

2023-24 ANNUAL REPORT



School of Options and Applied Research Middle School



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SOAR MS BACKGROUND



The School of Options and Applied Research opened its doors in the Fall of 2013. SOAR Middle School was created by a committee of over 30 members made up of school staff, community members and parents looking at ways to improve student learning within the Northland Pines School District. The work of the committee and the support of the Northland Pines School District and its Board have made the dream of SOAR MS come true! SOAR's approach to education is through Project Based Learning (PBL). This instructional methodology encourages students to learn and apply academic content and skill through the development of a well-designed project. In projects, students learn how to apply knowledge to the real world, and use it to solve problems, answer complex questions, and create high-quality products. We believe students need to be able to think critically and solve problems, work well with others, and manage themselves effectively.

This annual report is intended to share our year at SOAR MS. If you have any questions or comments please feel free to contact Carie Nordine, SOAR MS Principal, at canordine@npsd.k12.wi.us or 715-547-3619. We also invite you to visit, our door is always open! We believe that one of the best ways to learn more about SOAR MS is to see it in action!



Education is not the learning of facts, but the training of the mind to think.

-Albert Einstein



MISSION AND VISION

SOAR MS MISSION AND VALUES

The SOAR MS Mission is to inspire learning through student directed projects, service experiences, and the application of 21st century skills.

SOAR MS VALUES:

- Empower students to reach their innate intellectual, creative and leadership potential
- Prepare students academically and socially to make positive contributions to an ever changing global society
- Engage students in learning outside of school walls through authentic experiences
- Promote student, family and community engagement



NORTHLAND PINES SCHOOL DISTRICT MISSION:

The Northland Pines community guarantees rigor, relevance, and relationships to prepare all learners for life.

NORTHLAND PINES SCHOOL DISTRICT VISION:

All learners will thrive in inclusive and welcoming environments.

23-24 DEMOGRAPHICS

At the close of the 2023-24 school year, the enrollment was 41 students (see chart). SOAR MS is comprised of students in grades 5th, 6th, 7th, and 8th. At the time of this publication we are expecting to open in the Fall of 2023 with 44 students. We will continue to advertise additional openings in all grades to reach our target capacity.

GRADE	#	NOTES
5TH	8	
6TH	16	
7TH	11	*1 student moved out of the area 12/23 *1 student moved out of the area 11/23
8TH	6	*1 student transferred to NPMS 1/24
TOTALS:	41	

Charter schools often get characterized for taking all the “leaders” or the “high achieving” students of the district. SOAR MS’s goal is to have similar demographics reflective of the NPMS district and avoid a homogenous student pool. While SOAR MS populations do not precisely mirror Northland Pines Middle School, we are close in achieving that goal in terms of students with disabilities, those who qualify for free and reduced lunch, and attendance rates (see chart). SOAR MS has no set template or criteria to describe a typical student. However, they all have one thing in common-- they choose to be at SOAR MS!

SCHOOL	% STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES	% STUDENTS WITH ECONOMIC DISADVANTAGE	RATE OF ATTENDANCE
SOAR MS	5%	51%	94%
NPMS	12%	45%	93%

ENROLLMENT TRENDS

The enrollment trend data for SOAR Middle School over the past 11 years reveals intriguing patterns regarding student retention. Analysis of the data indicates that a fair portion of students choose to stay at SOAR Middle School for the entirety of their middle school education. This demonstrates the positive experience and satisfaction students have with the school's environment and academic programming. On the other hand, the data also suggests a portion of students opt for premature transfers to Northland Pines Middle School or other alternatives. While the reasons behind these transfers may vary, it could be attributed to factors such as changing family circumstances, relocation, easier access to sports and interest in other academic programming. Monitoring and understanding these enrollment patterns can aid SOAR Middle School in refining our programs, addressing potential areas for improvement, and ensuring that students receive an optimal educational experience throughout their middle school years. Please note the following data points:

187 Total Enrolled between Fall 2013 and Spring 2024

24% of students left during year 1 or 2, that were not in 8th grade

If students started in 5th grade, but left before 8th grade:

31% left in 5th grade

23% left in 6th grade

44% left in 7th grade

Of the 153 students who were enrolled and already left, they attended SOAR an average of 2.83 years

