**What does it mean to you to have your school be the winner of the first annual DuFour Award?**

We are truly excited and proud to receive such a prestigious award named after Rick and Becky DuFour. Rick and Becky have provided us the building blocks to our school’s foundation. Their advice, teachings, books, and good humor have made us what we are today. The honor of receiving this award is beyond words and one that we will forever be grateful. We know there are hundreds of Model Professional Learning Communities around the world that are deep into the process of learning and are doing extraordinary work on behalf of children. In the presence of so many amazing schools operating as Professional Learning Communities, we feel very humble. While rewarding, teaching is one of the most difficult professions and just like every school out there we are not immune to the challenges and the everyday ups and downs that all educators experience. This award provides our staff with positive feedback and encouragement that they are indeed focused on and doing the right work. After taking a minute to celebrate, the award pushes us to strive to delve even deeper into the process and to step out of our comfort zone to continue to grow and learn. Still, we have not figured it all out yet; this is a process and we will continue to improve as we learn and do things together.

**Staff responses:**

*When it is understood how highly we regard Rick and Becky DuFour and all they stand for, it's just about the greatest honor any educator could receive. Our successes are directly related to the philosophy they have taught us to live by. We are forever grateful, and not just because of the award, but because of the children's lives we are able to touch because we work in this collaborative way.*

*~Jennifer Deinhart, Math Specialist*

 *When Brian, Diane, and Sherry told us that we had won the DuFour Award, it made my heart sing! In the media, the world of education is often attacked or ill-represented and this can be frustrating. However, when you see all the hard word that your school does and you see it being honored by educational gurus such as the DuFours, it empowers you and your school to continue the charge you are leading. This award inspires me to keep changing the world of education, one day at a time, with the help of my team and the PLC way.*

 *~Stephanie Osborn, 5th Grade*

*Receiving the first annual DuFour Award means being celebrated for the hard work every educator at Mason Crest does each day. It is an honor to be recognized as a model Professional Learning Community and tells us that, while we still have much room for growth and improvement, we’re on the right track to guaranteeing high levels of learning for each and every child. More importantly, however, receiving the DuFour Award means having the opportunity to share our work with educators across the nation (and globe).*

 *~Christina Hunt, 5th Grade*

*Being part of the team that won the first DuFour award means a lot. We work hard to meet the demands of a true PLC, and winning this award signifies that what we do is best for kids.*

 *~Kimberley Mathews, ESOL*

*It is an incredible honor to receive the first annual DuFour award. I think we will all stop for a moment to look at each other, breath and high five, and then roll up our sleeves and dive right back asking ourselves, “Where are we right now and what happens next?”*

 *~Jessie Bagnall, Math Specialist*

*Our school is focused on high levels of learning for all students. We are building a Professional Learning Community of shared knowledge, collaboration and respect. If we do our job well; most people will never know what is going on behind the scenes. We do not look for recognition; we do what is in the best interests of our students. However, being recognized with the DuFour Award is an extraordinary accomplishment.*

*We put a significant amount of time, effort and work into education and growth each day. Our job is not easy but working at Mason Crest and being part of a strong Professional Learning Community makes what we do come as normality. We are dedicated individuals that overcome obstacles every day to just go one step further. The award is a measure of reassurance that we are headed in the right direction. We still have so much that we can improve on as we continuously reflect on our efforts but it helps us see that we, successfully, are striving for our goals together.*

 *~Louise Robertson, Kindergarten*

 *Being the recipients of the DuFour Award means we can continue to push forward in our goal of helping everyone learn at high levels. The recognition is a great honor, but what is more special about the award is that we will be able to continue our work by teaching other schools and teachers about how we operate at Mason Crest. We will be able to learn together as a staff, to ensure we continually put teamwork and quality education at the forefront of our work. And lastly, it means our students will have more opportunities to discover their passions and find their love for learning.*

 *Celia Boltz, General Music Teacher*

**What are some particular benefits that building a strong PLC has had on your school?**

The PLC at Work model has provided us with a clear focus. There are many initiatives and programs that can distract a school from the right work so as school leaders it helps us to stay the course while shielding our staff from work that veers away from the process. We are redundant in our message to teams by continuously reminding them of what is truly important; answering the Four Critical Questions of learning. It has also helped us create a positive culture that is focused on one thing--student and adult learning. With a focus on student achievement comes collective responsibility which in turn helps to build a culture of transparency and trust. Through this trust comes adult learning. We grow as individuals through the strength of the teams and learning from one another. No one is working in isolation and expected to know all the answers. This culture lifts each adult up to be successful which in turn elevates each child to high levels of learning. The benefits of building a strong PLC are never ending and we hope will be seen in the successes of our students as they venture out into the world as contributing adults.

