



First State Montessori Academy

2016-2017

Annual Report

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Charter School Program

Provide a Synopsis of the School's Mission and Educational Program, Including Key Components of the Education Model and Any Unique or Innovative Features of the School

Discuss Key Accomplishments of the Charter School Program over the 2016-17 School Year

First State Montessori Academy is a unique school that is rooted in our mission to make an authentic Montessori program accessible to all children in Delaware. As Delaware's first Montessori charter school, FSMA is a pioneer in our state. At the same time, FSMA's Montessori curriculum is based on more than a century of research, reflection, and practice. In the early 1900s Dr. Maria Montessori began to minister a child-led, teacher-guided pedagogy, espousing the connection of mind and body in joyful learning. Since then, Montessori education has proven to develop lifelong learners and engaged, responsible, respectful citizens.

The culmination of years of effort on the part of many determined people who know the power of a Montessori education, FSMA opened its doors in August 2014, serving students from kindergarten through sixth grade. In the spring of 2016 the state of Delaware approved a major modification to FSMA's charter, authorizing the school to add seventh and eighth grade. This new configuration will increase enrollment to more than 600 students by 2019, and 650 by 2021. To accommodate the growth, FSMA leased a second building at 920 North French Street, across the street from the school's building at 1000 North French Street (now the Lower School). This school continues to be a place where Delaware children benefit from FSMA's unique educational experience, which develops lifelong learners who are well prepared to

become contributing members of the Delaware community. FSMA is a valuable service to Delaware: it makes an excellent Montessori education an option for all children in our state.

FSMA believes that our impact goes far beyond our students and the surrounding districts. As a school in downtown Wilmington, we are making a positive impact in two very strong ways on the city. First, we are making a direct impact on many children who live in the city limits as over 25% of our children come from zip codes in Wilmington. The other children that we are bringing in from areas surrounding the city are allowing us to make a positive contribution to downtown Wilmington. We see our role in shining a spotlight on something positive happening in the city as an important way we are helping to rebuild the perception of our city. In a recent article, it was stated that “With the lifting of the desegregation order more than 20 years ago, and the subsequent development of charter schools and choice programs, few white children from the suburbs are now attending traditional public schools in Wilmington. But the enrollment numbers for First State Montessori demonstrate that there are suburban families who will choose to send their children to a public school in the city.”

In order to be true community member, FSMA is constantly seeking partnerships with our local neighbors. We have hosted events in the street and invited our local community, plus, has created service learning projects for our students that directly impact the city. FSMA also utilizes many local businesses for field trips and we are bringing families into the city to utilize these services as well. FSMA is making an extremely positive impact on our city and as we have grown, the impact is even greater.

Organizationally, we are functioning extremely well – meeting all legal requirements, attending to DOE deadlines, creating necessary procedures and policies, and our board has

shown strong responsibility and commitment to the students and families who are a part of the FSMA Family. Financially, FSMA has a strong outlook which includes a clean audit of the 2016-2017 school year and money budgeted to cover all operational needs and potential surprises. Additionally, our budget includes money set aside to cover all potential liabilities for things like summer pay for teachers and facilities.

Staffing highlights are both the quantity and quality of personnel that choose to work at FSMA. In the 2016-2017 school year, we had 34 classroom teachers, with two in each classroom; four specialist teachers to offer a well-rounded elementary curricula; three full-time special education teachers; two lead administrators with a Principal's Certificate and Montessori education, respectively; two nurses; four part-time office staff; and one full-time facilities manager. Every staff member was selected with great care and is a true asset to our school. From the previous school year, there were very few teachers who chose to leave FSMA and the returning staff started the year with a year of Montessori charter school experience under their belt. They were able to jump right in and get started and any new staff were quickly brought up to speed as we recognize that what we ask of our teachers is truly unique and must be cultivated carefully.

There are many components that make FSMA a choice for families that could be implemented in other schools and we hope to be active contributors to the changing landscape of education in Delaware.

Key Components of our Educational Model:

Implementation of an authentic Montessori Curriculum

- All classrooms have at least one certified Montessori teacher
- Montessori materials and curriculum utilized in all classrooms
- Components of a Montessori Approach included multi-age classrooms, extended work periods, and personalized learning

Incorporation of Responsive Classroom Principles

- All teachers, specialists and leadership staff were trained in Responsive Classroom
- All teachers received coaching and feedback throughout the year on their implementation of Responsive Classroom Approach from a national consultant
- Resources to support implementation were provided for all classrooms

Common Core State Standards

- Common Core Guiding Team formed and participated in professional development provided by the Delaware Department of Education
- PLC's utilized as time for connecting Montessori to CCSS
- Standards based report previously created by teachers were reviewed and improved

Innovative or Unique Features of the School:

Strong alignment of Montessori curriculum with Common Core State Standards - This required an intense amount of focus and perseverance to blend the two models, however it is possible because they are rooted in many similar beliefs about how children learn. FSMA is the only public school in Delaware devoted and committed to offering this type of education.

Multi-age classrooms (K/1st, 2nd/3rd, 4th/5th/6th) - At FSMA, we teach children at the academic level they are ready for. We know that each child learns at his/her own pace and will be ready for any given lesson in his/her own time, not on the teacher's schedule of lessons. In a mixed-age class, children can always find peers who are working at their current level. Children normally stay in the same class for two years. With half of the class returning each year, the classroom culture tends to remain quite stable. Also, working in one class for two years allows students to develop a strong sense of community with their classmates and teachers.

Key Accomplishments:

- Continued development of alignment of CCSS and Montessori
- Formation of a Middle School Committee dedicated to the curriculum development of our Middle School Program
- We received more applications than spaces and were forced to go into a lottery at all grade levels.
- All DPAS requirements were completed by the administration and all staff met satisfactory requirements of teacher evaluation program.
- FSMA's governing board participated in board training and has a strong presence in all parts of the school. This year they even combined their board meetings with other main groups of the school so that all of the "branches" of the school could meet on the same night.

