

PROJECT ABSTRACT

Smaller Learning Communities Concept. This project, the Memorial High Neighborhood Network, will restructure the *whole* school into four neighborhoods of approximately 500 students and 25 faculty members. Every student will be a part of a neighborhood community and will be connected to the school, as an integral part of their neighborhood, from the day they walk into the building to the day they graduate. All students will have increased opportunities to build important relationships with adult mentors, other school staff, and with each other through one of their neighborhood's 25 Backyard Groups and 5 Block Groups.

Population to be Served/Targeted and Indicators of Their Need. This project addresses two long-standing factors that have created deep divisions within Memorial High School: (1) the persistent achievement gap between our high-achieving mostly white middle class students and a growing number of struggling students, most of them low-income students of color; and (2) the lack of connection that even many of our successful students feel toward the school, the staff, and each other.

Goals. The goals of the Memorial High Neighborhood Network are to close this achievement gap, to create a collegial school culture, to build student leadership and ownership for the future direction of the school, and increase and diversify student participation in extracurricular activities.

Proposed Strategies and Activities. The proposed restructuring into Neighborhoods will enable Memorial High School to move forward with three key companion initiatives. First, Memorial will rework the School Day to create more opportunities for students to connect with their peers and with the adults in our building, to provide greater academic support outside the classroom to students who need it, and to build a stronger sense of community among our staff. Second, we will ensure that each student has an adult mentor, i.e. a staff member, a community volunteer, or other person who will be their trusted partner in navigating the high school years. Thirdly, Memorial will engage local government, higher education, community-based agencies and associations, and parents in ensuring successful implementation of our plan.

Each Neighborhood will have its own community center in newly-remodeled space within the school. Drawing on the real-world experience of Madison neighborhoods and what makes them strong social and political entities, each Memorial neighborhood will develop its own social fabric, self-governance structure, and program of community center activities. Governance groups will exist at the block, neighborhood, and school-wide level to engage a greater number of students and staff in charting the daily life and future direction of the school. Each neighborhood will also have a discretionary fund to support a wide range of physical, programmatic, and other improvements.

School staff will be assigned to these neighborhoods on an inter-disciplinary basis, to promote integrated curriculum and instruction around topics of interest to students in the neighborhood. A wide-ranging professional development program, in conjunction with the University of Wisconsin-Madison School of Education and Edgewood College's Center for Democracy in Action, will ensure that teachers have the conceptual understanding and practical skills they need to successfully implement – and take full advantage of – the proposed restructuring