

Avalon Middle School—Santa Rosa County

KEY THEMES:

- Parent Involvement and Commitment
- Respected, Caring, Charismatic, Flexible Principal
- Positive School Climate
- Data Analysis
- School wide expectations of excellence in student achievement
- Integrated use of technology across the curriculum
- Teaming across the curriculum
- Analysis and Reading Across the Curriculum
- Block schedule with Reading Component
- Remediation in each Classroom
- Curriculum Mapping
- Sunshine State Standards
- Bloom's Taxonomy used as a method of instruction
- Individual Academic Plan for Students
- Well defined Discipline Plan
- Staff Development
- Turnleaf Achievement Management System
- All Children Can Learn
- Life Long Learners
- Outstanding School Achievements
 - Florida School Report ranks Avalon Middle in top one percent of Middle Schools in FCAT Reading and Math scores
 - Florida School Report Award for High Performing School
 - "A" school grade for three consecutive years
 - Featured on Discovery Channel Show
 - Principal of Year Award for Santa Rosa County
 - Region I Principal of the Year

BEST PRACTICES:

- Student/Parent/Community Involvement
 - Active P.T.O.
 - School Advisory Council
 - Volunteers
- School/Home Communication
 - E-mail & Web Page
 - Principal's Newsletter
 - Progress Reports
 - Telephone
 - Conferences
 - Open House
 - School Planner
 - Letters Home
- Read 180 Program
- Analysis of Data in Planning Curriculum
- Shared Decision Making
- Stakeholder Involvement
- Positive Behavior Referrals
- After-School Tutoring
- Arts in Education Program
- Interactive Computer Math (C.C.C.)

THE PRINCIPAL

The Principal at Avalon Middle School (AMS) holds a Master's degree in Educational Leadership and has 29 years total educational experience, including the past five years at Avalon. She opened the school as a new structure and has molded the staff into a professional, methodical, innovative, caring group of educators. She has earned the respect and trust of not only her staff but the parents, students, and community as well. The Principal believes in an open door policy, strong parental involvement, and offering a curriculum and classroom procedures that encourage students to continually improve. She was recently awarded the Principal of the Year Award for her district and region. She stresses to all stakeholders that when a child leaves Avalon they will be life long learners and productive citizens.

PRINCIPAL LEADERSHIP

Principal Leadership will be described as it relates to the following standards, which are aligned with the National Standards of the Interstate School Leader Licensure Consortium (ISLLC), the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), and the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP).

Standard 1: Facilitating a Vision of Learning

The vision and mission of the school is based simply on the belief statement that when children leave Avalon they will be lifelong learners and productive citizens in our society. This is communicated to the stakeholders of the school through the School Improvement Plan, which is developed by the School Advisory Council, made up of parents, students, teachers, administrators, and community members. The vision is also communicated through the P.T.O., website, newsletters, open houses and other school publications. Probably the most obvious way the vision is communicated is through the actions of students and staff that live the vision and mission on a daily basis.

It has become an annual function of the School Advisory to revisit the vision and mission for updating and fine-tuning. It has become the driving force behind all curriculum and programs offered at the school. Assessment data is used extensively to ascertain the skill areas in which the AMS students may have a deficiency and thus the curriculum is based upon the outcome of the data. Teachers participate regularly in staff development at the district and school level to improve their skills in interpreting student data. Demographic data is used to determine Title I criteria and to help with planning for the subgroups in the No Child Left Behind initiatives. This focus helps carry out the Principal's goal that all children can learn.

As barriers to learning present themselves, they are addressed and solutions are sought such as writing grants, award programs, fund raising, rewarding good behavior and academic performance, and developing new programs. Sometimes the grants and fundraisers must be used to supplement the resources supplied by district for purchasing textbooks, classroom supplies, technology hardware and software and other equipment.

A continual monitoring of the vision and mission of the school takes place as the CCC reports, Read 180/SRI reports, and FCAT scores are reviewed and distributed to the faculty and parents.

Standard 2: School Culture and Instructional Program

Teachers' professional development plans are focused on student learning consistent with the School Improvement Plan goals. The needs of the faculty are surveyed on a yearly basis and these needs drive their Professional Development Plans.

The results of the FCAT scores, other data assessment, technology needs, and many other factors are reviewed previous to the beginning and throughout the school year as part of Avalon's continual quest for improvement.

