Columbus Municipal School District
Pathways Initiative
Columbus Municipal School District

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A message from the Superintendent:

Dear Families, Staff, and Community Members:

On behalf of the Board of Trustees and the entire Columbus Municipal School District (CMSD), I am pleased to present this overview of our Pathways Initiative.

Pathways provides the framework for all of our district-wide efforts to improve teaching and learning, provide first-rate academic and enrichment opportunities, and prepare every student for college and career success. The challenge before us is to change fundamentally the way we educate kids in the 21st century. Our education system must always be looking ahead to the future – anticipating the skills our students will need to achieve after high school – rather than relying on the practices of the past. This plan is built on the premise that college and career readiness begins at the elementary level, starting in kindergarten. Therefore, we are introducing programs and activities that add context to students’ learning, giving them a sense of purpose and understanding about real-life application.

Our approach is simple: We want to help every student plan his or her path – to graduation, college, and a meaningful career. Along the way, there are many important decisions to be made. Parents and students need to be informed about their options so that they can make the right choices to stay on the road to success. All students will begin 9th grade with a Personal Graduation Plan (PGP) that includes selecting one of five “endorsements,” similar to choosing a major in college. We also have raised the bar for graduation requirements, giving students the opportunity to earn a customized diploma that signifies a “Distinguished Level of Achievement.”

This publication also outlines four priority areas to ensure successful implementation of the Pathways Initiative: academics, social-emotional learning, technology, and professional development. At the core of these strategies is a new instructional model that is more student-centered, based on a personalized learning environment. We are fortunate to have outstanding educators across the district who have begun to embrace a new approach that emphasizes collaboration and active learning to develop students who are more engaged and responsible for their own learning.

I am grateful to all of the teachers, administrators, and parents who have helped to develop this plan. We look forward to your continued feedback and involvement. Together, with ongoing support from the CMSD community, I am confident that we will ensure that all students achieve excellence.

Sincerely,

Dr. Philip W.V. Hickman
Superintendent
PLAN YOUR PATH: KINDERGARTEN THROUGH GRADUATION

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The Columbus Municipal School District (CMSD) has embarked on a dramatic shift in the way students progress from kindergarten through high school. Students who are in ninth grade during the 2015-2016 school year – the Class of 2019 – will be the first CMSD graduates to experience an entirely new personalized learning path to graduation. The members of this class, along with all current elementary and middle school students, each will develop a customized set of college and career goals and chart a course of study to achieve those goals.

The Pathways Initiative is designed to prepare our students for great success after high school, equipped with the knowledge and skills needed to be competitive in the 21st century. Through first-rate instruction, innovative curricula, and state-of-the-art learning environments, students will be immersed in core subjects, as well as an exciting new array of elective offerings in career-themed topics.

To ensure the success of this bold new approach, CMSD is investing in four key district priorities: academics, social-emotional learning, technology, and professional development. Together, they set the stage for a remarkable educational experience for all of our students.

Welcome to Pathways, and welcome to a bright future for the young scholars of Columbus.
Here at CMSD, we believe that college begins in kindergarten.

Elementary School

THE PATHWAYS INITIATIVE creates new opportunities for our youngest students to begin discovering a broad range of subjects to explore and pursue in greater depth. That does not mean first graders have to decide which career path they will choose, but rather, that it’s never too early to help students understand how their learning today will prepare them for success after high school.

Our students begin their academic career at one of five elementary magnet schools, spanning pre-kindergarten through grade 5, each focused on a year-long magnet theme in addition to the core curriculum. Parents may choose to enroll their child at any one of the schools, based in part on the student’s interest and aptitude in the subject matter:

- Cook Fine Arts Magnet School
- Fairview Aerospace and Science Magnet School
- Franklin Medical Sciences and Wellness Magnet School
- Sale International Studies Magnet School
- Stokes-Beard Technology & Communication Magnet School

At each grade level, students complete age-appropriate projects to demonstrate mastery of the content, using electronic portfolios to capture their work. Students also participate annually in career exploration activities through university, business, and industry partnerships aligned to each school’s magnet theme. Academic competitions – such as speech and debate tournaments or science fairs – give students opportunities to showcase their learning to the broader community.

