
**Report to Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools
Magnet Study Visit**



Magnet Schools of America
National Institute for Magnet School Leadership

May 2015

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MAGNET **SCHOOLS**
OF AMERICA



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Executive Summary

Background

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (CMS), N.C., has a rich history in the area of school desegregation and was the first school system in the nation to operate a court-ordered busing plan approved by the United States Supreme Court (*Swann vs. the Board of Education, 1971*) as a method of desegregating its schools. Adjustments were made in following years, such as the Student Assignment Plan of 1974 that incorporated geographic zoning, satellite assignments, pairing elementary schools (K-3 and 4-6) and five optional schools (another name for magnet schools). From November 1991 through February 1992, a variety of different community groups were actively involved in the development of a new approach, including surveys, to determine the level of support for the use of magnet schools.

In the 1992-93 school year, CMS took its first major steps toward using magnet schools as part of a new student assignment plan. The magnet programs were supported with local funds. In 1993-94, CMS applied for the Federal Magnet Schools Assistance Program grant for start-up funding. It was awarded, and CMS was awarded this grant for five cycles (three year cycles). These grants allowed the district the freedom and flexibility to maximize opportunities for proven, specialized programs such as Montessori, Foreign Language Immersion and International Baccalaureate. As required by any Department of Education grant recipient, CMS conducted annual magnet evaluations from 1994-2007. Data used in these evaluations included magnet student achievement, magnet program student retention rates, and survey responses of magnet students, parents, and teachers.

Throughout CMS history, magnet programs have successfully implemented quality academic programs with achievement results exceeding the district averages and with a lower achievement gap. CMS encourages open and equitable access to magnet programs and continues to offer critical needs programs such as Chinese Immersion and to design new programs such as the Military and Leadership Academy at Marie G. Davis.

In April 2014, Magnet Schools of America (MSA) was requested to submit a proposal to conduct a Study Visit for 38 of their district magnet programs. In January 2014, MSA was contracted to complete the Study Visit process and deliver a report to the Magnet office in May 2015 that answered three essential questions:

1. Are CMS magnet schools diverse?
2. Are CMS magnet schools promoting achievement?
3. Are CMS schools “magnetic” (attractive to students and families)?

Every magnet school has its own story to tell. They are ideally places in which thematic-based instruction is profound and the learning outcomes, in their most desirable state, are high-achieving and sustainable.

The theme also impacts the way a school system stays faithful to its vision. Many factors in this report contribute to the overall narrative of the story in each magnet. The purpose of the Study Visit is to provide Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools with a strategy to build upon its strengths and leverage challenges as opportunities. By doing so, the public and members of the community will have a more complete picture of how the magnet schools are a vital part of the system itself.

The following findings, recommendations, and cycle of improvement opportunities are the result of bringing together experts who lead, design, and evaluate nationally recognized magnet programs throughout the United States, as well as through the creation, and pilot of the National Standards devised by MSA. The Study Visit process used was thorough, comprehensive, and yielded many opportunities for CMS to continuously improve the magnet school experience for its students and families. It is our hope that this report will be meaningful and of use to the magnets of Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools for years to come. Charlotte-Mecklenburg, with its strong appreciation for diversity and choice, should serve as a pillar of example for other districts that strive for equity and excellence for all students. With diligent work and exercise, the implementation of the changes recommended in this report will service as a cornerstone and a foundational document for the CMS community. It is our goal to promote opportunity, equity, transparency, and preparation for all students so they may have the skills to thrive in a global society.

Methodology

MSA conducted the Study Visit in March 2015. During this time, MSA conducted two parent focus groups, school board trustee interviews, and held site visits to all 38 schools. During each school visit, principals and staff members were interviewed. MSA also conducted a community survey with more than 795 respondents. In addition to these components, data findings were used to determine which school and programs were promoting diversity, achievement, and were magnetic. Lastly, MSA utilized the Five Pillars of Magnet Schools – essential attributes of successful magnet schools, which were officially adopted by MSA in 2012 to assist schools and districts to promote best practices for diversity, equity, access, and academic excellence.

Findings

As a result of spending one half-day at each of the school sites, conducting interviews, and reviewing data, MSA made the following findings.

Are CMS magnet schools promoting diversity?

- The district primarily handles student recruitment and marketing, not the schools, beyond the CMS Magnet Fair held annually.
- No substantiated marketing plan for individual schools was consistently noted.

- Targeted recruitment was virtually nonexistent for CMS magnet schools.
- There is evidence that the school/district use a clear and transparent lottery system, but may not consistently provide access to all magnet programs through the varied criteria.
- Waiting lists varied greatly. Some schools had little or no wait list, whereas others had waiting lists of a few hundred students.
- Transportation is available to certain magnet schools, but not all.
- Students with special needs and English Language Learners (ELL) are underrepresented and underserved by CMS magnet schools.
- There is limited evidence of diversity reflective of the district and community in the enrollment of most district's magnet schools.
- The schools and/or district have developed a policy statement of student diversity, but there is no evidence of updates of enrollment success with integration and diversity.
- The district provides cultural competency training and other areas related to diversity to meet the needs CMS students.
- The operation of the zone/corridors, especially the Grey Corridor and the operational and student assessment barrier for the LITD programs may be detrimental to the diversity goals of the district.
- The district has a strategic plan, but does not include magnet schools: the focus and commitment regarding their diversity goal are unclear.
- School choice is because of transportation boundaries, which does not always allow equitable access to all students.

Are CMS magnet schools promoting achievement?

- Unique, theme-based training has been provided for some faculty.
- Collaboration time is limited and inconsistent.
- The needs of the school's population are not clearly aligned with professional development.
- There is virtually no CMS principal and teacher training on magnet schools. Essential elements to high-quality magnet schools such as a school-wide, research-based instructional focus that supports the theme, or integrated curriculum into the theme did not exist with the exception of several Montessori, IB, and LITD schools. Further, only a few CMS administrators are using their resources to train teachers in instructional practices that support the theme or focus of the magnet school.
- CMS teachers in similar magnet schools are not consistently provided with the opportunity to collaborate and share lessons, units, or assessments with one another. Dedicated personnel need to be in place to facilitate staff to share best practices with one another between like-themed schools.
- CMS promotes school-wide instructional philosophies that exist using multiple modes of learning, but these are not always to the theme.
- CMS Magnet programs within schools (partial magnets) have inequitable outcomes, with minority and low-income student achievement remaining in decline.
- Student achievement and the quality of the magnet curriculum do not correlate.
- Student collaboration and problem solving are key components of the instructional design.
- Formative assessments are given, but they are not clearly aligned to learning objective or targets, thus cannot be used to drive instruction.

- There is no systematic process to provide tiered intervention to all students, even though some teachers do provide support for students.
- District guidelines and state practices are consistent throughout all magnet teacher evaluations.
- CMS acknowledges that gaps exist between the highest and lowest performing students and has a plan for reducing these gaps.
- CMS recognizes the need to eliminate racial predictability. The district ensures that magnet schools analyze data, evaluate instruction, and modify instructional practices to eliminate the racial predictability and disproportionality of student groups.
- Comparable to whole-school programs, magnet programs within schools (partial magnets) had lower student achievement.
- Selection of students based on academic criteria precludes many students from the opportunity to enroll in a theme-based school that may be of interest to them.
- CMS magnet schools use and analyze multiple indicators to measure student success and plan and adjust instruction.
- Over time, student achievement has improved.

Are CMS magnet schools magnetic?

- The magnet theme is integrated into most subjects and courses and there is limited consistency of the theme across subjects and courses.
- The magnet theme is accessible to most students.
- The magnet curriculum is documented, and paced, but lacks evidence of being assessed, reflected, and adjusted.
- The magnet curriculum is differentiated, and includes unit plans based on student needs.
- The magnet curriculum provides a limited vertical and horizontal progression between grades/courses.
- The magnet theme demonstrates innovative curriculum, and continuously evaluates to ensure rigor and relevance.
- The magnet curriculum varied by school and theme and was not often integrated throughout the day (with a few exceptions).
- Magnet theme curriculum fidelity varied widely by like-themed schools.
- Many magnet schools lacked a cohesive and consistent instructional focus that supported the theme of the school.
- There is no clear alignment of professional development to meet the needs of the school's population.
- Magnet-themed professional training for teachers and principals is not evident.
- There is not an opportunity for teachers in like-themed schools to collaborate and exchange best practices across campuses and grade levels.
- Principals have not been provided sufficient training to lead and support theme-based schools.
- School teams are meeting to discuss ways to implement the magnet theme across the curriculum.
- Leadership is meeting to develop processes for supporting the magnet theme, mission, and vision.
- Schools have to accept personnel that the district and region administration assigns.
- Leadership has identified some magnet program support and creative resources to overcome obstacles.

