



Amherst County Public Schools
Comprehensive School Improvement Plan For:

Amherst Middle School
165 Gordons Fairgrounds Road
434-946-0691
<http://ams.amherst.k12.va.us/>
2023-2024

The following individuals assisted in creating this plan:

Individual	Title
J. Kelly Holmes	Principal
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Kim O'Neil	Teacher
Hannah Wooldridge	Teacher
Tami Brooks	Librarian/Media Specialist
Linda Zabloski	Teacher
Lisa Laub	Teacher
Wanda Smith	Supervisor of Math, Science, Gifted, and Elective Programs
Craig Maddox	Supervisor of Career and Technical Education, ITRTs, and Library/Media



School Profile/Demographic Information

Status for Most Recent School Year		Student Population Percentages			
Total Enrollment	361	Poverty	49.03%	Other	9.48%
Attendance Rate	19.65%	White	68.96%	Special Education	14.12%
Graduation Rate	NA	Black	15.24%	English Learners	.8%
Accreditation Status	Accredited	Hispanic	5.82%	Gifted	9.4%
Title I Model <small>Schoolwide Program (SWP) Targeted Assistance (TA) Not Applicable (N/A)</small>	NA	Asian	0.5%		

Faculty & Staff						
		Years of Experience by Content / Grade Level				
Grade Level/Content	Number of Teachers	0-3 Years	4-7 Years	8-15 Years	>16 Years	New To School (for most recent SY)
Math	5	1		1	3	1
LA	6			2	4	1
Science	4			3	1	
History	3	1			2	1
SPED	5		1		4	
PE	3		2		1	
Exploratory	5	1	2		2	



Foreign Lang	1	1				1
Library MS	1				1	
School Counselor	1			1		
Admin	2			1	1	
Secretary	2			1	1	
Custodian	3	1			2	
Paras	9	4	2	1	2	
Nutrition Staff	3			1	2	
Nurse	1			1		
TAG	1				1	
ITRT	1				1	
School Psych	1				1	
SRO	1				1	1
Total	58	9	7	12	30	5

Executive Summary

Division Demographic and Curriculum Overview

Amherst Middle School is a small rural institution situated in Amherst County, just off State Route 60 and Gordon's Fairgrounds Road, about two miles east of the town of Amherst. The school has a student body of 361 students and offers stunning views of the Blue Ridge Mountains. The campus is home to a single-story brick building with three wings for 6th, 7th, and 8th grade. Additionally, the school campus boasts an outdoor track, a center athletic field at the back of the grounds, and a series of tennis courts in front of the building.

At Amherst Middle School, we hold high expectations for our students, faculty, and staff to embody the values of our "Big Three": responsibility, respect, and resilience. Our primary goal is to create a learning environment that encourages success for our students and develops character traits that will serve them well throughout their lives. We



aim to instill in our students a sense of responsibility, respectfulness, and resilience that they can carry with them wherever they go.

Amherst Middle School is an Amherst Tiered System of Support (ATSS) school, which utilizes a data-driven framework and strategies to establish academic, behavioral, and social-emotional supports for students. The key elements of the ATSS framework include an aligned organizational structure, data-informed decision-making, evidence-based practices, family, school, and community partnerships, monitoring of student progress, and evaluation of outcomes and implementation fidelity.

For the 2022-2023 school year, Amherst Middle School received full accreditation. Our current administrative team has been in place since the 2018-2019 school year and has worked tirelessly to improve staff morale and student achievement in many ways during unprecedented times. Our faculty and staff are very active in community events and are proud of our yearly Veterans Day Celebration and Veterans Garden.

Our current school schedule is built on a 7-period day with classes lasting forty-five minutes. Amherst Middle School currently offers the following instructional programs to our students:

- Year long Reading and Math courses for our general education and collaborative/inclusion students.
- Sixth-grade students are enrolled in either Math 6 or Advanced Math 6 courses. Seventh-grade students are enrolled in either Math 7 or Pre-Algebra, in addition, if they did not successfully complete the previous year's Standards of Learning math test, they are enrolled in a Math 7 remediation course. 8th grade students are enrolled in Pre-Algebra or Algebra, and Geometry..
- Sixth grade students are enrolled in Grade 6 Science, 7th grade students are enrolled in Physical Science and take the Science 8 Standards of Learning test. 8th Grade students are enrolled in Environmental Science
- Sixth-grade students are enrolled in United States History 1865 to Present, seventh-grade students are enrolled in Civics and Economics, and eighth-grade students are enrolled in World History I.
- All Amherst Middle School students are enrolled in Health and Physical Education for the year.
- The majority of our sixth and seventh grade students rotate through Exploratory courses which include Agricultural Science, Music, Art, and Technology. There are some students who are enrolled in Band for the year and who do not rotate through the other Exploratory course offerings.
- Students who are identified as Talented and Gifted (TAG), participate in TAG classes..
- Eighth-grade students are either enrolled in Band for the year or choose two Exploratory course offerings to take for one Semester each.
- There are two exploratory courses in eighth grade that are offered as high school credit courses.
- Eighth-grade students who are in Honors Reading/English enroll in Spanish. There are two Spanish courses offered.

