MONTESSORI EDUCATION CENTRE - NORTH CAMPUS

Performance Management Plan 2010

Introduction

Montessori Education Center (MEC) has a vision of our school that is not simply one of an educational institution of bricks and mortar that is built and managed. Rather, it is a living, evolving entity whose faculty and staff think organically. We develop programs and environments that lead toward a fully integrated and cohesive Montessori community.

MEC is committed to preparing students to be constructive contributors to society by focusing on academic, personal, and social development. The learning environment is based on the Montessori philosophy because of its emphasis on the development of the whole child. MEC focuses on individualized and differentiated learning. Students are grouped into mixed-aged classrooms that span three years. Montessori curriculum is grounded in engaging, sensory-rich materials that make abstract concepts more concrete. Evolution comes with a deeper knowledge that includes the "why" in addition to the "how." Students learn through direct experience and social interaction in a classroom that is complete and sequential with common elements. The learning environment cultivates individualization, freedom of choice, concentration, independence, problem solving, interdisciplinary breadth, and competency in basic skills. Teachers facilitate learning by carefully observing each child's behavior and growth, then guiding each student using changes in the environment, invitation for inquiry, and direct instruction. Teachers work hard to create and sustain a classroom and school culture where demonstrations of respect, initiative, risk-taking, and persistence in learning are the norm. Furthermore, parents and caregivers are vital partners in the education of their children. They are welcome and present at MEC as they are given many opportunities for participating in and setting the direction of the school life. In conjunction with teachers and students, parents provide input and important feedback on their child's educational path.

Montessori Education Centre has been educating the children of Arizona in this manner since 1985. Our school remained private until 1996 when we received our charter and were able to open our doors to more children who would greatly benefit from not only a Montessori school but a charter school. MEC expanded to a second (North) campus in 2001.

We earned an AMS (American Montessori Society) Accreditation in 2008 after an arduous self-study process. MEC had to meet a litany of standards set down by the AMS commission. The American Montessori Society also continuously recognizes the need to align themselves with other national agencies that accredit schools. Therefore, AMS bases their standards in part on protocol that define an authentic Montessori but additionally acknowledge the standards of the Commission on International Trans-Regional Accreditation (CITA). Currently MEC is the only Montessori school in Arizona that is AMS accredited.

MEC operates aware of the need to not only meet AMS standards, but to ensure that the students are continually growing academically as determined by the Arizona Instrument to Measure Standards-Dual Purpose Assessment (AIMS/DPA) test. As a means to this end, we have sought out the counsel of the Arizona Charter Schools Association to help us actively assure that we are following best practices to initiate quality education.

The Arizona Charter Schools Association identifies four foundational elements that schools must embody to maintain student academic growth. These four foundational elements are: a leader with a purpose, teachers who take responsibility for the end result, a culture that promotes teamwork, and the process for solving problems. MEC feels confident that the first three of these elements are being met, and evidence of this was born of the AMS accreditation process. Surveys were distributed to five constituencies: current parents, past parents, staff/administration, teachers, and students. Of the 200+ questions asked, below is a sampling of results that reflects MEC's strengths in leadership, responsible teaching, and teamwork (all scores have a maximum agreement score of 5).