- Leadership has contacted key leaders in business and community to discuss development of partnerships.
- CMS school administrators' understanding of the purpose and goals of magnet schools varies greatly from program to program.
- Criteria for principals in CMS magnets are not necessarily focused on their ability to teach or interest in working in a theme-based magnet school.
- Currently, the district office does not have sufficient resources to provide leadership or training for magnet schools.
- The school publishes all data to the community and shares information about student success.
- All site committees are listed and process and timelines for becoming a parent, staff or community member are listed.
- District decision-makers lack a sufficient level of understanding about what is required to fully support necessary staffing of theme based schools. District consideration of theme needs is secondary when placing teachers. Building autonomy is intermittent.
- CMS Magnet Schools are not comparing magnet student achievement to non-magnet student achievement in the same school to address systemic inequities and outcomes.
- Although transportation to magnet schools is effective and appears to be efficient, the transportation zones cause a great deal of anxiety, are limited, and inequitable in access.
- District level staff is committed to magnet programs being successful and viable choice options for CMS families.
- Magnet and choice programs are a large part of the district market share of student enrollment.
- The district has not developed and implemented a viable and sustainable financial plan for the magnet program.
- The departure of students from magnet schools, especially in the IB programs is concerning.
- Some CMS magnet schools have partnerships with organizations that support the implementation of the curriculum and preparation for future careers and college readiness for their students, however this is not consistent.
- CMS is developing its family and community engagement process.
- There is no identified support from the district to support magnet schools in developing community partnerships.
- There is a parent advisory group but it does not make recommendations regarding the magnet school's operations.
- Policies and documentation of communication/support are evident but may not be systemic.
- The school shows a tradition of community showcasing including: activities such as exhibitions, community showcase, and other events occur in which at least half of the families attend.
- Parents show some interest in the magnet program. Parents attend activities, volunteer at schools, and attend individual student conferences. Documentation is maintained.
- Parent surveys are available but do not include detailed items about the magnet theme.
- Public meetings or outreach to inform the community about the magnet theme implementation is not consistent.
- Parents believe that the magnet schools are keeping students in the district, and that they serve an important purpose within the community.

- Because of the transportation zones and limitations, school choice in CMS is complex and unclear to many families.
- Parents often apply to magnet schools to “replace” something they perceive as a worse option.
- Despite district efforts, many families are unaware of the numerous programs available to them and their students.
- Marketing materials are limited and are often only in English, making them inaccessible to all members of the community.

Recommendations



Based on the above findings, MSA is making the following 27 recommendations. We believe that the recommendations should not be taken individually, but rather, as part of a larger process that will require additional planning and design. CMS is a complex system, and various factors such as demographics, transportation, displacement, and discontinuation of programs will all have an impact on the district overall and should be considered carefully and holistically.

The level of detail in some of these suggestions will be arduous in some cases, however, we strongly believe that many of the CMS magnet schools will lead as examples and model greater achievement, magnet authenticity, and equity for all students.

1. CMS should clarify the purpose, mission, and goals of the magnet programs. The entire community should know the purpose of magnets; history of their inception, pillars, etc. This information should be accessible to all — inclusive of stakeholders, parents, business partners and principals.
2. Each magnet school should annually implement a targeted recruitment and marketing plan consistently and with fidelity. Ensure there is a review and evaluation of the recruitment and marketing plan, and there are clear means for improvement of stated goals.
3. Each magnet school should collect, review, and analyze clear and concise indicators for success annually related to its marketing and recruitment plan that results in the reduction of minority group isolation.
4. The district should use clear and transparent entrance and assignment policies with published procedures ensuring all students have access to the magnet program(s).
5. CMS should build capacity with leadership to ensure all classes and programs in the magnet school are fully and consciously integrated to reflect the diversity of the district and community.
6. CMS has a policy statement emphasizing the importance of student diversity, but should annual reports provide evidence that support statement’s intent toward further success with integration and diversity.
7. Magnet schools should be highly integrated into the district’s strategic vision in prevention of racial isolation, turnaround strategy, etc.
8. All staff and faculty should be trained in cultural proficiency using theory, research, and practice.
9. A community task force should be created within CMS with various stakeholders to determine the purpose, goals, and types of magnet programs that will serve students in the CMS.

The Magnet Programs and School Redesign Office should set goals for the task force to develop a strategic plan, monitor the implementation, and serve in an advisory capacity during this process.

10. CMS should set a goal and create a process to improve, undersubscribed, and low-achieving magnet schools and programs within one year. Through this process, affected schools would be required to submit a plan that specifies how the school will address theme integration, targeted student recruitment, and professional development and training. Using MSA's *Cycle of Improvement*, CMS should determine which schools have demonstrated success. These schools should be provided with adequate resources to meet their goals.
11. Implement a mandatory, annual review, and require all magnet schools to submit to the magnet office for approval a publicly available plan that addresses student recruitment, curriculum, instruction, and professional development.
12. Ensure all staff and faculty have theme-based training in theory, research and practice.
13. Devise a plan for collaboration time with colleagues and curriculum specialists, which is a structured part of weekly planning. Vertical and horizontal articulation within the school and across the district is optimal.
14. Coordinate professional development activities, which show evidence of correlation to fidelity to the school's theme and improvement in student achievement.
15. Provide training to build capacity for school-wide instructional philosophy that focuses on multiple modes of learning aligned to the theme that is regularly evaluated with data to determine if the approach is effective.
16. Magnet schools should analyze student achievement data by demographic groups and conduct ongoing research and evaluation of student outcomes in magnet schools and programs, and develop plans that address ways in which the magnet program can become more inclusive, accessible, and equitable. The district should explore ways to make programs within schools, school-wide.
17. Ensure that tiered levels of intervention are successfully implemented, so that there is no disproportionality of student achievement based on race, gender, socioeconomic status, etc.
18. Include magnet schools as a highly integrated strategy into the district's strategic vision in prevention of racial isolation, turnaround strategy, etc.
19. Provide staffing allocation for a theme based curriculum specialist for each of its themes. (e.g., IB coordinator, Project Based Learning Coordinator, etc. and the District provides budgets, PD, and/or other needed resources).
20. Develop and implement a viable and sustainable financial plan for the magnet program.
21. Organize a means to collaborate more effectively, specifically with Curriculum and Instruction staff to give these areas greater leadership and support within schools.
22. Provide teachers and magnet coordinators with professional development around the theme and curriculum development.
23. Adopt a full-time position with significant responsibility, resources, and autonomy to coordinate and provide professional development and training to magnet school teachers and principals, as well as coordinate purchasing and oversee all marketing and recruitment efforts.
24. Identify exemplary models of other magnet programs to compare notes with and learn from and to ensure magnet schools are relevant and continually improving.

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25. Convene an industry advisory board to provide validation, feedback and suggestions. To make them accessible to families, marketing materials, applications and choice information should be provided in multiple languages.
 26. Ensure greater inclusion and access for English Language Learners and Special Education students in magnet programs by providing services at all magnet schools to the greatest extent possible.
 27. Allow for nearly exclusive building autonomy in decision-making processes in multiple areas including: hiring, curriculum, assessment, facility needs, etc. These and other decisions are made at the discretion of building leaders. This includes but is not limited to allocation of sufficient staffing resources for the promotion and success of the magnet theme and seeks and retains a highly qualified workforce at the school and central office level.

Introduction

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (CMS) is located in the Charlotte, N.C., region and provides academic instruction, rigor, and support each school day to more than 144,000 students in kindergarten through 12th grade in 164 schools throughout the cities and towns of Mecklenburg County. CMS believes setting high standards for all students creates a greater opportunity for future success – in its communities, within the region and across the diverse and global society. Each day, CMS students are prepared to be leaders in a technologically savvy and globally competitive world. CMS is proud of its diverse mix of students who represent 160 different countries and various cultural and ethnic backgrounds. CMS offers an extensive range of magnet programs in 38 of its schools to nurture the talents of students who have interest and ability in specific areas. CMS also educates, supports, and meets the needs of students with learning and physical disabilities.

In speaking with district administrators at the beginning of the review process, three key questions were articulated through the interview and walk-through protocols:

- Are CMS magnet schools promoting diversity?
- Are CMS magnet schools promoting achievement?
- Are CMS magnet schools “magnetic” (attractive to students and families)?

CMS has had a long history of running magnet school programs and their affiliation to the Magnet Schools of America organization. Over the past the last decade, superintendents in Charlotte-Mecklenburg have opened and closed magnet schools in the spirit of reform and to void racial isolation.