By the end of grade five, students will be proficient in subjects and careers related to their school’s magnet theme.

Across all elementary magnet programs, we are infusing a deep focus on STEM / STEAM learning – Science, Technology, Engineering, (in some cases, Arts) and Mathematics – to ensure that all students gain essential skills and knowledge to be competitive in the future. Students will develop a foundation in these areas through Project Lead the Way (PLTW) Launch, designed to help students become more effective problem solvers and critical thinkers.

To put our students on an early path to success, CMSD is one of only six school districts in the country to pilot at the elementary level the use of Naviance, an online platform for building college and career readiness, aligning students’ strengths and interests to post-secondary goals. The tool enables schools to develop personalized success plans for each student, offering exposure to college and career opportunities and strategies for academic achievement.

Our elementary schools now offer block scheduling in both Reading/Language Arts and Mathematics to provide students with additional learning time to master these core subjects.
Building on a strong academic foundation developed in elementary school, Columbus Middle School students will continue to chart a course of study aligned to their college and career goals.

**Middle School**

**STUDENTS BEGIN GRADE 6** with a year-long **magnet immersion course**, designed to expose students to all of the magnet themes offered at the elementary level: aerospace, medical sciences and wellness, fine arts, technology and communication, and international studies. All students will continue to progress through Project Lead the Way, specifically the middle school program PLTW Gateway, taking required foundational courses in Design & Modeling and Automation & Robotics, infused into existing science courses.

During the middle school years, students will work closely with their parents, teachers, and counselors to develop a **Personal Graduation Plan** (PGP) – a roadmap to graduation and success after high school. In developing this plan, students will choose one of five **endorsements**:

- STEM
- Business and Industry
- Arts and Humanities
- Public Services
- Multi-Disciplinary

These endorsements, similar to an academic major in college, comprise a series of electives around a particular career theme. They are offered in addition to the standard menu of electives at all middle grades, such as band, drama, physical education, and the SPIRIT gifted program. In grades 7 and 8, students will produce an authentic end-of-year project to demonstrate mastery of the content in their particular area of study.

Evidence of student learning is further captured electronically through a virtual portfolio. Continued use of the Naviance platform provides important data and tools to keep middle school students engaged and on track, including a career interest inventory to help accelerate their exploration of career fields.

Block scheduling continues in middle school, with additional instructional time in all Math and Reading / Language Arts classes. In addition, students can now earn up to five high school credits during middle school by taking advanced classes in Math, Social Studies, Spanish, and other subjects. Students who are not meeting academic goals receive personalized interventions and supports.
THROUGHOUT HIGH SCHOOL, students will continue to be guided by their Personal Graduation Plans, working closely with teachers, counselors, and parents to select courses and programs aligned to college and career goals.

The Distinguished Level of Achievement sets a new standard for graduation from CMSD, as well as an expectation that all students can perform at this level of excellence. In addition, particular academic achievements – such as dual credit, dual language, top scores on AP, SAT, and ACT exams – will be acknowledged on customized diplomas. The new diplomas also will show that students have earned a nationally or internationally recognized business or industry certification.

All endorsements include an advanced Math course, an advanced Science course, and electives related to the endorsement the student chooses.

Entering ninth grade students will begin their high school career in the new Freshman Academy, with an intense focus on reading mastery, digital and math curricula, as well as a special education curriculum. Freshman Academy is designed to strengthen students’ foundational skills along with deeper exploration and personalized learning.

The high school years include: traditional block scheduling; STEM education through Project Lead the Way; and Naviance to support the college research and application process.