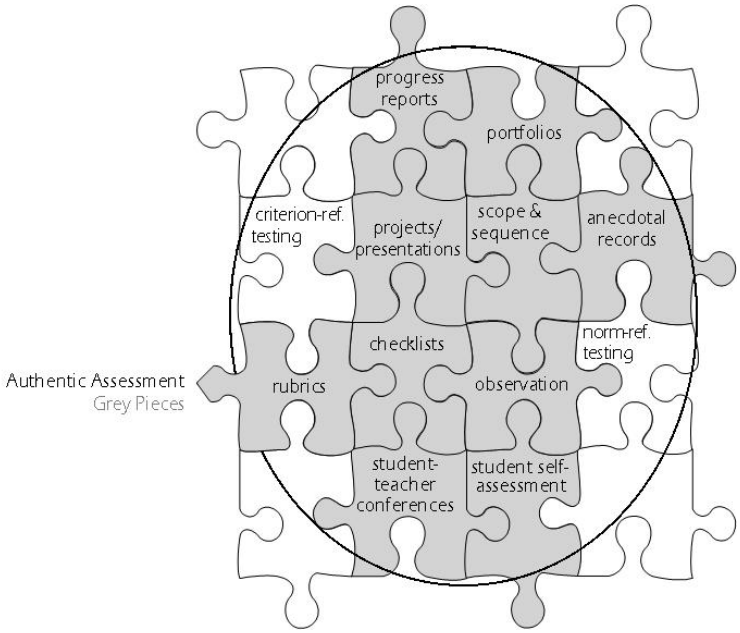
Group	Survey Statement	Avg Rating
Parents	The educational program at MEC is of high quality.	4.162
Parents	I understand the mission statement of the school.	4.026
Parents	The Director is accessible.	4.079
Staff	The Director and staff implement the school's missions through appropriate activities and decisions.	4.118
Staff	Curriculum content reflects the mission of the school.	4.176
Staff	The primary focus of all leadership activities within the school is on student learning.	4.471
Teachers	The primary focus of all leadership activities within the school is on student learning.	4.166
Teachers	The Director and staff model high expectations.	4.222
Teachers	The focus of the instructional supervision process is placed on improving teacher effectiveness.	4.388
Teachers	Instructional activities are consistent with and reflect the mission of the school.	4.444
Teachers	There is a clear rationale for the instructional methodologies used in the classroom.	4.277
Teachers	Teaching strategies provide clear instructions, feedback to the student, and reinforcement of good performance.	4.222
Parents	Teachers hold high standards for each child's learning.	4.135
Parents	Teachers, staff, and administration are concerned about my child as an individual.	4.265
Teachers	Opportunities for collaboration and shared decision making enhance achievement of the desired results for student learning.	4.000
Parents	Parents are encouraged to take an active role in their children's education.	4.225
Parents	Our school provides an adequate opportunity for parents to be involved.	4.275
Parents	Students, teachers, staff, and administration treat each other respectfully.	4.211

When students were asked to "list the great things about your class," the response most frequently given was teacher, followed by environment, friends and lessons. When prompted to finish the statement, "If I have a concern, I can go to…," students overwhelmingly listed teacher, followed by the Director/Principal, then friends. Overall, the scores reflected that MEC is highly functioning and a highly-regarded school. The average scores for virtually every statement were quite high, and, as illustrated above, many of the statements were nearly identical to those first three elements that the Arizona Charter Schools Association gives as facilitators for student growth. As for the other stipulation, a process for solving problems, that fourth element was looked at more closely.

As a rule, MEC recognizes that assessment is an integral aspect of the teaching process. Decisions affecting level of instruction and/or instructional programs are based on data from assessments. In an effort to determine the best fit for the student in the educational environment, both teachers *and* students are involved in assessments. For one, the Montessori materials are didactic in nature and self-correcting which provides for immediate feedback for the student. Self-assessments enable students to develop a vested interest in their education and reach a level of self-awareness that will serve them each day in class and for a lifetime. Those and further assessments enable teachers to gauge development and make necessary adjustments in individual lesson plans and overall learning objectives. MEC believes that

education should make knowledge, skills, and ideas useful. Assessment should determine whether one can use her or his learning, not merely whether one has learned stuff; “can you transfer your learning?” Achieving transferability means a student has learned how to adapt acquired knowledge to novel and important situations. In an education for understanding, learners are constantly challenged to take various ideas and resources they encounter and become adept at applying them to increasingly complicated contexts.

