



An Ideal Choice for Your District Portfolio of Schools

Ten Years of Success

In just the past 10 years alone, MicroSociety, Inc. (MSI) has helped over 30 districts create unique, award-winning magnet and theme-based schools. The roots of our success are based on the theory that children want to learn and succeed when learning is made relevant to their lives. Using the *MicroSociety* learning environment model, your district can create a magnet or theme-based school that will motivate students to learn, attract and excite parents, and generate sustained commitment in your community while ensuring a high-quality 21st century education for children.

Selecting the Right Theme

Selecting a theme is a significant decision as it directly impacts your school's ability to reduce minority group isolation, attract a diverse student body, and increase student achievement. The information below is provided to enable you and your community to thoughtfully consider the ways in which the *MicroSociety* theme can support your goals of:

1. Providing parents with additional educational opportunities for their children
2. Building a diverse, integrated community within your school
3. Promoting a strong, positive school climate where students, teachers, parents, administrators and community members all work together to advance student academic, social and emotional development
4. Increasing student achievement by meeting and exceeding state content standards and challenging student performance standards
5. Preparing students with the skills, knowledge and dispositions necessary for success in the 21st century
6. Establishing the environment and structures to support professional learning communities that enable teachers to collaborate, share best practices, assess learning applied in real world contexts, and develop their skills as 21st century facilitators of learning
7. Improving district capacity to obtain federal funding and to establish innovative ways to sustain the theme after federal funding ends.

Improving Upon or Enhancing an Existing Theme

A school that already has a compelling theme also has the option to adopt the *MicroSociety* learning environment to improve upon or enhance the implementation of this theme. Using *MicroSociety* as a framework creates a compelling environment for students to understand why their theme is

important to the world outside of school. The *MicroSociety* framework extends an existing theme such as visual and performing arts, for example, when a group of student artists open an art gallery in the main school lobby. A science and technology theme comes to life when student scientists hold a

conference on the impact of global warming as part of their environmental protection agency in the multi-purpose room.

MicroSociety also supports teachers in becoming skillful facilitators of 21st century learning, with an emphasis on multi-cultural integration, and managers of their own learning.

(To see a case study of how the *MicroSociety* theme successfully integrates two themes, see Chocochatti Center for Fine Arts and *MicroSociety*.)

Pedagogical Theme Enhancement Sample Options

MicroSociety & Integrated Thematic Instruction

MicroSociety & Montessori

MicroSociety & International Baccalaureate (IB)

Content Theme Enhancement Sample Options

MicroSociety & Visual and Performing Arts

MicroSociety & 21st Century Learning

MicroSociety & Character/Leadership Development

MicroSociety & Career Awareness

MicroSociety & STEM Education

MicroSociety & Economics and Math

Frequently Asked Questions When Considering the Adoption of the *MicroSociety* Theme

1. How does the *MicroSociety* theme provide parents additional educational opportunities for their children?

The *MicroSociety* theme has been used successfully by districts to attract families from diverse economic, racial, and ethnic communities, stretching into the suburbs, depending on district policy. In Hartford Public Schools, for example, Noah Webster *MicroSociety* Magnet increased its non-minority population from 9% to 21% in 3 years.

Parents find that when their children graduate with real work experiences in a *MicroSociety* learning environment – their “resumes” qualify them for acceptance into top area middle and high schools. They appreciate the ways in which the *MicroSociety* learning environment fosters the integration of students throughout the school through multicultural, vertical age, and mixed gender groupings. Parents and teachers realize that these diverse approaches to mixing students throughout the instructional program foster the development of important collaboration and problem solving skills that are critical for college and workplace success. Children develop a genuine respect for one another – the kind of respect that is critical for combating intolerance and prejudice.

Finally, in comparison to more traditional approaches, parents value the wide range of opportunities that the *MicroSociety* environment affords children to pursue interests, develop talents and skills, and be rewarded for their contributions and successes, all in a safe and encouraging environment. One benefit of a student’s ability to try on many hats as a member of a *MicroSociety* environment is that (s)he has genuine opportunities to explore careers in a way that typically does not happen until that student interns in college.

2. How does the *MicroSociety* theme build a diverse, integrated community within your school?

The *MicroSociety* theme is specifically designed to create an equal playing field for all students in the school so that each one has an opportunity to experience success and excel in some areas while receiving support in other areas of need. In traditional school settings, a student who may be weak academically has few opportunities to stand as a leader and develop confidence as a student. The unique learning environment of the *MicroSociety* school enables every student to play a role that is critical for the functioning of the society, thereby gaining the respect of peers and developing confidence in his or her ability to succeed in school. Below are some specific ways in which the *MicroSociety* model helps to build community in the school.

