



# Each Learner Prepared for Success



District 112 Educational Plan for  
Learning and Success in the 21st Century

The Schools of Eastern Carver County/**School District 112**

CARVER - CHANHASSEN - CHASKA - VICTORIA, MINNESOTA

# Each Learner Prepared for Success

## District 112 Educational Plan for Learning and Success in the 21st Century

**I**n January 2007, a Secondary Program Design Team of 60 students, parents, teachers, administrators, and community representatives came together to tackle one of education’s biggest challenges: to redesign the educational system for grades 6-12 in District 112 to fit the demands of the 21st century.

Superintendent David Jennings described the challenge this way: “The digital revolution, the information age, and the demographic tides sweeping the country make obvious the demand for something far different for learners at the secondary level, something far beyond what we have known in the past.”

Secondary school reform is a national education issue. The need to change is not a condemnation of the current system but rather an acknowledgement of the realities of the 21st century. The District 112 School Board recognized that our learners can not afford to wait for the national debate to conclude. The Board challenged the staff and community to create a program to ensure that each learner of Eastern Carver County is prepared to succeed in a changing world.

District 112’s rich history of planning and using research to build exceptional programs, curriculum, and instruction provided a strong foundation for our secondary program redesign. The District’s 1992 report *We’re Planning to Succeed—Educational Plan: The Vision for 2010* and other relevant literature and reports greatly influenced the Design Team’s work and helped shape this document. These sources included: International Center for Leadership in Education; National Association of Secondary School Principals; National High School Alliance; the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation; National Middle School Association; and Partnership for 21st Century Skills.

We are not adopting a pre-packaged plan to improve schools for each learner. Instead, we reviewed literature and research to find effective practices for improving learner preparation and created a personalized plan for our community. Through this plan, we will change the way learners experience education at the secondary level to better prepare them for success in the 21st century. Success depends on the deep and consistent implementation of these recommendations by the committed educators of grades 6-12 and those who support them.

This report, *Each Learner Prepared for Success*, reflects the vision of the Design Team for learner success in the 21st century. The report was adopted by the School Board on November 8, 2007.

**We will change the way learners experience education at the secondary level to better prepare them for success.**

# Our Changing World: Preparing Today's Learners for Tomorrow's World



merica's public education system was perfect for the time in which it was created. Education was valued, but not necessarily required for a successful lifetime in the world of work. The system sorted its students, determined what they needed to know,

and prepared and encouraged only some students for post-secondary education. In most of 20th century America, a high school diploma combined with hard work was good enough to support a family and grab at least a portion of the American dream.

**“Education today is about helping kids think critically and make good decisions, about helping them understand their world and its cultures, about helping them embrace technology and understand both its strength and its limitations, about helping them understand the difference between information and knowledge, and about giving them the self confidence and skills to be successful.”**

In today's world, we know that success requires additional training and education beyond a high school diploma. All learners need to be prepared for post-secondary education programs and more; they need to be prepared to learn, unlearn, and relearn throughout their lifetime.

The pace of change in public education has not matched the pace of change in the world. We live in significantly different times. Globalization and rapid technological advances are having enormous effects on our lives. Developing countries are increasing their standards of living and competing for jobs internationally. Changing demographics challenge our economy as baby boomers retire and growing numbers of new Americans speak different languages and have different cultural expectations.

The nation and our learners need more from public schools. Education is the key for individual opportunity and success in a global society. Our learners will be competing with students from everywhere in the world for the jobs of the future. Their success will depend on their ability to adapt quickly to a changing world.

Superintendent David Jennings sums it up this way: “Education today is about helping kids think critically and make good decisions, about helping them understand their world and its cultures, about helping them embrace technology and understand both its strength and its limitations, about helping them understand the difference between information and knowledge, and about giving them the self confidence and skills to be successful.”

Our challenge is to prepare students for a future we can't even imagine. The key will be to actively involve learners in their own planning and

learning, to emphasize the values that are fundamental in creating wise leaders, to offer the chance to apply learning to improve the community and the world, to personalize our programs to honor individual interests and talent, to create opportunities to connect with people and cultures around the world, and to instill the confidence and expectation among all learners that post-secondary education is achievable.

To meet that challenge, we'll take the best of what we are already doing, change what we need to, and ask our families and community for their involvement and support. Our graduates must envision a compelling, personal future for themselves. They will need knowledge, skills, and character to create that future and a sense of hope and confidence that they can be successful.