Students and staff are made to feel valued and important in the school in many different ways. For instance, breakfasts for the staff are held periodically, recognition programs for whole weeks are scheduled, end of the year luncheon is planned, and written and oral communication takes place continually during the school year. The staff is never overlooked for their outstanding commitment to the educational process at Avalon Middle School. Students are recognized and awarded through Positive Behavior Referrals, which are sent home, ceremonies and assemblies which are planned, newsletters, local newspaper columns, in classroom ceremonies, at P.T.O. functions, on the marquee, and by announcements over the P.A. system. Just before the Winter Holiday Season, the principal distributes gifts to deserving recipients as a special honor.

When barriers to student learning are identified, clarified, or encountered, the school immediately takes action to break these barriers down. This is accomplished through teacher referrals to guidance, parent-teacher conferences, parent-administrator conferences, looking at assessment data to determine ability and placement, tutoring, or any other way the individual can be helped. Student learning is assessed through FCAT scores, FCAT simulations, FCAT Explorer, Read 180, AR Math, CCC levels, and teacher comments.

The school is always aware of the diversity of the student body. A concerted effort is made to make everyone feel welcome at AMS. The school culture and climate is assessed yearly by a climate survey. Information is summarized and presented to the faculty and SAC. Events are scheduled so that the students can learn different cultures such as an annual Cultural Fair, Black History Month, and Women in History Program. The extra curricular program also provides a means for cultural mixture. The faculty and administration encourage respect for all students in the school. Parents of all cultures are encouraged to become members of the School Advisory as well as the P.T.O. All parents are invited to become volunteers at the school.

The principal promotes a culture of high expectations for all. She constantly stresses “Keep the main thing the main thing” and “Teachers, teach, teach, teach; students learn, learn, learn; and everyone works, works, works.” These mottos are posted throughout the school and in publications of the school. The principal leads by example as she certainly depicts what is posted on these mottoes.

Technology is a huge part of AMS and is used across the curriculum, especially in improving Math and Reading skills. There are computer labs and at least one computer in each classroom. The faculty participates in training at the district and school level focused on the use of technology. The media specialist utilizes her expertise to deliver in-house workshops.

As previously mentioned, a comprehensive co-curricular and extra curricular program is offered at AMS. There are curricular interest clubs, Band and Chorus, Student Government, Beta Club, Yearbook, Media Productions, Drama, and Red Cross Club. All these activities are based on the interest of the students.

Standard 3: Management

The knowledge of learning, teaching, and student development is shared with the faculty as frequently as possible. The Curriculum Council, composed of eleven teachers, and the administration, meets frequently to consider mutual concerns and investigates means of enhancing academic progress. The School Advisory meets monthly and hears and reacts to the potential problems and concerns brought to them. The participatory leadership of the principal keeps her involved throughout every aspect of the school. Shared decision-making and stakeholder involvement are key processes in her management style. The assistant principal also practices this style of management.

The school is very active in the business community. There are numerous businesses that act as partners, lending their support with in-kind goods and providing personnel as guest speakers and volunteers. Teachers, administrators, and district personnel are always seeking grants that may bring additional funding to the academic programs and lead to continuous improvement. Parents are staunch supporters of the school and report that their input is sought and is accepted through formal and informal opportunities.

Teachers are also very involved in the organization of the management of the school through their grade level or subject area teams as well as through the Curriculum Council School Advisory Council, and the Parent and Teacher Organization. Regularly scheduled faculty meetings create another avenue for teachers to be heard.

The facility is considered a new school. It is well taken care of by the district contracted custodial staff under the supervision of the assistant principal. Students and faculty show a great deal of pride in their school by maintaining a clean, safe and aesthetically pleasing campus.

Student records are securely placed in a locked vault, monitored by office personnel and guidance staff. Teacher records are kept in confidence under the care of the principal.

Standard 4: Collaboration with Families and Communities

Community members and families are given an open invitation to visit the school. Every opportunity is utilized to recognize community leadership through school publications or ceremonies. They are encouraged to join the School Advisory Council and the P.T.O. or to become active in the school as volunteers or guest speakers.

Collaborative skills for the staff are developed through grade level, faculty, Curriculum Council, School Advisory and P.T.O. meetings. Teachers are encouraged to spread their wings and attend professional seminars, conferences, and conventions both on the local and national levels as a means of communicating new methods of collaboration to their peers.