Pathways also introduces a new type of high school diploma for our graduates: the Distinguished Level of Achievement. To receive this honor, students must fulfill requirements in four areas:

- 24 credits in core subjects: English, Math, Social Studies, Science, etc.
- 5 endorsement credits in STEM, Business & Industry, Arts & Humanities, Public Services, or Multi-disciplinary
- 21 hours of dual credit or 6 Advanced Placement (AP) courses
- 2 years of Foreign Language

A student’s educational career at CMSD culminates with graduation from high school. The Pathways Initiative is designed to provide a more rigorous course of study from pre-kindergarten through grade 12, with greater opportunities for students to choose their path to college and career success.
Plan Your Path

Endorsements
- STEM
- Business and Industry
- Arts and Humanities
- Public Services
- Multi-Disciplinary
Personal Graduation Plan

Distinguished Level of Achievement

Career

College

Graduation

HIGH SCHOOL
FIRST AND FOREMOST, the young people of our community are scholars. They are tomorrow’s scientists, executives, civic leaders, inventors, educators, and artists. We must instill in all of our students – beginning at a very young age – the confidence and conviction that they can achieve whatever goals they set for themselves. At the same time, we must help students make connections between their learning in school and practical applications later in life. At CMSD, we are committed to making learning rigorous and engaging from kindergarten through high school, offering students a wealth of opportunities to study, explore, discover, and excel.

The centerpiece of our academic work is a new, district-wide 21st century teaching model. To prepare our students for the future, we must resist old ways of doing business, including obsolete methods of teaching and structuring classroom lessons. CMSD teachers are embracing a more student-centered approach that combines group instruction with personalized activities adapted to the needs and learning styles of each student.

This innovative teaching approach encourages students to take ownership of their learning and to have a stronger voice in the subjects they study and the projects they undertake. It emphasizes hands-on learning, designed to foster problem-solving and critical thinking skills essential to college and career success. Students also become drivers of their own learning through the use of personalized data folders, which allow students and teachers to set goals and measure progress toward meeting standards.

We have begun to establish High Impact Centers in classrooms, modeled on “blended learning” research, in which small groups of students rotate among a series of classroom stations that feature teacher-led instruction, small group work, independent practice, and technology.

The Pathways Initiative provides consistent reinforcement of college and career awareness and readiness at all levels. Given the dramatic changes in the global economy and workforce, we have to prepare our students to be highly qualified for the jobs of tomorrow. Therefore, Pathways places great emphasis on STEM and STEAM study and careers, particularly through participation in Project Lead the Way from K-12. We are equipping our high schools with state-of-the-art facilities, such as SMART labs and STEM labs at Columbus High School and a robotics lab at McKellar Technology Center. High school students also operate a television station, creating programming that airs on the local network WCBI.

With expanded access to dual credit programs, more of our students are earning college credit while in high school. Participation in this program increased by 38 percent in just one semester, with students taking college-level classes at East Mississippi Community College and Mississippi University for Women. McKellar offers engineering
courses and a pre-nursing class, the only one of its kind at a career and technical education school in Mississippi.

CMSD is the first school district in Mississippi to partner with VIF International Education, as Sale Elementary School and Columbus Middle School become VIF Global Schools.

This program requires a school-wide commitment among teachers, students, and administrators to build global competence, integrating technology, cultural literacy and other 21st century skills into everyday classroom instruction, including collaboration with schools in other countries. By taking students on a virtual journey around the world, we are preparing the next generation of leaders who will think, work, and communicate in an international context.

In addition to a wealth of opportunities during the school day, CMSD offers a rich variety of after-school programs at all levels to keep students active and engaged — including athletics, arts and music, debate, student government, volunteerism, and much more.

To ensure the achievement of all students, we also provide targeted supports and interventions to students who are struggling or who fall behind in their learning. Critical safety nets at all levels, including innovative use of technology solutions, are designed to help students get back on track.

The former Columbus Alternative School is now Success Academy, which features three components:

- An overage program for middle and high school students who have repeated academic years;
- A short-term suspension program to keep students on track academically during suspensions of 10 days or fewer; and
- An alternative center providing academic and behavior support to students needing a different learning environment.
Social-Emotional Learning

In addition to academic learning, it is essential for our students to develop skills to form and sustain positive relationships; experience, manage, and express emotions; and explore and engage with their surroundings—all in a healthy learning environment. The Pathways Initiative includes a variety of programs to strengthen social-emotional learning at all levels in every school.

