intervention process to monitor student learning on a timely basis and to ensure students receive additional time and support for learning in a consistent and directive way as soon as they experience difficulty. In order for that system to work, you must report student progress accurately and often and be as precise as possible regarding the skill or concept the student is struggling to master. Remember, here at Mason Crest there is a structure in place to support your efforts to help all students learn. You must make certain your students have access to that structure and rely on your teammates to help you.

You and your teammates will analyze the results from every common assessment, not only to identify students who are having difficulty or those who require extension/enrichment, but also to identify the strengths and weaknesses of each member's instruction. On every common assessment you will be given prompt feedback regarding the success of your students in achieving the team's agreed-upon standard of proficiency compared to all of the other students

who took the assessment. The information is presented in a user-friendly format and is openly shared among teammates, so everyone has a wonderful opportunity to learn about materials and methods of colleagues who are getting the best results for each skill or concept taught. You will discover that leadership at **Mason Crest** is a function of expertise rather than position. Each and every one of you will be considered a leader at some point and we expect you to embrace this as an opportunity to help your colleagues improve their practices. When the evidence demonstrates you have been extraordinarily effective in helping your students learn a particular skill or concept, you will be encouraged and expected to take the lead in helping colleagues develop new insights and strategies in those areas.

Building shared knowledge (learning together) is the prerequisite homework for making a decision in our school. Developing a common language and agreeing to a limited use of acronyms (without explanation) is an important piece to helping all team members move forward with clarity. We attempt to resolve every important question and issue by engaging in collective inquiry, jointly examining both external and internal evidence of best practice, and honestly assessing our own practice in light of the evidence. We operate from the premise, “without evidence, you are just another person with an opinion.” We make our important decision—what to teach, how to assess student learning, best instructional practices, how to assign grades, etc. —on the basis of evidence rather than opinions. We will encourage Pilot Projects (like the joint Intellectual Disabilities’ Team –Kindergarten Guided Reading Project) because they will help us gather additional information before moving forward with a schoolwide initiative.

As a part of our School Improvement Plan (SIP) every team is expected to develop and pursue **SMART goals** (Strategic and specific, Measurable, Attainable, Results-oriented, Time-bound) to drive the continuous improvement process of **Mason Crest**. The goal will be aligned with one of our school goals, will focus on results that require evidence of student learning, and will call for a significant contribution from every member of the team in order to be achieved.

One of the most powerful forms of professional development we experience at **Mason Crest** is the ongoing, job embedded learning that takes place among teammates as they work together to meet the needs of all their students. Your team will be able to pursue and identify the topics you feel are most critical to achieving your **SMART goals**. We learn collectively, we stay focused on issues that have the most powerful impact on teaching and learning, and move quickly to apply our new skills and insights. We value learning by doing, and you will see that working at **Mason Crest** is the best graduate program you could ever have.

It should be evident to you how serious we are about hiring people who fit our culture. Before each of you was offered a job at **Mason Crest** you were given an expectations document from Diane and Brian, you were interviewed at length by the team, asked to respond to a variety of questions and probed your thinking around the school that you saw **Mason Crest** becoming in the future. We have invested considerable effort to bring each of you to **Mason Crest**, we expect you to be successful, and are prepared to offer you considerable support to promote that success. To continue with us, however, you must prove your strong commitment to the learning of all students, become a positive contributing member to your team (and the **Mason Crest** Team as a whole), and demonstrate a willingness to continue your own professional learning.

Mason Crest is a wonderful place to work. Celebration is an important part of who we are. Every staff gathering gives us an opportunity to celebrate efforts and achievement of a variety of individuals and teams. The team process fosters both appreciation and recognition as you make contributions to your colleagues and they recognize improvement in your teaching. The achievement of SMART goals is another cause for collective celebration and builds a powerful sense of individual and collective self-efficacy. You will have a sense of belonging and connection because you will always have someone to turn to for help in meeting the challenges of this profession. All the systems that have been created to keep us focused on student learning will remind you of the significance of the work we do, and there is something very

*powerful about being a part of a collective effort to achieve a mighty purpose. Finally, you will become the very best educator you can by virtue of the fact that you work here at Mason Crest, and there is a tremendous sense of satisfaction that comes with fulfilling your full potential as a professional and a person. This is the story that drives **Mason Crest** to fulfill its mission of ensuring high levels of learning for both students and adults. If, through our collective effort, we are able to fulfill that mission/purpose, our students will have the knowledge, skills, and dispositions essential to pursuing their goals and dreams throughout their lives.*

Adapted from DuFour & DuFour, Building the Foundation of a Professional Learning Community Course, 2012