As teachers gather data regarding student performance or achievement, they begin to fit the pieces together to form a picture of each student’s abilities and interests. MEC recognizes that no single assessment strategy works universally to form this picture. Teachers employ different methods and work from several sources before making any evaluation of student growth. Within that atmosphere, a variety of assessments can be appropriate. And, while our picture is not entirely exclusive of criterion-reference and norm-reference testing, Montessori schools deal mainly in authentic assessment. Within the framework of authentic assessment, our school uses the following tools: observation, anecdotal records, checklists, portfolios, rubrics, projects/presentations, student-teacher conferences, curriculum scope & sequence, and progress reports. The following diagram illustrates the idea that many elements comprise an effective assessment for each child and that the elements are connected and of no preconceived proportion.



Referring to the four fundamental elements necessary for student growth (and the “process for solving problems” in particular) and collecting and analyzing our own achievement data, MEC embarked on a self-study to determine a Performance Management Plan (PMP) that would address MEC-North’s academic growth deficiencies. The need to be more methodical in our overall assessment process has been identified as a means to catch issues in a timelier manner. Measured intervention, the structure for which is detailed in the strategies of the attached PMP, will thus be enacted and monitored to the degree that the issue is resolved thoroughly.

Although Montessori Education Centre-Mesa Campus has been ranked Excelling (2009), Highly Performing (2004, 2007 & 2008) or Performing Plus (2005 & 2006) and MEC-North has been ranked Highly Performing (2007) Performing Plus (2006 & 2008) or Performing (2004, 2005 & 2009), we

recognize these particular rankings do not necessarily mean that we are growing our students to a satisfactory degree.

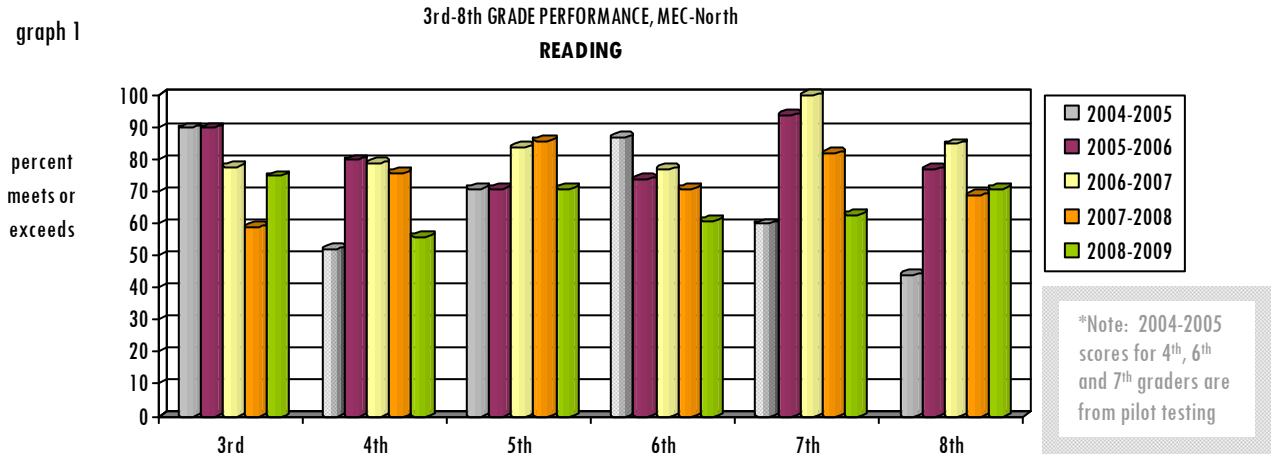
MEC understands that growth is only sustainable if it nourishes learning, and we have always been committed to providing an environment that encourages awareness and introspection to the point of perpetual learning. While it is difficult for us to discover that any part of our body is not growing students academically in accordance with the standards set down by the State, we see this process as an opportunity to reflect on what we do well, where we might improve, and what we need to *do* to improve. Most importantly, because we are open to the self-exploration and strategies toward improvement, our students will benefit by getting the most out of every aspect of their educational experience at MEC.