**Staff responses:**

*The number one benefit is just as I mentioned, the children. Nothing compares to the joy and excitement of being a part of a child's growth and learning. In my role as a math specialist, I often take part in a child's learning over many years. And over that time sometimes progress is slow and requires much work on everyone's part. But in the end, when you can see the positive results of our collective work, it makes a difference in a child's life. It's why I am a teacher and why I love my work.*

*But in this process, not only are children learning and achieving, but the adults are growing in knowledge too. As we collaborate, we design and deliver instruction in new and more powerful ways. We are more aware of student needs and better prepared to tackle the challenges we face. And through all of this, our collaborative teaching relationships get stronger and stronger. It's a great feeling to be doing a tough job, but knowing that your teammates are going to be right beside you lifting you up along the way.*

 *~Jennifer Deinhart, Math Specialist*

*From the first day that I interviewed at Mason Crest, I knew there was something very special about this school. From the high energy vibe of the school to the positive outlooks that permeated all facets of school culture, I knew it was a school I wanted to be at. The past three years at Mason Crest have really opened my eyes to all the possibilities that the world of education has to offer. Working in continued collaboration with grade level colleagues, subject area specialists, and support staff has allowed our school to do amazing things that others might call “impossible”.*

*Every day we enter Mason Crest, knowing that our co-teachers, friends, and colleagues will be there for us and for EVERY child in the school. Knowing this allows each and every one of us to take risks, make mistakes, and grow into even better teachers and collaborators. In return, our students are willing to take risks and find success as well.*

 *~Stephanie Osborn, 5th Grade*

*Before coming to Mason Crest, I had never experienced working on teams who set goals and did everything imaginable to reach those goals. Knowing the true meaning and experience of being on a goal-oriented and data-driven team is just one of the benefits from creating a strong Professional Learning Community. Working on such a team has developed a sense of openness and learning-by-doing-and-reporting-back where every person at the table as an important and equal voice.*

 *Another benefit of working as a Professional Learning Community, is the knowledge that setbacks are never failures. The PLC is designed to bring everyone to the table and problem solve a setback head on. When faced with a challenge, I know that I can approach my team members – grade level team and school-wide team – to find the solution. As one teacher, I might not be able to reach every student, but in the Professional Learning Community* ***we*** *can.*

 *Additionally, working in a Professional Learning Community has created mutual trust among team members. We know that by working together we can all learn to be the best educators possible. We trust every team member sitting at the table and know that they are there for our kids. Anything that is shared or discussed is meant to improve the experience our students have when they walk into Mason Crest. Trusting and knowing that each person at my school loves and wants to be the best they can be for our kids is my favorite benefit of coming to work at a Professional Learning Community.*

  *~Christina Hunt, 5th Grade*

*Building a strong PLC has created a culture of trust and open communication. Through this process we can share new ideas and focus on what works for students.*

 ~Kimberley Mathews, ESOL Teacher

*One of the greatest benefits of maintaining and refining a collaborative process is student growth and achievement. We know our students, we know where they need to go, and we are committed to making a plan for how we’ll get them to the finish line. It is not without bumps or bruises, or questions along the way, and it is because of our unfailing trust in each other and our belief in the process of learning by doing, that we live our mission day in and day out.*

 *~Jessie Bagnall, Math Specialist*

*The benefits of building a strong Professional Learning Community for our school culture are endless. However, if I had to pick a few particular benefits I would say 1) the continuous learning for both staff and students in a safe and collaborative environment and 2) the continuous monitoring, analysis and reflection of teaching purposes/data to ensure high levels of learning for all.*