- FSMA formed relationships with all of its contractors (transportation, food service, cleaning, etc.) that positively impacted the quality of service and continues to build on this so they are a part of our community.
- FSMA utilized local resources for our students. This includes the Wilmington Public Library, The Queen Theatre, The Grand and Baby Grand, the DuPont Theatre, Rodney Square, St. Joseph's Church, Market Street Church, and more. These relationships have provided many cultural experiences and learning opportunities and activities for our students.

Performance Reflection

What are the successful academic practices at FSMA that other schools can replicate?

FSMA has done a deep analysis of our academic practices. With a few years under our belt, we have been able to determine trends and gaps and have created a plan to address the identified needs. A summary of our Smarter Balanced Assessment Data (Appendix A) is included and shows that we are committed to understanding the numbers and strong progress is being made.

A key feature of our school is the foundation in the need for the social and academic curriculum to go hand in hand. We believe that in order for children to be ready to learn, they must have their social and emotional needs met. Every classroom utilizes a plethora of practices to ensure that children are learning both social and emotional skills. Many of these practices can be utilized by any classroom teacher and have had very positive effects on the classroom community and culture of the school. Some of the social curriculum features include:

Daily Morning Meeting – each classroom begins the day with a whole group meeting where children are greeted, share about themselves, and participate in group activities rooted in academic skills. Each child is taught oral communication skills and practices them daily in this activity.

Peace Tables – Each classroom has a designated “Peace Table” where children are supported in mediation, reparation and problem-solving. By teaching children to quickly resolve their differences, they are able to refocus on academic tasks more quickly. This lifelong skill is having positive effects on all of our children.

Student Support Specialist – In the 2016-2017 school year, FSMA determined that we needed an additional resource to support students. Because of our belief in educating the whole child, we determined that an emotional support teacher was needed to proactively support students who may need additional behavior or emotional support. This teacher works directly with students and teachers both proactively and reactively and has had a strong impact on many children at FSMA.

In addition, FSMA utilizes many strong academic practices that could positively impact any classroom. Some of these include:

Individual Work Plans – Each child is provided a work plan that includes each academic area and has lessons or tasks specifically chosen based on the competency level of the child. These work plans are a guide for independent work periods and allow each child to maximize the time spent on learning and lessons that are at the optimal level.

Small group and individual lessons – In every classroom, all ELA and Math lessons are taught in a small group or individual basis based on the level of the student. These lessons are rooted in the Montessori curriculum and teachers carefully scaffold skills so that children can master necessary skills and move forward.

Parent Education Activities – As partners in a child’s education, FSMA has created a variety of ways for parents to learn about what we do and how to help their child at home. These include both involvement and engagement opportunities such as “Watch Me Work” days when parents actually come in and observe the classroom in action, Parenting classes, Montessori Moments at PTO and Board Meetings where teachers demonstrate lessons, presentations, informal gatherings, playground playdates, etc.

Literacy Coach – FSMA utilized the expertise of a literacy coach in all of our K/1st grade classrooms. With our 30 hours of on-site coaching, our expert was able to model lessons, provide feedback and deliver strong professional development. The result has been that every child is receiving an effective reading group lesson every day.

Increased Response to Intervention Supports - One of the areas we focused on in the 2016-2017 school year was Response to Intervention. We worked with teachers to brainstorm strategies that would work to identify children and increase services. With teacher input, we have created a strong program and many children are reaping the benefits.

What are the successful organization practices at FSMA that other schools can replicate?

First and foremost, the FSMA Board is extremely active and involved. They are present at events, volunteer often, and help spread the word about what was happening in the school. They have yearly retreats to strategize and carefully analyze the operations of the school. An involved board is critical to the operations of a successful school and sets the tone for the operations at the school. The school leadership team echoes this high level of organization around operations and works tirelessly to ensure that the operational needs of the school are done in the most effective way.

FSMA has been committed to meeting all regulatory requirements and streamlining processes for completion. FSMA is focused on creating and adhering to local, state and federal timelines. FSMA keeps a timeline of due dates and activities as well as who is responsible for each task to prevent overlap. Additionally, we developed a clear distribution of tasks and increase the training for related personnel in these areas. There is a true spirit of team that embodies the leadership team and the entire school.

Communication is a key to our organizational success. FSMA built on the current communication structures with all stakeholders – students, staff, families, board members, and

the community to ensure that everyone is educated and informed about what is happening in our school. Our main goal is to make sure current families had the information they needed about the operations of the school. We utilize a variety of resources to make sure everyone is informed and understand that ensuring everyone has the information they need is a critical component to a successful school. By keeping everyone “in the loop,” we can seek help as needed because our community is able to see the big picture and the smaller details.

What are the successful financial practices at FSMA that other schools can replicate?

First State Montessori has managed its finances and achieved a Meets Standard in all rated categories. This has been accomplished through strong administrative leadership, an involved Board Finance Committee, an experienced and knowledgeable Citizens’ Budget Oversight Committee and the use of an outside financial consultant. As we have added an additional facility this year, it is important to note that strong financial management has enabled FSMA to lease the new Upper School building without incurring any debt.

FSMA’s approach is one of both collaboration and transparency. The Head of School and Business Manager lead the development of the budget and use it as a guide to make sure fiscal responsibility. The school leadership is responsible for purchasing and monitoring of the school’s cash position in coordination with the school budget but does so with extreme care and guidance from the team. The Head of School works in conjunction with many key players on the Finance Committee to ensure accuracy and effectiveness in budget planning and execution. There is transparency in reporting and the Board and CBOC have access to all

financial information. Collaboration amongst all parties has been a key component in contributing to the financial stability of the school. Decisions are made thoughtfully and with inclusion of all parties.

In terms of reporting and audits, the monthly financial report includes a month by month cash flow analysis to monitor all facets of the financial transactions, budget and cash position of the school. In addition, the annual audited financial statements have been completed timely and without any findings or recommendations.