Leadership in CMS has been supportive of magnet, school choice options, and desegregation. Dr. Peter Gorman (2005-2011) continued the standards of excellence and commissioned an internal review of magnet schools/programs. During this review, CMS ultimately decided to close underperforming low attendance magnet schools and programs, while setting their sights on improving those who demonstrated academic rigor, achievement, and choice. At the same time, CMS exercised caution in opening further magnet schools/programs. In 2011, Superintendent Heath Morrison assembled the Office of Innovation, which pushed into motion more options for families with Early College, STEM, and entirely focused on reclaiming the population of students who left the public school sector. Presently, Superintendent Ann Clark, is anxious to explore opportunities for improvement and ultimately continue the momentum to create a progressive approach to student achievement options as they relate to choice.

CMS is applauded for its efforts and vision to continue to this day with the vision of additional magnet schools, funded without federal assistance, primarily STEM or STEAM as these have been a priority across the nation.

The CMS website is full of accolades and repeated voice regarding the outstanding students, system, and community supports. Known for its rich and intricate history, Charlotte-Mecklenburg has forged with progressive mindset to ensure that the importance of optimal educational arenas exists in the community. The public schools inclusive of the magnet and choice options in this area have had a tremendous impact on the growth and economy of the region – as well as the thousands of individuals it has served.

CMS Magnet promotes the promise: *to provide a personalized environment of academic excellence that prepares every child, every day, for a better tomorrow.*

Vision for Magnet Schools:

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools provides all students the best education available anywhere, preparing every child to lead a rich and productive life.

Mission for Magnet Schools:

The mission of CMS is to maximize academic achievement by every student in every school.

Accolades

MSA has recognized the great work of Charlotte-Mecklenburg magnet schools/programs. Below is a quick glimpse of the merit winning magnet programs over the past few years in CMS.

MSA Merit	2012	2013	2014
School of Distinction	3	10	8
School of Excellence	10	10	7
Top 3 in America	Piedmont		Collinswood

In 2012, Piedmont IB was identified as one of the top three in the nation, and in 2014, Collinswood Language Immersion, was recognized with the same honor. That same year, Blythe IB received the award for New and Emerging School in the nation. Additionally, Collinswood Language Academy, which has been recognized by *Education Week* for earning some of the district's highest math scores, and Oaklawn Language Academy, which was recently recognized as Title I Reward Schools for 2014-2015, cannot go unrecognized.

Through the CMS website, much information is available regarding magnet schools, their application, the lottery, and entrance criteria. CMS is congratulated on its vision and mission statements, which speaks to diversity, innovative curriculum, and academic excellence – three of the five Magnet Schools of America Pillars.

DISTRICT VISION: CMS magnet students attain the highest levels of academic preparation and achievement within carefully tailored learning environments crafted to maximize opportunities for personal cognitive growth and skill development.

DISTRICT MISSION: CMS Magnet Programs provide public education options emphasizing specialized learning environments and innovative instructional programs to promote excellence in student achievement and growth. This is accomplished by attracting students to unique and distinctive, diverse, and engaging theme-based learning environments specifically designed to capitalize upon and to nurture and enhance students' abilities, aptitudes, interests and talents.

Lastly, through critical partnerships such as Discovery Place and A+ Schools Program of the North Carolina Arts Council, CMS STEM and elementary Visual and Performing Arts teachers have attended rich professional development with more engagement for the upcoming school year.

Five Pillars of Magnet Schools of America

Incorporated and designated as a 501(c)(3) in 1994, Magnet Schools of America is the national association of magnet and theme-based schools and serves school districts, individual schools, and professionals who are members. Today, MSA sponsors programs, events, technical assistance, student scholarships, professional development, and leadership through the National Institute for Magnet School Leadership (NIMSL). There are approximately 4,000 magnet and theme-based schools across the U.S. that are experiencing a renaissance as districts reconsider magnet schools as a means to attract new students, provide choice and innovation, and turn around low-performing schools.


The mission of Magnet Schools of America is to provide leadership for high-quality, innovative, instructional programs that promote choice, diversity, equity, and academic excellence for all students. MSA supports and serves the leaders and teachers of magnet and theme-based schools, while promoting the development of new magnet programs and public schools of choice. It also connects with other professional organizations and encourages partnerships to support magnet programs. More information can be found online at www.magnet.edu.

The theory of action behind magnet schools is based on the idea that all students, no matter where they live or who they are, are endowed with unique interests, talents, and abilities. These interests, talents, and abilities are especially cultivated in a learning community that nurtures and develops them over time. Staff, who often share interests in the themes of magnet schools, are able to create a community of learners who take greater academic risk, and engage with other students they may not otherwise engage and learn alongside, because they attend a school where others have also been drawn to by the magnet focus. When magnet schools are offered to students, they have the ability to seek out schools that are of interest to them. When transportation is provided, a diverse learning community emerges.

The research on magnet schools is robust and clear. Students who attend these schools are more likely to have positive interracial friendships, have lower absenteeism, higher achievement and graduation rates, peer support for student achievement, demonstrate college and career readiness, and much more. A larger sample of research on magnet schools can be found at www.magnet.edu/resources/research-and-studies.

The landscape of public school education is shifting to a system of family choice and engagement, personalized education, and innovative teaching practices. The MSA Board of Directors recognized a need to serve this new paradigm. Over the last few years, the board has spent a great deal of time thinking about its role as the national association for magnet schools and how it can best serve its mission. As a result, the organization has made a greater commitment to support the development of high-quality magnet programs and the provision of direct services to members that result in improved magnet schools. In addition, MSA has outlined Five Pillars (or critical features) of effective magnet programs: Diversity; Innovative Curriculum and Professional Development; Academic Excellence; High-Quality Instructional Systems; and Family and Community Partnerships. These Five Pillars framed the Study Visit conducted for CMS magnet schools.

Diversity is a cornerstone to offering students a global educational experience. Schools, through recruitment and lotteries, strive to have student populations that are reflective of the community. Culturally competent educational environments model empathy, respect, and working collaboratively with a variety of persons.



Innovative Curriculum and Professional Development is developed to ensure theme-based, relevant instruction to students. Effective teaching strategies, emulating from best practices, are implemented through the inclusion of the school's theme. Curriculum is based on high-quality rigorous standards that prepare students for higher education and career success.

Academic Excellence is demonstrated through a commitment to multidimensional instruction focused on the learner's needs. Multiple assessment strategies are employed to monitor student learning, progress, and success. High expectations are clearly articulated and personalized supports are in place to address the interests and aspirations of all students.

High-Quality Instructional Systems are rooted in well-prepared, well-educated professionals. Teachers and administrators who are student-centered, collaborative, and inquisitive prepare learners to be world ready, workforce ready, and higher education ready.

Family and Community Partnerships are mutually beneficial, offer a system of support, shared ownership, and a caring spirit, and are designed to enhance a theme-integrated educational environment. Partnerships with parents are essential for a rich educational experience for students. Community partnerships include a diverse array of stakeholders including business, health and human services, and policy-makers to support the education of all students.

As CMS considers its next steps regarding its magnet programs, it would be advised to consider seriously each of these five pillars. As our magnet school experts reviewed the data and toured the school campuses, they looked for indicators that the CMS magnet programs incorporated each of these pillars.

Methodology

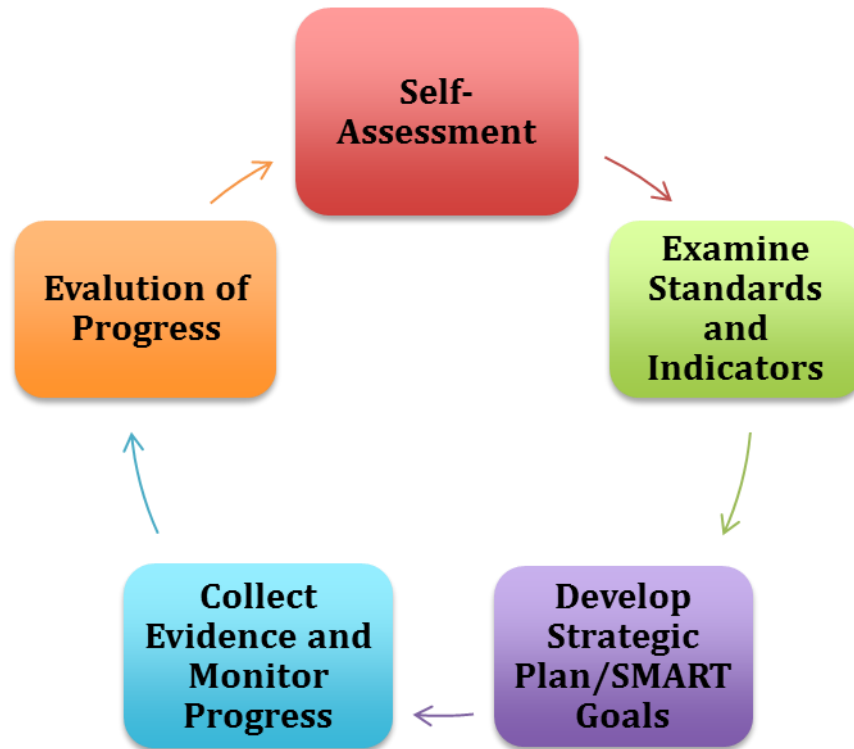
The National Institute for Magnet School Leadership developed a methodology for the review of magnet programs in Charlotte-Mecklenburg that would provide a multifaceted perspective on the success of their programs, especially related to the three key questions:

- Are CMS magnet schools promoting diversity?
- Are CMS magnet schools promoting achievement?
- Are CMS magnet schools “magnetic”?