During the 2023-2024 school year, a strong emphasis is being placed on improving student achievement in English/Reading. Additional support will be offered to students in the Virginia Department of Education subgroups of black, economically disadvantaged, and students with disabilities, for Reading. We will monitor our student growth through data collected VDOE Growth Assessments, and Qualitative Reading Inventories given at the appropriately suggested times (beginning, mid, and end of year/beginning and end of year). Reading teachers will compile and utilize a QRI Summary Chart to plan and implement appropriate tiered instruction for students within



their courses. All Reading will analyze data through these assessments, class performance, and grades to determine intervention needs based on student performance.

Amherst Middle School teachers plan and implement lessons that are developed and aligned to the Virginia Standards of Learning and the Curriculum Framework. Also, all teachers are expected to follow the Amherst County Public Schools Pacing Guides that are aligned to the Virginia Standards of Learning and the Curriculum Framework by quarter and to utilize the school adopted lesson plan template.

Our Amherst Tiered Systems of Support (ATSS) team along with our attendance team will monitor daily attendance and support students and families to ensure that we provide our students with an understanding of the importance of being responsible students, faculty, and staff. Amherst Middle School will utilize the Amherst County Public Schools attendance plan and resources provided by the VDOE Office of School Quality Collaborative Learning Cohort focused on Chronic Absenteeism.

Extended Learning Opportunities – Before, During & After School

At Amherst Middle School, teachers are available to meet with students during their lunch and planning block period to provide individual help. Students with an Individualized Educational Plan, with accommodation for a resource class, have that course built into their academic schedule. Students identified as Talented and Gifted participate in a TAG class taught by the Talented and Gifted coordinator, which extends education opportunities in the content areas they are identified in as talented and gifted. Additionally, students have the opportunity to attend the after-school Cougar Academy. This program is designed to help students with missing assignments and test preparation, and it runs from January through May on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays.

Amherst Middle School offers an extended learning opportunity during and after school intervention programs for reading. The program is scheduled for fourteen weeks from January 2024, through April 2024. Students will be invited to the after-school remediation program based on their grades and Virginia SOL Growth Assessments. After-school STEM and Drama programs are also available once a week.

In addition to the before, during, and after-school extended learning opportunities, Amherst Middle School offers a remedial summer school program for rising 6th through rising 8th graders. There is also an enrichment math bridge program for rising sixth-grade students who are taking Advanced Math 6 during the summer term.

For individuals interested in education as a career, Amherst Middle School offers internship opportunities for students from Amherst County High School. These students have the opportunity to work closely with students, teachers, and faculty at Amherst Middle School. Amherst Middle School also collaborates with surrounding Colleges and Universities, which provide practicum and student teachers to complete their required hours for their program of study with teachers at Amherst Middle School.

Amherst Middle School staff participate in professional development opportunities to further their professional growth. Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) exist at Amherst Middle School and include Content/Department and Grade Level meetings and Content PLCs. Leadership Team meetings are offered monthly and are led by the Principal's designated department lead. Grade Level Representatives meet monthly and aim to



enhance teaching practices among educators to create a learning environment for all students to succeed. A needs assessment program is also in place to ensure students receive the necessary support to achieve their academic goals.

Amherst Middle School respectfully follows both the vision and mission of Amherst County Public Schools. The vision of Amherst County Public Schools is to cultivate excellence in every child, every day. This vision is driven by the mission of Amherst County Public Schools, which is to create a culture that inspires excellence in academics, career readiness, and citizenship in every child. However, the profession of education has been upended due to COVID-19. Every aspect of education has been altered. Interactions between students, teachers, and the community, how we work and communicate, and how we move and travel within our building and community have been affected.