Of the 171 students who started SOAR in 5th grade:

(35%) 59 attended all 4 years

(19%) 33 attended only 3 years

(14%) 24 attended only 2 years

(16%) 27 attended 1 year or less

(14%) 24 are still enrolled

2023 Fall Grade Levels as percentage of entire NPSD:

5th Grade 10 of 88 at SOAR: 11%

6th Grade 15 of 110 at SOAR: 7%

7th Grade 11 of 101 at SOAR: 11%

8th Grade 8 of 92 at SOAR: 9%

2022 Fall Grade Levels as percentage of entire NPSD:

5th Grade 17 of 112 at SOAR: 15%

6th Grade 9 of 113 at SOAR: 8%

7th Grade 9 of 95 at SOAR: 9%

8th Grade 12 of 108 at SOAR: 11%

HIGHLIGHTS

COMMUNITY SERVICE

Participating in community service work holds great significance for our middle school students, fostering personal growth and cultivating a sense of civic responsibility. Engaging in service activities empowers young individuals to develop empathy, compassion, and a deep understanding of the world beyond their immediate surroundings. By actively contributing their time and effort to meaningful causes, students witness firsthand the impact they can make on the lives of others and the community as a whole.

Service work instills valuable life skills, such as teamwork, leadership, and problem-solving, while nurturing a sense of social awareness and appreciation. Involvement in community service enhances self-esteem and confidence, as students witness their ability to bring about positive change. By immersing themselves in service work during their middle school years, students lay the foundation for a lifelong commitment to service and become agents of positive transformation in their communities.

At SOAR MS, students are required to complete at least 20 hours of community service every semester and 15 hours over the summer. Many of the students have found a passion for service, completing many more hours than required. This year, students volunteered for a wide variety of community needs, including improvements to the NPSD School Forest, Cranberry Fest, NPSD Mission Possible Running Club, local Food Pantrys, Blizzard Blast, and much, much more!



HIGHLIGHTS

FIELD STUDIES

At SOAR MS, we believe that Field Studies are essential to the development of our learners. The value of taking middle school students outside the school building to learn in the natural environment is immeasurable. Field studies offer a unique and enriching educational experience where intentional learning occurs amidst the wonders of the natural world. By immersing themselves in outdoor environments, students develop a deep appreciation for nature.

The hands-on, experiential learning approach stimulates curiosity and ignites wonder, as students witness the marvels of the natural world firsthand. This sense of awe sparks a genuine interest in learning, as students explore and engage with their surroundings. Field studies also promote physical activity, providing opportunities for students to engage in nature walks, collect samples, or participate in interactive experiments. Learning in nature enhances overall well-being, reduces stress levels, and fosters a positive attitude towards learning.

SOAR MS aims to schedule two or more Field Studies per month. Sometimes these trips are as simple as a nature hike through nearby National Forests, while other times they involve a van full of eager middle schoolers navigating the streets of downtown Minneapolis!

If you would like to see pictures and regular updates of these trips please visit:
www.facebook.com/npsdsoar



STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

SOAR ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS (ELA) GOAL

Each year we develop local, building goals, based on current student achievement data. We aspired to reach the following goal for ELA this year: SOAR MS will use best instructional practices and Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) to enhance student learning for all ELA students in the area of Reading. By the end of the year 70% of our students will be proficient or advanced in the STAR Literacy Assessment based on national norms.

ELA PROFICIENCY	SOAR MS FALL	SOAR MS SPRING	ERES/NPMS FALL	ERES/NPMS SPRING
5TH GRADE	63%	50%	57%	57%
6TH GRADE	50%	64%	39%	37%
7TH GRADE	50%	40%	44%	45%
8TH GRADE	50%	80%	49%	38%

Although we did not reach our goal of 70% proficient or advanced, we showed areas of success. For example, our 8th grade students ended the year at 80% at or above grade level proficiencies in Reading. We also gained an enormous amount in terms of developing collaboration as a team, focused on student outcomes. We met on a weekly basis to share teaching strategies, data, and success/challenges.