Some of the practices utilized by FSMA that have contributed to this strong financial picture include:

We heavily researched anticipated costs and created a budget that ended up being very close to our actual revenue and expenses. Because of this, we could prioritize and budget accurately. As a school, we have been extremely strategic in our spending. We have utilized the advice and feedback from our Innovative Schools consultant as well as reached out to other charter schools for information. We have built a collaborative relationship with these “thought partners,” and are constantly seeking new information and training from those who have worked with charter schools.

Our administration knows the budget inside and out. Our Head of School understands everything from coding to processing and has taken the time to learn each step of the process for all budget related items. As a building leader, she is engaged and involved in budget development and monitoring. She uses historical data to make budgeting decisions, is

constantly seeking grants and forming relationships with funders, and is extremely conservative when it comes to spending on anything that does not impact the classroom or students.

Developing a community that donates and volunteers services that are not directly related to student learning so that all of our funding can go directly into classrooms has allowed us to budget creatively. For example, our entire food service distribution system is run by parent and grandparent volunteers, all printing and marketing needs were covered by a parent with access to the necessary printers, all of our landscaping needs have been donated by a parent, many office supplies have been given to us by local companies, and almost all of our paper was donated based on a relationship with our vendor. There are many more examples of the generosity of our community that have allowed us to focus on the classrooms, and it is important to note that these things did not just happen but instead, relationships were formed and a culture of giving has been created.

Our Citizens Budget Oversight Committee/Finance Committee has made a tremendous impact on the financial status of the school. Our chair has previously sat on other charter school CBOC's and the other members bring a background in finance and business. We also have staff members and parents who sit on this committee. They have learned the ins and outs of charter school finance, have participated in state training, have sought resources to address questions, have recreated our Financial Policies and Procedures Manual, and have been highly engaged in the budget process. This group has been an incredible asset to the school and continues to add to our strong financial performance.

Appendix A



A Deeper Look at FSMA's Data from the 2016 – 2017 school year

*FSMA is rooted in a belief that we must help a child develop socially, emotionally, physically and cognitively. Our Montessori approach requires our incredibly talented teachers to prepare children to be focused, independent and innovative learners as well as responsible, respectful and mindful individuals. We go beyond just teaching the academics and through Montessori, we teach children to think critically, work collaboratively, and act boldly – all skills that are needed in the 21st century. FSMA is committed to **whole child development**, which we believe is **the key to raising test scores the right way.***

What do SBAC scores reveal about a school?

Assessment results such as SBAC tell much more than just a child's academic ability. In order for children to be ready to learn, they must be healthy, safe, engaged, supported and challenged. FSMA believes that we must ensure that the whole child is not only ready to learn but is also given the opportunity to flourish by putting strategies in place to make this happen for every child in every classroom, every day. Our results do not just tell us about student academic abilities but also gives us insight into each child's overall wellness.

But, we always remind ourselves that behind each of these data points is a child with a story. The stories are often of tremendous growth and an individual journey that may or may not show up on SBAC data. We know there is powerful anecdotal evidence about each child's experience and will continue to tell these stories alongside the picture our numbers represent.

Key Findings - What do our SBAC scores show about FSMA?

Overall, the results show that we are making strong gains in all areas. In a comparison to last year's data, the average grade level increase was 12% with gains as much as 23%. These are strong increases, especially when compared to last year which showed a 7% decrease in scores.

ELA scores are much higher than Math scores, averaging about 15% higher in number of students meeting the standard. In past years, this has been a statewide trend.

Math scores are much higher in 3rd and 4th grade, in comparison with 5th and 6th grade. Conversations around why this might happen suggest that the concepts become much more abstract at this grade transition. A review of statewide trends and effective teaching at this level will need to be done to further understand the relevance of this data.

Looking at our 6th graders, all but 1-2 are At/Near the ELA sub-component standards. These students have almost all been with us for 3 years. While there overall ELA percentage is not as high (69%), these students are all very close to meeting the standard and 0% of our 6th graders received a 1 in ELA. This data is very promising and suggests that our 6th graders are close to on track to meet the standard next year.

Why are test scores important?

- Give us an overall snapshot of how we are doing in comparison to other Delaware schools
- Can impact how much money is received and how money is spent
- Highlight areas where additional resources are needed
- Identify school, grade and teacher strengths that can become a learning experience for everyone
- Give families and our community a data point regarding student achievement

What's Next – How do we translate our data into meaningful action?

- A deeper look for any specific trends in regard to race, socio-economic status, ELL, special education
- Interpret the data in regards to instruction and review our professional development plan to ensure they are aligned.
- Review state averages and discuss how they relate to FSMA data

School-wide results for the 2016-2017 school year

English Language Arts(ELA) and Literacy – SBAC results

	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6
Far Below the Standard	8%	18%	13%	0%
Below the Standard	29%	21%	13%	32%
At/Near the Standard	36%	24%	51%	45%
Above the Standard	28%	37%	23%	24%
Total At or Above	64%	61%	74%	69%
State Average	52%	54%	60%	52%

Mathematics – SBAC results

	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6
Far Below the Standard	16%	17%	33%	19%
Below the Standard	28%	27%	31%	46%
At/Near the Standard	36%	22%	16%	20%
Above the Standard	20%	32%	20%	15%
Total At or Above	56%	54%	36%	35%
State Average	53%	50%	44%	41%

Summary: FSMA is above the state average in ELA at all grade levels. Last year we were only above the state average in 2 grade levels. In math, we are much closer to the state averages in the two grade levels that are still below the state average.