The school and all its stakeholders are considered family and thus there is a warm feeling of caring on the AMS campus. The principal takes time from her busy schedule to personally counsel every student who has multiple failures on their report card. She presents them with a contract for improvement that they must sign and carry home to the parents.

Standard 5: Acting with Integrity, Fairness, and in an Ethical Manner

Personal and professional values are examined through reflection of actions, ideas, and programs. The values of the staff are evaluated by students and parents every day as they perform these professional duties on the campus. A more formal evaluation of teachers is done by the administration with suggestions for improvement if necessary. The district, in turn, evaluates the principal according to professional performance standards.

The principal adheres to a philosophy of “Let your walk match your talk” and expects no less of the faculty as they demonstrate values, beliefs, and attitudes to those students in their classrooms. AMS students are inspired to be the best that they can be.

The school is accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools and therefore must meet all the standards required by this association.

Appreciation for the diversity of the school community is demonstrated by the school through the celebration of Black History, Women in History, the Cultural Fair, and the geography curriculum, which recognizes and distinguishes the many cultures in our global community. Parents of all cultures are made to feel welcome at AMS and are encouraged to become a part of the Avalon family and participate in the School Advisory Council and the P.T.O.

Standard 6: The Political, Social, Economic, Legal, and Cultural Context

Communication occurs among the school community concerning trends, issues, and potential changes in the environment in which the school operates through faculty meetings, e-mail, newsletters, web-page, phone messages and conversations, the student planner, the local newspaper articles as well as the open door policy of the school.

An on-going dialogue with representatives of the diverse community groups take place through the School Advisory Council, P.T.O., Orientation meetings, Recognition Programs, Band and Choral performances as well as other communication opportunities previously mentioned.

Decision-makers outside the school are made to feel welcome at the school at any time. They can access the web page and be added to the newsletter mailing list by just making this known to the principal. News from the school is also sent to the local newspaper and other media. Lines of communication are constantly open to the entire community. This school is a family and all are welcome.

DATA, DECISION MAKING & DESIGN

Various methods are used to assess student progress, some areas of which follow:

- Teacher made tests
- Standardized tests
- Unit tests
- Rubrics
- Computer software tests in reading and math
- Teacher observations and comments
- Projects
- Pre and post unit tests
- Portfolio
- FCAT results

The composite scores for both reading and math for all incoming sixth graders to AMS are received from the district and reviewed by the faculty and administration. Each sixth grade teacher receives a copy of these scores so they can familiarize themselves with their new students and plan accordingly. Composite scores from standardized testing and teacher-made test data for the seventh and eighth graders are also made available for the teachers at those levels. The analysis of all this data is the driving force from which the curriculum develops or is modified.

Academic Improvement Plans (A.I.P.) are created for all students who score at Level 1 or 2 on the FCAT reading and math sections. Those students who score below a cut point on the norm-referenced test have an AIP created also. A new program entitled “Turnleaf” has been purchased by the district and provides data on individual student’s strengths and weaknesses. Individual remediation classes for students in Levels 1 and 2 in math and reading are homogeneously grouped. Parent conferences are held using all this data to compare student achievement in the classroom against academic potential.

The district provides inservice opportunities for teachers in the use of assessment data at the Professional Development Center. Additional training is provided at the school site by staff that has expertise in this area, thus making it very convenient

for faculty. Although there are no site-based inservice funds provided by the district, inservice is provided in support of a strong push to use the data to drive the curriculum.

Results of all the assessment data are made available to teachers through the Turnleaf Program via the district offices. Hardcopy of all student scores are provided to the faculty as well. This data is used to identify the strengths and weaknesses on particular subtests and show class composite scores by particular subgroups, such as for those students on free and reduced lunch. There is so much usable data that time can become an issue in the retrieval of the data. The guidance department also provides data as well as that found in the student's cumulative folders.

Student data is used in the formulation of the School Improvement Plan and goals contained within the document. Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) can be assessed by determining the progress of the students in meeting the goals. The school grade determined by the state is also an indicator of how well the school is achieving their goals.