- Students from traditionally disadvantaged backgrounds who may arrive at school with limited prior knowledge and experiences outside their neighborhood, have many more opportunities to experience success and internalize the value of their own hard work and contributions to society. This enables such students to engage more productively in the school community.
- The *MicroSociety* learning environment provides significantly more time and more authentic opportunities for ELL students to speak English. (In San Diego Unified School District's, Florence Griffith Joyner *MicroSociety* Elementary Magnet School, with an ELL population of 77%, test scores in Language Arts rose 14% over one year after its school opening and implementation.) This not only supports the development of language skills but participating in a *MicroSociety* supports acculturation as well. Schools report parents and family members learning job skills from their children who attend *MicroSociety* schools.
- Collaboration, decision-making, problem-solving, teamwork and communication are at the heart of the *MicroSociety* learning environment, which is why all student and staff voices are listened to and are highly valued. Since students are empowered and trained to run all facets of their micro-society, they are constantly challenged to think about what is fair, how they can work with one another on new ventures, how they can resolve both business and interpersonal issues, and how they can engage the skills, expertise and talents of others.
- Professional development takes into account different learning styles, interests, backgrounds and goals of staff and students. Staff is trained to create, adapt and align curriculum using differentiated instruction and more flexible configurations of learning which makes the school a safe place for children to learn.
- Parents and Community Involvement (see question 3 below on promoting strong positive climate)

3. How does the theme promote a strong positive climate in the school?

The ability to experience success is the most powerful strategy for creating a healthy, joyful environment. In a *MicroSociety* school, every stakeholder assumes responsibility for every student and for transforming the school community into a safe, nurturing, and inspirational learning environment. Students, teachers, families, administrators and community members all work together to advance student academic, social and emotional development. Because all stakeholders are focused on the common goal of student achievement, a unity of purpose and reliance on diverse perspectives exists that keeps everyone working together and feeling valued. The list below outlines some of the ways in which this happens in a *MicroSociety* school.

- An unparalleled culture of empowerment and accountability gives students the freedom and responsibility to improve their school. Rather than using adult-imposed penalties, punishments and rewards, a *MicroSociety* environment produces natural consequences agreed upon by peers, drastically reducing disciplinary infractions. Teacher-facilitators are trained to use the “Micro Mindset” to specifically help students create, enforce, and amend laws, hold town meetings, mediate disputes, and analyze social, emotional and academic indicators of student success using tools such as data collection tools such as surveys, focus groups, interviews, and other societal measures.
- Deep, meaningful, and long-term roles exist for family and community partners - Parents and community partners from business, academia, and government are essential contributors to the learning community. They play seven roles that help students to improve the society/school: Broker, Benefactor, Trainer, Mentor, Advisor, Planner, and Consumer. (For more information, go to A Case Study: A Tale of True Partnerships, Sageland Elementary School, El Paso, Texas). Volunteers are often matched directly with student businesses (i.e. a banker trains students to run the *MicroSociety* bank). A *MicroSociety* environment also fosters numerous unique business-education partnerships and sponsorship opportunities including: community resource fairs, family nights, student market days, student mayoral inaugurations, student job fairs, and *MicroSociety* storefront facade-building projects.
- Shared Responsibility and authority - Through a process of relationship and trust building, *MicroSociety, Inc.* works with school staff to create alignment teams that collaborate to make decisions related to student achievement. In doing so, all members come to understand that they are a valued member of the school where their input has merit. Student data is openly reviewed and discussed to develop a shared plan of action that leads to improved teaching and learning.
- Uniquely inspirational learning environments - Walking into a *MicroSociety* school is a highly visual experience. Classroom entranceways are framed with student created storefront facades; kiosks are set up on the playground by student entrepreneurs; student artwork and artifacts, such as a copy of the *MicroSociety* school constitution that has been ratified by the students, are displayed in the hallways; and each learning space in the school serves as a reminder of the students’ productivity and contributions to the *MicroSociety* learning environment.

4. How does the theme help students meet and exceed challenging state content standards and challenging student performance standards?

The purpose of state and national standards is to ensure that all children have equal access to a quality of education that will allow for their full participation and success in society and in the national and global economies. Whereas many schools struggle to determine the most effective ways to cover the standards and monitor student learning, the *MicroSociety* model not only integrates the standards in a way that is meaningful and compelling for students, but fully empowers them to self-monitor their own progress as well.

- Standards become meaningful to students because they serve as the building blocks of their work in this proxy society. Students are concerned with the quality of their writing because

their work may be published through a school-wide newspaper venture or read aloud through a school-wide public radio station that they have created. It is the authenticity of the context for learning that drives student motivation for mastering the standards. Because the standards serve as outcome measures for students' success in their micro-society, this leads to significantly higher student achievement results on assessments that measure student proficiency on the standards.

