



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/>
2021-2022

The following individuals assisted in creating this plan:

Individual	Title
Tami Brooks	Library Media Specialist
Mary Allison Fitzgerald	8th Grade Language Arts/VTSS Coach
Kimberly Forch	World History Teacher
Matt Giles	Assistant Principal
Kelly Holmes	Principal
Kristin Maddox	School Counselor
Kim Hunnicutt	6th Grade Language Arts
Lisa Laub	Earth Science Teacher
Tracy Slaughter	Lead Special Education
Linda Zabloski	Math Teacher



Today's Learners, Tomorrow's Leaders

School Profile/Demographic Information

Status for Most Recent School Year		Student Population Percentages			
Total Enrollment	380	Poverty	48.6%	Other	9.5%
Attendance Rate	75.7% of students missed less than 10%	White	72.6%	Special Education	7.3%
Graduation Rate	NA	Black	15.7%	English Learners	.2%
Accreditation Status	Accreditation Waived	Hispanic	2.0%	Gifted	10.5%
Title I Model <small>Schoolwide Program (SWP) Targeted Assistance (TA) Not Applicable (N/A)</small>	NA	Asian	.2%		

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	1	2	1
LA	6	1		1	4	1
Science	4			3	1	2
History	4			2	2	
SPED	5		1	1	3	1
PE	3	1		2		

Exploratory	4	2	1		1	
Foreign Lang	1		1			
Library MS	1				1	
School Counselor	1		1			
Admin	2			1	1	
Secretary	2			2		
Custodian	3	1		1	1	
Paras	10	5	1	2	2	4
Total	51	11	6	16	18	9

Executive Summary

Division Demographic and Curriculum Overview

Amherst Middle is a small rural school in Amherst County located off of State Route 60 and Gordon's Fairgrounds Road, roughly two miles east of the town of Amherst. Amherst Middle School has a student enrollment of 380 students. The campus of Amherst Middle School offers beautiful views of the Blue Ridge Mountains and is home to a single story brick building housing 3 wings for 6th, 7th, and 8th grade. Our campus offers an outdoor track with a center athletic field at the back of our grounds and a series of tennis courts in the front of our building. Our students, faculty, and staff are expected to hold true to the values of our "Big Three"; being responsible, respectful, and resilient. The Amherst Middle School family diligently seeks to ensure our students are successful and remain Respectful, Responsible, and Resilient while they are Amherst Middle School Cougars.

Amherst Middle School is a Virginia Tiered System of Support (VTSS) school, where we utilize a framework and strategies based on data driven decisions to establish academic, behavioral, and social-emotional supports for students to create an effective learning environment for all students. Essential elements of the framework we utilize 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.

Prior to the state of Virginia waiving accreditation due to COVID-19, Amherst Middle School was fully accredited. Our current administrative team has been in place since the 2018-2019 school year. The current administration has worked to improve and maintain staff morale in many ways as well as work to improve upon student perception of our school climate and student achievement in a variety of ways during unprecedented times.

Our current school schedule is built around a four 90 minute block day. We have two alternating weeks, where Friday serves as either an A or B day to offer a consistent amount of time to each course.

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. Advanced 8th grade students participate in an A/B day alternative day year round Reading course.
- 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 years Standards of Learning math test, they are enrolled in a Math 7 remediation course. 8th grade students are enrolled in Pre-Algebra or Algebra 1.
- Sixth grade students are enrolled in Life Science, 7th grade students are enrolled in Physical Science and take the Science 8 Standards of Learning test. 8th Grade students are enrolled in either Earth Science or Pre-Advanced Placement Earth 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 at all grade levels who are enrolled in Advanced Math are also enrolled in a Robotics/STEM class.
- Students who are identified as Talented and Gifted (TAG), are enrolled in the TAG class for the year.
- 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 2021-2022 school year, a strong emphasis is being placed on improving student achievement in English/Reading and Math for all students who have suffered from COVID slide and trauma associated with school closures due to COVID. We will monitor our student growth through data collected from MAP Tests, 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 and Math teachers 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. As well, 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.

Extended Learning Opportunities – Before, During & After School

Before school activities offered to our students include Tin Men, for male students, and Rubies, for female students. These programs offer student support in areas related to character development and “The Big Three” of Amherst Middle School. Students attending the Tin Men and Rubies programs will also support community events and offer community service.

Amherst Middle School teachers regularly meet with students during their own lunch and planning block to provide help for individual students. Students with an Individualized Educational Plan, with accommodation for a resource class, have that course built into their academic schedule. As stated in the Amherst Middle School Curriculum Overview section, students identified as Talented and Gifted participate in a TAG class taught by the Talented and Gifted coordinator to extend education opportunities in the content areas they are identified in as talented and gifted.

Students will also have the opportunity to attend the after school Cougar Academy. This program is created to assist students with missing assignments and test preparation. The program is scheduled for December 7, 2021, through May 5, 2022, and students will meet on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Amherst Middle School will offer extended learning opportunities during an after school intervention program for reading and math. The program is scheduled for fourteen weeks from January 10, 2022, through April 21, 2022. Students will be invited to the after school remediation program based on grades and MAP assessment scores. Amherst Middle School also offers after school STEM and Drama programs once a week.