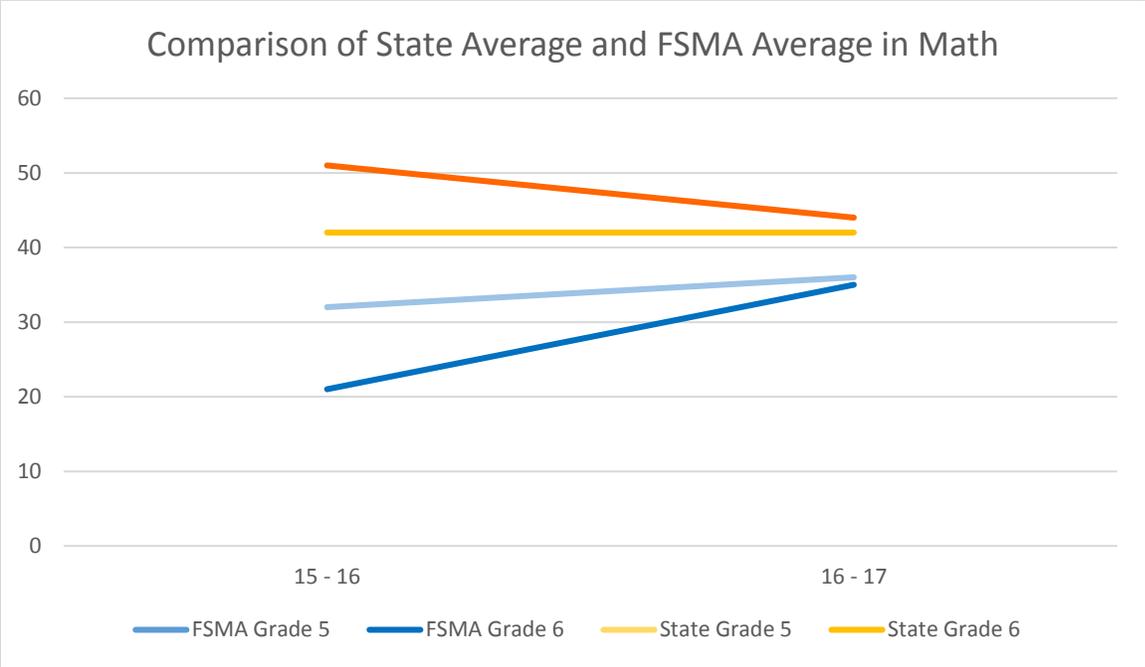
ELA - Comparison to Last Year's Data of Same Children

Current Grade	15-16	16-17
Grade 3	N/A	64
Grade 4	52	61
Grade 5	54	74
Grade 6	46	69

Math - Comparison to Last Year's Data of Same Children

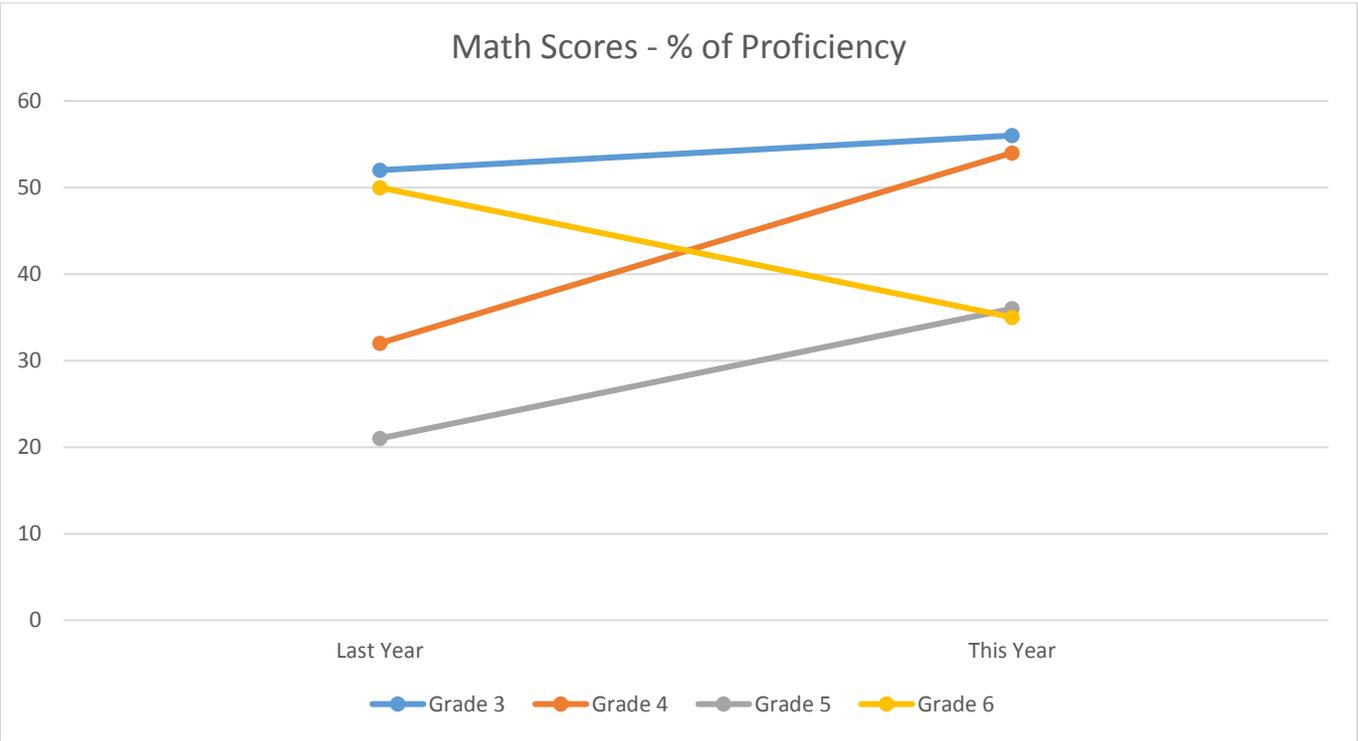
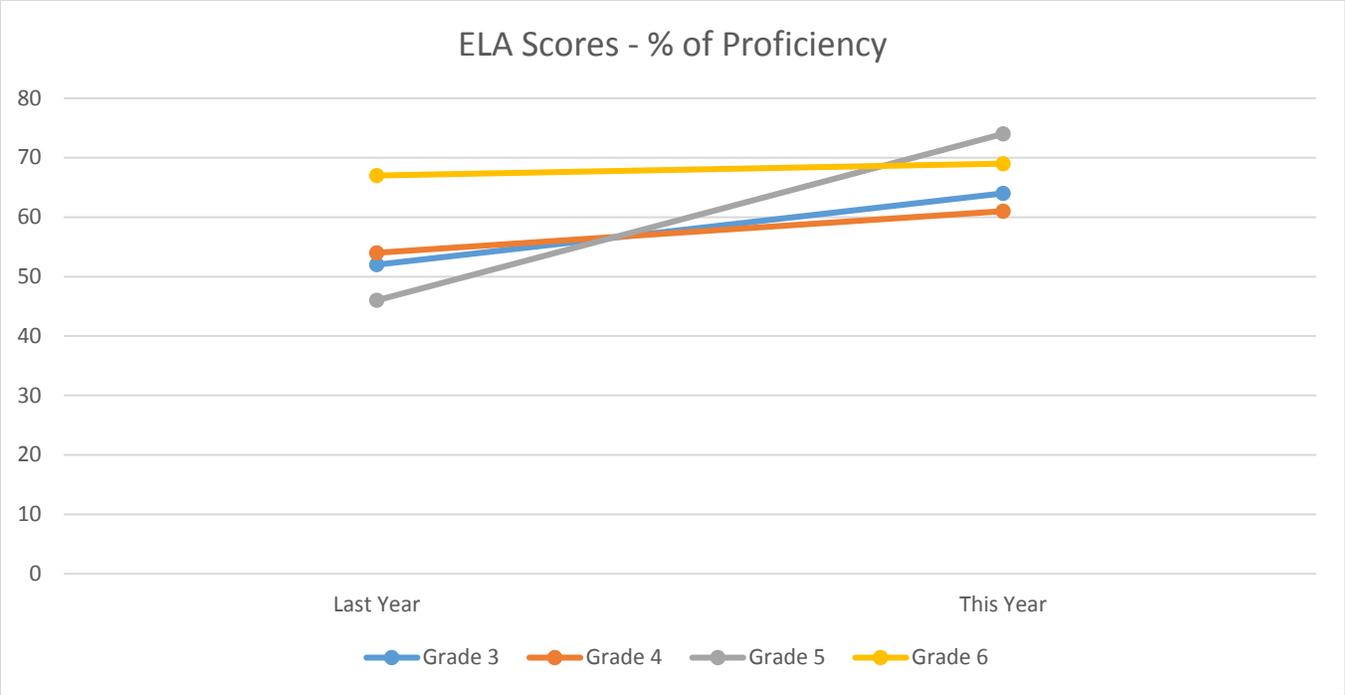
Current Grade	15-16	16-17
Grade 3	N/A	56
Grade 4	52	54
Grade 5	32	36
Grade 6	21	35

