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To: Board of Education  
From: Dr. PJ McGinnis and Denise Harwood  
Re: Academic Services Update  
Date: October 16, 2024

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Members of the Board of Education,

We have started the year off with a strong academic focus. Our staff throughout the district has been engaged in excellent, continuous work that should result in growth for our students. We have strategically focused learning around new teachers, professional learning communities, iReady, and competency based learning.

We have 24 teachers in their first or second year of teaching. All of these new teachers are going through the Best Practices workshops and are being supported by the District Instructional Coordinators and building leaders.

We have a systematic process to look at instruction and data in grade level or district teams. This process occurs in our Professional Learning Communities (PLC). Although PLCs are not new to Smithville, we have spent some time retraining teacher leaders and administrators on the required components of the process. Building PLC teams meet weekly or biweekly to look at data.

This year, our benchmark diagnostic assessment has switched from NWEA to iReady. This benchmark is given 3 times a year to all students in grades K-8 for reading and math. The data from the assessment will be analyzed and tracked to see growth in each student over the course of the school year. Teachers will use this data in PLC meetings to determine what instructional strategies or interventions need to be put in place.

Finally, our largest chunk of new learning has been centered around competency based learning. This is the largest district wide initiative the district has implemented in several years. Competency-Based Learning (CBL) promotes equitable student outcomes by establishing clear proficiency targets aligned with state standards. By utilizing proficiency scales to enhance clarity, instruction becomes more effective and impactful, while students gain a better understanding of their progress and increase agency in their learning. CBL aims to drive academic student growth and cultivate the attributes outlined in Smithville's Portrait of a Graduate.