Intentional Play in MPS
A Systemic Approach

May 24, 2022
Our Agenda

01 Toward a systemic approach

02 Intentional Play is HQI

03 Bringing it to life in our Classrooms
Why are play and executive function important?

“Play allows children to use their creativity while developing their imagination, dexterity, and physical, cognitive, and emotional strength. Play is important to healthy brain development.”

From American Academy of Pediatrics
(https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/119/1/182)

- School Achievement
- Positive Behaviors
- Good Health
- Successful Work

Center on the Developing Child
HARVARD UNIVERSITY
What does the research say?

Research on the developing brain shows us that early childhood experiences build the foundation for a skilled workforce, a responsible community and a thriving economy. A new evidence base has identified a set of skills that are essential for school achievement, for the preparation and adaptability of our future workforce, and for avoiding a wide range of public health problems.
Current Early Childhood Programs in MPS

- **Integrated PK**: 3’s AM and 4’s PM, 2-5 days - Special Ed and General Ed (gen ed pays fee) (LOS, JFK, OHS, PDS)
- **Ready-to-Learn**: Full Day, plus before and after care; fee-based (PDS, LOS, OAS)
- **Child Care Lab Foran High School**: Fee-based day care, M-F full day; High school Family Consumer Science Course
- **PK 5**: 4 full days M-TH (OAS)
- **Self Contained PK and K**: PK students attend 4 ½ days Monday pm and T-F all day; K students attend 5 days; partner with PK/K classes (LOS)
- **Primary Development**: Full day program with a partner Kindergarten class; Special Education (OAS)
- **Supported K/Kindergarten**: Concentrated special ed cluster in 2 gen ed class w/support (OAS)
Purpose: examine current program practices and make recommendations about incorporating intentional play and executive function in preschool and kindergarten.

Process: Interviews, Focus Group, Observations, Surveys, Curriculum and Assessment Review
Commendations

- MPS investigating ways to increase engagement in learning and agency in early grades
- The Model of High Quality Instruction makes learning stick
- Instructional Supervisors support coaches and teachers
- Community support of early childhood opportunities
- Executive function skills recognized as critical for social and academic success as well as are indicative of improved long term outcomes
- Spanish in kindergarten
Recommendation #1

Building Coherence PK-12

- Continue professional learning on the model for HQI, embedding executive function and intentional play in the context of the Vision of the Learner
- Develop a shared understanding and infographic on executive function and intentional play
- Consider merging the various early childhood programs under the same administrative oversight to afford consistency and continuity across programs for children and families
Recommendation #2

Curriculum and Professional Learning

Provide curriculum writing and professional learning opportunities to allow staff to develop early childhood learning experiences across content areas that
- use intentional play as an instructional strategy
- promote executive function as a critical competence to support academic and social success
- enhance social emotional learning (SEL) and
- embed developmentally appropriate assessment practices to inform responsive instruction
Recommendation #3

Schedule, Resources and Environment

- Integrate intentional play in the daily schedule, including outdoor time, ensuring that the planned opportunities promote the development of executive function and align to the district model for high quality instruction.

- Provide carefully selected materials for children to engage in that supports HQI.

- Evaluate room arrangement, including storage and access to materials as well as what is visually available to children.
Leading For Early Childhood Education

“The energy that is at the core of accelerated action and dual operating systems is an aligned energy. The kind of pioneers who create these systems begin by developing not just a powerful sense of strategic urgency among large numbers of people, but a force for change that aligns peoples’ feelings, thoughts and actions.”

8 Accelerators
1. Create a sense of urgency
2. Build a guiding coalition
3. Form strategic vision and initiatives
4. Enlist a volunteer army
5. Enable action by removing barriers
6. Generate short-term wins
7. Sustain acceleration
8. Institute change
Intentional Play and HQI
The Developmental Relationships Framework and Executive Function

Children are more likely to build executive function skills if the important adults in their lives are able to:

- Support their efforts;
- Model the skills;
- Engage in activities;
- Provide a consistent and reliable presence;
- Guide them from dependence to independence;
- Protect them from stress that disrupts development.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MPS Vision of the Learner</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Scholarship</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Knowledge and academic skills learners of all ages acquire and sustain to be successful now and in the future.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Citizenship</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>The skills required for learners to be global citizens who think and act in the service of others.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Creativity &amp; Innovation</strong></td>
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<td>The skills required for learners to be persistent, imaginative, and resourceful problem-solvers.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Personal Development</strong></td>
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<td>Personal skills required for learners to be productive, self-directed, healthy and successful in school and life.</td>
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Intentional Play

What does it look like?

Milford Public Schools ◆ Milford, Connecticut
Executive Functioning

- Independence
- Problem-solving
- Self-control
- Making choices
- Building memory
Oral Language

- Expanding vocabulary
- Building background knowledge
- Problem-solving
- Social emotional learning
Play Plans

- Select a center
- Draw a picture
- Write a sentence
- Refer to plan later
We will make a card for my family.

We will make a card for my family.
We will help make the animal hospital we will help set up the animal hospital.
we will make
a circle
tracker
Scenario Development

- Imagination
- Creativity
- Builds recall/memory
- Background knowledge
9. blocks
10. lawn mower
11. toy car
12. rake
push move away
pull move towards you

race track

snack stand
water

winner

trophy flag

seats

audience

cars steering wheel

driver

fire numbers
STEM & Specials

- Receive instructions
- Use background knowledge
- Encourages conversation
- Communication
Today, this is your challenge:

With your materials, design and build the tallest structure you can, and then race from the top.

**MUST WORK TOGETHER**

You have 20 minutes!
MPS Steps to date...

- Spring 2021 the Guiding Coalition of MPS district leaders, EA Aschenbrenner and teachers started the process of drafting a vision and shared understanding for executive function and intentional play.

- Professional learning experience on Intentional Play for district administrators; Stakeholder and Community Engagement

- Pilot Implementation
  - 9 Preschool and 9 kindergarten classrooms implemented play
  - Professional learning throughout the school year
  - Coaching sessions with EASTCONN consultant, Coordinator of Early Childhood Programs and building leadership
  - Supportive materials
  - Modeling of Intentional Play strategies by Coordinator of Early Childhood Programs
Next Steps 2022–2023...

- Full implementation in all kindergarten classrooms
- Professional learning plan for all preschool and kindergarten teachers
- Consideration for learning schedules in early childhood settings
- Continued communication of the vision for early childhood learning opportunities
- Update the kindergarten classroom environment to allow for the integration of Intentional Play
- Collaboration with community preschools to share professional learning and vision for early childhood learning to ease the transition from preschool to kindergarten