

Menlo Park Terrace

School Based Research Report

School # 19
Woodbridge Township School District
Woodbridge, New Jersey

Submitted by:
John Ingemi, Principal
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INTRODUCTION

Menlo Park Terrace School is currently home to 389 students in grades K-5 and 30 staff members. Our schools' approach to learning is student-centered, promoting a sense of belonging, encouraging diversity, individual strengths and talents, and fostering close teacher-student and student-student relationships.

In an effort to meet the learning needs of each student, a variety of innovative educational strategies and programs have been implemented at Menlo Park Terrace. Schools Attuned, a program from *All Kinds of Minds*, has helped us better understand and manage learning differences in children and has brought us both state and national recognition.

We are very proud of the efforts of all our T.E.A.M. (Together Everyone Achieves More) members, helping us all to learn about learning and embrace the philosophy that 'Everyone is Someone' at Menlo Park Terrace School. A significant modification within our educational program during the last several years has been the integration of Schools Attuned. Using Schools Attuned, teachers understand how children learn, students have learned about learning, and parents have enthusiastically joined in this team effort to give their children hope and help for realizing authentic success.

ATTUNED TO EVERY CHILD...EVERYDAY

Monday mornings at Menlo Park Terrace School begin bright and early with a meeting of our Pupil Assistance Committee (PAC). The team is made up of two classroom teachers, a member of our Child Study Team, and the Principal. Each member of the PAC has been trained in the Schools Attuned program. The meetings have a clear, specific agenda, which is identified in pre-meeting notes given to committee members at least two days in advance. The format is based on a Grand Rounds concept. Summary reports on active students are reviewed and modified when needed. Classroom teachers also present new students to the PAC during these Monday morning meetings.

Based on the Grand Rounds format, PAC discussions focus on how previously suggested strategies have been employed within classroom settings, how effective they were in bringing about desired outcomes, or how they were modified. Notes are recorded and duplicated for each PAC team member.

Teacher presentations of individual student profiles begin the Attuning process. A classroom teacher will present a summary of initial observable phenomena and provide work samples that may suggest a link between academic and neurodevelopmental weakness. The committee members also participate during these presentations by posing questions, suggestions and possible hypotheses. These meetings close with the

development of a timeline for contacting and meeting with parents to discuss the Schools Attuned process.

Throughout the week, teachers and students are involved in a wide range of activities that embody the Schools Attuned philosophy. Highlights include daily readings and discussions about the characters found in Dr. Levine's text, "All Kinds of Minds." These readings normally begin our afternoon session each day. The primary level teachers read aloud from the text and the children respond to questions and situations that may be familiar to them or someone they know. The teachers often ask the children to draw a picture or write a letter to one of the characters. This is also a time to introduce the "common language" of Schools Attuned. Memory, Language, and Attention are constructs found in all kindergarten, first, and second grade classrooms.

For grades 3-5, each classroom has a copy of "All Kinds of Minds." The 5th grade classes are also equipped with a copy of "Keeping A Head in School." The discussions in the classrooms of older students are extraordinary, especially for children who have already been exposed to Dr. Levine and Schools Attuned. Teachers lead whole-class discussions or monitor small group activity. Without fear of humiliation or peer pressure, children are free to talk about themselves, their feelings, and their strengths and weaknesses. (The freedom of humiliation is initiated in K-1st grade.) From these discussions and activities, reports are generated, journals are kept, and modified student views are completed. In addition, more Schools Attuned vocabulary is introduced and used.

Teachers regularly participate in "working" lunches, enhancing and honing their skills using Schools Attuned internet resources. The most frequently used website, the Learning Base, has been a tremendous resource for strategies and help regarding the attuning process. The Teachers View log-in site is also used daily. In fact, a schedule had to be generated to accommodate all faculty.

The *Developing Minds* video series is used so frequently we had to order another set! The most beneficial aspect of our Schools Attuned project has been our monthly Schools Attuned faculty meeting. The meeting provides an opportunity for us to all put our heads together to review, reconstruct, and revisit ideas about the program, or sit and relax to watch a *Developing Minds* video. Prior to the meeting, teachers are asked to select topics from a "menu." Based on the selection, we prepare materials to either re-teach or clarify some aspect of the program or facilitate a group activity that will enhance the Attuning process.