The methodology includes six critical components:

1. **Quantitative data analysis:** We carefully analyzed the school-level data provided by CMS to identify trends and opportunities in magnet school programs. This included two years of student achievement data, application and acceptance data, demographic data, school survey data, school budgets, Equity Scorecards, and National Clearinghouse data (high school only).
2. **Survey analysis:** With assistance from CMS communications staff, NIMSL administered a survey instrument that allowed parents and community members to provide their views of the magnet programs in Charlotte-Mecklenburg. This survey focused on the magnet experience, rigor, and perceptions of magnet schools and also sought out suggestions for improvement.
3. **Site visits:** A team of seven magnet school experts from across the country spent a week in Charlotte-Mecklenburg visiting 38 schools with magnet programs. During the visits to each magnet site, the experts interviewed the school principal and walked through the campus looking for particular indicators of magnet school success.
4. **Community Focus Groups:** Two community focus groups were conducted. Focus group questions were similar to survey questions, however, follow-up questions were asked as well.
5. **Interviews:** In both formal and informal interviews, district administrators and school board trustees were asked a multitude of questions to provide context, history, and perspective about the magnet system in CMS. The Magnet and Options Office staff made itself readily available throughout the review to provide NIMSL with any additional information required and to answer specific questions as did staff in all departments with which we interfaced.
6. **Lastly, using the Cycle of Improvement developed by NIMSL and in support of the Pillars and Standards, CMS will see their opportunities with clarity.**

MSA believes in a culture of continuous improvement and opportunities for acceleration. Through multiple previous District Magnet Reviews, this Study Visit is designed to combine the stated methodology along with the vision for opportunities designed specifically for CMS Magnet Schools.




The MSA community promotes a cycle of improvement and has ensured that the National Standards of Excellence set forth a practice for schools and districts to provide optimal opportunities as designed by the Standards rubric by way of a diagnostic tool.

National Standards as a Diagnostic Tool

An integral part of determining a magnet school or program’s effectiveness is the design and use of a diagnostic tool that reveal the details to which the practices demonstrate the student success opportunities. In preparation for the CMS Study Visit, the CMS leadership attended a webinar where they were introduced to the Standards of Excellence in which we would base the Study Visit. These standards and criteria would be used as a guide along with purposeful interview protocols, collecting walk-through data, and focus group dialogue. Each magnet school at CMS provided evidence to support its organizational effectiveness in ensuring acceptable and improving levels of student performance.

Based on multiple observations and empirical evidence demonstrating eminent strength and important connection to school successes most especially student achievement, MSA Standards are designed to ensure all students are college and career ready.

The performance Indicators for each Standard and the corresponding rubrics are in the final development stages by the National Institute for Magnet School Leadership of MSA. The rubrics and associated performance levels to assess the indicators are designed to look at school and program, with a focus on outcomes and processes.



Connecting and articulating the specific elements of the Standards, this indicator-based tool provide teams the ability to gather evidence for continuous improvement.

This instrument allows for a deeper dive into the fidelity of administration, the magnet theme, and its instructors emphasizing the capacity of all stakeholders to participate in ensuring student success.

The NIMSL team’s findings and critical observations are shared in this report through the standards alignment.

Standards Data

Throughout this report, MSA provides a statement of finding in relation to the indicator of the Standard. These Standards statement of findings represent the overall averages across the CMS magnet community. Therefore, the MSA Community average provides an extraordinary opportunity for CMS to understand their context district-wide rather than simply comparing school to school.

These statements of finding are provided to serve as a tool for the cycle of continuous improvement and not as a measure of quality in and of itself. This data should provide CMS a unique capacity in which to identify and leverage its strengths and opportunities for improvement to significantly impact the CMS Magnet school option, and ultimately, student college and career readiness.

Cycle of Continuous Improvement

MSA believes each and every magnet school can and must improve no matter what levels of performance it has achieved in its past. An external team of consultants from National Institute for Magnet School Leadership (NIMSL) can identify, during the process of the Study Visit, areas of improvement where the magnet school/district is demonstrating success yet, also identify improvement that should be considered by the school/district. Using the criteria described in the Standards to the recommended priorities, the school/district can identify what elements of practice must be addressed to guide the improvement. MSA recommends the school/district use SMART goals through the means of a strategic action plan in which to carry out their improvement efforts.

Recommendation Priorities

The expectations for this Study Visit are clearly defined in a series of overarching questions:

1. Are CMS magnet schools diverse?
2. Are CMS magnet schools promoting achievement?
3. Are CMS schools “magnetic” (attractive to students and families)?

Through the guidance of our standards and indicators and evaluative criteria focused on the impact of teaching and learning on student performance, the NIMSL team examines the capacity to which the school/district can be guided by effective leadership, and the allocation and use of resources to support student learning and

demonstrate a successful magnet school/district. The NIMSL team reviewed, analyzed and deliberated over several data points and bodies of evidence provided by the Magnet and School Options office. In the professional judgment of the team, as well as the results of the diagnostic process, recommendation priorities, with rationale, are provided. It is MSA’s protocol that the recommendation priorities be addressed in a timely manner by the district to retain and improve with the steadfast motivating factors with which this Study Visit was requested. Recommendation Priorities serve as the basis for the follow-up and monitoring process that should begin upon conclusion of the Study Visit.

The Study Visit

CMS Magnet Programs and School Redesign office welcomed the NIMSL team over a two-week period, March 3-6, and March 11-13, 2015. The NIMSL team consisted of seven highly trained magnet professionals. The NIMSL team members independently visited assigned campuses for one half-day, but spent several days reviewing the school data points and artifacts, using online communication to share information and to clarify questions before arriving for the visit. The NIMSL team member arrived at each school site, highly engaged with questions developed and lists of artifacts they needed to review to support their findings. The MSA protocol begins with a leadership interview followed by a walk-through and site observation protocol.

MSA and NIMSL would like to extend their gratitude to the Magnet Programs and School Redesign and school site leadership, for their hospitality. It was evident that the school thoroughly prepared for the visit, many of which provided readily available artifacts to support the protocol and recognizing the Standards to which they were briefed on during the Study Visit webinar. Secondly, the NIMSL team extends a sincere thank you to the Director of Magnet Programs and School Redesign, and her staff for willingly participating to organize and record focus group feedback during two meetings. These focus groups allowed for 44 stakeholders to give input and feedback in a nonintrusive setting and format. The opportunity to interview the Board of School Trustees was critical and necessary to engage in meaningful conversations with NIMSL on the feedback from each of their constituents. The focus groups and interviews brought much insight to these reports and findings.

Stakeholders attended one of two focus groups to gain their perspectives on topics relevant to the district’s effectiveness in carrying out magnet programs, choice options, student selection, and varieties of themes. The feedback from these focus groups was used, along with the other pieces of evidences and data, to support the findings of the NIMSL team. Lastly, the input from the online community survey provided other stakeholders the opportunity for critical feedback. The following chart depicts the numbers of persons attending the focus groups, board of school trustees interviews, and online survey groups.

Feedback Type	Number
Board of School Trustees	8
Focus Group AM	26
Focus Group PM	18
Online survey	795
Total	847

Assessment of CMS Magnet Programs Based on MSA National Magnet School Standards

Each of the magnet programs in CMS has been evaluated using the MSA National Standards, which follow with corresponding indicators. Since the rubric has not yet been made available for public use, NIMSL created a modified tool that provides a picture of how the schools compared to one another. It is important to note that the data for Charlotte-Mecklenburg magnet schools has not been nationally normed. All comparative data is confined to the CMS context.