In addition to our before, during, and after school extended learning opportunities, we also offer a remedial summer school program for rising 6th through rising 8th graders. As well as an enrichment math bridge program for rising sixth grade students who are taking Advanced Math 6 during the summer term. This past summer program was very successful as we had 60 students attend this program.

Amherst Middle School offers a variety of opportunities to individuals who have expressed an interest in Education as a career. Amherst Middle School specifically offers internship opportunities for students from Amherst County High School, who are given the opportunity to work closely with students, teachers, and faculty at Amherst Middle School. Amherst Middle School is also fortunate to have the opportunity to work closely with surrounding Colleges and Universities. These collegiate level partnerships open the doors of Amherst Middle School and extend opportunities to 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 a myriad of professional development opportunities in order to continue to develop and further their professional growth. Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) exist at Amherst Middle School and include Content/Department and Grade Level PLCs. Content/Department PLCs are offered monthly and are led by the Principal's designated department lead, who also serves on the School Leadership Team. Grade Level team meetings, which meet weekly, work to enhance teaching practices of educators through collaborative planning and work to create a learning environment for all students to succeed within.

Needs Assessment Process

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 Amherst Middle School has moved into updating and writing the Continuous School Improvement Plan for the 2021-2022 Academic Year, it has become apparent that the comprehensive needs assessment used to initially begin this process provided information which has been drastically altered due to ramifications of COVID-19. Individuals involved in the comprehensive needs assessment included central office administration, building administration, teachers, and school counselor. The identified areas of strength and areas for improvement from the initial comprehensive needs assessment appear to be a solid, yet basic foundation, an overall need for improvement in scores in both reading and math was evident and which will be utilized to build from due to changes required from COVID-19. However, it is believed that a more current comprehensive needs assessment will need to be performed

in the near future to best serve the students, staff, and other stakeholders of Amherst Middle School. This belief is supported by the fact that the decisions made here, now, and in the near future will impact Amherst Middle School students, staff, and other stakeholders for the foreseeable future.

Needs Assessment Findings – Areas of Strength

There are some terrific things happening at Amherst Middle School. Areas of strength noted in the previous 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 use of independent reading time at the beginning of each class.
- Evidenced through Standards of Learning tests, MAPTests, Qualitative Reading Inventory, a variety of Student Growth Assessments, teacher created assessments, and QRI Summary sheets.

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.
- The consistent use of programs such as International Xcellence in Leadership during math remediation class.
- Evidenced through Standards of Learning tests, benchmark tests, iReady, International Xcellence in Leadership, 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.

Science:

- The implementation of experiments and increasing skills of making measurements, identifying variables, applying methods of inquiry.
- A more collaborative and supportive approach for implementing the Science Fair.
- Increased collaboration and vertical alignment as a department and amongst the 6th and 7th grade teachers who split teaching Life Science curriculum.
- Evidenced through Standards of Learning tests, benchmark tests, Student Growth Assessments, tier sheets, end of course tests, and common assessments.

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 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.

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).

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 CReating Independence through Student-Owned Strategies training for non- reading teachers.

Safe and Orderly Environment:

- Participation in VTSS
- 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.
- Implementation of 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

Although Amherst Middle School is doing great things, there are always areas in which to improve upon. The past needs assessment identified the following areas in which we could improve.

English:

- Absences continue to hurt students' performance creating gaps in instruction.
- Grammar/Writing skills being taught in isolation do not transfer to finished writing products.
- Due to discontinued 5th Grade writing Standards of Learning tests, students continue coming to 6th grade unprepared for middle school English Language Arts expectations.
- Evidenced through Standards of Learning tests, Student Growth Assessments, and QRI Summary sheets.

Mathematics:

- Absences continue to hurt students' performance creating gaps in instruction.
- 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:

- Figuring out ways to support students that struggle with vocabulary in the curriculum.
- Students with poor reading skills affect their ability to answer questions and apply higher level thinking.
- Evidenced 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 are sacrificing 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 staff in implementation fidelity of VTSS framework.
- Inconsistent adherence to teacher expectations for following guidelines concerning student safety, cellphones, hall passes, dismissal procedures, etc.
- Lack of 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.
- Inability to participate in the Amherst Christmas Parade with an Amherst Cougars Themed float due to Covid.

Schoolwide Reform Strategies

Strategies that Administrators and instructional staff will provide for Amherst Middle School students to meet challenging academic standards include utilizing research based instructional practices identified by Hattie and Marzano such as setting and posting objectives, providing positive reinforcement while maintaining high expectations, providing a wide range of opportunities for students to summarize and take notes, opportunities for direct instruction and individualized instruction, and higher level questioning strategies that support student development of student metacognition. Teachers will also closely monitor academic data for student performance and proper placement of students for differentiated and tiered instructional opportunities. Student achievement should be seen in improved performance on a variety of different performance based tasks including but not limited to teacher created formative and summative assessments, student created projects, student writing products, etc. Improved student behavior will be encouraged through the implementation of the Virginia Tiered System of Support and Positive Behavioral Supports for students. Administrators and members of the VTSS team will analyze data to evaluate the effectiveness of instruction and student growth, which should be demonstrated by positive student behavior. Identified action steps will directly assist with schoolwide reform strategies. All strategies will be analyzed for effectiveness through data collection, data analysis, and management of classroom strategies to promote active, engaged learning opportunities for all students.