ELA GROWTH	SOAR MS FALL TO SPRING	ERES/NPMS FALL TO SPRING
5TH GRADE	75%	67%
6TH GRADE	69%	66%
7TH GRADE	45%	65%
8TH GRADE	33%	45%

STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

SOAR MATHEMATICS GOAL

We also strived to reach the following goal for Mathematics this year: SOAR MS will enhance student learning for all students in the areas of Mathematics. By the end of the year 80% of our students will be proficient or advanced in the STAR Mathematics Assessment based on national norms.

MATH PROFICIENCY	SOAR MS FALL	SOAR MS SPRING	ERES/NPMS FALL	ERES/NPMS SPRING
5TH GRADE	63%	50%	61%	60%
6TH GRADE	44%	56%	48%	58%
7TH GRADE	30%	45%	66%	72%
8TH GRADE	86%	86%	67%	71%

Although we did not reach our goal of 80% proficient or advanced, we showed areas of success. For example, our 8th grade students ended the year at 86% at or above grade level proficiencies in Math. We are also proud of the growth that our students achieved from Fall to Spring in Math. Over 94% of our 6th grade students grew in Math!

MATH GROWTH	SOAR MS FALL TO SPRING	ERES/NPMS FALL TO SPRING
5TH GRADE	88%	86%
6TH GRADE	94%	88%
7TH GRADE	82%	82%
8TH GRADE	67%	70%

FINANCIALS

Each spring we design and request a budget for the following fiscal year. We consider equipment needs, travel opportunities, professional development experiences, and school supplies when we plan for our yearly finances. However, there are always additional, often unexpected, expenditures that arise. Throughout the year we report our monthly revenue and expenditures to the Charter School Governance Board for oversight and approval. Below is a Budget summary of funds for the 2023-24 school year:

SOAR MS GENERAL FUNDS BUDGET				
ACCT	DESCRIPTION	DESCRIPTION	BUDGETED 2023-24	EXPENDITURES
410	SUPPLIES	UNDIFFERENT CURRICULUM	\$3,500.00	\$2,985.31
415	FOOD (TRIGS)	UNDIFFERENT CURRICULUM	\$500.00	\$1,024.54
430	INSTRUCTIONAL MEDIA	UNDIFFERENT CURRICULUM	\$2,000.00	\$1,489.75
940	DUES AND FEES	REGULAR CURRICULUM	\$1,500.00	\$1,562.21
342	EMPLOYEE TRAVEL	SCHOOL BLDG ADM	\$400.00	\$303.54
410	SUPPLIES	SCHOOL BLDG ADM	\$500.00	\$310.28
940	DUES AND FEES	SCHOOL BLDG ADM	\$500.00	\$307.50
351	ADVERTISING	PUB INFO	\$300.00	\$846.86
353	POSTAGE	PUB INFO	\$200.00	\$51.83
		TOTALS	\$9,400.00	\$8,881.82
		BALANCE		\$518.18

Below is the ledger of the SOAR MS Fund 21 account for the 23-24 school year. We generate these funds through donations and school fundraisers, such as the Pasty Sale!

SOAR MS FUND 21 BUDGET				
ACCT	DESCRIPTION	DESCRIPTION	DEPOSITS	EXPENDITURES
341	PUPIL TRAVEL	PUPIL TRANSPORTATION		\$238.16
342	EMPLOYEE TRAVEL	REGULAR CURRICULUM		\$278.00
345	PUPIL LODGING & MEALS	FIELD TRIPS		\$1,853.63
410	SUPPLIES	UNDIFFERENT CURRICULUM		\$6,737.05
415	FOOD (TRIGS)	UNDIFFERENT CURRICULUM		\$515.43
940	DUES AND FEES	REGULAR CURRICULUM		\$331.75
21R 600		BEGINNING BALANCE	\$833.62	
		PASTY FUNDRAISER	\$9,496.00	
		OTHER	\$100.00	
		TOTALS	\$10,429.62	\$9,954.02
		BALANCE		\$475.60

PARENT SURVEY



The results of the spring 2024 parent survey, conducted by our District Administrator requested parent feedback on communication this year. This survey was administered to all families within the school community, aiming to gather information about their opinions and suggestions. 3% of the parents surveyed identified as SOAR MS families. See below for a sampling of their suggestions:

“Recommend setting up advocates for students that are afraid to approach a teacher about an issue.”