Pillar 1: Diversity

Standard 1: Student Recruitment and Selection

- a. The magnet school has an annual recruitment and marketing plan that outlines details of how new targeted students will be encouraged to apply to and attend the school (including who does what, when, and where).
- b. The magnet school recruitment and marketing plan includes the collection and review of indicators for success (including reduction of minority group isolation).
- c. The recruitment and marketing plan is continually evaluated by analyzing data and improved to achieve its stated goals.
- d. All students have access to the magnet program, and the school and district set clear entrance and assignment policies.
- e. Magnet transportation policies for students are available to ensure all magnet students have equitable access to magnet schools and programs.

Standard 2: Diversity and Equity

- a. The magnet program attracts and retains students to support integration and diversity, and enrollments (in all classes and programs) reflect the demographic diversity of the district and community.
- b. The magnet school has a policy or statement that emphasizes the importance of student diversity, and updated accordingly.
- c. The school and district use a clear and transparent lottery system with published standards.
- d. Professional educators have a demonstrated commitment to teaching in diverse educational settings focused on a magnet theme

Pillar 2: Innovative Curriculum and Professional Development

Standard 3: Theme and Curriculum Fidelity

- a. The magnet theme is clearly defined and fully integrated into all subjects and courses, and there is consistency of the theme.
- b. The magnet theme is accessible to all students, and teachers are trained accordingly. (e.g., English Language Learners, Special Education, etc.).

- c. The magnet curriculum is documented, paced, assessed, reflected, and adjusted.
- d. The magnet curriculum provides for differentiation, acceleration, and intensive instruction in unit plans and daily lessons based on student level, need, and/or learning styles.
- e. The magnet curriculum is articulated (e.g., clear progressions exist between grades/courses).
- f. Students and families have easy access to curricular documents (e.g., available on website, student handbook, etc.).
- g. The magnet theme is innovative and fosters relevant and rigorous application to ensure college and career readiness.

Standard 4: Professional Development

- a. The school has a plan that aligns professional development to the needs of the school (e.g., cultural competency, theme integration, and enrichment activities) and student achievement for all students.
- b. All faculty members have received high-quality, job-embedded training aligned to the magnet school theme or instructional practices (e.g., all staff are trained in inquiry, STEM, IB, language instruction, etc.).
- c. Collaboration with colleagues and the curriculum specialist is a structured part of weekly planning.

Pillar 3: Academic Excellence

Standard 5: Instructional Fidelity

- a. A school-wide philosophy to teaching and learning exists that focuses on delivering instruction using multiple modes of learning aligned to the theme.
- b. Student collaboration and problem solving are key components of the researched-based instructional design.
- c. Assessments are formative and relate to clear learning objectives or targets, drive instruction, and improve achievement.
- d. Tiered levels of interventions related to the theme exist to ensure success for all students.
- e. Magnet teachers are evaluated in a manner consistent with district and/or state practices or guidelines.

Standard 6: Student Achievement

- a. The school has demonstrated evidence of narrowing gaps between the highest- and lowest-performing students.
- b. The school has demonstrated evidence of eliminating racial predictability and disproportionality of which student groups that occupy the highest and lowest achievement categories.
- c. Student achievement is measured using multiple indicators.
- d. There is evidence of improvement in student achievement.
- e. The school continually collects and analyzes data from various sources to identify strengths and areas for growth, and puts that data into practice to continually improve the school (including student achievement, graduation, college going, disciplinary action, etc.).

Pillar 4: High Quality Instructional Systems

Standard 7: Leadership

- a. The principal champions the mission and purpose of the magnet theme.
- b. Teacher recruitment, selection, and retention policies are designed to meet the unique needs of the magnet program, and enable the school to hire the best individuals to support theme instruction and integration.
- c. Leadership decisions are made through shared processes that support the magnet theme, mission, and vision.
- d. The leadership structure ensures that the magnet theme is implemented with fidelity and not diluted by supplemental programs.
- e. The leadership finds creative solutions to challenges and supports the magnet program.
- f. The leadership forges strategic partnerships and relationships with community individuals, organizations, and businesses that enhance the theme, instruction, and success of the magnet school.
- g. The principal uses the school budget in productive, creative, and innovative ways that support the magnet theme (e.g., hiring, professional development, technology, etc.).
- h. The school has a stable staff that has been successful at delivering quality and rigorous instruction that leads to increased student achievement.


Standard 8: Magnet and District Relations

- a. District has clearly articulated plan for how magnet themes will be employed across grade levels (K-5, 6-8, 9-12).
- b. Magnet schools are integrated into the district's strategic vision.
- c. School achievement data and decision-making processes are transparent to the community.
- d. District provides increased latitude for decision-making and resource allocation at magnet schools, including principal selection and the hiring of teachers that enhance the quality of the magnet programs.
- e. The district supports school choice by providing reasonable transportation and allows equitable access to students who attend magnet schools.
- f. The district implements student selection policies that maintain equitable access to magnet schools.
- g. The district (school board) has policies reflective of its commitment to equity and diversity.
- h. Each magnet school has a dedicated curriculum specialist who works to integrate the theme into all subject areas.
- i. The school (or district) has developed a financial plan or demonstrated commitment to sustain and continuously improve the magnet program in the absence of additional district or MSAP funding.

Pillar 5: Family and Community Partnerships

Standard 9: Community Engagement and Partnerships

- a. The local community is invited into the magnet school and enjoys its benefits.
- b. Career-related and curriculum-focused partnerships are formed to benefit students resulting in college and career readiness.
- c. The school has a process to welcome and invite parents, local business and organizations (e.g., career day, fundraisers, in-kind donations, volunteers).
- d. All stakeholders receive regular information about the magnet theme implementation, reviews, and

- 
- adjustments and participate in decision-making for future sustainability and school improvements.
- e. The district supports and/or facilitates the development of partnerships that enhance the magnet themes within its schools.

Standard 10: Family Engagement and Communication

- a. There is a representative parent advisory group that makes recommendations about magnet school operations.
- b. Families can contact teachers and the principal via phone, email, website, or other technology and social media.
- c. The school regularly showcases student learning related to the magnet theme for families and the community and hosts public outreach meetings.
- d. Families have made a demonstrated commitment to the magnet school (e.g., a parent-school compact), and have attended activities, programs, or meetings.
- e. Parents are surveyed at least annually to determine their knowledge and support of the magnet theme for sustainability and school improvement.
- f. Public meetings and outreach events are held throughout the year to inform the community of magnet theme implementation.
- g. Planning (such as the School Improvement Plan) and data (such as academic progress) are publicly accessible to parents and the community.

Best Practices

The National Magnet School Standards include indicators related to diversity. Diverse magnet programs don't just appear; they are intentionally created through district recruitment practices and school policies that focus on equity of access to programs and services. The foundation of a diverse magnet program is the marketing and student enrollment plan. To achieve a diverse student population, it is critical to have a diverse applicant pool.

Schools must actively, enthusiastically, and strategically market magnet offerings to all racial, socioeconomic, religious, linguistic, ability, and citizenship groups.

The second stage of diversity has to do with the school environment. Schools must be able to meet the needs of all students and set high expectations for all learners. Teachers must have the cultural proficiency necessary to design effective instruction for all learners. When magnet schools enroll diverse student populations and meet their academic needs, schools are able to eliminate racial achievement gaps and the disproportionality of student outcomes.

Magnet schools have a thematic curricular approach that is integrated throughout the school day, supported by an instructional focus such as inquiry, problem- or project-based learning, concept-based and interdisciplinary. Ongoing professional development, training, and support for magnet school educators to “magnetize” district curriculum, align standards to the theme, and design learning structures is essential.

The National Magnet School Standards include indicators related to “magnetism.” For a school to attract students and families from outside its immediate community, it must offer something highly desirable.

When magnet program offerings are exceptional, parents will seek them out for their children and send their students to those schools — regardless of the location of the school facility. In fact, some neighborhoods, such as those in Chattanooga, Tenn., have been revitalized by the location of a strong magnet program that attracts middle-class families into what previously were low-income neighborhoods.

Magnet schools should be viewed as part of an ecosystem of schools and operate with the ability to be more flexible in how they deliver state and national standards, hiring of staff who may have or require specific training, and fiscal flexibility to resource their schools in a manner that supports the theme. A greater level of autonomy should be paired with a greater level of accountability to the district, which should support schools with expertise and leadership to ensure they are meeting the goals and purpose of magnet schools for the district. Balancing these best practices with ever-changing demands placed on schools and districts takes skill, commitment, and leadership at the district and school level. Most importantly, it requires a commitment from community stakeholders, including families and their students. Being responsive to the changing needs of our economy while incorporating research-driven best practices will lead to sustainable and innovative magnet programs throughout the district.