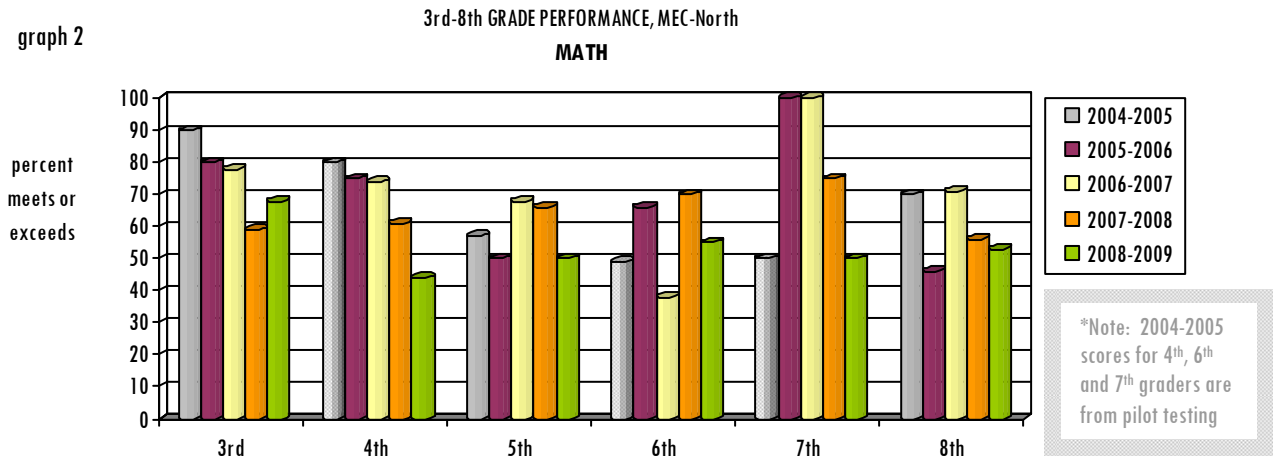
Data Self-Analysis

Data was collected and analyzed by MEC's Leadership Team (the District Administrator, Faculty/Staff Advisor, and MEC-North Principal). The Leadership Team was in charge of analyzing the school's current performance and designing and implementing strategies to improve student growth. In addition to the aggregate data examination detailed below, the Team assessed the quality of the administrative and teaching staff, as well as the school's curriculum in light of its mission, charter, AMS Accreditation standards, and the Arizona Charter Schools Association framework for successful schools. As part of the evaluation, the Leadership Team held lengthy discussions with individual teachers, administrators, parents, and the Board of Directors, all to shed light on the attributing factors to our student achievement data. What follow are graphic examples of the data collected and the data analysis.

According to the AIMS data for math and reading for the past five years, a high percentage of Montessori Education Centre-North's students were exceeding or meeting both math and reading standards for the state of Arizona (see graph 1 and graph 2).