This summary provides a brief overview a week at Menlo Park Terrace School using the Schools Attuned program. Clearly, there are many variations. Part of my vision for our Schools Attuned program was to have teachers and students participate in some Schools Attuned related activity each day: that vision has become a reality.

Over the last four years, the entire faculty, including all 25 teachers, the school nurse, physical education instructor, vocal music teacher, school librarian, and speech therapist, has all gone through the Schools Attuned training.

When we first became aware of Dr. Levine's work, we knew immediately that we had found the education plan for which we had been searching. Our long-term vision was to completely reform how education is delivered and how we acknowledge and embrace all children, everyday. We knew this would be a daunting task, as change does not come easily. We also knew that in order to be successful, all (or at least a majority) of teachers would have to buy in, be trained, and make Schools Attuned part of their everyday life.

We began to enlist faculty support five years ago. At first, just two teachers accepted the invitation. Together, they trained in North Carolina and here in New Jersey. They began using the vocabulary when they spoke about the children. Others began to inquire with questions such as, "What is saliency determination"? The principal wrote a grant and submitted it to the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation. We received an initial subsidy of \$25,000.00 (with an additional \$15,000.00 two years later). We have worked diligently over the past four years in order to have a committed group of professional educators who have been trained and have changed their approach to teaching to give, perhaps for the first time, children and their families hope for "authentic success".

Since our involvement with Schools Attuned, we have been extremely fortunate to be recognized by local, state, and national media. We are also very proud to have been part of the professional video produced here at our school. While these are all wonderfully exciting events, the most satisfying recognition came from Dr. Levine himself when he visited our school last year. In a *Newsweek* article, Dr. Levine described our school as, "The best implementation of the program that I have seen."

The most dramatic impact of Schools Attuned on our school reform program has been in the number of children needing Child Study Team intervention, evaluation, and special placement. For many years, the general practice in our district and most other districts was as follows: a teacher notices a child with academic problems hindering grade level success. The teacher seeks assistance from the Pupil Assistance Committee. "Band-aid strategies" are developed and a timeline for implementation identified. After limited progress, the child goes through the process of the Child Study Team intervention, testing, and placement in special education class. The whole scenario bothered me greatly. I searched many years for an educational program that would help teachers understand why children have problems in the classroom and teach them how develop a management plan, making the Child Study Team intervention the very last alternative. Then I met Mel Levine.

Schools Attuned has become the educational program and philosophy that has led to a total school reform at Menlo Part Terrace School. The following is a summary that substantiates the above statement:

In 1998, the initial year of training, our school identified 12 children for Child Study Team intervention. In 1999, the number of children referred to Child Study Team went down to 8 children. In the year 2000, staff fully trained, requests for Child Study Team intervention went down to 2.

EXAMINING THE IMPACT OF SCHOOLS ATTUNED

The following section includes a series of research questions related to the impact of Schools Attuned that were of interest to Menlo Park Terrace. The administration and teaching staff at Menlo Park Terrace collected, analyzed, and summarized the data in this research project.

1. How does Schools Attuned address specific Core Curriculum Content Standards? How does Schools Attuned promote high student achievement and contribute to school-wide accomplishments?

The school's specialization, Schools Attuned, is infused throughout the school environment and engages all students during their learning. Schools Attuned skills include, but are not limited to, methods of recognizing, understanding, and effectively managing individual differences in learning. Our teachers incorporate student self-management strategies throughout our curricula to help our students use and apply skills in the areas of concentration, memory, language, time management, thinking, motor abilities, and making and keeping friends. The focus of our program is to work collaboratively to educate students, parents, school personnel, and the community about the various styles and tools of learning. The framework is based on the scientific research of learning expert Dr. Mel Levine. Our philosophy is built upon the belief that all children can learn and that through an understanding of their own strengths, weaknesses, and affinities, each child can succeed. Our program celebrates our differences in a positive learning environment.