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## Secondary Schools' Mission: To Prepare Each Learner

**The District 112 mission: “Prepare learners to achieve their personal best.”**

District 112 secondary schools believe in the potential of every learner and that education enables future opportunity and success. We accept the responsibility of providing an educational system that positions our graduates with the knowledge, understanding, skills, and character traits they need to fulfill their individual promise for success and achieve their personal best. They deserve a school program grounded by a compelling purpose and our best efforts to achieve it.

### Secondary Schools' Mission

As a caring community focused on achievement, guided by values, and committed to equity and excellence for all, District 112 secondary schools declare as their mission:

**To prepare each learner for  
successful completion of a post-secondary educational program,  
life-long learning, career opportunities,  
and meaningful contributions as a citizen of the local and global community  
by providing personalized, rigorous, and relevant learning experiences.**

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## District 112 Graduates: Ready for Success in the 21st Century

This is the challenge for our schools: preparing learners for success and meaningful contributions for a time we cannot even imagine clearly. We must prepare learners to work with people around the world, to synthesize new knowledge using emerging technologies, and to create solutions for unknown problems.

Our foundation for earning a diploma includes these givens:

### Our graduates will:

- ▶ **Meet or exceed District 112's high standards for quality work with demonstrated knowledge, understanding, skills, and character.**
- ▶ **Complete personalized, rigorous, and relevant programs of study planned to meet individual goals.**
- ▶ **Serve their communities through activities that apply what they learn to real world needs.**

**Recognizing the importance of integrating skills and understanding across the curriculum, we will embed within all coursework elements of reading, writing, technology and information literacy, global awareness, critical thinking/problem solving, communication/collaboration, life skills, and District 112 Community Values.**

Our curriculum and assessments used to evaluate learner proficiency will be tied to local, state, national and international standards.



## All District 112 graduates will be:

### ▶ Globally concerned citizens who demonstrate:

- Cultural awareness and understanding
- Competency in a world language other than the student's first language
- Recognition and understanding of interrelationships among individuals, groups, organizations, and countries across the globe

### ▶ Innovative problem solvers with skills in:

- Analysis
- Creativity
- Evaluation
- Metacognition
- Understanding interconnection among systems

### ▶ Fluent users of technology and information with skills in:

- Reading and media literacy
- Responsible use of technology and information
- Technology use
- The research process

### ▶ Productive individuals through the following life skills/attributes:

- Ethical decision-making
- Personal financial management
- Flexibility, resilience, and persistence
- Initiative and self-direction
- Leadership and responsibility
- Self-awareness in identifying interests, strengths and goals
- Work ethic

### ▶ Strong communicators and collaborators with skills in:

- Interpersonal communication
- Multi-media
- Speaking
- Writing

## Every District 112 graduate will demonstrate enduring understanding in these essential knowledge areas:

- algebra
- communication arts
- earth science
- geography
- government and civics
- personal wellness
- world and U.S. history
- arts and humanities
- data analysis/statistics and probability
- economics
- geometry
- life science
- physical science
- world cultures and languages



Adapted from *Learning for the 21st Century* by Partnership for 21st Century Skills.



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## Adolescent Development: Knowing our Learners Guides our Work

Adolescence is a distinctive developmental stage characterized by significant growth and change. Experts tell us that adolescence today starts earlier and lasts longer than in previous generations. Understanding the adolescent experience is foundational to creating and implementing a successful secondary education system. In developing our program, we paid particular attention to the following areas:

**Physical Development/Brain Development** – Bodies and brains of adolescents grow and mature. They face coordination issues and restlessness. Their brains are refining and pruning some connections and strengthening others as their abilities to plan, reason, anticipate consequences, pay attention and make decisions continue to develop.

**Intellectual Development** – Reasoning, understanding and the ability for abstract thought grows significantly. To make sense of the world, adolescents prefer real-life learning experiences in areas they find useful or interesting.

**Social Development** – Interest and capacity for more mature interaction with groups and individuals may not develop with the same speed as bodies and intellect. Adolescents need to belong; they test limits; they want to be like their peers.

**Emotional/Psychological Development** – Adolescents are searching for their own independent, adult identity. They may be moody or restless; they are frequently self-conscious and highly sensitive to criticism. They are likely to believe that their experiences and feelings are unique.

**Moral/Ethical Development** – The ability to make principled choices grows in adolescence. This involves a transition from a focus on self to considering the rights and feelings of others. Idealism and a strong sense of fairness develop, along with a set of personal values. Shades of gray in moral issues may replace what has always appeared black and white.

We believe that understanding adolescent development and brain research supports our focus on relevance, choice, real-life experiences, and positive relationships. It makes full consideration of these issues a necessity for a successful secondary school program. We will respond to these adolescent development issues and their environmental, curricular, and instructional implications through the core principles and strategies that guide our work.