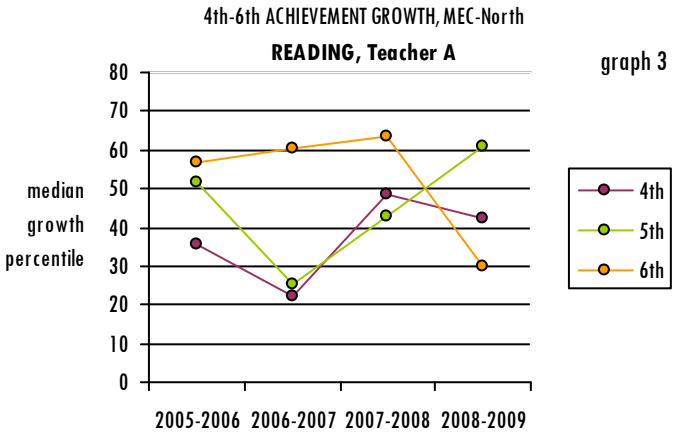
graph 1

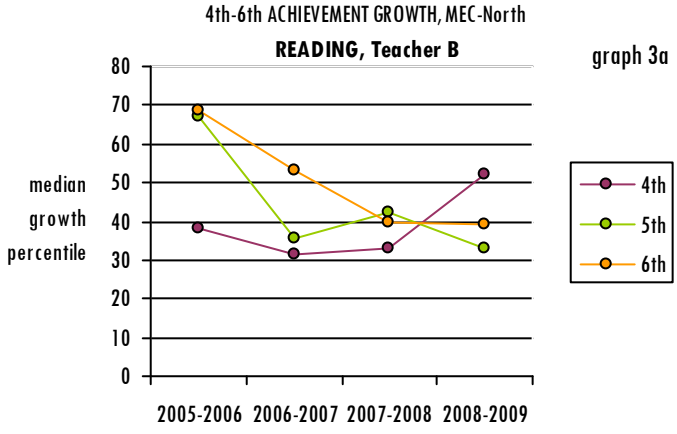




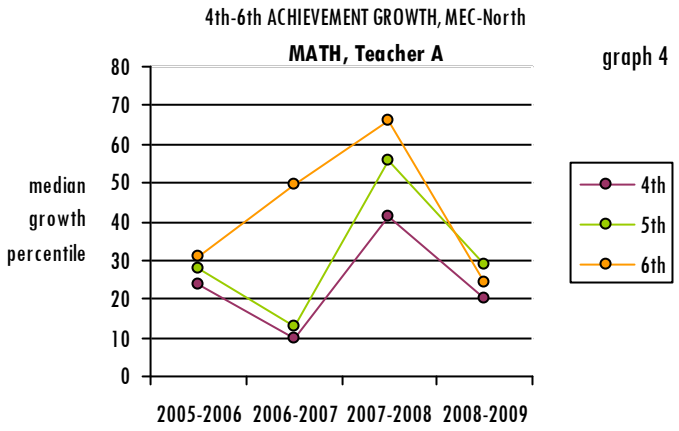
It was not until reviewing the data scatter plots for math and reading, provided to us by the Arizona Charter Schools Association, that we realized Montessori Education Centre-North Campus was not universally growing its students academically. The campus fell below the range for student level growth rate in math for the school year 2008-2009. After more in depth analysis, this phenomenon was traced primarily to the two multi-aged classrooms equivalent to fourth through sixth grades. However, no significant patterns emerged when we factored in the length of time students had been enrolled at MEC. Each of the two classrooms were then scrutinized and factors, such as teacher role, were weighed. Of the two 4th – 6th classes, one has been lead for nearly six years by a veteran teacher (Teacher A); the other classroom experienced a change in leadership beginning in 2006 (Teacher B).

While ample growth was achieved in reading by both classrooms in the past four years (see graph 3 and graph 3a), growth in math was less than adequate for those same classes over the same period.





In graph 4, median growth percentile for Teacher A is erratic over the past four years but often lower than satisfactory.

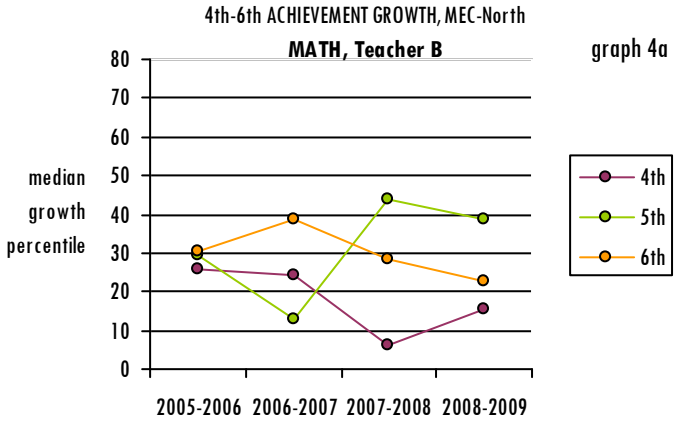


A spike in achievement growth for Teacher A occurred in the 2007-2008 school year. This increase was attributed to the following:

- more consistent use of individual weekly academic goals
- more directed use of Montessori materials to solidify concepts
- incorporation of a program designed to help students master math facts
- providing one-on-one tutoring sessions

