



BUILDING SUCCESS ONE STUDENT AT A TIME

MADISON

CONSOLIDATED SCHOOLS

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BUILDING SUCCESS ONE STUDENT AT A TIME

How one Indiana school district is empowering student success through mental health support, technology integration, and community partnerships

AT A GLANCE

MADISON CONSOLIDATED SCHOOLS

WHAT: A public school district pioneering innovative educational programs including mental health services, fine arts pathways, STEM integration, and early childhood education

WHERE: Madison, Jefferson County, Indiana

WEBSITE: www.madison.k12.in.us



Madison Consolidated Schools has reimagined its educational approach over the past three years, placing students at the heart of every decision. “We are student-centered, achievement focused, where everyone is valued,” explains Dr. Teresa Brown, Superintendent of Madison Consolidated Schools. “We look at test scores in the aggregate, but we focus more specifically on how each individual student is matriculating and what we can do to improve their outcomes.”

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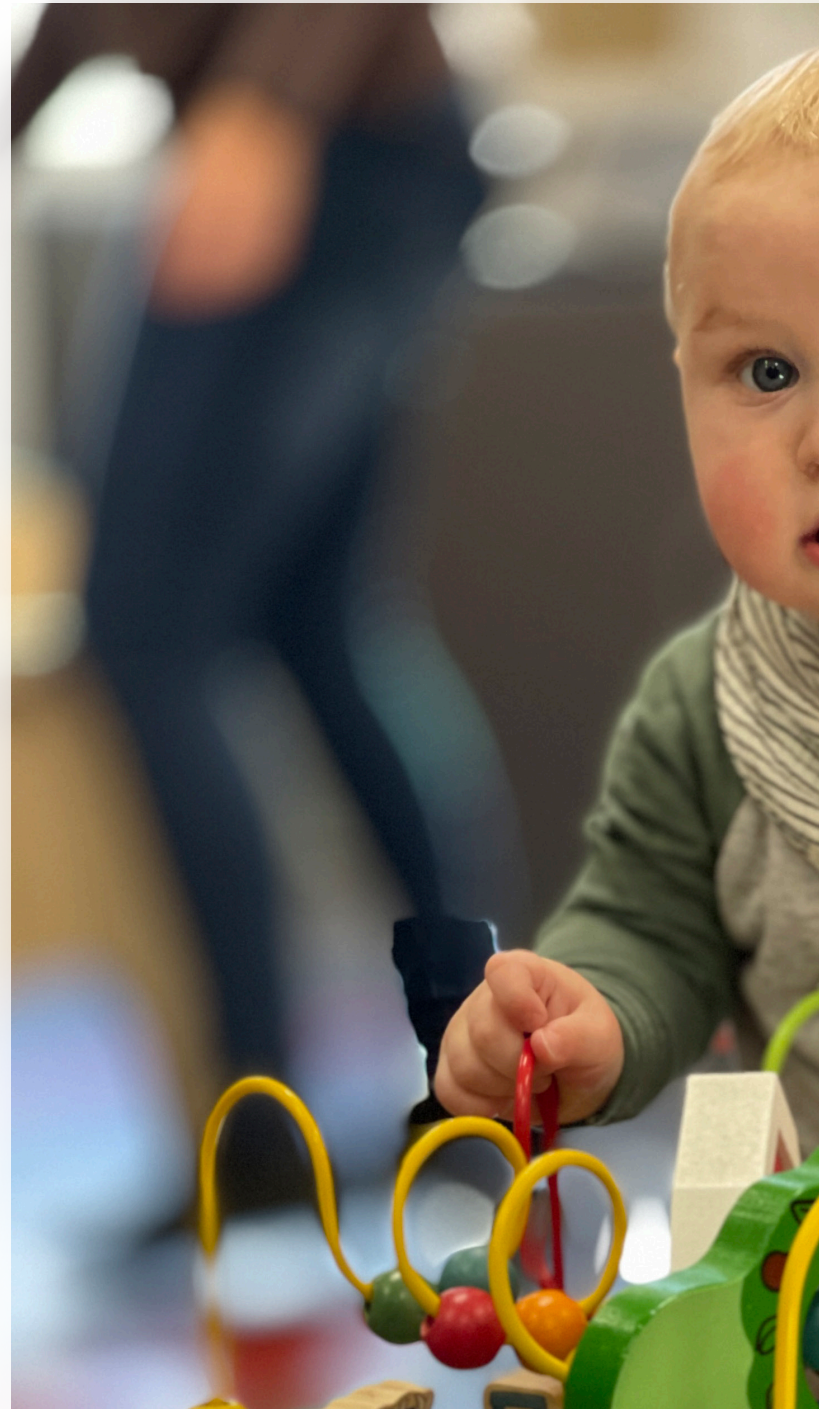
The district's response to post-COVID challenges showcases this philosophy in action. When staff identified student behavior as a key concern, the administration launched trust-based relational intervention (TBRI). "Student behaviors have become more complex, and students seem to be experiencing more trauma," says Dr. Brown. "Our staff were struggling to know how to handle that and address the issue so they could teach." The TBRI program teaches staff about trauma response and self-regulation, recognizing that "50% of every issue is what you're bringing to the equation."