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## Core Principles and Strategies: Our Plan for Success

Fulfilling our mission requires focused work. A changing world and the requirements for preparing learners for their future demand that we create a new plan for success. The core principles and strategies that follow are the synthesis of research and literature about effective practice and represent our best thinking about personalizing learning and preparing each learner for success.

### District 112 secondary schools commit to implementation of the following core principles:

- Safe and Nurturing Environment
- Engaged Learners
- Strong Partnerships
- Integrated Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment
- Excellent Educational Team
- Dynamic Organization

These core principles are a non-negotiable framework to guide the policy, program, and practice of the secondary schools. They are the foundation of all our work and function interdependently to form a synergistic secondary system. Each core principle includes recommended strategies identified as the most vital components necessary to accomplish our mission.

**SAFE AND NURTURING ENVIRONMENT** – District 112 secondary schools will provide a personalized, safe, and nurturing learning environment characterized by positive relationships, respect for all, and supports for success.

**Safe and Secure Environment:** We will provide a learning environment free from intimidation, harassment, or violence which cultivates a respect for diversity, cultural awareness, and learning for those whose needs may interfere with their full participation in the academic process.

**Caring Relationships:** We will personalize the school environment and develop a sense of belonging among all learners by promoting caring relationships between adults, between adults and students, and among all students.

**Healthy Climate:** We will provide procedures, programs, and atmosphere that foster the learner's intellectual/academic, physical, social, emotional, and character development.

**Flexible School Structures:** We will provide flexible school structures, small learning communities, and personalized learning experiences that satisfy learner needs and honor individual differences to optimize learner success.

**Supportive Transitions:** We will support each learner and their families through intentional transitions within and between buildings and programs. This will include an elementary to middle school transition, a freshmen experience, and a specific plan for success after high school.



**ENGAGED LEARNERS** – District 112 secondary schools will actively engage all learners to meet high expectations, create a compelling vision for their future, and believe in their ability to succeed in those endeavors.

**Personalized Planning and Learning:** We will engage learners and their families in creating and maintaining personal, relevant, and compelling educational plans for secondary and post-secondary education.

**Equity and Excellence for All:** We will eliminate achievement gaps, instill in each learner hope for achieving a compelling future, maintain high expectations, ensure open access to learning opportunities, and provide every support necessary for success.

**Developmental Guidance and Counseling:** We will provide effective and developmental guidance and counseling for each learner to address academic, personal, social, and post-high school planning issues.

**Learner Advocacy:** We will implement structured advisory or mentorship programs to form long-term, meaningful relationships so each learner feels cared for and connected, has an adult advocate, and is a self-advocate.

**Quality Co- and Extra- Curricular Activities:** We will provide a wide variety of high quality co-and extra-curricular activities and will encourage each learner to participate.

**STRONG PARTNERSHIPS** – District 112 will build strong partnerships with families, schools, and communities, bringing together the assets and resources of each to support the development and preparation of all learners.

**Family:** We will provide and encourage opportunities to build strong family involvement through communication, education, and comprehensive support.

**Community:** We will establish close links with government and community agencies and organizations as well as other resources in the broader community to promote the health and well-being of all learners.

**Business:** We will partner with businesses for support and for real-life learning experiences to enhance learner preparation.

**Infant - Adult Education Programs:** We will provide connected enrichment and aligned educational opportunities which promote life-long learning and meaningful contributions to our world.

**Post-Secondary Institutions:** We will form active collaborations to enhance secondary program planning to establish student supports for learning and transitions.



**INTEGRATED CURRICULUM, INSTRUCTION, AND ASSESSMENT** – District 112 secondary schools will provide rigorous curriculum and instruction relevant to the lives of our learners and measured through multiple assessments.

**Rigorous Curriculum:** We will implement horizontally and vertically aligned curriculum that embeds essential skills and content for all District 112 learners.

- ▶ **Program of Study:** We will provide academic options for post secondary level courses of study as well as extended campus and online learning as part of meeting District 112's high standards for graduation.
- ▶ **Mastery Standards:** We will provide standards-based curriculum that focuses on mastery of core learning. Learning will be the constant; time and strategies will vary.
- ▶ **Dynamic Curriculum Review Cycle:** We will implement a dynamic curriculum review cycle that supports interdisciplinary instruction and continuous improvement.

**Relevant instruction:** We will make instruction relevant to each learner by using varied strategies designed with specific outcomes in mind and based on current best practice. Real-life learning activities will be co-constructed with learners to relate to their world and personal interests.