As we began the Comprehensive Needs Assessment for the 2023-2024 school year we reached out to our AMS stakeholders for their assistance. Our team consisted of general education teachers from each grade level and content area, SPED teachers, curriculum specialist and district administrative liaisons. The CNA process required our team to analyze data which had been collected, begin to collect data to be used as evidence in the creation of our CNA, and to collaborate while continually analyzing multiple data sources in order to create resolutions to specific, modeled questions from the Virginia Department of Education. Those questions are as follows:

- What are we trying to accomplish?
- What changes can result in improvement?
- How will we know that a change is an improvement?

As our team worked through these questions we were able to reflect upon, analyze, and identify the needs, priorities, and essential actions needed to begin the creation of our VACSIP. We are excited to work through this process and thankful for the opportunities it presents for cyclical reflection and potential for growth and improvement.

Needs Assessment Findings – Areas of Strength

There are great things happening at Amherst Middle School. Areas of strength noted in the needs assessment included the following:

English:

- Thinking maps used for vocabulary instruction and new concepts.
- Qualitative Reading Inventory for tiering and differentiated instruction.
- Unified and focused English department that regularly collaborates to meet student needs.
- Incorporate Google Docs through writing to assist with feedback and editing.
- Completion of the VDOE Scoring Summary for scoring alignment of teachers.
- Consistent and unified incorporation of the TSEET Writing Strategy for vertical alignment in writing.
- Consistent opportunities for independent reading time at the beginning of each class.
- Teachers work as a collaborative team to support student learning in collaborative classrooms.

Mathematics:

- Improved use of vocabulary consistently across grade levels.



- Number sense brought from elementary grades being retained and applied to new concepts.
- Collaboration with teachers in the county provided a more consistent curriculum pacing.
- Evidenced through Standards of Learning tests, benchmark tests, Student Growth Assessments, common assessments, and tier sheets.
- Recovery students and intervention data is well tracked through Google sheets.
- Professional development for new SOL standards.
- Chromebooks for the math department due to changes with online calculator implementation.
- Teachers work as a collaborative team to support student learning in collaborative classrooms.

Science:

- The implementation of hands-on activities to meet the requirements of the addition of leaves in the curriculum framework from the VDOE.
- Hands-on activities to increase laboratory skills such as performing measurements and problem solving skills.
- A more collaborative and supportive approach for implementing the science fair, which has now become our science expo event. The science expo not only includes science class participation, but also STEAM Club. This event is a school-wide approach to science and engineering.
- Increased collaboration and vertical alignment of lessons as a department and amongst the 6th and 7th grade teachers who split teaching Life Science curriculum.
- The implementation of Science Learning Collaboration (SLC) to improve student success and use performance assessments and data to drive instruction.
- The addition of lab skill classes is being implemented by our science teachers and Dr. Lisa Schoener to improve upon our students measurement and problem solving skills.

History:

- Mastery of vocabulary in transitioning student learning from knowledge to understanding and application.
- Forming connections between Standards of Learning strands and current events.
- Collaborating with division History teachers to update curriculum framework and pacing guides as well as creating performance based assessments for United States History II.
- An emphasis on preparing students for future written portions of upcoming Standards of Learning tests.
- Evidenced through Standards of Learning tests, benchmark tests, common assessments, Student Growth Assessments, tier sheets, end of course tests, and Performance Based Assessments.

Students with Disabilities:

- Growth in reading comprehension and fluency due to consistent implementation and disaggregation of the Qualitative Reading Inventory (QRI).
- Teachers consistently meet students' accommodations across content areas.
- Growth in Reading Standards of Learning tests for students with disabilities due to explicit tiered instruction.
- Teachers work as a collaborative team to support student learning in collaborative classrooms.

Leadership and Governance:

- Rules are more clearly communicated and are consistent across the population of the school.
- Administrators follow a progressive chart when handling discipline.



- Observations are more frequent and followed up with timely and constructive feedback.
- Administrators are approachable for both staff and students.
- Implementation of Virginia Tiered System of Supports (VTSS), which draws on research and evidence-based practices of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports(PBIS). ATSS in Amherst County Public Schools.
- Amherst Middle School offers leadership opportunities for growth and service through its Student Council Association.

Commitment to Professional Learning

- Staff keeps track of professional development participation.
- Staff is encouraged to report back during faculty meetings in order to share techniques and strategies learned at conferences and encourage implementation.
- Staff committed to continuing education to adapt to changes in education.
- High participation in and utilization of CCreating Independence through Student-Owned Strategies training for non- reading teachers.

Safe and Orderly Environment:

- Participation in ATSS
- Implementation and demonstration of the AMS Big 3 by faculty and students: Respect, Responsibility, and Resilience
- All crisis plans are updated regularly, and procedures are followed appropriately.
- Implement an incentive program that acknowledges student attendance, academics, and behavior.
- Students receive “Awesome Cougar awards” for good citizenship and earn lunch in the courtyard where they can play games and socialize outside.