Interesting to note: Math in the upper grade surfaces as a concern but when analyzing against state trends, an interesting fact emerges. At FSMA, our students in 5th and 6th grade are increasing in % of students meeting or exceeding the state standard which is not found for this cohort of students across the state. The following chart shows the state trends in yellow/orange and FSMA trends in blue. *In summary, the state shows a downward trend while FSMA shows an upward trend in math scores at the 5th and 6th grade level.*



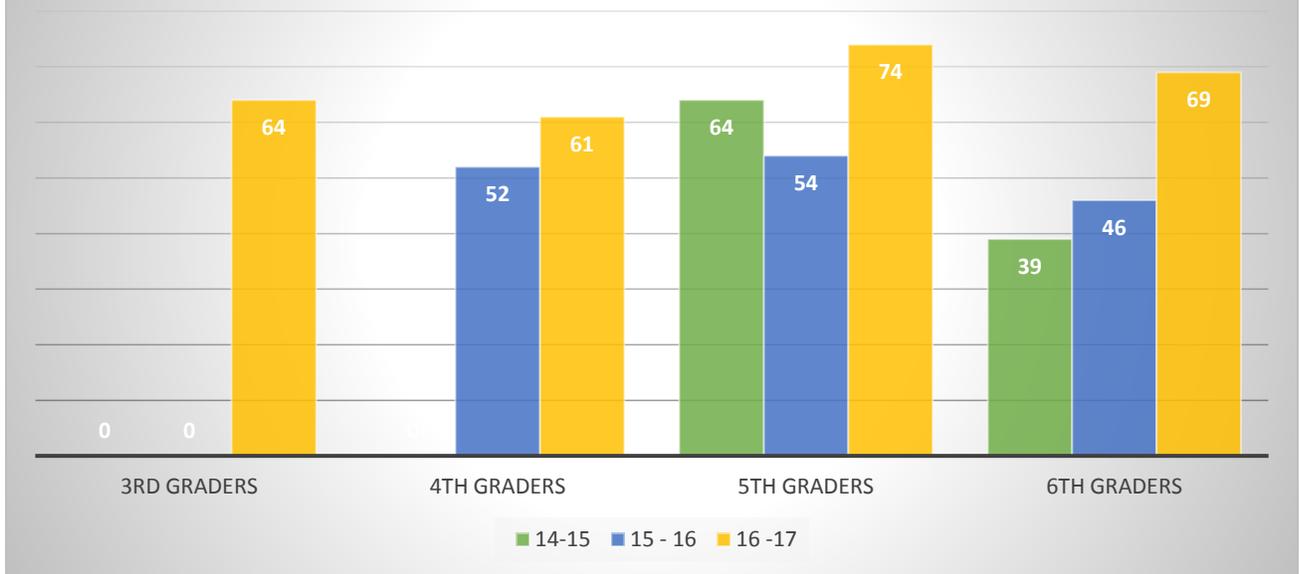
Overall Proficiency Scores – SBAC 2017

Overall, the number of students at each grade level who are meeting or exceeding the standard is growing. This is not an apples to apples comparison but rather a look at overall trends. The one exception is the 6th grade but again, these are not the same students.



