



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/>
2022-2023

The following individuals assisted in creating this plan:

Individual	Title
J. Kelly Holmes	Principal
Matt Giles	Assistant Principal
Kristin Maddox	School Counselor
Mary Allison Fitzgerald	Teacher
Kim Hunnicutt	Teacher
Kim Forch	Teacher
Tracy Slaughter	Teacher
Tami Brooks	Librarian/Media Specialist
Sarah Coleman	Teacher
Lisa Laub	Teacher
Wanda Smith	Supervisor of Math, Science, Gifted, and Elective Programs
Stephanie Moehlenkamp	Supervisor of School Counseling
Dr. Lisa Schoener	Science Curriculum Specialist



School Profile/Demographic Information

Status for Most Recent School Year		Student Population Percentages			
Total Enrollment	345	Poverty	44.6%	Other	7.5%
Attendance Rate	22	White	71.5%	Special Education	16.2 %
Graduation Rate	NA	Black	16.2%	English Learners	.5%
Accreditation Status	Accredited	Hispanic	4.3%	Gifted	9.3%
Title I Model <small>Schoolwide Program (SWP) Targeted Assistance (TA) Not Applicable (N/A)</small>	NA	Asian	0.5%		

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



Foreign Lang	1				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 an Amherst Tiered System of Support (ATSS) 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.

For the 2021-2022 school year 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 faculty and staff are very active in community events and are proud of our yearly Veterans Day Celebration and Veterans Garden.



Our current school schedule is built on a 7 period day with classes lasting fifty minutes. 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.
- 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 , and Geometry..
- 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 who are identified as Talented and Gifted (TAG), participate in TAG classes..
- 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 2022-2023 school year, a strong emphasis is being placed on improving student achievement in English/Reading. Additional support will be offered to students in the Virginia Department of Education subgroups of black, economically disadvantaged, and students with disabilities, for Reading. We will monitor our student growth through data collected from 2021-2022 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 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 and to utilize the school adopted lesson plan template.

Our Amherst Tiered Systems of Support (ATSS) team along with our attendance team will monitor daily attendance and support students and families to ensure that we provide our students with an understanding of the importance of being responsible students, faculty, and staff. Amherst Middle School will utilize the Amherst County Public Schools attendance plan and resources provided by the VDOE Office of School Quality Collaborative Learning Cohort focused on Chronic Absenteeism.



Extended Learning Opportunities – Before, During & After School

Before school activities offered to our students include opportunities for students to work independently with teachers in tutorial type programs offered based upon student need. Another opportunity for our students to participate includes IRON Lives. This program offers student support in areas related to character development and “The Big Three” of Amherst Middle School. Students attending the IRON Lives 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 January, through May and students will meet on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays. Amherst Middle School will offer extended learning opportunities during and after school intervention program for reading. The program is scheduled for fourteen weeks from January 10, 2023, through April 20, 2023. Students will be invited to the after school remediation program based on grades and Virginia SOL Growth Assessments. 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.

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 or bi-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 we began the Comprehensive Needs Assessment for the 2022-2023 school year we reached out to our AMS stakeholders for their assistance. Our team consisted of general education teachers from each grade level and content area, SPED teachers, curriculum specialist and district administrative liaisons. Our team visited the [Virginia Continuous School Improvement Process \(VACSIP\)](#) website, provided by the Virginia Department of Education, multiple times, to educate our team and to start the CSIP process by guiding and building our Comprehensive Needs Assessment. The CNA process required our team to analyze data which had been collected, begin to collect data to be used as evidence in the creation of our CNA, and to collaborate while continually analyzing multiple data sources in order to create resolutions to specific, modeled questions from the Virginia Department of Education. Those questions are as follows:

- What are we trying to accomplish?
- What changes can result in improvement?
- How will we know that a change is an improvement?

As our team worked through these questions we were able to reflect upon, analyze, and identify the needs, priorities, and essential actions needed to begin the creation of our VACSIP. We are excited to work through this process and thankful for the opportunities it presents for cyclical reflection and potential for growth and improvement.

Needs Assessment Findings - Areas of Strength

There are great things happening at Amherst Middle School. Areas of strength noted in the 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 opportunities for independent reading time at the beginning of each class.



- Evidenced through Standards of Learning tests, Qualitative Reading Inventory and Summary Sheets, a variety of Student Growth Assessments, and teacher created assessments.

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 hands-on activities to meet the requirements of the addition of leaves in the new curriculum framework from the VDOE.
- Hands-on activities to increase laboratory skills such as performing measurements and problem solving skills.
- A more collaborative and supportive approach for implementing the Science Fair, which has now become our science expo event. The science expo not only includes science class participation, but also STEAM Club. This event is a school-wide approach to science and engineering.
- Increased collaboration and vertical alignment of lessons as a department and amongst the 6th and 7th grade teachers who split teaching Life Science curriculum.
- The implementation of Science Learning Collaboration (SLC) to improve student success and use performance assessments and data to drive instruction.
- The addition of lab skill classes is being implemented by our science teachers and Dr. Lisa Schoener to improve upon our students measurement and problem solving skills.

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). ATSS in Amherst County Public Schools.

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

Safe and Orderly Environment:

- Participation in ATSS
- 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



English:

- Absences continue to hurt students' performance creating gaps in instruction.
- Economically disadvantaged students struggled to demonstrate mastery on the Spring Reading SOL test per expected VDOE student performance..
- Students with disabilities struggled to demonstrate mastery on the Spring Reading SOL test per expected VDOE student performance.
- Black students struggled to demonstrate mastery on the Spring Reading SOL Test per expected VDOE student performance.
- 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:

- Students with poor reading skills affect their ability to answer questions and apply higher level thinking by emphasizing scientific vocabulary building.
- Strengthening student's laboratory skills.
- Gathering additional evidence 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 some staff in implementation fidelity of ATSS framework.
- Inconsistent adherence to teacher expectations for following guidelines concerning student safety, cellphones, hall passes, dismissal procedures, etc.
- Lack of substitute 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 be asked to provide evidence of lesson planning which will include these strategies as well as skill focus areas for our Tier One student population. 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 ATSS 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.

Our school attendance team will also work closely with administrators and parents in an effort to lower the number of chronically absent students throughout the 2022-2023 academic year.

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.

Goals and Action Steps

Please contact the building administrator if you would like more information about the Comprehensive School Improvement Process.