The 4R’s of Character Development

We want our students to cultivate values, morals, and life skills from pre-kindergarten through graduation. Thinking about the qualities we expect adults to demonstrate, we adopted “the 4R’s” to instill in our students throughout their time in CMSD:

- Responsibility
- Respect
- Responsiveness
- Resourcefulness

Our teachers will teach the 4R’s by example in the classroom, while also rewarding students who exhibit these qualities through the Learning Earnings and Caught in the Act programs.

IN EVERY PRE-KINDERTGARTEN THROUGH GRADE 2 CLASS, students will watch 10-minute animations from WonderGrove Kids featuring vignettes of typical classroom situations, followed by discussions among the teacher, students, and counselors about the social and emotional values demonstrated in the video.

Students also will create their own videos in animation studios at Stokes Beard Elementary and Columbus Middle School. Using the studios’ green screens, professional cameras, and computer graphics and editing tools, students can star in their own productions about appropriate behavior.

The Caught in the Act program empowers teachers to reward students for displaying the 4R’s: Respect, Responsibility, Responsiveness, and Resourcefulness. Schools highlight students getting “caught in the act” of positive behaviors in order to reinforce these values among all students.

Through the Learning Earnings program, teachers can award credits to students who are “caught in the act” of positive behaviors. Students maintain the credits throughout their K-12 education and can redeem them for rewards and prizes in the Learning Earnings school store.

In order to develop academically, physically, socially, and emotionally, students must enjoy nutritious meals during the school day. CMSD participates in the National Lunch Program, providing every child a healthy breakfast and lunch at no charge.
Technology

Technology has the power to transform the way we educate our students and teachers, and here at CMSD, we pride ourselves in providing the latest technology in our classrooms and trainings. Innovative digital tools are making classrooms more interactive, state-of-the-art learning environments.

TO ENABLE STUDENTS AND STAFF to connect to digital tools during and after the school day, Columbus has prioritized Wi-Fi access in classrooms and the community, including buses and public spaces such as parks. CMSD also has launched a new district website and mobile app to keep families and staff up to date on the latest news, announcements, events, and information about our schools.

Our technology strategies also rely on students and staff having state-of-the-art devices and skills to access digital content. CMSD is investing extensively in computer hardware, software, training, and support, including:

- iPads in Pre-K to Grade 5: two-to-one ratio (two students per device)
- HP laptop computers in Grades 6-8: two-to-one ratio
- MacBook Airs in Grades 9-12: one-to-one ratio in Freshman Academy, projected one-to-one ratio in all high school grades by 2018
- Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) program at the middle and high school

In addition, CMSD has invested in a number of classroom technology solutions to equip our teachers and students with digital resources to enhance learning and data management.

- The online platform FishTree provides real-time assessment and feedback to students. FishTree provides students with a digital “exit ticket” to denote mastery of content, including opportunities to learn and relearn for continuous improvement.
- Naviance is a comprehensive college and career readiness solution that helps align our students’ strengths and interests to post-secondary goals and improve student outcomes.
- InformationNOW (iNOW) from Chalkable is an electronic grade book, scheduler, and data management tool that makes managing student, teacher, administrator, and staff data faster and more reliable.
- Engrade helps teachers manage daily classroom activities, integrate curriculum content from academic management systems, deploy and score custom assessments, and view district-wide student assessment data.
- Intervention periods are embedded into school schedules to help students build content mastery. During this time, programs like Direct Instruction, Study Island and Istation are used to enrich learning and remediate for students who are falling behind.
- Teachers also are expanding use of open education resources (OER), gaining access to shared teaching, learning, and research resources available under legally recognized open licenses, with the ability to reuse, revise, and redistribute in collaboration with teachers around the world.
Professional Development

There is no lever more critical to our students’ academic achievement than outstanding classroom instruction. Therefore, we have adopted a relentless focus on training and supporting great teachers, particularly through high-quality professional development.

