



Patterns of Progress

Marion School District | 2017-2022

DISTRICT ORGANIZATION

- Adopted the **Hybrid Academic Calendar**, creating an earlier start date for the school year and providing for 2-week rejuvenation breaks between each 9-week session throughout the school year. The move was in response to research supporting the educational benefits of a shorter summer and additional breaks throughout the school year.
- Established **three new magnet schools** in the district that offer students and parents a wide choice of options for their elementary experience:
 - **Herbert Carter Global Community Magnet** shapes young scholars into future leaders by integrating rigorous academics with high expectations in an environment rooted in global awareness and competence. Students learn Spanish as a second language beginning in kindergarten. Teachers infuse reading, writing, math, science, and social studies into learning that promotes teamwork and the development of leadership skills.
 - **Marion Math, Science & Technology Magnet** uses innovative strategies to engage the inquisitive child. The curriculum offers opportunities for hands-on learning experiences involving both mathematics and science labs. Students make mathematical, plant, and animal science discoveries using models they can touch and manipulate. Coding, cyber security, 3D printing, drones, sports science, and other state-of-the-art STEM-based educational techniques are woven into the state-mandated curriculum.
 - **Marion Visual & Performing Arts Magnet** offers an exciting academic curriculum to creative students while also stressing the core academics. Through visual arts, dance, drama, and music, students cultivate problem-solving, time management, teamwork, and effective communication skills. Students are encouraged to express creativity through a variety of energizing platforms that foster the development of critical and innovative thinking skills, including plays, art exhibits, drama, and musical productions. The rich history of Arkansas Delta art, music, and dance are also emphasized.
- Created the **"7th-Grade Experience,"** a campus and tailored program dedicated solely to 7th-grade students providing a uniquely enriching experience and a great bridge from elementary to junior high.
- Established the **Marion School District Foundation, Inc.**, a 501(c)(3). This entity is designed to bring many existing booster clubs and fundraising efforts under one coordinated umbrella. The focus of this foundation is to raise funds for innovative programs and activities that enhance the educational experience, both in and out of the classroom, and create opportunities for students and faculty that enrich the quality of life for our greater community. Membership in this group represents leadership from throughout the communities that MSD serves.
- Received **more than 640 School Choice applications** since 2017.

FACILITIES

- Successfully campaigned for a **5-mil tax increase** to provide up to \$25 million for improvements throughout the district.

Completed projects include the following:

- State-of-the-art playgrounds at all three magnet schools
- New modern entryways at all school campuses, including access controls at most locations
- New field turf and press boxes at Premier Bank Stadium (football field)
- Surface upgrades (floor tile, paint, door repair, ceiling tile replacement, etc.) at all district facilities
- Hundreds of security cameras installed in schools and on buses
- More than 100 new rooftop HVAC units and more than 400,000 square feet of roof coatings, district-wide
- Updated teacher workrooms on each campus
- Outdoor learning space at MHS
- Restroom modernization at HCGC
- State-of-the-art greenhouse construction at MST
- Office renovation at VPA
- Parking lot repairs district-wide
- Electrical upgrades district-wide
- New field turf at First National Bank of Eastern Arkansas Stadium (baseball field)
- Upgraded furniture at all three magnets

Ongoing/upcoming projects include the following:

- Physical education building at HCGC
- New softball field (and training facility) at the Marion Recreational Complex
- New soccer fields on Rica Road
- New paved road connecting L.H. Polk Drive with the MHS Fieldhouse
- Upgrades sound systems at both the Marion Performing Arts Center and MHS
- Courtyard improvements at MHS
- Outdoor learning space at MJHS and the 7th-Grade Experience
- Office renovation at MST
- Vape sensors installed in school bathrooms
- 100+ additional HVAC units district-wide

Additionally, the new PE building at HCGC will allow the district to donate the old Marion School Gymnasium building to the city of Marion, creating a new home for the **Sultana Disaster Museum**.

- Created **facility naming/sponsorship program** to raise funds for the MSD Foundation. To date, sponsorships have been secured for the football stadium, baseball stadium, basketball arena, and volleyball arena, generating \$65,000 a year over the next five years.