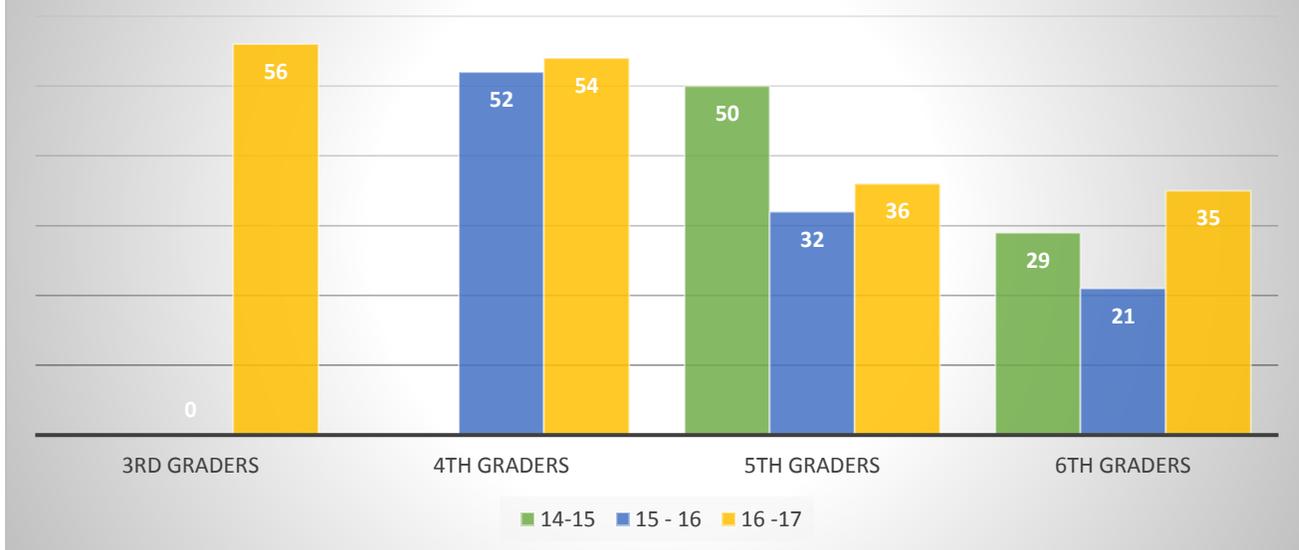
SBAC Results - Looking at the same kids over time

16 - 17 ELA/Literacy Scores



These graphs represent the same cohort of students. In almost all of the year after year comparisons, strong growth is seen. The one exception is the current 5th graders who showed a decrease between 3rd and 4th grade but an overall growth of 10% points. The greatest story is our current 6th graders – only 39% of them were meeting the standard when they arrived in 4th grade and now 69% of them are.

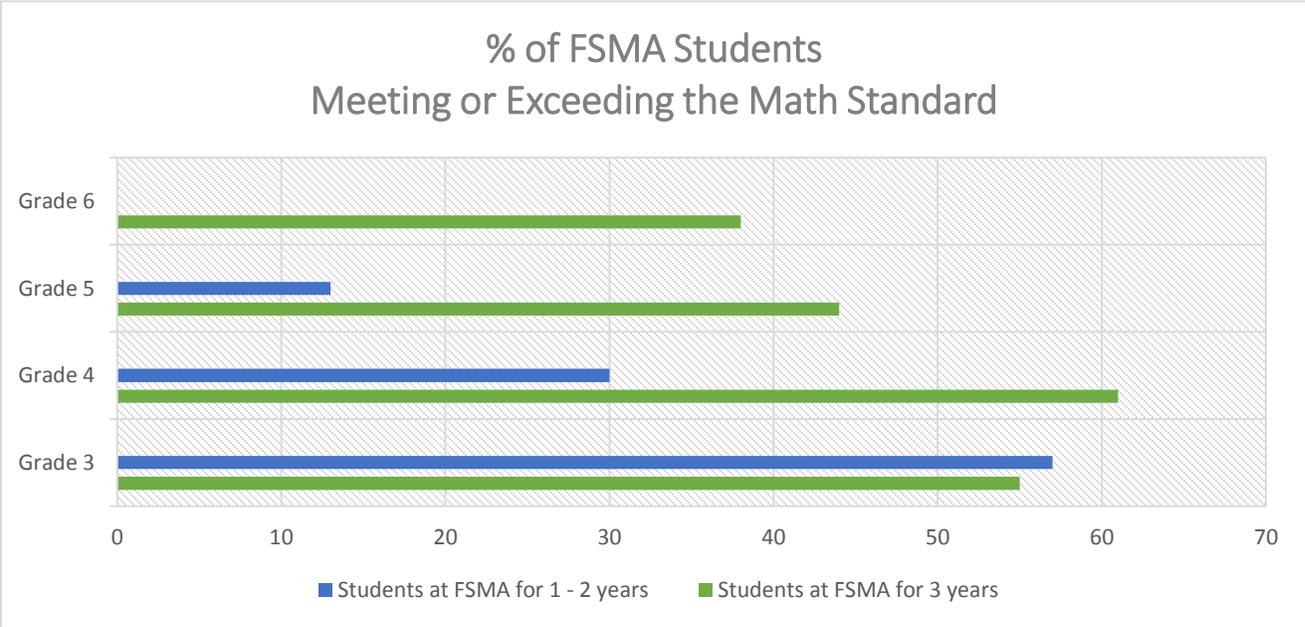
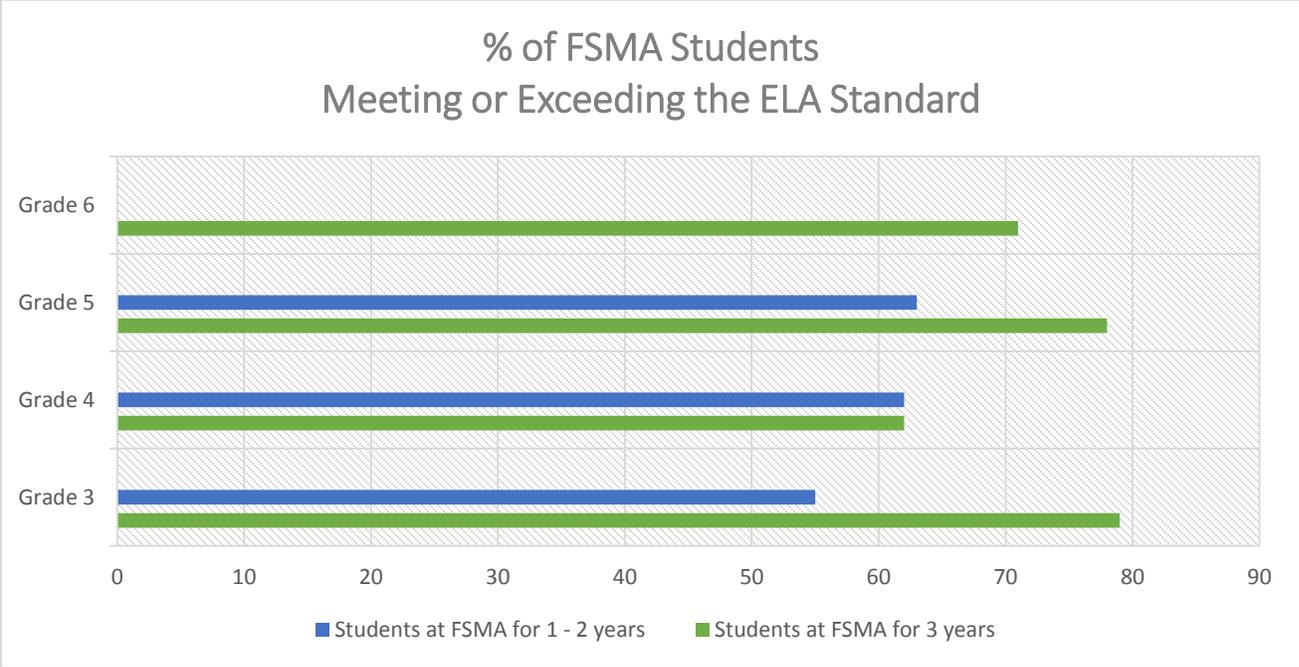
16 - 17 Mathematics Scores