- ▶ **Research-Based Instruction:** We will continuously evaluate current educational research and literature to identify and implement best practice instruction. Current best practices include: backward planning, differentiated instruction, and interdisciplinary and thematic instructional strategies.
- ▶ **Real-Life Learning:** We will engage all students in real-life learning activities including service-learning, work-based learning, problem-based learning, and/or simulations.
- ▶ **Online Instruction:** We will explore, develop, and implement web-facilitated, blended, and fully online learning opportunities which promote personalized learning experiences and enhance learner preparation.

**Multiple Assessments:** We will use a balanced system of authentic, formative and summative assessments aligned to standards to diagnose learner needs, plan next steps in instruction, and provide learners with descriptive feedback they can use to improve the quality of their work.

- ▶ **Formative and Summative Assessments:** We will utilize a balance of on-going formative assessments and summative assessments to continuously inform instruction and shape learning.
- ▶ **Common Assessments:** We will work in common content teams to develop and utilize common formative and summative assessments and assessment items for essential learning and skill outcomes in courses.
- ▶ **Authentic Assessments:** We will develop and implement methods to authentically assess student learning in an on-going and final basis.
- ▶ **Uniform Grading Practices:** We will develop grading practices that accurately reflect student learning and preparation, are based on mastery standards for learning, and promote continued effort and success.



**EXCELLENT EDUCATIONAL TEAM** – District 112 secondary schools will ensure that every level of the organization is served by empowered, accountable, and highly qualified professionals who share a collective and personal commitment and responsibility for the preparation of all learners. District leadership will set expectations, act as change agents, and provide building leaders and staff with the support necessary for success.

**Accountable Leadership:** We will ensure that each building’s principal and administrative team are leaders of learning who create a culture dedicated to learner success by fostering teacher and student leadership and supporting the activities of staff and students. The administrative team will use district-wide assessment systems to assess all components of learner preparation.

**Continuous Professional Development:** We will engage all staff in an ongoing, comprehensive professional development program aligned with the content knowledge and instructional strategies required for the success of the secondary mission.

**Communities of Practice:** We will create a culture that promotes excellence in teaching and improves student learning by providing ongoing, structured, and job-embedded time for collective participation in problem solving, planning, inquiry, and decision-making.

**Individual Professional Learning Plans:** We will support all members of the educational team in their development of individual professional learning plans designed to improve the achievement of all students by identifying specific areas of professional growth as a guide for their learning and to provide accountability to their community of practice.

**DYNAMIC ORGANIZATION** – District 112 secondary schools will operate classrooms, schools and programs as aligned systems that can adapt to change through a shared vision and commitment to continuous improvement. We are committed to data-based, collaborative decision-making and strong communication.

**Shared Vision:** We will develop and operate from a dynamic, shared vision that will guide all decisions and focus actions at all levels.

**Continuous Improvement and Best-Practice:** We will actively evaluate and continuously improve our strategies and processes. We will use best-practice and research to inform our efforts to target and achieve well-defined goals for learner preparation.

**Collaborative and Data-Driven Decision-Making:** We will use collaborative decision-making and data-driven analysis to evaluate and recommend policies, programs, practices, and resource allocation in all aspects of District 112. The focus of all decisions will be what is best for the learner.

**Strong Communication:** We will use frequent and clear two-way communication between and within all levels of the educational organization, with learners and families, and with the broader community to maintain alignment and focus on preparing each learner for success.



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## Next Steps to the Future: Implementing our Plan

**“The future is not some place we are going to, but one we are creating. The paths are not to be found, but made, and the activity of making them changes both the maker and the destination.”**

— John Schaar

The challenge outlined in this document is enormous. Yet the evidence for the need to change our secondary school system is compelling. The future of each learner is too important to be satisfied with timid steps toward change. Their strong preparation requires courage and persistence in taking bold steps. We must achieve our mission.

We must find within ourselves the same knowledge, skill, character, hope and confidence we aspire to instill in our graduates. It will require letting go of practices that have worked for many years and using new ideas in their place. It will mean new learning for the adult learners as well as for the student learners. It will mean taking a leap of faith that we can make a difference in ways that we never imagined.

September 2009 will mark a dramatic change in District 112 as five buildings open for the first time in a new configuration. Much work needs to be done before that time, and much will continue to be done after that time, as we create our future.

Our task now is implementation. This plan is only a binder on the shelf unless the core principles and strategies become the living work of our secondary programs. Creating our own future will require commitment from all of us: staff, parents, community, and the learners themselves.

### Resources and Definitions

A complete list of resources used by the committee and definitions of educational terms used in this report are available on our web site:  
[www.district112.org](http://www.district112.org).



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