 *We trust everyone at our school. We are continuously learning from each other. Every individual that enters our building has something to teach and something to learn. We help each other expand our knowledge, as well support each other in learning new or adapting to the old. We work as one big team with smaller teams intertwined. We have become comfortable with the uncomfortable, pushing each other to guarantee our success. We utilize all the resources we have in order to better reach all our students. Our collaborative and common planning times allow us to really support each other and create the best practices for all our students.*

 *We strive for high levels of learning for all students and we could not do that without leaning on all staff members and our students. We utilize our data and let that speak for itself. Something we always say is you cannot argue with data; it truly speaks volumes. We use this to drive our instruction. Answering the four essential questions of a Professional Learning Community and discussing with each other what we can do better for our students.*

 *~Louise Robertson, Kindergarten*

*Because being a teacher in a Professional Learning Community means you’re never isolated or working alone, a great benefit has been the ability for all- students and teachers- to take risks. We can try out a new lesson or different way to assess students without having to stress about our failures. Students can work with different teachers throughout the day without having to worry that they’re away from their homeroom teacher and missing something or not receiving the same instruction. Everyone feels safer because we know many people are supporting us. Because of this safe and supportive environment, it gives everyone the flexibility to push the limits, possibly fail, and then get back up and try something different.*

*By creating a strong PLC, we have built a home for the Mason Crest family. Students and staff enjoy being at school because we are surrounded by people who know and care about us. The people around us work hard to accomplish common goals and everyone lends a hand when assistance is needed. The environment at Mason Crest has kept many teachers from giving up when their failures were piling up, and has roused students and encouraged them to grow and continue exploring what learning has to offer.*

*Celia Boltz, General Music Teacher*

**“Learning for all” is a part of your school’s mission statement—it’s a part of our mission statement as well! For Mason Crest, what does it mean to ensure learning for all?**

Each year MCES staff members collectively make commitments to each other for how they promise to behave in order to realize the mission and achieve the vision. The process is continually revisited, refined, and reflected on to ensure that there is a common language, common knowledge and expectations. As a result of this shared mission, our staff is united in the belief that these are all of our students and take collective responsibility in teaching for understanding and expecting students to be both problem solvers and critical thinkers. The emphasis of the work together is to build shared knowledge on how lessons are constructed and best practices in instructional delivery; to hold true to the unified philosophy that all students must be engaged in order to deepen their learning and build a conceptual understanding.

At Mason Crest everyone learns together in order to build common knowledge, common language, and common expectations around how to collectively move forward in a clear, unified way. These are the anchors of our professional development. Mason Crest focuses the bulk of ongoing professional development on learning by doing through grade-level and content specific collaborative team meetings. These teams are made up of classroom teachers and resource teachers working with students at each grade level. Team members are collectively responsible for learning together in order to address the Four Critical Questions of Learning.

1. What is it we want our students to know?
2. How will we know if our students are learning?
3. How will we respond when students do not learn?
4. How will we extend the learning for students who are proficient?

MCES is intentional and inclusive in its approach to adult learning, through co-teaching, observation, and reflection; learning from and with each other. Creating and sustaining a culture of collaboration does not happen by accident. The school’s mission is to ensure high levels of learning for all students and adults, adults are therefore provided with the time and training to perform collectively at high levels.

Each grade level team (classroom teachers, reading/math specialists, special education and ESOL teachers, advanced academics resource teacher, and technology specialist) is a dynamic model of co-teaching, expert coaching and modeling, and small group instruction. There is consistently job-embedded professional development that occurs each time our teams meet and share their knowledge, expertise, skills, and strategies. Together, during weekly planning meetings they plan for instruction to ensure that all students are provided with high quality instruction that is engaging and targeted to meet student needs. Best practices are explored in differentiation and co-teaching based on evidence of student learning. These deeply embedded processes ensure that instruction is targeted to meet the needs of every student. In order to address every student by name and by need, data analysis is fine-tuned, going beyond the score to look deeper and evaluate student work to identify the targeted needs of the learners. Analyzing data in this way helps to determine next instructional steps and future professional development within collaborative teams. Building the foundation of the Professional Learning Community and keeping the foundation strong is an on-going process. This focus leads to success for adults; and therefore, students succeed.