Overall, we see gains over time (except for the 5th grade cohort). The scores, while on an upward trend are still far below where we expect them to be. The younger graders, who have been with us for a majority of their school years, are so much stronger results but again, not where we want them to be.

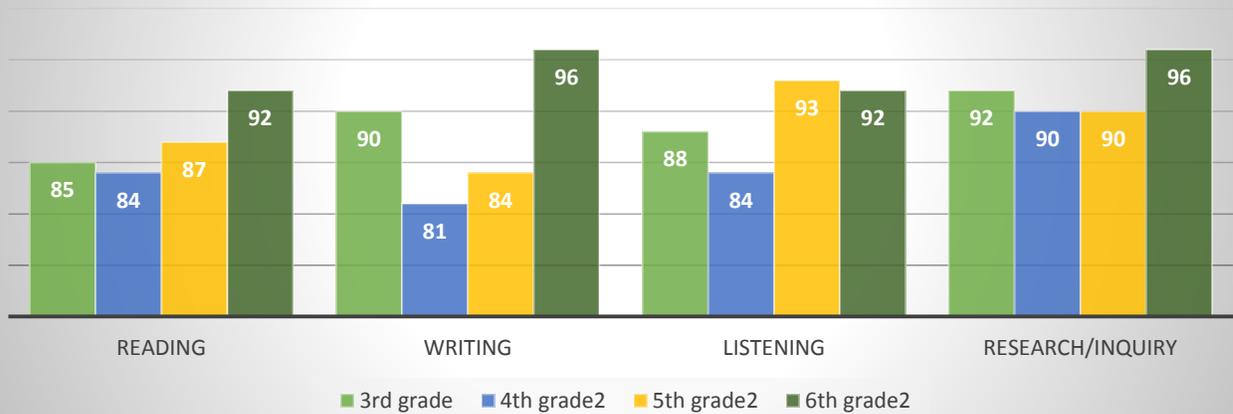
The following charts show the percentage of children who have been here for all 3 years who are meeting the standard as compared to the percentage of children who have only been at FSMA for 1-2 years. The overall results show that the children who have been at FSMA for 3 years have a much higher likelihood of meeting or exceeding the state standard in ELA and Math.

The moral of the story (or of this data)... the longer a child remains at FSMA the more likely they are to be meeting the state benchmarks on the SBAC.



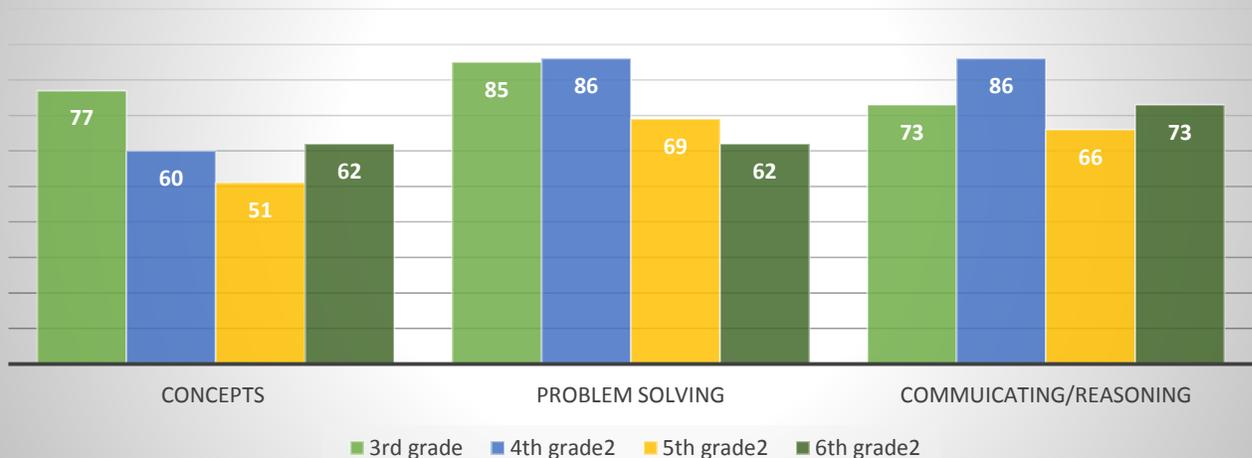
Note: 6th grade was not included because there were only 2 students at this grade level who have not been here for all 3 years.