JUST AS WE ARE CHALLENGING TEACHERS to adopt new approaches to instruction, we as a school district are creating more innovative, practical approaches to professional development. The longstanding “sit and get” model of teacher and administrator training has proven to be neither effective nor sustainable. Therefore we are adopting a more collaborative, interactive model, in which our educators learn from one another, particularly from their peers who have demonstrated success.

CSMD professional development strategies include the following:

• Teachers identified with particular skills and best practices are selected as district master teachers to lead professional development sessions district-wide in order to build capacity across the board.

• Teachers are trained as building-level teacher coaches to provide mentoring and support to colleagues within their schools.

• Small groups of teachers participate in learning walks, taking time during the school day to go from classroom to classroom observing other teachers in action – to observe and to replicate effective classroom strategies.

• Both within school buildings and across the district, we are establishing professional learning communities (PLC), groups of educators who meet regularly to share expertise, compare practices, and work together to improve teaching and learning.

• Every school leader has been assigned a principal mentor from an external partner agency to receive weekly full-day, real-time coaching in instructional leadership.

• CMSD University consists of half- and full-day academies for all staff from the district, in which educators choose sessions most relevant to their needs and interests.

• In addition to these opportunities for staff, CMSD is developing learning activities for parents and community members, to build their capacity to support our students in achieving their goals.
How to Support Your Child’s Education

ALL LEVELS

- Make sure your child comes to school on time every day.
- Schedule your child’s appointments outside of the school day to avoid absences.
- Maintain strong lines of communication with your child, talking frequently about what the student is learning in school.
- Set a daily routine, including a regular bedtime that affords your child adequate sleep.
- Schedule parent-teacher conferences on a regular basis.
- Volunteer at your child’s school, and get involved in parent decision-making opportunities.
- Talk regularly at home about college and careers, and encourage your child to aim high. Stress the importance of school success in meeting college and career goals.
- Visit college campuses.

MIDDLE SCHOOL

- Accompany your child to meet with his/her counselor to develop a Personal Graduation Plan.
- Help your child select one of the five endorsements and choose electives based on his/her career interests.

HIGH SCHOOL

- Review with your student information about endorsements and other requirements to graduate with a Distinguished Level of Achievement.
- Encourage your student to:
  - Keep his/her grades up. They affect future opportunities now more than ever before.
  - Request tutoring if he/she needs it. Teachers are here to help.
  - Meet regularly with his/her counselor to set and monitor college and career goals.
  - Earn college credits in high school by taking Advanced Placement (AP) and dual credit courses, as well as passing AP exams.
  - Take electives based on his/her career goals and interests.
  - Register and prepare for SAT and ACT exams, and take other steps to prepare for college admission.

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

- Select a magnet elementary school with a theme most suited to your child’s interests.
- Read with your child and encourage your child to read on his/her own.
CMSD Schools

**ELEMENTARY**

Cook Elementary School
2217 7th Street North
Columbus, MS 39705
662-241-7180
Fine Arts Magnet School

Fairview Elementary School
225 Airline Road
Columbus, MS 39701
662-241-7140
Aerospace & Science Magnet School

Franklin Elementary School
501 3rd Avenue North
Columbus, MS 39701
662-241-7150
Medical Sciences & Wellness Magnet School

Sale Elementary School
520 Warpath Road
Columbus, MS 39702
662-241-7260
International Studies Magnet School

Stokes-Beard Elementary School
311 Martin Luther King, Jr. Drive
Columbus, MS 39701
662-241-7270
Technology & Communication Magnet School

**MIDDLE**

Columbus Middle School
175 Highway 373
Columbus, MS 39705
662-241-7300

**HIGH**

Columbus High School
215 Hemlock Street
Columbus, MS 39702
662-241-7200

McKellar Technology Center
810 North Browder
Columbus, MS 39702
662-241-7290
Career and Technical Education

**K-12**

Columbus Success Academy
(formerly Columbus Alternative School)
924 20th Street North
Columbus, MS 39701
662-241-7400
Excellence All Over

“One Team, One Columbus”