The school's objectives are:

- To develop self-management skills which enable each student to succeed;
- To prepare students to assess their own thinking;
- To acquire and apply strategies in problem-solving situations;
- To develop skills that enable students to analyze their behaviors and its implications for learning;
- To convey the importance of and acquire time-management skills;
- To prepare students to become lifelong learners.

Our Schools Attuned program has enabled our students to achieve remarkable academic success. We have witnessed this success in various ways. As a result of our program, our school's Elementary School Proficiency Assessment scores have dramatically improved. This past school year (2001-2002), our school had the most students in the district to test out of the Basic Skills Program. Furthermore, since

beginning this self-management program, we have been able to address more individual learning issues in the classroom. The results include fewer referrals to the child study team and significantly fewer students being classified with a specific learning disability.

Schools Attuned (student self-management) skills are not limited to a specific curriculum, but rather enhance all major areas of the Core Curriculum Content Standards and support the Workplace Readiness Standards. In doing so, this specialization enables students to blend the acquired skills throughout their learning experiences. Each year students become more astute in techniques that enable them to achieve academic success. These techniques are acquired through age-appropriate activities taught at each grade level in our K-5 school. Staff members participate in ongoing staff development to enhance the strategies that meet our school's objectives. This specialization incorporates our school's vision of TEAM - *Together Everyone Achieves More*. The success of TEAM is centered on the cooperation of students, parents, school personnel, and the community working in conjunction with each other to help each child thrive.

Self-management skills are acquired by our students through various age-appropriate activities adapted by each teacher to fit the needs of his/her class. One such activity might be a story or vignette focusing on a specific weakness of a fictional character (Cross-Content Workplace Readiness Standard (CCWRS) #4). Through exploration, students learn to identify problem areas exhibited by the fictional character and draw parallels to themselves. When students encounter similar situations, they draw upon strategies they have internalized and incorporate those strategies to meet their personal needs. Accommodations and interventions are consistently explored, empowering students to anticipate possible problems and allow for independent solutions (CCWRS #3).

Another excellent example of the effectiveness of our program is student achievement derived through activities such as role-playing. These activities center on the social and inter-personal aspects of learning. Through these activities, students gain a better understanding of the unique aspect of individual learning. This enables students to respect personal learning styles and abilities of their peers. In addition, it offers the adept student the opportunity to become more tolerant of less capable students. As a result, the less capable students are developing self-esteem by appreciating their unique learning differences (CCWRS#4 and 3). By developing an appreciation for the learning differences of others, students are also fostering characteristics required of good citizens (CCWRS #1).

Time-management skills are essential life skills. Early mastery of these skills fosters a positive learning environment. Through self-management learning techniques, students are exposed to various ways of using time efficiently and effectively. Students acquire time-management skills on an age-appropriate level. They are encouraged to become "in tune" with how they learn. Various methods are explored at each age level, allowing students to discover the most appropriate personal learning style. The methods include, but are not limited to, recognizing when your body needs nourishment or a break, and learning how to segment larger tasks into smaller chunks. By evaluating the

effectiveness of various solutions, students become adept at monitoring and validating their own thinking (CCWRS #3 and 4).

We have shared our philosophy in an effort to inform and educate the parents and the community. In the spring of 2002, we held an information session that was attended by many of our school families and Board of Education personnel. The session was so well received by the targeted audience that there was standing room only! In an effort to educate the greater community at large, this session was broadcast on the local public access television station several times during the course of a month. We have the privilege of being referenced in several newspapers and magazines, including the nationally acclaimed *Newsweek Magazine*. Our program has become so successful that we have achieved national acclaim as an Exemplary School by the *All Kinds of Minds Institute*.

2. How does the Schools Attuned professional development program contribute to exemplary teaching practices in classrooms?

All staff members were trained in the Schools Attuned program. The training was initiated six years ago to explore and merge new theories with best practice techniques and to turn-key their findings to the entire staff. The training included workshops affording staff members opportunities to enhance skills, embrace knowledge, and incorporate needed practices to revitalize and motivate students and parents. The energizing transformation motivated the entire staff to attend trainings and incorporate the practices into their classroom strategies.