This comprehensive approach to student support carries through to the district's disciplinary practices. The Jefferson County Alternative to Suspension Program (JCASP), developed in partnership with local probation department and court services, offers students an alternative to expulsion. "It helps them stay connected to the school, connected to their teachers," explains Tara McKay, Assistant Superintendent and Director of Programs. The results speak for themselves – expulsion rates dropped significantly within months of implementation. The district has also partnered with law enforcement for their "Handle with Care" initiative, ensuring teachers are notified when students experience traumatic events outside school, allowing for more compassionate support without compromising privacy.

MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLNESS: BREAKING NEW GROUND

Madison Consolidated Schools has taken bold steps to address student and staff mental health needs through innovative programs and substantial funding. "We received more than a half-million-dollar grant from the Bethany Legacy Foundation to grow our own Mental Health Haven," says Lori Slygh, Assistant Director of Programs. "Through that, we are working to ensure we have licensed school counselors, licensed school social workers, and licensed mental health therapists on our staff who can support students' and staff mental health needs."

The Mental Health Haven initiative includes unique support systems tailored to both students and staff. "Our TBRI coach works with faculty and staff across the district," Slygh explains. "She's doing adult



nurture groups for our faculty and staff, and student nurture groups for our students to help provide extra support." The program even incorporates animal-assisted therapy, with a certified therapy dog named Clem visiting schools. "Students love Clem," notes Slygh, adding that a second therapy dog is currently in training to join the program next year.

The district's innovative approach extends to medical care through a groundbreaking telehealth partnership. "Our nursing coordinator worked out a



program with Norton's Health where we do virtual medical appointments and clinic appointments," explains McKay. "Our school nurses were trained in that, and they know how to use the equipment and do the assessment in conjunction with the medical professional that's on virtual." This program proves particularly valuable for families facing transportation challenges, as McKay points out: "It allows our students who normally wouldn't be able to find transportation to get to a doctor to be seen right there within our school building."

ARTS AND INNOVATION: WHERE CREATIVITY MEETS EDUCATION

The Madison Fine Arts Academy highlights the district's innovative spirit, offering students diverse creative pathways. "Our students love it. We participate in theatre, instrumental vocal, and we have a civic arts pathway," says Slygh. "The state of Indiana requires students to complete a pathway to graduate, so we've adopted a civic arts pathway that students can work through our fine arts program to receive their high school diploma." The theatre department's excellence earned them a rare distinction – they were selected as the only school in Indiana to perform *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child*.

The district's artistic vision reaches beyond traditional performances through a unique partnership with renowned sculptor Dale Rogers. "Dale Rogers visited, gave a presentation to our high school students, and spent time in classrooms answering questions," explains Ashley Schutte, the Communications Coordinator. This collaboration led to an innovative community project featuring the "Birdman" sculpture at a new shopping center. The project bridges multiple disciplines, as Schutte describes: "Eric Phagan will work with junior high students to create mini sculptures. They were able to tour downtown and, through learning about our community, picked something special, drew it, and then our high school welding students and engineering students are taking that from their 2D design to the engineering department."

The project showcases the district's skill at integrating various educational disciplines. "Our high school students will create mini sculptures to match the type of work that Dale Rogers does that will be placed throughout our community as kind of a virtual scavenger hunt," says Schutte. These artistic initiatives thrive thanks to aggressive grant pursuit. "A lot of these things are possible because we have been getting grants," Dr. Brown explains. "We've been really pursuing any kind of grant funding to help us make all of these innovative ideas happen because clearly you don't want money to be the obstacle. We've gotten more than \$2 million in grants over the last 18 months that have allowed us to fund a number of these things."

TECHNOLOGY AND STEM: PREPARING FOR TOMORROW

Madison Consolidated Schools has built a comprehensive technology foundation, equipping every student from kindergarten through 12th grade with devices. “With that, we’ve had to make digital citizenship part of our instruction in the classroom,” explains Janet McCreary, Director of Curriculum, Instruction & Assessment. The district’s approach to artificial intelligence shows this forward-thinking mindset. “We’re starting to figure out how we can help teachers embrace it for their use, and then also how they can allow it to be used by their students and still make it a learning tool.” As Dr. Brown emphasizes, “We shouldn’t be afraid of it. We just need to establish parameters for it. It is something that’s definitely a tool that can help educators do better lesson planning and make them operate more efficiently.”