“More parent involvement (during school hours) options. Allows me to see interactions between my students and others within a school setting. Also allows me to see how I could help my student more outside the classroom to be better involved with the classroom.”

We also surveyed the students this year regarding their experiences and opinions of SOAR MS. We are always looking for student voice and input for ways to improve their educational experience. Based on enrollment data, we were curious if there was more or different programming we could incorporate to better retain our 7th and 8th graders. Below is a sampling of student questions and responses:

What are the benefits of going to SOAR verses a more traditional school?

- SOAR is more fun, you are not limited
- When I was in traditional school I had bad attendance because it was too much, but at SOAR its better because I have Fridays off and now I have good attendance!
- Friends with higher/lower grades. In normal schools everyone would be in the same grade level.
- Choose what you want to learn
- So much more room to be creative. If you research something you are interested in you are more likely to WANT to remember it. Especially if you have to present information to the class later.
- You can excel in math. In traditional school you have to learn at a pace the teacher sets instead of one that fits you.
- It's more hands-on than a normal school. At a normal school we're at a desk all day at SOAR we're able to move around and have an open work space. We're also not learning things that we will never use in the real world. We're learning things that will benefit us in life like who cares if you know all 50 states or every country? At SOAR we lean stuff we will use like fractions, decimals and percents!
- I like how we do the outside the walls day because it gets you to make your own schedule and be responsible for things.
- Because like the dance, someone brought up the idea and we made it happen!
- SOAR really helps a person find knew interests and discover themselves. The learning method isn't for everyone, but personally it really helps me!

RESPONSE TO LEARNING



COLLABORATIVE TEAM MEETINGS

When we set learning goals for the year, we consider the 4 questions of the Professional Learning Community model (see graphic above). We begin by identifying what it is we want to students to know. When we identify the 'what', we consider a variety of data sources, such as: each student's current levels of performance, their interests, and the identified grade level promise standards. Then we create a pathway of learning for them to achieve their goals.

When we collaborate as a SOAR staff, we continuously monitor and adjust each student's goal and progress towards it. At the same time we set the goals, we also identify the criteria for 'how will we know if they know it?'. At SOAR, students demonstrate their learning in a wide variety of ways including: project presentations, oral reports, written pieces, digital displays, artwork, online math knowledge checks, etc.

Once we determine the 'what' and the 'how', that's when our collaboration really ignites! Questions 3 and 4 are critical for individual growth at SOAR, in all levels and subjects. How do we respond to students who already 'know it' and how do we support students who 'don't know it yet'? One of the benefits of SOAR is that we have the flexibility to support students, based on their needs. If a student already 'knows it', we have the opportunity to design individual projects to enhance that student's learning experience. If a student is 'not there yet', we have an opportunity to individually target their needs. We begin with working to meet their needs universally if other students have the same needs, otherwise we move towards small group instruction or 1:1 support. Based on the needs of the students, we might invite other specialists to join our collaborations (Occupational Therapists, Title I Teachers, etc.) to ensure we have the expertise we need to problem solve. We pride ourselves on taking action and doing whatever it takes to ensure students succeed!



SUMMARY

SOAR Charter Middle School recognizes the challenges of meeting the diverse academic and social-emotional needs of our students. However, our school stands strong with a team of dedicated professionals who possess a growth mindset and a resolute determination to overcome any barriers they encounter. The school's commitment to planning with a Universal Design for Learning approach and implementing Collaborative Team structures has laid a solid foundation for success. By analyzing data, SOAR Charter Middle School strives to determine appropriate levels of rigor and support for all students, ensuring that each individual receives the necessary engagement and rigor in their learning journey. With an unwavering dedication to continuous improvement, the school endeavors to provide an enriching educational experience that meets the needs of every student, fostering a stimulating and challenging environment for their growth and development. We are proud of our students and our school. We can't wait to begin again in the fall!



We would like to express our heartfelt gratitude to our Board of Directors for their invaluable dedication to our organization. Your visionary leadership, strategic guidance, and unwavering commitment have played a pivotal role in shaping our success and driving us forward. Your efforts and expertise have been instrumental in guiding us through challenges, making informed decisions, and ensuring the fulfillment of our mission.

President – Emilie Braunel
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