I.0 Are Magnet Schools Promoting Diversity?

Standard 1: Student Recruitment and Selection

Standard 2: Diversity and Equity

Standard 8: Magnet and District Relations

Statement of Findings

Standard 1: Student Recruitment and Selection

- The district primarily handles student recruitment and marketing, not the schools, beyond the CMS Magnet Fair held annually.
- No substantiated marketing plan for individual schools was consistently noted.
- Targeted recruitment was virtually nonexistent for CMS magnet schools.
- There is evidence that the school/district use a clear and transparent lottery system, but may not consistently provide access to all magnet programs through the varied criteria.
- Waiting lists varied greatly. Some schools had little or no wait list, whereas others had waiting lists of a few hundred students.
- Transportation is available to certain magnet schools, but not all.

Standard 2: Diversity and Equity

- Students with special needs and English Language Learners (ELL) are underrepresented and underserved by CMS magnet schools.
- There is limited evidence of diversity reflective of the district and community in the enrollment of most district's magnet schools.
- The schools and/or district have developed a policy statement of student diversity, but there is no evidence of updates of enrollment success with integration and diversity.
- The district provides cultural competency training and other areas related to diversity to meet the needs CMS students.

Standard 8: Magnet and District Relations

- The operation of the zone/corridors, especially the Grey Corridor and the operational and student assessment barrier for the LITD programs may be detrimental to the diversity goals of the district.
- The district has a strategic plan, but does not include magnet schools: The focus and commitment regarding their diversity goal are unclear.
- School choice is because of transportation boundaries, which does not always allow equitable access to all students.

Marketing and student recruitment to the CMS magnets is a critical component to the success of the school. Transparent information that ignites students' and parents' interests and excitement is paramount. Parents across the nation are very receptive to school choice and are becoming savvy in their search, expectations, and deliverables. The district primarily handles student recruitment and marketing, not the schools. Some schools invited feeders in

and did little individual recruitment but at a minimum. The Magnet Office conducts an annual School Options fair that is held at the Phillip O. Berry Academy of Technology every winter. This one-time event may not always serve the parents' best interests, and venues throughout the district with varied times may be a desirable addition.


In 2005, CMS conducted an analysis of transportation and designated the transportation zones for magnet due to budget cuts and efficiency. MSA recognizes these strategies and understands the financial implications of countywide magnet transportation. That being said, the 2015 review of the transportation zones and student assignments should take into consideration this Study Visit and the opportunities to reexamine for more equitable access.

The CMS Strategic Plan 2014: *Teaching Our Way to the Top*, while focusing on student achievement and previous indicators of success, does include a statement of diversity. MSA suggests that magnet schools are highly integrated into the district's strategic vision in prevention of racial isolation and turnaround strategy.

An explicit policy might include the presence of diversity goals, whereby a magnet program maintains a conscious directive to promote diversity. More indirect policies center on the ability to access school choice, which can be curtailed by a number of factors. Awareness of choice options, for example, is critical and may require special outreach to communities that lack access to mainstream social and informational networks (Petrovich & Wells, 2005).

Recommendations

1. CMS should clarify the purpose, mission, and goals of the magnet programs. The entire community should know the purpose of magnets, history of their inception, pillars, etc. This information should be accessible to all — inclusive of stakeholders, parents, business partners, and principals.
2. Each magnet school should annually implement a targeted recruitment and marketing plan consistently and with fidelity. Ensure there is a review and evaluation of the recruitment and marketing plan, and there are clear means for improvement of stated goals.
3. Each magnet school should collect, review, and analyze clear and concise indicators for success annually related to its marketing and recruitment plan that results in the reduction of minority group isolation.
4. The district should use clear and transparent entrance and assignment policies with published procedures ensuring all students have access to the magnet program(s).
5. CMS should build capacity with leadership to ensure all classes and programs in the magnet school are fully and consciously integrated to reflect the diversity of the district and community.
6. CMS has a policy statement emphasizing the importance of student diversity, but should have annual reports to provide evidence that support statement's intent toward further success with integration and diversity.
7. Magnet schools should be highly integrated into the district's strategic vision in prevention of racial isolation, turnaround strategy, etc.
8. All staff and faculty should be trained in cultural proficiency using theory, research, and practice.
9. A community task force should be created within CMS with various stakeholders to determine the purpose, goals, and types of magnet programs that will serve students in the CMS. The Magnet Programs and School Redesign Office should set goals for the task force to develop a strategic plan, monitor the implementation, and serve in an advisory capacity during this process.
10. CMS should set a goal and create a process to improve, undersubscribed, and low-achieving magnet schools and programs within one year. Through this process, affected schools would be required to submit a plan that specifies how the school will address theme integration, targeted student recruitment, and professional



development and training. Using MSA's *Cycle of Improvement*, CMS should determine which schools have demonstrated success. These schools should be provided with adequate resources to meet their goals.

11. Implement a mandatory annual review and require all magnet schools to submit to the magnet office for approval a publicly available plan that addresses student recruitment, curriculum, instruction, and professional development.

2.0 Are Magnet Schools Promoting Achievement?

Standard 4: Professional Development

Standard 5: Instructional Fidelity

Standard 6: Student Achievement

Standard 8: Magnet and District Relations

Statement of Findings

Standard 4: Professional Development

- Unique, theme-based training has been provided for some faculty.
- Collaboration time is limited and inconsistent.
- The needs of the school's population are not clearly aligned with professional development.
- There is virtually no CMS principal and teacher training on magnet schools. Essential elements to high-quality magnet schools such as a school-wide, research-based instructional focus that supports the theme, or integrated curriculum into the theme did not exist with the exception of several Montessori, IB, and LITD schools. Further, only a few CMS administrators are using their resources to train teachers in instructional practices that support the theme or focus of the magnet school.
- CMS teachers in similar magnet schools are not consistently provided with the opportunity to collaborate and share lessons, units, or assessments with one another. Dedicated personnel need to be in place to facilitate staff to share best practices with one another between like-themed schools.

Standard 5: Instructional Fidelity

- CMS promotes school-wide instructional philosophies that exist using multiple modes of learning, but these are not always to the theme.
- CMS Magnet programs within schools (partial magnets) have inequitable outcomes, with minority and low-income student achievement remaining in decline.
- Student collaboration and problem solving are key components of the instructional design.
- Formative assessments are given, but they are not clearly aligned to learning objective or targets, thus cannot be used to drive instruction.
- There is no systematic process to provide tiered intervention to all students, even though some teachers do provide support for students.
- District guidelines and state practices are consistent throughout all magnet teacher evaluations.

Standard 6: Student Achievement

- CMS acknowledges that gaps exist between the highest and lowest performing students and has a plan for reducing these gaps.
- CMS recognizes the need to eliminate racial predictability. The district ensures that magnet schools analyze data, evaluate instruction, and modify instructional practices to eliminate the racial predictability and disproportionality of student groups.

- Selection of students based on academic criteria precludes many students from the opportunity to enroll in a theme-based school that may be of interest to them.
- CMS magnet schools use and analyze multiple indicators to measure student success and plan and adjust instruction.
- Over time, student achievement has improved.

Standard 8: Magnet and District Relations

- The district has established significant pathways for students to pursue magnet themes across grade levels.
- Magnet schools are not mentioned as a viable component of the district strategic plan.
- The historical perspective to prevent racial isolation and eliminate pockets of underperforming schools is unclear within the magnet schools.
- CMS publishes all data (e.g., school achievement and interpretation, attendance, suspensions, and expulsions) to the community and shares information about student success (e.g., writing and art contests winners, musical and athletic awards, and state competitions). All site committees are listed and process and time lines for becoming a parent, staff, or community member are listed.
- There is a lack of a sufficient level of understanding by district decision-makers about what is required to fully support necessary staffing of theme-based schools. District consideration of theme needs is secondary when placing teachers, and building autonomy is intermittent.
- The district does not provide specific staffing allocation for a theme-based curriculum specialist.
- The district does not have a financial plan that addresses sustainability for the magnet program.
- Community perception about the quality of the magnet program is directly linked to the “magnetic” ability of the school.

MSA’s summation of CMS magnet professional development points to a need for further commitments to implement strong, sustainable training that drives achievement of student learning goals that also should be tailored to the unique theme, vision, goals, students, and teachers of a particular school. Through our work with the Standards and experiences in many other districts with magnets, these exemplars have clarified school educational goals, increased teacher accountability for linking teaching and learning to student results, and significantly improved the process for selecting the professional development that teachers need to get results. Each of these campuses and districts has used best practices in collaborative and systemic design in planning for their professional development.