ACADEMICS

- Implemented the **Edmentum Exact Path** program as our interim assessment tool. After taking the diagnostic, this tool provides a learning pathway for each student, pinpointing specific strengths and needs in reading, language arts, and math. Dedicated time is built into the school day to give students time to improve skills, work on deficient areas, get additional support from teachers, and work in small groups.
- Earned acceptance into the sixth cohort of the state's **Professional Learning Communities at Work** program for VPA. Through this project, VPA will be matched with a certified PLC at Work associate from Solution Tree, a national professional development provider. Staff will receive

intensive on-site support as they implement and sustain the PLC at Work program over the next three years. This involves creating an action plan focused on increasing student achievement through aligned curriculum, formative assessment practices, and proven instructional strategies.

- Accepted into the **PEER (Promoting Educator Effectiveness in Rural Arkansas) Network**, a partnership with the Arkansas Public School Resource Center (APSRC) and the Crowley's Ridge Educational Service Cooperative (CRESC). The network will provide incentive funding through multiple pathways. The PEER Network is supported by a federal Teacher and School Leader grant that was awarded to APSRC. All schools in the district will participate in the opportunities afforded by this grant.
- Adopted two new **literacy curricula** for the district. For kindergarten through 6th grade, the curriculum is "Wit and Wisdom" from Great Minds. Wit & Wisdom is a comprehensive English curriculum developed by and for teachers that centers on the study of rich and engaging texts, curated to build student knowledge and enhance their reading and English language arts by incorporating literature, history, art, and science. For grades 7 through 9, the curriculum is "My Perspectives" from Savvas, which is a powerful English language arts curriculum that values the perspective of the learner, collectively and individually, and provides a learning experience that promotes higher achievement and develops the competencies needed for college and career readiness. Curriculum options were based on the approved list of literacy curricula that is provided by the state. Teachers attended vendor presentations and voted on their choices. These new curricula will be implemented in the 2022-23 school year.
- Added **School Improvement Specialists** at all buildings. School Improvement Specialists provide support for administration in all areas with an emphasis on curriculum and instruction.
- Created a **critical reading program** for students in grades 7, 8, and 10. Through an extensive screening process, students are identified as struggling readers and are placed in this year-long class for intensive intervention.
- Partnered with Arch Ford Educational Service Cooperative to create a non-traditional way for students to graduate from high school. In the **HUB program**, students are identified and referred for placement. Qualifying characteristics that indicate the presence of at least two barriers hindering their success in traditional programs are identified.
- Partnered with Arch Ford Non-Traditional Learning (AFNTL) services to offer an innovative, flexible, and proven model for success in **Alternative Education**. This program offers a safe environment enriched with social/emotional classes, behavioral and mental health support, individual action plans, and numerous reinforcements to assist students in becoming the best versions of themselves.
- Created **Discovery, The Talent, Enrichment, and Acceleration at Marion (TEAMS), Honors, and AP offerings** in compliance with the Arkansas State Guidelines for Gifted and Talented Education.
- Added a team of **seven facilitators** who specialize in literacy, math, science, and technology. These facilitators work with teachers on developing strong curriculums and effective classroom practices. A team of three dyslexia specialists and four interventionists provides individualized instruction for students who are struggling. Together, this team creates an effective support system for both teachers and students.
- Implemented the **science of reading** as a part of the RISE initiative. All teachers are trained in the science of reading to expand their understanding of how students learn to read and become better

readers. As an important component of this effort, a daily “no excuses” protected reading time has been established on each magnet campus.

- Added the **JAG program** and a **JAG specialist** to provide career and technical students with the skillset needed to graduate from high school and obtain meaningful employment.
- Launched an innovative new **coding curriculum** in grades 8-12 to provide students an opportunity to complete industry-recognized certifications while still enrolled in high school.
- Launched the MHS **cybersecurity program** and marked a new way of thinking about the relationship between public education and computer science and emerging employment opportunities.
- Awarded the **21st Century Grant**. This \$660,000 grant serviced students in grades 7-12 and provided instruction and enrichment outside of the school day, as well as transportation to and from school. Programs offered included ACT prep, tutoring, financial literacy, eSports, robotics, Spanish, beginning piano lessons, and art.