Individual teachers use empirical data to determine curriculum and guide explicit instruction in the classroom. It is generally not a school wide program of instruction. School decision-making is based on FCAT scores such as determining which students receive intensive reading and math. Data drives the entire curriculum so what is taught in content areas is largely determined by this data. Each teacher uses data to guide the individualized instruction and curriculum for each student. After the teachers assess and diagnose the data, remediation is planned for those students designated Level 1 or 2.

FAMILY/COMMUNITY

The school communicates its philosophy and goals through monthly newsletters, school website, open houses, orientation programs, School Advisory and P.T.O. meetings, vision and mission posters throughout the school and letters to the parents from each classroom teacher outlining what is expected of the student and the grading procedures.

The progress of the student is assessed through report cards, progress reports, standardized test scores, teacher observations and comments. The school programs, policies, and procedures are communicated to the parents and community partners in printed materials through a student handbook and the student planners. These items are also discussed verbally at school open house events, school advisory meetings, P.T.O. meetings, Orientation Programs, and are contained in the newsletters from the principal.

Families and community partners are able to share their ideas with the school through questionnaires which are sent home, School Advisory, P.T.O., Open Houses, and at other school functions and activities. Shared decision-making is certainly a strong belief of the principal therefore her ears are always open to parental and community suggestions. The school mission, budget, and School Improvement Plan are all functions of the School Advisory, therefore parents have input in all these facets of the school.

The school is very aware of the transition of new students and family into the school and plans an orientation program before the school year begins. Students and parents are given the opportunity to meet with the teachers, hear about school curriculum, activities and programs, ask questions, as well as tour the school and locate their classrooms.

Ongoing two-way communication is maintained with the parents/community through the student planner issued to each student. Teacher comments and parent responses or concerns can be written in this planner which is brought home on a daily basis. Teachers also use e-mail, telephone, letters and notes to enhance this two-way communication and demonstrate that they have respect for student and family input. Parent-teacher conferences are held as needed so both home and school can be working together positively to handle problems or differences.

The school continually makes efforts to make parents/community feel welcome in the school by creating such events as "Bring Your Parent to School Day", "Family Read Night" and Open Houses. An active P.T.O. is a viable organization on the campus and offers membership to all who may have interest. Volunteers are also recruited to help at the school in many ways, such as chaperoning field trips, in the classroom, in the lunchroom, or at school sponsored events.

The school has a well-organized plan to inform parents/community about day-to-day happenings and special events. An automatic call system is used with a recorded message about special events, letters are sent home, e-mail, and notes in student planner are some methods to communicate. Parent-Teacher conferences can be scheduled as often as needed so that parent and teacher can work together in helping the child. Again the staff and administration do their utmost to foster the family atmosphere on the campus.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Avalon is located in Milton, Florida and is a part of the Santa Rosa County School District. Avalon is one of newer schools in the district and is a modern attractive campus. The county of Santa Rosa is growing and moving from a rural agricultural community to one of more urban and residential. Many residents have chosen to live in the county but commute to nearby Escambia County and the City of Pensacola for their employment.

School Demographics

Avalon Middle School has 779 students in grades 6-8 of which 89.05% are white, 4.22% are black, 2.08% Hispanic, 1.93% Asian, 0.77% Indian, and 1.95% Multiracial. There are 15.8% of the student population classified with disabilities and 1 student classified as an LEP student. There are 6.2% gifted students and twenty eight per cent of the students are on a free/reduced lunch program. There were only 8 incidents of crime or violence reported this past year. The stability rate of the students was 95%. The faculty is composed of 34% with advanced degrees and the teacher's average number of years of experience is 10.8. The school received an "A" grade last school year.

Goals

Goal 3 - Student Performance

The FCAT scores for this school have not been received at this writing, but the Florida School Report has ranked Avalon in the top one percent of middle schools when FCAT reading and math scores were compared with other schools across the state. The school was also awarded a High Performing School status in the Florida School Report.

Goal 4 - Learning Environment

The school population continues to grow and the quality of education also continues to improve. The school received an "A" school rating for the third year in a row.

Goal 5 - School Safety and Environment

The number of incidents for the school has decreased by one this school year and parents and students indicate they are pleased with the school in the climate survey results. Parents report this is an environment conducive to learning.

Goal 8 - Parental Involvement

Parental involvement is one of the contributing factors to the success of this school. All the parents interviewed were totally pleased with the school's efforts to stay in touch with the home and community. Parents indicated the staff, students, and parents feel as though they are part of an extended family.