



## Mehlville School District

Located in suburban St. Louis, MO, Mehlville School District currently serves 10,308 students across two high schools, four middle schools, eleven elementary schools, early childhood school and satellites as well as a fully virtual school. Students speak over 40 world languages, and the district has a 27% subsidized meal rate. According to Superintendent Chris Gaines: "...our vision is a district striving for excellence focused on each student's challenge to engage in their future." As an AASA Learning 2025 lighthouse district, Mehlville is intentional in its focus on personalized student preparation; multiple student pathways; a focus on safety, access, and opportunity; employee support; and effective and efficient systems.

The district stresses the importance of learners as co-author of their own learning process. A commitment to personalization and differentiation is integrated into the system's strategic plan, emphasizing student agency, supported instruction to promote executive functioning skills, and emotional intelligence. A K-12 commitment to student agency is also evident in Mehlville's placement of Zones of Regulation Systems in all elementary systems (i.e., to support learners' understanding and communication of emotions) as well as alignment with soft skills highlighted in Portrait of a Graduate, traits identified and supported by community and stakeholder involvement.

The development of Mehlville's Learner-Centered Framework involved input from students, teachers, and administrators. It serves as a guide for approaching student agency, ownership, and learning in real-world settings and contexts. Similarly, since 2016, teachers have engaged in high quality project-based learning professional development. As a result, this Lighthouse District engages all students in collaborative projects that encourage students to identify challenges, generate questions, and design solutions as well as products.

An essential component of this Lighthouse District's work is the sustained use of cross-functional partnerships with family, community, and national organizations. For example, to support students in critical thinking and problem solving, the district has ongoing partnerships that include Discovery Education, Washington University in St. Louis, MySci, and the Institute for Personalized Learning. These partnerships facilitate significant instructional shifts and empower teachers to become designers of learning, incorporating multiple methods and modes of instruction. As part of its culture of continuous improvement, the district was recently accepted into the League of Innovative Schools and Missouri's Success Readiness Network.

A significant component of Mehlville's transformational work involves a new paradigm for student progress monitoring. In 2014, for example, the district began moving away from traditional grading practices toward a standards-based learning approach at the elementary level. In 2019-20, the district moved to standards-based grading at the 6th grade level and looped 7th and 8th grades in subsequent years. At the high school level, the district's Portrait of a Graduate skills and dispositions are assessed in a strength-based manner on report cards.

Similarly, Mehlville uses a comprehensive approach to program evaluation and school as well as district progress monitoring. Continuous Improvement, Baldrige frameworks, and other systemic approaches to school improvement are in place to analyze district practices. Innovation Coaches use this data to provide ongoing job-embedded professional development just as staff at all grade levels participate in continuous improvement cycles.

Structural examples of how these processes and principles are made actionable in Mehlville include the following: (1) The MOSAIC Elementary School is the first project-based and personalized learning-focused elementary in the region; (2) Interdisciplinary middle school academies allow for student input and design based upon their personal interests and goals; (3) The Wohlwend GROWS Project has developed outdoor learning facilities and a native prairie; (4) Mehlville High School has developed a physical education course (Adventures and Outdoor Pursuits) for students interested in physical activity that takes them outside into different learning environments; (5) Similarly, the high school offers an Early College Academy, allowing students to attend college courses at St. Louis Community College; and (6) Career Pathway coursework and field experience at the high school level includes a Center for Advanced Professional Studies (CAPS), allowing student to gain real-world experiences in healthcare, education, computer science and business (all while earning high school credits).