- Students not only care about the standards, they assume responsibility for the overall monitoring of their personal, class-wide and school-wide progress toward mastery. For example, in each *MicroSociety* school, a group of students each year is employed through the Department of Education agency. These student workers are directly responsible for supporting the school's academic progress by learning the standards, then in turn, teaching their peers how to connect their own venture and agency activity with the standards. They also monitor and report on these connections. Students derive considerable empowerment for being in control of their own learning in this way.

5. How does the theme prepare students with the skills, knowledge and dispositions necessary for success now in the 21st century?

Unlike other countries, where standardized tests assess ability to think critically about facts positioned in new ways, persuasive explanations of ideas, and whether students can apply what they have learned to real world situations, standardized tests in the U.S. are generally designed to assess whether students have learned the curriculum, focusing on recall and recognition of fact.

Because the *MicroSociety* model is designed to reflect the world in which we live, it creates the context in which all children are able to apply what they have learned naturally, everyday. It requires students to integrate the skills, knowledge and dispositions critical for success in the 21st century. Managing their own free market economy provides students limitless opportunities to demonstrate entrepreneurial risk taking, resourcefulness, adaptability, cooperation in diverse teams, creativity, self-direction, all competencies needed for students to be marketable and competitive in a global economy.

The model fits directly into the Framework for 21st Century Learning (www.21stcenturyskills.org)

- Teaching and learning includes mastery of the core subjects using research-based instructional strategies. As in the real world, students' success in their *MicroSociety* societal roles such as employee, consumer, citizen, entrepreneur, and civic leader are directly linked to mastery of academic standards, which are developed and evaluated using measures such as job descriptions and performance evaluations.
- All 21st century themes are clearly integrated into *MicroSociety* student-run ventures and agencies. Some examples include:
 - Financial and Business/Entrepreneurial Literacy: Students develop financial literacy through the maintenance of a personal budget, managing and/or interacting with the bank, developing budgets and managing the financial aspects of their ventures and agencies, and calculating profits and losses. They write business plans, apply for loans at the student bank, conduct market surveys, hire and manage employees.
 - Global Awareness: Students develop global awareness through managing and interacting with the travel agency and the multicultural museum.

- Civic Literacy: Civic Literacy is integrated throughout *MicroSociety*. Students research and determine the form of government that will oversee their society, they pay taxes, engage in service learning, hold jobs, and contribute in every way to ensuring the healthy functioning of their school-based society.
- Health Literacy: Students develop health literacy through their work in the health related public agencies (many students work directly with the school nurse to understand policies and procedures related to dispensing care to fellow students in the school) as well as work in a venture such as the health and fitness center.
- All 21st century skills are practiced daily:
 - Learning and innovation skills: Whether running a weather station or a television station, students working in all businesses and agencies must track, analyze and synthesize data, generate ideas to solve complex real-world problems, and figure out how to keep their businesses competitive and profitable.
 - Communication and collaboration skills: From business meetings to town hall meetings, or negotiating business deals to trying cases in court, students practice speaking, reading, writing and reflecting in diverse work group settings and apply social and cross-cultural skills.
 - Information, technology, and media literacy skills: Spreadsheets, customer satisfaction surveys, presentation, newsletter, graphic design, and publishing abilities are all necessary for production, marketing, and financial management in each student venture and agency.
 - Life and career skills: All students write a resume, complete job applications, interview for professional positions within their *MicroSociety*, undergo performance reviews by their peers, and are compensated based upon their reliability and productivity in their *MicroSociety* jobs.

6. How does *MicroSociety* support the ongoing professional learning for teachers?

Whether adopting *MicroSociety* as a school-wide theme, or using *MicroSociety* as the framework for enhancing or improving upon another theme (e.g. science, performing arts, school of character), *MicroSociety, Inc.* provides the necessary supports for 1) implementation, 2) continually deepening their understanding about how to maximize student learning in a real world context, and 3) assessing student ability to apply what they have learned to new situations. During the first two years of adoption, educators receive comprehensive training on the use of the *MicroSociety* model and all of its components. A key aspect of this training process is supporting educators as they make the shift to becoming true 21st century facilitators of learning.

- Educators not only learn how to integrate the 21st century learning content and process standards (www.21stcenturyskills.org), but they develop the art of empowering students to assume responsibility for their own learning as well.
- One critical component of the *MicroSociety* model is the Alignment Teams. Alignment Teams - or Professional Learning Communities - are the most important mechanism for ensuring continuous school improvement. Alignment Teams focus on issues such as curriculum integration, formative and summative assessment, evaluation and development, parental and community involvement, school climate, etc... These

communities are the mechanism by which the adults in the school evolve in their understanding about how to maximize student intellectual, social, and emotional development using real world connections.