The district’s STEM education strategy emphasizes practical integration rather than isolation. “We

actually have a STEM coach that works with our kindergarten through fourth grade teachers on student-centered coaching,” McCreary says. “She works with the classroom teacher and collaborates on coaching cycles where she then goes in with the teacher and they co-teach through some STEM opportunities.” This approach has transformed how STEM is taught: “Prior to that, we had a STEM special and it kind of put that STEM model in a box. Now it allows the STEM opportunities and STEM learning to come into the classroom and be part of their everyday structure.”

The district’s technological advancement is guided by exceptional leadership. “Last month, our tech director was just awarded a certified education technology leader certification. He’s one of just a handful in the state,” Dr. Brown notes. “What we’ve done in the last couple of years is create a technology department. Before that we had a provider. We found that to be tremendous, to help us really integrate technology, even things like cybersecurity.”



The district has also embraced emerging fields like eSports. “It’s been a real motivator for a lot of our students who couldn’t find their niche,” McCreary explains. “It also opened their eyes to all of the different branches that are involved in eSports, which is very similar to the sports business.” The program includes visits to collegiate eSports programs, like Butler University, expanding students’ understanding of potential career paths beyond game creation.

REAL-WORLD READY: CAREER PATHWAYS AND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Madison Consolidated Schools has developed robust career and technical education (CTE) programs that connect students directly with workplace experiences. “Our students are involved in numerous pathways from culinary arts to business to industrial maintenance and welding. We have an agriculture department that students are receiving opportunities in,” says Slygh. These programs are strengthened through partnerships with local industries, including Grote Industries, Super ATV, Madison Precision

Products, Arvin Sango, Royer, Inc., and VSG where students gain hands-on experience, mentorships, and opportunities through internships and co-ops.

The district’s innovative Farm Stop project showcases their entrepreneurial education approach. “We will be the first school district in Indiana, maybe the country that’s going to have a student-run farm stop,” Dr. Brown explains. “Our business will open downtown on Main Street. People will be able to come in and buy fresh produce and goods from our students as they’ve been working with local farmers and producers to create a supply chain.” The project emerged from a year-long entrepreneurship program where seven students developed a comprehensive business plan, supported by USDA grants.

The district’s work-based learning initiatives create tangible value for local industry partners. “We make things for them. Our students in manufacturing produce things that they need in the company, and then they’re paid for that,” says Dr. Brown. This





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practical approach extends to higher education through their partnership with Ivy Tech Community College. “We have students who are receiving, each year, hundreds of dual credits,” Slygh notes.

LOOKING AHEAD: BUILDING FOR THE FUTURE

Madison Consolidated Schools is tackling Jefferson County’s childcare crisis with characteristic innovation

and community focus. “Our community has had a needs assessment that aligns with what we hear from our employees about the lack of childcare and early childhood opportunities,” Dr. Brown explains. The district already serves 275 preschoolers, making it Jefferson County’s primary preschool provider. “We were losing employees because they couldn’t find childcare. We applied for a grant with FSSA and were awarded \$750,000 to explore an early childhood idea.”



This initiative has already shown promising results. “We opened our own early childhood center this fall just for our employees. We have three classrooms right now for infants and toddlers, and a fourth one opening in spring,” says Dr. Brown. The project has garnered significant community support: “We have 10 partners that signed letters for us to help us get that grant that have been working with us to figure out what childcare needs in Jefferson County could be addressed.” Looking ahead, the district plans to

potentially issue bonds this spring, aiming to open an expanded facility by fall 2027.

The district’s growth mindset shapes its future vision. “I think more than lifelong learning, the idea of a growth mindset is what we always need to get better,” Dr. Brown reflects. “We don’t ever arrive. None of us do. And I don’t think we should ever be afraid to make mistakes. We just have to learn from them and keep getting better.” This philosophy drives continuous academic expansion, particularly in higher education partnerships. “We’re working towards becoming an early college high school,” explains Slygh. “Students are earning the Indiana College Core, and we’re working to get some of our students associate degrees by the time they graduate high school.”

These initiatives spotlight Madison Consolidated Schools’ comprehensive approach to education and community development. As Dr. Brown emphasizes, their work addresses both immediate needs and





long-term goals, creating pathways for student success while strengthening community resources. The district's ambitious plans underpin its efforts to evolve alongside the needs of its students, staff, and community.

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