SCHOOL PROGRAMS/ATHLETICS

- Won the **2022 5A State Baseball Championship**, the first state title in baseball in school history. The team finished the season with 16 straight wins, prompting the popular high school sports websites maxpreps.com scorebooklive.com to rank Marion as the No. 1 baseball team in the state, regardless of classification.
- Dramatically expanded the size and scope of the **Marion band program**. This included the hiring of a veteran band director and new investments into the program. As a result, the band program has completed two historic seasons that saw the ensemble earn the ASBOA Sweepstakes Award, first-division ratings at regional and state assessments, and more than 70 All-Region Band selections. In 2022-23, more than a dozen band alumni will be attending college on band scholarships. The marching band has more than doubled in size over this time and is expected to include as many as 150 students in the fall of 2022.
- Re-established and expanded the **MHS and MJHS robotic teams**. Competing in 2022 for the first time after a two-year Covid hiatus, the MHS team took 9th out of 19 teams at regional competition and traveled to Alabama for a competition sponsored by the U.S. Air Force and NASA.
- Established an **eSports team**, one of the first of its kind in our region. This included the creation of a dedicated eSports lab, which consists of 30 high-performance, personal gaming computers. The Patriots have already advanced to the quarterfinals of state competition twice.
- Introduced several **new clubs and activities** at the secondary level, including Drama Club, Quiz Bowl, Debate, and F.O.R. Club (an anti-bullying organization).
- Improved **athletics facilities** across the district, providing state-of-the-art, college-level venues for student-athletes. Projects include:
 - Completed baseball stadium renovations, including new artificial turf, new stadium seating, and a new scoreboard. Also included is a new baseball hitting facility with locker rooms and a state-of-the-art video hitting program.
 - Complete renovation and upgrade of four weight rooms for 7-12 athletics.
 - Renovation of the volleyball gym (3M Transit Arena), including updated locker rooms.
 - Renovation of the track and field facilities, including new high jump and pole vault mats, new hurdles, and new long jump/triple jump pits.

- Installation of new field turf at Premier Bank Stadium.
- In-progress softball stadium renovations, including new artificial turf, new stadium seating, and a new scoreboard. Also included is an on-site dedicated softball training facility.
- In-progress construction of a new practice field for soccer/football on Rica Road, across from Premier Bank Stadium.
- Hosted the **5A State Volleyball Tournament** in 2021, bringing 16 teams into the community and providing a boost to the local economy.
- Achieved unprecedented athletic success during the 2021-22 school year, sending **five different sports teams to the state semifinals or beyond** – becoming the only school in Arkansas (in any classification) to achieve this milestone. Teams reaching the semifinals included volleyball, football, boys basketball, girls basketball, and baseball. (The baseball team won the state championship.) Two other teams, softball and girls soccer, were state qualifiers. Additionally, the Patriots girls doubles tandem reached the state semifinals in tennis.

STAFF DEVELOPMENT

- Launched the **Patriot Academy** to ensure that teachers who are new to the district have all the resources they need to be successful. The program utilizes multiple days of professional development in which new teachers tour the district, learn about the Patriot culture, gain classroom management tips, build a cohort of colleagues who can support one another, and more.
- Provided **raises for faculty and staff** in multiple phases, including the 5-mil tax increase and the state's Salary Equalization Funding. Through this work, as well as the creation of an updated district salary schedule, MSD now offers the **sixth-highest starting teacher pay** among Arkansas districts (behind only Springdale, Bentonville, Fayetteville, Rogers, and Lakeside).
- Developing a new **"Productivity Plan"** for district employees that will provide additional compensation for teams and workgroups who achieve specific goals. This compensation will not be tied to the district salary schedule, and the model will be funded using independent revenue sources such as ESSER and other funding streams.
- Obtained two **Act 1240** waivers from the State Board of Education, which were effective beginning with the 2020-21 school year and will last for five years. One waiver waived teacher licensure requirements, while the other waived the public school fair hearing act for those employees who are hired under the teacher licensure waiver. The district was the first traditional K-12 public school in the state to be awarded the two waivers together. The waivers provide for greater flexibility in hiring practices as MSD works diligently to add diversity and local knowledge to its talent pool of educators.
- Created a **Teacher Cadet Course** to provide a curriculum-based, hands-on approach to educate students on the requirements to become successful teachers and enable students to put their knowledge to work through a classroom internship.
- Developing plan to convert to **payroll every two weeks** for district employees. Designed to facilitate more convenient monthly budgeting for staff members, the plan is expected to go into effect in the summer of 2022.