The entire staff attended workshops that addressed the needs of students and teachers. Our school places a strong emphasis on professional development. Each year, faculty members attend bi-annual district in-service programs. Monthly faculty meetings are transformed into active working environments to discuss and apply Schools Attuned strategies. Teachers attend the NJEA Atlantic City Convention, numerous on and off-site workshops, teacher-conducted workshops, speakers, and professional programs offered by the principal. The school administration provides training in Affirmative Action, cooperative learning, anti-bullying, and discipline issues. All staff members are in-serviced monthly on our Schools Attuned program and the application of learning strategies that focus on the learning differences of our students. The principal supports the faculty with training, research studies, and teaching methods to better serve students and the community.

Professional development strengthens the practices and performance in our classrooms. Students, teachers, and parents understand and express feelings, communicate effectively, assume responsibility, problem-solve, and set attainable goals in a collaborative learning environment. Education is enriched through the application of self-management skills and strategies preparing students for a successful future.

3. How does the leadership style of the school's administration support the efficient and innovative implementation of Schools Attuned?

The building principal has been the catalyst in the development and implementation of the Schools Attuned program. His leadership is clearly evident at every level of our school reform program. He is both a facilitator and resource provider. As a result of his efforts, our school community evolved into a partnership environment where students, teachers, and parents share in the vision of a common goal - the promotion of student self-worth through the acquisition and implementation of self-management strategies.

Our Schools Attuned program embraces an educational philosophy founded upon the belief that all children learn differently and every child can be successful in school. Professional development opportunities have resulted in 100% of our faculty (including the school nurse, all special area subject teachers, and members of the Child Study Team) being trained in the techniques and methodology of teaching children with learning variation. The financing for staff development programs was accomplished through several grants from the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation, thus eliminating the need for any financial support from the school district.

Monthly staff meetings reinforce the methodology of our Schools Attuned program in a collaborative, inclusive, and professional atmosphere. In addition to the monthly meetings, the staff utilizes cooperative study groups and peer observations that assist in evaluation of student behaviors ultimately providing the foundation for the development of student learning profiles and management plans. Teachers design lessons that help students become aware of their learning variations and embrace the philosophy that it is 'okay' to be different. Empowered to manage their own abilities, students make great strides when they understand that their strengths, weaknesses, and affinities can work in harmony for success.

Parents play an integral part in our Schools Attuned program. Using a variety of activities, parents are invited to participate in their child's learning experience and serve as educational consultants for their child. Specially designed parent observation checklists are used to gather perspectives on a child's learning profile. Close home-school communication also keeps parents abreast of how their child is progressing, including awareness of any special educational needs that can be reinforced at home. The link between home and school is an important one. Parents who take an active role in their child's education and understand the way their child learns best have a much better framework for positive interaction and communication.

We are committed to the philosophy of our student self-management program. Our whole-school reform initiative integrates students, parents, and teachers into an all-encompassing educational alliance that strives to find the key for the academic, social, and emotional potential of every child.

4. How are assessment practices aligned to Schools Attuned? How do assessment practices ensure that the content being measured is consistent with the Core Curriculum Content Standards?

Assessment is the key that determines the success and effectiveness of our school’s specialization, student self-management program. The data noted in the charts below summarize pupil performance using three formal measures: *New Jersey Elementary School Proficiency Assessment* (ESPA) in grade four, our school’s *Basic Skills Summary Report*, and our students’ performance on the *District Writing Sample*.

ESPA scores report the percentage of students attaining “Proficient” and “Advanced Proficient” in Language Arts/Literacy and Math Assessment. Our school results over a two-year period reflect a significant increase in both categories. Our data indicates an 11.0% increase in student performance in the category “Proficient” and a 9.1% increase in the category “Advanced Proficient” in Language Arts/Literacy. In Math Assessment, our data indicates a 19.0% increase in “Proficient” and a 16.7% increase for “Advanced Proficient.”