Schools with academic criteria are selecting students who have already reached a particular level of mastery. Many CMS secondary magnets require a score of Level III from the EOG and thus, diversity in ability is diminished at these schools. This past year, for Math I, 36.2% of CMS students would have been marked ineligible as they score below Level III. More importantly, 13.9% of those students were marked a Level II. These students may have had good attendance, good citizenship, and progressed through their classwork with some level of difficulty; their Level II denotes “Partial Command or knowledge and skills.” Students who have experienced failure or difficulty have their access to rigorous magnets significantly curtailed as a result. These policies are not promoting achievement across all magnet programs.

A concern exists regarding staffing and resource allocations from the district to support magnet schools. To ensure a continued delivery of high-quality options for the CMS community, appropriate personnel should be provided. Where IB and LITD have dedicated personnel to ensure optimal instructional practices, recruitment, and professional development, the other magnets do not have the same privileges.

See Appendix Table F, Magnet Achievement by Program Non-Magnet. This table punctuates the disparities between magnet and non-magnet students.

CMS Magnet Schools 2013-2014						
Elementary Schools' Reading, Math and Science EOG Percent Proficient						
Elementary Schools	Magnet Theme		Reading	Math	Science	Math I
Marie G Davis* (K-5)	Cntr. LeadGE		47.24	44.17	55.32	
Blythe						
	IB		77.63	87.5	84.44	
non-magnet			51.82	60.06	59.48	
Cotswold						
	IB		87.23	81.91	84.85	
non-magnet			64.18	59.22	74.7	
Huntingtowne Farms						
	IB		55.56	70.37	75.86	
non-magnet			32.15	41.48	56.82	
Lansdowne						
	IB		73.68	69.3	68.75	
non-magnet			47.54	42.08	56.82	
Statesville Road						
	IB		55.13	64.06	60.71	
non-magnet			40	43.24	34.21	
Collinswood*						
	Lang. Imm.	Spanish	72.44	87.11	87.69	100
Oaklawn*						
	Lang. Imm.	Spanish	56.52	68.94	64.58	100
Waddell						
	Lang. Imm.	All	75.89	85.34	86.18	100
Barringer						
	LI-TD		87.59	87.59	91.67	
non-magnet			44.07	38.42	27.27	
Idlewild						
	LI-TD		83.19	84.87	89.74	
non-magnet			50	42.86	36.39	
Irwin Academic*						
	LI-TD		87.23	88.79	84.16	
Mallard Creek						
	LI-TD		88.89	86.32	100	
non-magnet			51.13	54.69	74.79	
Shamrock Gardens						
	LI-TD		75.47	77.36	75	
non-magnet			23.44	32.03	29.55	
Tuckaseegee						
	LI-TD		67	66	76.92	
non-magnet			32	28.62	21.59	
Morehead*						
	STEM		67.18	76.49	91.27	68.47
Chantilly*						
	Montessori		86.09	68.7	61.11	
Highland Mill*						
	Montessori		70.48	63.81	84.38	
Park Road*						
	Montessori		83.41	75.36	79.03	
Trillium Springs*						
	Montessori		N/A	N/A	N/A	
Elizabeth*						
	Traditional		72.49	69.89	83.15	
Myers Park*						
	Traditional		68.53	66.13	76.67	
First Ward*						
	Visual & Per. Arts		48.91	44.57	31.91	
University Park*						
	Visual & Per. Arts		44.96	42.02	63.22	

Average for all CMS Elementary		56.8	55.7	70.3	63.8
* Full Magnets					
CMS Magnet Schools 2013-2014					
Secondary Schools' EOG and EOC Percent Proficient					
Middle Schools	Magnet Theme	Reading	Math	Science	Math I
Albemarle Road	IB	76.19	62.7	88.64	86.96
non-magnet		36.95	25.5	62.97	96.97
JM Alexander	IB	80.47	77.81	95.54	93.15
non-magnet		43.58	37.36	60	100
Piedmont*	IB	82.79	78.18	95.92	100
Randolph*		79.41	66.37	82.45	97.45
Ranson	IB	64.23	54.01	85.11	78.57
non-magnet		33.61	21.73	55.89	66.1
EE Waddell (6-8)*	Language Academy	77.27	63.4	81.89	
Oaklawn Language Academy (6-8)*	Lang. Acad.	77.57	63.55	89.74	
Collinswood Language Academy (6-8)*	Lang. Acad.	85.57	74.13	97.92	
Coulwood	Math, Science & Envir. (STEM)	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
McClintock	Math, Science & Envir. (STEM)	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
JM Morehead (6-8)*	Math, Science & Envir. (STEM)	71.93	55.85	96.43	68.47
Marie G. Davis (6-8)*	Military & Global Leadership	43.66	27.87	75	
Sedgefield (7-8)	Montessori	66.7	57.97	87.18	86.36
non-magnet		24.83	21.48	55.05	84.44
Northwest (6-8)*	Visual & Performing Arts	77.7	58.92	80.14	77.17
Average for all CMS Middle Schools		56.8	55.7	70.3	63.8
High Schools	Magnet Theme	English 2	Biology	Math I	
East Mecklenburg	IB	87.18	65.56	80.69	
non-magnet		58.33	33.72	38.6	
Harding University High*	IB	86.05	78.67	65.59	
non-magnet		34.24	34.08	20.92	
North Mecklenburg	IB	91.19	79.17	79.39	
non-magnet		48.98	53.33	30.72	
West Charlotte	IB	84.85	56.86	63.27	
non-magnet		32.62	16.83	24.3	
South Mecklenburg	Language Academy	92.23	89.25	85.48	
non-magnet		71.25	67.4	55.22	
West Mecklenburg	Language Academy	84.24	71.43	43.33	
non-magnet		39.19	49.23	29.45	
Marie G. Davis (9-12)*	Military & Global Leadership	61.36	50	20	
Hawthorne Health Sciences*	Health Sciences	N/A	N/A	N/A	
Phillip O. Berry*	STEM	75.45	57.87	67.16	
Northwest*	Visual & Performing Arts	85.07	36.8	70.71	
Magnet Students Average HS		81.26	63.25	71.47	
Average for all CMS High Schools		66.86	58.5	55.09	
* Full Magnets					



Recommendations

1. Ensure all staff and faculty have theme-based training in theory, research and practice.
2. Devise a plan for collaboration time with colleagues and curriculum specialists, which is a structured part of weekly planning. Vertical and horizontal articulation within the school and across the district is optimal.
3. Coordinate professional development activities, which show evidence of correlation to fidelity to the school's theme and improvement in student achievement.
4. Provide training to build capacity for school-wide instructional philosophy that focuses on multiple modes of learning aligned to the theme that is regularly evaluated with data to determine if the approach is effective.
5. Magnet schools should analyze student achievement data by demographic groups and conduct ongoing research and evaluation of student outcomes in magnet schools and programs, and develop plans that address ways in which the magnet program can become more inclusive, accessible and equitable. The district should explore ways to make programs within schools, school-wide.
6. Ensure that tiered levels of intervention are successfully implemented, so that there is no disproportionality of student achievement based on race, gender, socioeconomic status, etc.
7. Include magnet schools as a highly integrated strategy into the district's strategic vision in prevention of racial isolation, turnaround strategy, etc.
8. Provide staffing allocation for a theme-based curriculum specialist for each of its themes. (e.g., IB coordinator, Project Based Learning Coordinator, etc. and the District provides budgets, PD, and/or other needed resources).
9. Develop and implement a viable and sustainable financial plan for the magnet program.

3.0 Are CMS Magnet Programs Magnetic?

Standard 3: Curriculum and Theme Fidelity

Standard 4: Professional Development

Standard 7: Leadership

Standard 8: Magnet and District Relations

Standard 9: Community Engagement and Partnerships

Standard 10: Family Engagement and Communication

Statement of Findings

Standard 3: Curriculum and Theme Fidelity

- The magnet theme is integrated into most subjects and courses and there is limited consistency of the theme across subjects and courses.
- The magnet theme is accessible to most students.
- The magnet curriculum is documented, and paced, but lacks evidence of being assessed, reflected, and adjusted.
- The magnet curriculum is differentiated, and includes unit plans based on student needs.
- The magnet curriculum provides a limited vertical and horizontal progression between grades/courses.
- The magnet theme demonstrates innovative curriculum, and continuously evaluates to ensure rigor and relevance.
- The magnet curriculum varied by school and theme and was not often integrated throughout the day (with a few exceptions).
- Magnet theme curriculum fidelity varied widely by like themed schools.
- Many magnet schools lacked a cohesive and consistent instructional focus that supported the theme of the school.