DIVERSITY

- Implemented an aggressive **talent/diversity recruitment plan** that continues to produce new leadership in a wide range of positions. This talent recruitment model produces a wide variety of

extremely talented administrators, classroom teachers, coaches, and other staff members who have chosen to join MSD who otherwise may have never considered MSD as a good fit for their talents.

- Increased **the number of certified minority staff** members from 49 in 2017-18 to 95 in 2021-22. This represents a growth from 17% to 29% of our district total.
- Added **minority leadership** in several key district-wide administrative positions including the following:
 - Director of student services
 - Director of special services
 - District supervisor of instructional data
 - Athletic administrators (2)
 - Principal at MJHS
 - Assistant principal at MHS
 - Assistant principal and dean of students at MJHS
 - Assistant principals at MST (2)
 - Assistant principals at VPA (2)
 - Assistant principal at HCGC
- Increased efforts to **recruit minority teachers from other fields of work**, taking advantage of the state's alternate teacher certification programs

STUDENT SAFETY & WELLNESS

- Partnered with East Arkansas Family Health Center and opened a **school-based health clinic** to provide both physical and mental care for all students and staff members. The SBHC averages 100-150 visits per month.
- Hired a **director of campus safety** and seven campus safety officers to improve district safety.
- Installed **cameras and lighting** throughout the district to improve campus safety. Over 158 cameras have been configured, installed, and deployed across each campus.

COVID-19

- Led a statewide effort to **allow Arkansas public schools to utilize face coverings** as a way to mitigate the spread of the Covid-19 virus. The district joined with the Little Rock School District in a lawsuit challenging the state's ban on mask mandates. Winning an injunction in the case, the district successfully implemented a mask mandate during the worst of the Delta Variant surge. This move resulted in a dramatic drop in the number of students and staff who were forced into quarantine, as well as a drop in the number of students and staff testing positive for the virus.
- Successfully weathered **multiple phases of the pandemic** through the use of a remote learning option in 2020-21 and ongoing mitigation strategies including social distancing, use of face coverings, surface cleaning, and CDC-recommended quarantine protocols. In 2021-22, the district **returned to full in-person learning**.
- Held a series of **free vaccination clinics** to promote Covid-19 vaccinations and boosters for staff, students, and the community at large.
- Launched a **summer school program** in 2021 to address learning loss brought on by the pandemic. More than 200 students participated in the program, building reading, math, and language skills.

- Delivered **nearly 50,000 meals** to students during the school shutdown in the spring of 2020. During the 2020-21 school year, more than 100,000 weekend meals were delivered to students to ensure quality nutrition.

COMMUNICATIONS

- Entered into an agreement with **Mascot Media** to live-stream numerous athletic and student events via a district website and app. Through this work, football, volleyball, basketball, baseball, softball, and soccer competitions are broadcast, as well as other events including MHS graduation and band and choir concerts. The partnership with Mascot Media also provides an opportunity to showcase local businesses during broadcasts, with each Patriot Partner receiving a custom commercial as part of their package agreement.
- Bolstered district communications with the hiring of **a full-time director of communications and two communications specialists**. The team is charged with improving overall district communications, marketing Marion schools to families in the community, and strengthening the Marion School District brand across the region.
- Partnered with Flex360 to create a **marketing plan** to increase awareness of the Marion School District in Crittenden County and across the region, specifically targeting families who may move into the region through new economic development projects in the region. The plan utilizes social media advertising, search-engine optimization, and streaming video ads.
- Working with Cherry Street Productions, a Helena-based firm, to create **a series of promotional videos** spotlighting the district and the community.
- Launched a revamped **district website** to communicate district information more efficiently to parents, students, staff, and the general community.

STUDENT SERVICES

- Created a **food distribution program** to serve district families facing food insecurity. Utilizing a \$30,000 grant from the Arkansas Food Bank, the program provides meals to families every week. In 2021-22, more than 350,000 pounds of food were given away, supporting more than 800 households.
- Successfully campaigned to meet the criteria for inclusion in the federal **National School Lunch Program** for the first time in district history, ultimately producing \$1.5 million in additional annual funding to better provide for the needs of our students. This revenue made possible the hiring of instructional facilitators, school resource officers, a district health coordinator, computer lab teachers, and more. Funding is also used to pay for technology and additional days worked by our team of school counselors.
- Outsourced **food services** for all district students which increased food sales by 59% in the first year.
- Implemented **HERO**, an education data system, used to identify students with characteristics that may predict the need for early intervention services.
- Hosted third-generation **Japanese Chef John Sugimura**, who shared Japanese cuisine and culture with students as part of the "Tasting Japan" tour sponsored by Taher Inc., the company that

manages the district's food service program. The program provided authentic cultural insights for our students.