ESPA Results, Language Arts/Literacy Assessment

Year	Number Tested	Proficient	Advanced	Total Passing
00-01	61	73.8	10.6	93.5
01-02	66	84.8	19.7	95.4

*The school’s aggregate scores do not include Special Education students.

ESPA Results, Math Assessment

Year	Number Tested	Proficient	Advanced	Total Passing
00-01	61	51.5	19.7	87.9
01-02	66	70.5	36.4	90.2

*The school’s aggregate scores do not include Special Education students.

Since the implementation of our Schools Attuned Program, the number of students receiving basic skills instruction shows a very significant reduction. The number of students enrolled in our **Basic Skills Language Arts** program decreased by 6.6% in the 2000-01 school year and by 25.1% in 2001-02. Student enrollment in our **Basic Skills Math** program decreased by 14.3% for the 2000–01 school year and by 18% in the 2001-02 school year. We are particularly pleased that the 2002 Basic Skills Results District Summary showed that our school had the most students test out of the program in the entire district.

Basic Skills Services Summary – Language Arts

Language Arts	Number Tested	Number Tested Out	Percentage Tested Out
2000-01 School	56	46	82.1
2000-01 District	713	538	75.5
2001-02 School	17	12	70.6
2001-02 District	341	155	45.5

Basic Skills Performance Summary – Mathematics

Language Arts	Number Tested	Number Tested Out	Percentage Tested Out
2000-01 School	16	13	81.3
2000-01 District	457	306	67.0
2001-02 School	32	19	59.4
2001-02 District	447	185	41.4

The students’ scores on our *District’s Writing Sample* also serve as a good indicator of pupil progress. Based on Registered Holistic Scoring, with a maximum point total of 10 in grades 3 and 4 and 12 in grade 5, our data shows that our students’ writing results have improved by an average of 1.6 points during the 2000-2002 testing period.

District Writing Sample

Year	Number Tested	Mean Score Grade 3	Number Tested	Mean Score Grade 4	Number Tested	Mean Score Grade 5
2000-01	64	4.9	67	5.5	68	4.6
2001-02	70	5.3	64	6.5	67	6.2

All assessment criteria, including district-wide evaluation instruments and rubrics, as well as performance assessments, are directly related to our curriculum and aligned with state and national standards. Our data clearly indicate the success of our Schools Attuned (student self-management program). With the support and assistance of parents and teachers, our Schools Attuned program provides ample opportunities for our students to be successful in school as they become proficient in identifying, understanding, and applying strategies that help them to learn best.

5. How is Schools Attuned related to collaborative efforts with families, business, the community, school districts, and/or higher education?

The success of our school's Schools Attuned program is due to our collaborative efforts with parents, business, and the community. The school reaches out to parents through our *Back to School Night* with informative programs that highlight our goals and programs for the year. The philosophy of our Schools Attuned (student self-management) program is introduced to parents in a yearly open-school night that features plays, presentations, and a question and answer session. The *Parent Volunteer Program* encourages parents to become part of our daily academic programs as well as our student self-management programs. *Library Parents* encourage our students to find books and assist students in our technology program. Throughout the year, the *Classroom Parent Program* assists our staff with field trips, class projects, and classroom extra-curricular activities.

Each year, the school sponsors programs to involve families in cooperative learning activities such as Family Math, Family Science, Family Writing, Character Education, and the PALS Program. Programs are funded by grants from the businesses and the Woodbridge Township Educational Foundation. The *Box Top for Education Program*, our holiday food drive, the *American Heart Association* cupcake fund-raiser, *October Fire Fighters Presentation*, *Dare Program*, and community leaders visitations instill the importance of being part of a larger community into the every classroom.

Our business partnership allowed our school to reach some of our technological goals through computer programs with Comcast and Technological Training through the Chamber of Commerce and Woodbridge Township Municipal Government. In the area of higher education, our faculty participated in university training at Rutgers University, Kean University, and the School's Attuned Program from University of North Carolina. The community partnership is an integral part of our daily program that encourages lifelong learning skills.