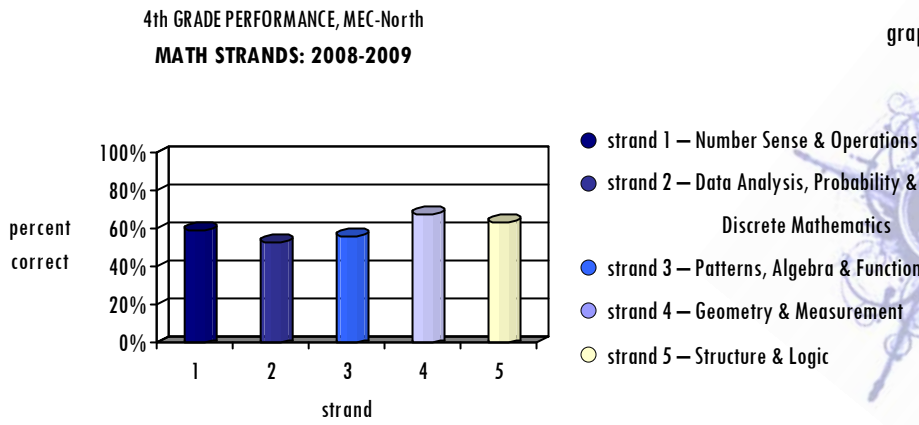
One reason student growth decreased in 2008-2009 was that Teacher A did not implement the above strategies. Without growth data, and seeing that math scores for 4th graders had decreased from the previous year, her focus in 2008-2009 was trying new math texts. Implementing these new books took away from time spent with Montessori materials. She also did not continue the use of weekly academic goals and was less consistent attending to student mastery of math facts. The one-on-one tutoring was also given lower priority. Teacher A now recognizes the importance of re-implementing the strategies that proved to be successful in achieving student growth.

In graph 4a, the median growth percentile is less erratic but still below an acceptable level. After the change in lead teachers in 2006, what becomes inconsistent for Teacher B is the growth level of different grades.



For both classrooms, the weakest overall growth can be attributed to the fourth grade classes. Pass rate data showed that a high percentage of students had been meeting or exceeding standards while in third grade, but a decreasing percentage of students performed as well each year as they moved through grade levels (refer to graphs 1 & 2); hence, while the Arizona Charter Schools Association does not have data on the median growth percentile in third grade, we surmised that some students entered fourth grade on target and were not challenged to grow over the course of their three years in a fourth-sixth grade classroom at MEC-North.

In yet a more detailed examination, analysis of the AIMS data-by-strand showed a shallow range of performance in each of the math standards (see graph 5). There are no telling extremes in performance as it pertains to any particular strand. For this reason, our measures, metrics, and strategies for improving growth do not have a concept or stand specific focus.



There was a sporadic decline in student growth in the past four years. While having probed the factors for the relative success in growth of 2007-2008, MEC finally gave meaning to the data and hypothesized that achievement on any unsatisfactory level was mainly due to five factors:

- MEC-North 4th-6th grade classrooms were experiencing instability because of weak instruction, lack of organization, and ineffective student assessment
- Teachers are not fully aligning and integrating the Montessori curriculum to Arizona State Standards
- Teachers are not fully and consistently utilizing authentic, diagnostic, formative, and summative assessment tools to drive education plan
- MEC-North does not have a formal model for monitoring teacher use of student assessment
- There is an imbalance of student instruction (i.e. providing a high focus on “low-level” students and special needs students)

Underlying Reasons for Performance

MEC-North has identified causes for the school's level of academic growth in math in their fourth through sixth grade program. Some of these issues have been resolved; the rest have driven the Performance Management Plan. Our plan, while given a math bias in this document as per the data analysis, is readily translatable in several elements to maintaining student growth in reading and will be implemented with strict assurances that reading Standards are not marginalized.