BUSINESS OPERATIONS

- The payroll department **converted hourly payroll processing from a paper-based to an electronic system**, streamlining it from clocking in and out on an electronic time clock to imported data entry in eFinance. Printed direct deposit notifications were replaced with emailed PDF versions, saving the district time and money.
- Human Resources added an **electronic onboarding system** to process new employee paperwork. The eFinance Employee Access Center (EAC) was added allowing employees anytime, anywhere access to paystubs, tax forms, and leave information.
- A purchasing department was created to **implement centralized purchasing**, including a multi-level review and approval process to better align purchases with district priorities and ensure compliance with district, state, and federal procurement requirements. The new purchasing process changed from paper-based to electronic document storage. Purchasing cards were added as an optional method of paying for district purchases, especially staff training and student and staff travel.
- Accounts payable **converted 80% of payments to electronic payments**, speeding the delivery of funds to vendors and saving the district the cost of printing and mailing paper checks. This also increased the accuracy of our vendor database by consolidating multiple vendor records into one per vendor and verifying vendor contact and tax reporting information.
- Activity accounting was **consolidated into eFinance and the district's checking account**, eliminating the need to maintain multiple checking accounts and accounting records in dual systems. A standardized activity accounting chart of accounts was added for consistency across all schools.
- The district's **budget preparation process** moved from different paper-based methods for each campus and department to the eFinance budget preparation module, ensuring a data-driven approach to preparing the budget for the upcoming fiscal year. The new budgeting process is one that more equitably distributes limited funding across all campuses and all students, while also implementing new fiscal controls ensuring we are not using resources just because "it's the way we've always done it." Because all budget and expenditure data is in the same system, continuous monitoring ensures that campuses and departments adhere to assigned budgets.
- Created a **disaster recovery and continuity of operations plan** to comply with current Arkansas Legislative Audit requirements and ensure the district's ability to continue essential business functions in the event of a disaster situation.
- After decades of using a private firm to audit the district's financial books, the district switched its auditor to **Arkansas Legislative Audit**, saving the district tens of thousands of dollars each year and producing an audit report that is widely accepted as the "gold standard" for public agencies in Arkansas.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

- Modernized the **district's data network**, including installing a new generation wireless network to support an explosion of new computing devices.
- Installed a **local firewall** to enable the district to secure its network from malicious actors on the Internet.

- Converted the district's disparate **telephone systems** into one district-wide system based on modern voice-over-IP technology, while slashing the cost of the system by two-thirds.

HONORS

- Kelly Fogleman, district school health coordinator, named **Arkansas School Nurse of the Year** by the Arkansas School Nurse Association.
- Sean Gray, an MHS teacher and coach, named **Arkansas Computer Science Teacher of the Year**.
- Awarded the College Board AP **Computer Science Female Diversity Award** in back-to-back years. This award recognizes schools that are closing the gender gap and engaging more female students in computer science coursework in AP Computer Science Principles and AP Computer Science.
- Earned a series of national awards for the **Marion Patriot Activities Network**, including Best Sports Network and Best School-Run Broadcast Team in 2021; and Event of the Year, Play of the Year, and Best School-Run Broadcast Team in 2022.
- Monty Hill, MHS director of bands, was a national quarter-finalist for the **Grammy Music Educator Award**.
- Received the **Reading Horizons Charlotte Lockhart Award**, a national award given to a district that exemplifies dedication and perseverance in the teaching of reading.
- Earned "**Best Communities for Music Education**" designation from the NAMM Foundation.
- The **Marion Gifted & Talented program** was spotlighted by the Arkansas Department of Education for its efforts to ensure equity in identification by extending Whole Group Enrichment across grades K-6 to identify and serve the gifted population.
- Received "**Best Mannered Teacher**" awards for two teachers, Christie George of HCGC and Kelly Phillips of MJHS. The awards were presented by the National League of Junior Cotillions, Arkansas Delta Chapter.
- Superintendent successfully navigated a serious case of **Covid-19**, a **heart attack**, and **knee replacement surgery**.