**Staff Responses:**

*It means that we, adults and students, learn through the real work of teams everyday. It means that when we look at the results of our common formative assessments, we look to those areas of weakness and commit to bettering our practices. It means we ask each other for guidance when we haven't been successful, and that we share the tools and resources that support children when there is a success. It means that we often engage in action research to determine the best practices and paths for helping all students learn. This learning we do happens within teams and vertically across teams. We know, that each of us truly has so much to bring to the table, and collectively when we work to find answers, everyone learns.*

 *~Jennifer Deinhart, Math Specialist*

*At Mason Crest, ‘Ensuring high levels of learning for ALL’ means that we truly are advocates for all of our students. At MCES we believe that it is our job to push our kids to levels of success they may have not felt they were capable of, to find out what they are passionate about and integrate it into their learning, and to give them opportunities that will push their thinking outside of the box. Every year we share the idea of “growth mindset” with our students. From literally growing brains in 3rd grade to having Socratic Seminars regarding the brain in 5th grade, we show students that the brain is a magnificent tool that is always growing and developing. Teaching our students this mindset helps them understand why we take learning risks and in turn allows them to reach higher levels of learning.*

*As MCES we also believe in ‘high levels of learning’ for our staff. As educators, we need to take risks, try new things, and be comfortable with the uncomfortable. This is the only way we as educators can improve our craft.*

*~Stephanie Osborn, 5th Grade*

*I think collaboration is by far the most powerful tool to ensure learning for all. At each team meeting, we have a plethora of educators present- classroom teachers, reading/math specialists, ESOL teachers, special education teachers, the advanced academics teacher, and our technology specialist. The power in this is that we are able to think about each student as an individual, rather than as part of an established category, and provide for their needs. It can be easy to think of students as “ESOL students”, “special ed students”, or “advanced learners”, but the reality is that none of those categories are mutually exclusive. By bringing all professionals to the table, we are able to share best practices for different types of learners, ensuring that we are learning from each other and ensuring that our students’ needs will be met to the fullest.*

 *~Morgan Hyunh, Advanced Academics Resource Teacher*

*Learning for all at Mason Crest means EVERYBODY at our school is held accountable for high levels of learning; students and staff. As a team (specialists, classroom teacher, special education teachers, resource teachers, instructional assistants – ALL educators together), we meet and learn best practices to improve our instruction. We use clear vocabulary so that everyone understands and can apply what we’ve learned. Learning for all means all adults learning at high levels so that all of our students can learn at high levels.*

*Thinking beyond the staff, learning for all means that we promise to grow 100% of the students who enter into our school. We set goals for all students, and design special curriculum for those students who need additional time to reach those goals. We also design special curriculum for those students who have exceeded our goals and need to be challenged further. Believing in the motto “Learning for all” to me, means that no one can walk in o Mason Crest and just be a bump on a log. Everyone is working, engaging, and learning each and every day.*

 *~Christina Hunt, 5th Grade*

*To get it right you constantly have to be open to new ways of doing things. Learning for all means you keep learning as an educator and share that learning with others through the PLC process.*

~Kimberley Mathews, ESOL Teacher

 *No question is a bad question! We encourage questions from students, parents, each other, visiting schools…and when we don’t know the answer to a question, we learn together as a result.*

 ~Jessie Bagnall, Math Specialist

*We believe all who walk through our doors are learning; whether they are students, staff, parents, community members, visitors and more. We all have something to learn and we must hold each other accountable. How can we ensure this learning? We have to collaborate and we have to open our doors to all. We enjoy being questioned about our practices because it makes us look more deeply into what we are doing. We can learn from everyone and everyone can learn from us. We are not doing the students in our school justice if we are not always improving our practices and if we are not always striving for high levels of learning for every student. We believe that every student at Mason Crest is our own. Without having everyone on that individual child’s team we will never ensure the highest of learning for them. We must join together and support each other; we must work with families and we always must work with and believe in our students to ensure that learning for all is always taking place.*

 ~Louise Robertson, Kindergarten