Reason 1: TEACHER QUALITY (instability of a classroom including faculty members' weak instruction and lack of organization)

Concern: The Median Growth Percentile (MGP) started to decrease in 2006-2007 when there was a faculty change (the original teacher returned to teaching 1st - 3rd grades and was replaced by another Montessori certified teacher). After three years with MEC, the new faculty member was found to be lacking in organizational skills, including record keeping and tracking of student progress. Moreover, the students did not receive consistent instruction on basic math skills. This faculty member's contract was not renewed for the 2009-2010 school year.

The other classroom of concern is lead by a veteran teacher. She recognizes her lack of integrating Montessori lessons with State Standards, unbalanced teaching time (focused on low-level students), and ineffective use of assessment tools to drive decision making. And, although she is a veteran teacher, she is eager and open to being trained and evaluated to continue her professional growth. In turn, MEC has realized that we need to keep growing our veteran teachers professionally and provide opportunities for them to learn and implement new strategies and techniques. We will continue to observe and give coaching and feedback and not merely rely on years of experience to equate to best practices and performance.

It is evident that a priority must be given to immediately establishing a protocol regarding teacher performance when data shows they are not growing their students. Montessori teachers, in their multi-age classrooms, stay with the same students from fourth through sixth grade. Although this continuity maximizes teaching and learning time (students do not spend time every year getting to know new teachers, classrooms, and entire new peer groups), it becomes that much more important to have intervention strategies in place.

Strategy: Implement Teacher Performance Plan (in the event that a group of students does not show academic growth in one year)

Reason 2: ALIGNMENT (not fully aligning Montessori math curriculum to Arizona State Standards)

Concern: When teachers pursue Montessori certification, they carefully document and sequence comprehensive lessons for each of the core curriculum subjects within a series of albums (i.e. math, language, etc.). Our own review has confirmed that these Montessori lessons target many of the same core learning objectives as the State Standards. To be certain, we contracted with Montessori Made Manageable, an organization that specializes in aligning Montessori scope and sequence with state-level benchmarks. Each Arizona State Standard is cross-referenced to Montessori curriculum for 4th - 6th. Our contract involved the purchase of an alignment of the MEC program with Arizona State Standards. Although every teacher was given this alignment, MEC-North had not adequately worked with teachers to ensure that this alignment was used to inform their instruction activities and programs. Furthermore,

we had not provided professional development to an extent that produced teachers deeply familiar with the State Standards and how the school's curriculum aligns with those standards across subjects. And, in this case, math suffered.

Strategy: Provide professional development regarding Montessori curriculum alignment with Arizona State Standards in math

Reason 3: ASSESSMENT (not fully and consistently utilizing authentic, diagnostic, formative and summative assessment tools)

Concern: Montessori schools, by nature, rely heavily on authentic assessments as mentioned earlier. Our teachers are trained specifically in observation techniques so they learn to recognize and address individual learning needs, thereby decreasing the likelihood of student failure or lack of challenge. But, through our analysis of AIMS growth deficiencies, MEC-North has recognized the need to provide training for teachers on refreshing their skills in observation, authentic assessments and understanding how to use diagnostic, formative and summative assessments in addition to observation. Our commitment to inform and guide teachers as they make instructional decisions throughout the school year must be renewed.

Strategy a: Expand and reinforce understanding, creation, and analysis of authentic, diagnostic, formative and summative assessment tools

Strategy b: Expand utilization of the results from AIMS testing to inform decision making

Reason 4: ACCOUNTABILITY (MEC does not have a formal accountability model for assessment)

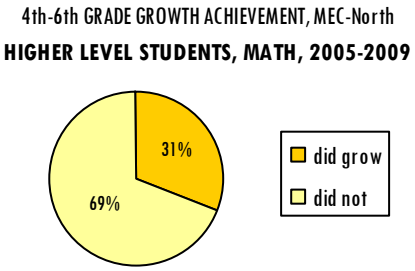
Concern: Although we confirm that the fourth through sixth grade teachers use assessments in their classroom, these have not been consistent between the two classes. There has not been a protocol established regarding what types of assessments MEC-North uses, how they are used, and a timeline for their implementation. This void includes underutilization of the child study team. Colleague observation sessions of select students during work time are the first steps to establishing a child study team (a teacher goes into another classroom to observe a specific student and meet with that student's teacher to discuss strategies to help achieve growth). The resulting discourse can act as a forum for sharing assessment practices, as well aiding colleagues in addressing challenge areas. This process often applies to helping address lower-level students' issues while keeping higher performing students challenged (thus, a child study team also applies to the BALANCE OF INSTRUCTION section below).