% of students At or Above the Standard for ELA sub-components



Strongest results overall are in Research/Inquiry followed by Listening. The area of greatest need is writing for 4th and 5th grade. Overall, the 6th graders as a cohort scored high with only 1 – 2 students missing the benchmark.

% of students At or Above the Standard for Math sub-components



Strongest results overall are in Communicating/Reasoning and Problem-Solving. The area of greatest need is Mathematical Concepts for all grade levels. The 3rd and 4th graders did noticeably stronger than the 5th and 6th graders.

Important to note: The majority of the 3rd grade cohort started with us when they were in 1st grade – the majority of their elementary education is in a Montessori classroom.

A look closer at our students who receive special education services:

Some background information about Montessori and special education: There are several things about the Montessori philosophy and materials that make it a wonderful option for children with special needs. Montessori teaching materials engage all the senses, important for students with distinct learning styles. Students learn by doing and are free to move about, an advantage for those who require a high level of physical activity. And each child has the latitude to learn at his own pace, without pressure to meet formal standards by a predetermined time. **Children with special needs, such as learning differences or physical disabilities, often thrive in a Montessori setting.**

# of students at 4/5/6 level receiving special education services in ELA	% meeting ELA standard
15	20%

# of students at 4/5/6 level receiving special education services in Math	% meeting the standard
17	0

This information is incredibly powerful. We recognize that this is an area of need but the results are somewhat not surprising. At the upper grades, when a child is qualifying for special education services, there must be a large deficit in grade level skills. This deficit aligns with the below standard score on the SBAC.

What we know – the SBAC is not a strong measure of progress for our students who qualify for special education services. We must use other data such as IEP goals and growth scores to determine progress for students who qualify for special education services.

Every school has a similar story about how this impacts their overall scores. Here is a snapshot of how it impacts our overall scores at the upper grades:

	ELA % meeting standard (All students)	ELA % meeting standard (not including students who receive special education services)
3 rd grade	64%	72%
4 th grade	61%	65%
5 th grade	74%	81%
6 th grade	69%	72%

	Math - % meeting standard (All students)	Math - % meeting standard (not including students who receive special education services)
	56%	58%
	54%	60%
	36%	42%
	35%	43%

Another success worth noting:

The goal is that children are moving up a level over time. These charts show that overall, the number of children receiving 1's and 2's is going down while the number of children receiving 3s and 4s is going up.

Worth noting:

- In 3rd grade, the number of children receiving 4's this year are the largest percentage. This is a very hopeful sign of the foundation our children are being given and the potential impact on future years is likely very positive.
- In 6th grade, the number of children receiving 1's in ELA and Math has gone down significantly. There were no 6th grade students, including students who receive special education services for ELA, who received a 1 in ELA this year.

Current 4th grade students:

	ELA 15-16	ELA 16 -17		Math 15 – 16	Math 16-17
1	27%	18%		27%	17%
2	23%	21%		21%	27%
3	21%	24%		27%	22%
4	29%	37%		25%	32%

Current 5th grade students:

	ELA 15-16	ELA 16 -17		Math 15 – 16	Math 16-17
1	24%	13%		25%	33%
2	22%	13%		44%	31%
3	29%	51%		18%	16%
4	27% (15/55)	23% (14/61)		13%	20%

Current 6th grade students:

	ELA 15-16	ELA 16 -17		Math 15 – 16	Math 16-17
1	27% (7/26)	0%		46%	19%
2	27%	32%		31%	46%
3	19%	45%		15%	20%
4	27%	24%		8%	15%

Professional Development Needs

FSMA recognizes that achievement data offers invaluable insights for making decisions about instruction. Analyzing our data is a critical component of our professional development plan and helps us determine areas of need. It is important that we force ourselves to slow down and carefully interpret individual, class and school-wide data to ensure we are doing all we can to help every child succeed. We continue to build our abilities to critically and strategically collect and interpret the data so that our decisions are informed and meaningful.

Data Sources Used:

- Smarter Balanced Assessment
- Response to Intervention(RtI) results
- Observational data from Formal and Informal Observations
- IEP goal data
- Teacher feedback
- Dibels, Aimsweb, Fountas & Pinnell, and other assessments utilized by classroom teachers at the relevant grade level

Based on SBAC data and internal data collected over the previous school year, we have determined a few areas that will be the focus of our professional development in the 2017-2018 school year.

Target Area of Need:	
<i>K/1</i>	Continue to build instructional capacity in regard to guided reading. Build off of the previous year's literacy coach work through a focus-group PLC
<i>2/3</i>	Guided reading instruction with literacy coach Need is based off of the strong work K/1 did in the previous year and the intent is to build off of the momentum children have by developing the capacity of teacher's at the next grade level
<i>4/5/6</i>	Math instruction – Montessori and CCSS Combined Focus group PLC led by 2 FSMA teachers who have a strong background in math instruction at the Upper Elementary level and who have had success in the classroom as shown on the SBAC.
<i>7</i>	Build off of the ELA success students had in 6 th grade Develop new curriculum in math and science that aligns with Montessori Middle School Curriculum