- Using a combination of small, collaborative vertical and horizontal groups, one-on-one mentoring and workshops, MSI consultants coach educators in the process of using more authentic types of assessments to drive instruction than the basic standardized fill-in-the-circle tests. Formal observation, rubric use and design, peer reviews, journaling, portfolios, performance evaluations, graphic organizers and conferencing all provide data for teachers to measure students' ability to apply what they have learned in the classroom to real-world situations (running businesses, drafting legislation, providing community services and generally managing the challenge and opportunities that arise inside the school and that of a fully functioning society). Our consultants demonstrate and help teachers incorporate and assess using higher order knowledge and skills, integrate content across the core curriculum, and articulate their usefulness by giving them specific tools as well as aiding them in crafting lessons and integrated units.
- MSI also provides continuous support for professional learning through their relationship with the Certified Trainer, regional forums, the annual conference, webinars, networking with educators around the country, e-newsletters, and ongoing technical assistance.

7. How does the theme improve district capacity to obtain federal funding and establish innovative ways to sustain the program after federal funding ends?

Magnet and theme-based schools that build a reputation for rigor, excellence, and diversity often achieve the greatest longevity. The robustness of a magnet school's theme is one important piece that contributes to the overall strength and stability of the school. Many *MicroSociety* magnet schools have, in fact, been going strong for over a decade, with one magnet program lasting over 25 years, demonstrating a proven magnet theme that stands the test of time.

Adopting *MicroSociety* for your school can support your efforts to obtain federal funding:

- Using a Research-Based Model - Using a well-established pedagogical theme proven to attract, raise test scores, increase motivation and attendance will produce a stronger magnet grant application. The *MicroSociety* model is also a federally-approved comprehensive school reform model, which is encouraged by federal magnet grant guidance.
- Demonstrating Need for Funds- Ideally, the *MicroSociety* theme is implemented over a 3-year period, allowing for thorough planning and restructuring, extensive professional development and curriculum alignment. The difficulty of implementation without initial federal funds to expand capacity to provide choice is compelling.

After three-year planning and implementation, we make it easier to sustain your program by:

- Increasing Program Capacity at Minimal Expense -Because schools that maintain high levels of implementation usually achieve the greatest results, we continue to work with your school after the initial funding ends. However, once planning and implementation are completed over a three-year period, only minimal expenses are required.

- In terms of professional development, magnet resource teachers are equipped to orient new staff, and generally attend our annual national conference and regional forums. Staff participates in yearly refresher workshops as needed.
- Additional direct expenses include the raw materials needed to stock the *MicroSociety* warehouse. Often much of this can be donated by the community.
- As far as staffing, once alignment teams are functioning at a high level, program management responsibilities can be assumed by these teams in smaller schools. In larger schools, however, a coordinator is usually needed at least part-time, again, once strong alignment teams are in place. Alignment teams work collaboratively, and can distribute the coordinator's responsibilities amongst several staff members.
- A small annual fee of \$500 for *MicroSociety* school certification and licensing is also required.
- Helping to Secure Additional Funding - Because of the real-world connection of the *MicroSociety* theme, it is often easier to establish innovative business-education partnerships, secure donations, and attract volunteers.
 - After the three years implementation period, *MicroSociety* program materials are typically sustained through in-kind services. Banks donate checkbooks, a local Walmart might supply materials for the warehouse, a local Best Buy might provide software or computers, or a local pet store might even loan animals for an animal caretaking business.
 - Our staff can also assist in researching funding opportunities from private foundations, within the local business community, and state and federal grants. Because the *MicroSociety* model is interdisciplinary, it also meets the criteria for many grants. We also provide technical assistance on strategies to raise funds through various events and promotions.
- Garnering Public Recognition - We assist schools in co-presenting best practices at conferences, applying for awards, and working with the district magnet office on public relations and marketing efforts.

Additional Resources:

To learn more about our The *MicroSociety* Learning Environment, including program building blocks, guiding principles, teaching strands, and our research base, go to: <http://www.microsociety.org/what.php>

To read a case study of how the *MicroSociety* theme successfully integrates two themes, download Chocochatti Center for Fine Arts and *MicroSociety* at: http://www.microsociety.org/microsociety_magnet_schools.php

To download our *MicroSociety* Magnet School Brochure, go to:
http://www.microsociety.org/microsociety_magnet_schools.php

To download our other brochures or additional examples, go to:
http://www.microsociety.org/press_room.php

To view a list of *MicroSociety* Curriculum and Resource Materials, visit:
http://www.microsociety.org/micro_shop.php