Family and Community Engagement:

- Veterans Day Celebration which honors and remembers service members of our community held on Veterans Day each year.
- Parent communication is increased through regularly updated web pages, newsletters, text messages, and smartphone apps.
- Regularly scheduled parent-teacher conferences which are communicated well in advance and reminders sent through multiple forms.
- Local businesses have donated prizes to the incentive program.

Needs Assessment Findings – Areas of Improvement

English:

- Absences continue to hurt students’ performance creating gaps in instruction.
- Economically disadvantaged students struggled to demonstrate mastery on the Spring Reading SOL test per expected VDOE student performance.
- Students with disabilities struggled to demonstrate mastery on the Spring Reading SOL test per expected VDOE student performance.
- Black students struggled to demonstrate mastery on the Spring Reading SOL Test per expected VDOE student performance.



- Evidenced through Standards of Learning tests, Student Growth Assessments, and QRI Summary sheets.

Mathematics:

- Absences continue to hurt students' performance creating gaps in instruction.
- Economically disadvantaged students struggled to demonstrate mastery on the Spring Reading SOL test per expected VDOE student performance.
- Fewer remediation sessions
- Multi-step word problems challenge students' stamina and reading ability.
- Because fraction, decimal, percent is over all grade levels, this topic needs to be strengthened.
- Evidenced through Standards of Learning tests, iXL performance data, Student Growth Assessments, and teacher created assessments.

Science:

- Students with poor reading skills affect their ability to answer questions and apply higher level thinking by emphasizing scientific vocabulary building.
- Strengthening student's laboratory skills.
- Gathering additional evidence through Standards of Learning tests, end of course tests, and teacher created assessments.

History:

- Analyzing graphic information in the form of graphs, maps, and other photographic evidence.
- Written communication to demonstrate mastery of content.
- Evidenced through Standards of Learning tests, teachers created assessments, and end of course tests.

Students with Disabilities:

- Weaknesses in writing (grammar, spelling, and sentence structure) are evident.
- Students not reading on grade level- decoding skills, comprehension, summarizing, etc.

Attendance

- Focus on decreasing the number of students with unexcused absences.
- Improve the number of students who are chronically absent with 10% or more total absences.

Leadership and Governance:

- More accountability to expectations and student-earned consequences translates to more time for students spent outside of class when serving appropriately earned consequences.

Commitment to Professional Learning

- Difficult to find subs, so staff often sacrifice their own planning to help Amherst Middle School staff, or opportunities are limited when hoping to attend conferences.
- Lack of funding affects opportunities to participate in professional development.

Safe and Orderly Environment:

- Inconsistency of buy-in from some staff in the implementation fidelity of the ATSS framework.
- Inconsistent adherence to teacher expectations for following guidelines concerning student safety, cellphones, hall passes, dismissal procedures, etc.
- Lack of substitute custodial support during school hours.
- Construction that has to take place during the school year creates distractions.



Family and Community Engagement:

- Lack of consistency in parent engagement, especially when considering all the opportunities that are offered to keep in constant contact by Amherst Middle School.
- Low parent conference participation on advertised nights.
- Lack of an active PTO/PTA, which provides additional support to extracurricular activities.

Schoolwide Reform Strategies

To help Amherst Middle School students meet challenging academic standards, administrators and instructional staff will use research-based instructional practices. These strategies will include setting and posting objectives, providing positive reinforcement while maintaining high expectations, offering a wide range of opportunities for students to summarize and take notes, and using higher-level questioning strategies that support student development of metacognition. Teachers will be required to provide evidence of lesson planning that includes these strategies. They will also closely monitor academic data to ensure proper placement of students for differentiated and tiered instructional opportunities, and to identify areas where students need additional support.

To encourage improved student behavior, we will implement the Virginia Tiered System of Support and Positive Behavioral Support for students. We will also work closely with administrators and parents to lower the number of chronically absent students throughout the 2022-2023 academic year.

Finally, administrators and members of the ATSS team will analyze data to evaluate the effectiveness of instruction and student growth. Positive student behavior and improved performance on a variety of performance-based tasks will be used to measure student achievement. Identified action steps will directly assist with schoolwide reform strategies. All strategies will be analyzed for effectiveness through data collection, analysis, and management of classroom strategies to promote active, engaged learning opportunities for all students.

Goals and Action Steps

Please contact the building administrator if you would like more information about the Comprehensive School Improvement Process.