Standard 4: Professional Development

- There is no clear alignment of professional development to meet the needs of the school's population.
- Magnet-themed professional training for teachers and principals is not evident.
- There is not an opportunity for teachers in like themed schools to collaborate and exchange best practices across campuses and grade levels.
- Principals have not been provided sufficient training to lead and support theme-based schools.

Standard 7: Leadership

- School teams are meeting to discuss ways to implement the magnet theme across the curriculum.
- Leadership is meeting to develop processes for supporting the magnet theme, mission, and vision.
- Schools have to accept personnel that the district and region administration assigns.
- Leadership has identified some magnet program support and creative resources to overcome obstacles.
- Leadership has contacted key leaders in business and community to discuss development of partnerships.

- CMS school administrators' understanding of the purpose and goals of magnet schools varies greatly from program to program.
- Criteria for principals in CMS magnets are not necessarily focused on their ability to teach or interest in working in a theme-based magnet school.
- Currently, the district office does not have sufficient resources to provide leadership or training for magnet schools.

Standard 8: District and Magnet Relations

- The school publishes all data to the community and shares information about student success.
- All site committees are listed and process and timelines for becoming a parent, staff or community member are listed.
- District decision-makers lack a sufficient level of understanding about what is required to fully support necessary staffing of theme-based schools. District consideration of theme needs is secondary when placing teachers. Building autonomy is intermittent.
- CMS Magnet Schools are not comparing magnet student achievement to non-magnet student achievement in the same school to address systemic inequities and outcomes.
- Although transportation to magnet schools is effective and appears to be efficient, the transportation zones cause a great deal of anxiety, are limited, and inequitable in access.
- District-level staff is committed to magnet programs being successful and viable choice options for CMS families.
- Magnet and choice programs are a large part of the district market share of student enrollment.
- The district has not developed and implemented a viable and sustainable financial plan for the magnet program.
- The departure of students from magnet schools, especially in the IB programs, is concerning.

Standard 9: Community Engagement and Partnerships

- Some CMS magnet schools have partnerships with organizations that support the implementation of the curriculum and preparation for future careers and college readiness for their students however, this is not consistent.
- CMS is developing its family and community engagement process.
- There is no identified support from the district to support magnet schools in developing community partnerships.
- CMS is congratulated for one of its STEM partnership with The Discovery Place. More critical partnerships are necessary to fully engage the community.

Standard 10: Family Engagement and Communication

- There is a parent advisory group but it does not make recommendations regarding the magnet school's operations.
- Policies and documentation of communication/support are evident but may not be systemic.
- The school shows a tradition of community showcasing including: activities such as exhibitions, community showcase, and other events occur in which at least half of the families attend.
- Parents show some interest in the magnet program. Parents attend activities, volunteer at schools, and attend individual student conferences. Documentation is maintained.
- Parent surveys are available but do not include detailed items about the magnet theme.
- Public meetings or outreach to inform the community about the magnet theme implementation is not consistent.

- Parents believe that the magnet schools are keeping students in the district, and that they serve an important purpose within the community.
- Because of the transportation zones and limitations, school choice in CMS is complex and unclear to many families.
- Parents often apply to magnet schools to “replace” something they perceive as a worse option.
- Despite district efforts, many families are unaware of the numerous programs available to them and their students.
- Marketing materials are limited and are often only in English, making them inaccessible to all members of the community.

When we examined the magnetism for the CMS magnet programs, for the most part, CMS has substantiated opportunity that draws parent and student interest. Parents pride themselves on getting their students into CMS magnet schools. It was clear during the focus groups that CMS continues to thrive with a reputation of excellence in academics and opportunities. Focus group data and the online community survey both suggested CMS use more appealing marketing strategies such as graduation rates, college and career readiness, and demonstrate the additional benefits of the rigor in the magnet programs/schools. These marketing strategies, along with ensuring the access and diversity points, will only strengthen the applicant pool and accessibility. Much dissatisfaction was expressed in the communication from the student assignment letter provided post-lottery. Respondents stated they did not know what or why the student was ineligible, did not get selected, etc. CMS Magnet and School Options office does not author this letter as it is sent out from the Student Assignment Offices.

To represent the level of interest in a given magnet school or program, MSA reviewed the application data. Cultivated through awareness of the theme through recruitment and marketing, this interest focuses on the location of the school, community perceptions about safety and academics, and level of community interest in the theme overall. Based on the school’s history as a magnet school, specifically, when and how it was started, what support it has from the principal and district administration, how well the professional development of staff within the magnet school around the magnet theme was provided, our findings were varied.

As a result, there is a high level of interest in certain schools (as indicated by applications and waiting lists), and relatively low level of interest at others. We believe the reasons for such discrepancies are not necessarily the quality of the program being offered, but the perception of the school and demography of the neighborhood. In analysis of the “wait lists” and lack thereof, nine CMS magnets had “0” on their wait list. Surprisingly, student academic success does not appear to be a factor for eight of the nine magnets, which scored at or above the average for achievement. However, additional data demonstrates that six of these nine programs have a white enrollment that is less than 8% (all the way down to less than 1% at West Charlotte High) and exceed the district in black enrollment, suggesting racial imbalance.

Likewise, it may be beneficial to reexamine the practice in the IB magnet high schools, where students may not perform at the level of rigor necessary for entrance in the Diploma program and must return to their home school. This practice, while keeping the school on track with students entering the 11th grade prepared for rigorous coursework, weakens the propensity for the students to engage and challenge themselves for improved academic achievement. CMS is encouraged to review its procedures and processes to eliminate this option.

CMS magnet schools vary significantly in their overall quality, diversity, and achievement. These factors combined help determine how magnetic they are. Many of the schools, were provided few, if any, resources to train staff, procure technology, and retain materials to integrate the theme into the curriculum.

Because of this, these schools do not “scream the theme” in a manner that attracts parents and excites students. There are a few exceptions where school leaders managed to create robust, theme-based opportunities for students.

However, these programs are still not attracting students from outside the residing area.

Lastly, CMS is encouraged to seek further partnerships with local universities, critical partnerships such as:

ITT Technical Institute
Johnson & Wales University
The Art Institute of Charlotte
University of North Caroline at Charlotte
Queens University of Charlotte
Johnson C. Smith University
Pfeiffer University

Recommendations

1. Organize a means to collaborate more effectively, specifically with Curriculum and Instruction staff to give these areas greater leadership and support within schools.
2. Provide teachers and magnet coordinators with professional development around the theme and curriculum development.
3. Adopt a full-time position with significant responsibility, resources, and autonomy to coordinate and provide professional development and training to magnet school teachers and principals, as well as coordinate purchasing and oversee all marketing and recruitment efforts.
4. Identify exemplary models of other magnet programs to compare notes with and learn from. To ensure magnet schools are relevant and continually improving,
5. Convene an industry advisory board to provide validation, feedback, and suggestions. To make them accessible to families, marketing materials, applications, and choice information should be provided in multiple languages.
6. Ensure greater inclusion and access for English Language Learners and Special Education students in magnet programs by providing services at all magnet schools to the greatest extent possible.
7. Allow for nearly exclusive building autonomy in decision-making processes in multiple areas including: hiring, curriculum, assessment, facility needs, etc. These and other decisions are made at the discretion of building leaders. This includes but is not limited to allocation of sufficient staffing resources for the promotion and success of the magnet theme and seeks and retains a highly qualified workforce at the school and central office level.

Conclusion

Charlotte-Mecklenburg, with its profound respect for diversity and choice, should serve as a pillar of example for other districts that strive for equity and excellence for all students. The implementation of the recommendations in this report will demand diligent work and exercise, but it will serve as a cornerstone and a foundational document for the CMS community. It is our goal to promote opportunity, equity, transparency, and preparation for all students so they may have the skills to thrive in a global society.

We believe that the recommendations provided in this report should not be taken individually, but rather, as part of a larger process that will require additional planning and design. CMS is a complex system; factors such as demographics, transportation, displacement, and discontinuation of programs will all have an impact on CMS overall and should be considered carefully and holistically.

The objective of this report and our Study Visits have been to highlight the strengths, inconsistencies, and trials of the CMS magnet programs. By examining challenges that need attention and high-performance that needs recognition, the community will have an even greater opportunity for success. It is our hope that CMS will utilize these recommendations and further develop their community of teamwork, academic achievement, and excellence.