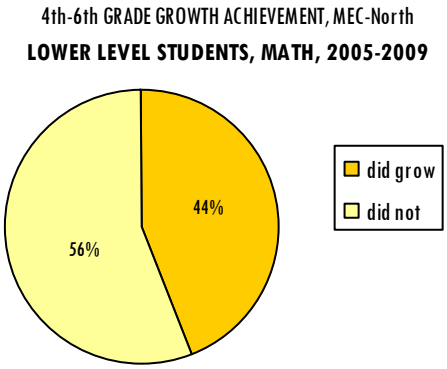
Strategy: Establish a model for monitoring teacher use of student assessments

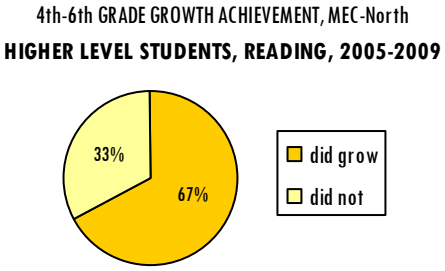
Reason 5: BALANCE OF INSTRUCTION (providing a disproportionately high focus on "low-level" students and special needs students)

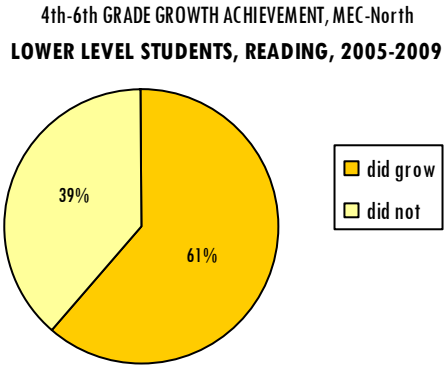
Concern: Although it is MEC's goal that every child receives the individualized education they need, this cannot always be the case. Over the past four years, teachers at MEC-North have been focused on growing students whose level of achievement did not match others in their grade. This approach organically evolved as the population of lower-level students was disproportionately high in both 4th - 6th

classrooms. These students are identified mainly through an existing or potential Individual Educational Plan (IEP) or as manifest in emotional and/or behavioral issues. Even though the students that met or exceeded Standards were and continue to be given a rich learning experience, there was not a strong emphasis on making sure teachers continue to challenge higher-achieving students. These students are identified mainly through teacher assessments. Their continued growth was perhaps limited in regard to reaching their full potential to perform in accordance with State Standards. The graphs below indicate percentages of students who achieved growth in either 4th – 6th grade classroom as opposed to those of a similar academic level that did not. The size disparity of the graphs indicates the proportion of students of similar academic level.









Strategy: Ensure balanced math instruction time per student

As a part of our mission, Montessori Education Centre sees to the growth of students at every level in myriad areas. We are pleased, therefore, that our state is focusing on growth in assessing achievement rather than specific, static results. The Montessori philosophy stresses an educator's focus on the process of student learning rather than the product of their knowledge. *Our* process for growth improvement was initiated with a workshop by the Arizona Charter Schools Association on the four foundational elements and has developed through data acquisition and analysis, as well as focused self-reflection, and now is on a progressive path to improvement and refinement through marked and purposeful strategies. It is our desire and commitment to raise our North campus's 4th – 6th grade Median Growth Percentile from 25 to 45 by 2014. Furthermore, we intend to have a comprehensive and measureable assessment protocol, which we are calling the Growth Assessment Program (GAP), implemented fully in both 4th - 6th grade classrooms at MEC-North by 2013.