

Dante B. Fascell Elementary—Miami-Dade County

KEY THEMES:

- Dynamic, visionary, innovative principal with excellent interpersonal skills
- Strong partnership with the community, local businesses, and professionals
- Media used as an avenue to increase reading resources and the love for reading
- Technology used as an effective tool of communication and learning
- A high performing workforce as a result of ongoing staff development
- Strong parental involvement
- Extensive community service projects such as Camillus House, The United Way, Dade Partners Program and Farm Share to name a few
- Evidence of the school-community connection – attaining the Golden School Award yearly
- Written parent communications in English and Spanish
- Parent workshops offered in English and Spanish
- A strong PTA
- Many school volunteers
- A strong formative Leadership Committee
- Strong commitment to ongoing professional development
- Focus on integrated curriculum
- Large bilingual faculty
- Use of teacher made tests
- Focus on student reflection of learning
- Recognition of achievements
- Vividly displayed school mission
- Consensus management
- Strong fine arts program
- Dedicated teachers
- Everyone a leader
- Strong collaborative, cohesive culture

BEST PRACTICES:

- Technology infused into the student's curriculum to enhance the delivery of instruction and increase students' ability to access, analyze, interpret, and disseminate data and/or information
- Most programs delivered using an inclusion model allowing for a decreased teacher-student ratio
- Staff members involved in decision-making
- Staff stipends reallocated to training dollars through an annual district waiver
- Systematic process of Plan Do Study Act (PDSA) used for continuous improvement
- Substitutes hired several times during the year for grade level and/or department planning
- A "cascading leadership system" distributing leadership broadly throughout the school
- School Performance Excellence Plan aligning the school's goals with state and district goals
- Systematic process of Plan Do Study Act (PDSA) used for continuous improvement
- Fourth and fifth grades departmentalized
- Higher order thinking ensured using Bloom's Taxonomy
- Fourth and fifth graders given agendas to assist in organizational skills
- Tutoring programs for third graders
- Paraprofessionals hired to help in kindergartens
- Many grants written by teachers funded to provide the school with additional resources
- A mentoring process in place for all new teachers
- Use of bilingual programs
- Proactive role of guidance counselors in solving student problems
- Immediate availability and accessibility of teachers and administrators to parents as needed

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 are communicated to all stakeholders through the school's web page, the community bulletin board located outside the main office, and the Parent/Student Handbook. Through newsletters, at meetings and via closed-circuit television the vision and mission are emphasized. Originally the vision and mission were developed by the school's Educational Excellence School Advisory Council (EESAC); they are confirmed and discussed annually during the School Performance Excellence Plan (SPEP) meetings.

Community members' contributions are recognized through letters of appreciation, a volunteer breakfast, and acknowledgements on the school's marquee and during school meetings, and recognitions such as Parent of the Month and Dade Partners. This school year Dante Fascell has four district winners of the Parent of the Month.

The vision is the driving force behind all endeavors. The six indicators – *daring to dream, nurturing the intellect, expressing emotions, raising achievement, sharing responsibility, and fostering the love of reading* – are reflected in all educational programs, plans and actions. The vision is the school's affirmation of what is important to the customers. Data is used by teachers to help students reach their full potential and develop meaningful instructional activities. The SPEP develops long term goals that relate to student learning and validate the vision and mission, *Brightening the future through the power of knowledge using a multiple intelligence approach*.

Demographic information is used to develop school goals; disaggregated test scores are analyzed and considered in programmatic and operational processes. Due to the large Hispanic population all communication and all parent meetings are presented in both English and Spanish. Barriers are avoided by encouraging participation and communication in either language. Periodic reviews of processes are revised as the need arises.

The EESAC has the responsibility of monitoring, evaluating and revising the vision, mission and implementation plans of the school. Members obtain feedback from their constituents and express them at meetings and conferences. Within the EESAC are members of the PTA and Dade Partners, all of whom work collaboratively to support the school with resources that are available. Equipment, supplies and materials are purchased to support the schools strategic and action plans with expenditures focused on identified key performance areas. An open door policy is evident throughout the school and contributes to consensus that enhances ownership and encourages participation in all facets of the school.

Standard 2: School Culture and Instructional Program

Professional development is an integral part of the school. During each grading period each teacher is given a professional day to follow up on the needs listed in their Professional Development Plan; the school provides a substitute. Activities include inservice workshops, grade level planning, online classes, and professional conferences. Students and staff are valued and recognized for their accomplishments via newsletters, staff meetings, closed-circuit television and letters of appreciation.

Barriers to student learning are identified through analysis of data, parent/teacher meetings and surveys. Diversity is provided through cultural experiences to reinforce values and respect for one another. Many activities enhance the love of reading, a major focus of the school.

The Dante Fascell family is encouraged to pursue life long learning. Staff members are encouraged to seek professional development opportunities and keep abreast of current education practices. A culture of high expectations is promoted through risk taking, recognition, professional development, and a "no excuse" academic achievement approach. Teachers are encouraged to pilot new programs and to abandon them if results are not as expected. Administration promotes high expectations by setting direction and aligning processes across all subsystems.

Technology is used extensively throughout the school. The school has been selected as one of sixty schools in the district to participate in a grant in technology leadership. The focus for selection was on the principal being knowledgeable and receptive to integrating technology throughout the curriculum. A technology mentor was chosen who attends workshops and then trains the fifteen members of the technology cohort who then train their peers. Teachers utilize technology to collect and analyze data on a regular basis. Programs that the school uses include: PowerPoint, Excel, Word, Internet Explorer, Riverdeep, and Standardized Test for Assessment of Reading (STAR), among others.

Curricular programs are designed, implemented, evaluated and refined using a systematic process for continuous improvement called Plan Do Study Act (PDSA). At each stage of the cycle the process is evaluated to determine whether or not it is moving the school toward improvement. By breaking ideas for change into manageable steps, what begins as an idea for change develops into a sustainable system for improvement.

The school culture and climate are assessed through a school developed climate survey, a district developed climate survey, staff and student surveys. Student learning is assessed using both formal and informal methods that include pre and post tests, student profiles, rubrics, performance assessments and standardized testing.

Pupil personnel programs are developed after a survey of teachers and as a result of comments on the school climate survey. Counselors create groups and programs to complement the identified needs in order that the school's programs are better aligned to the needs of all students.

Standard 3: Management

Knowledge of learning, teaching, and student development is used to make informed decisions regarding the purchase of curriculum materials, supplemental materials and the provision of staff development. Stakeholders are involved in decisions affecting the school by being members of the EESAC and PTA and participating in surveys. Potential problems and opportunities are identified through school climate surveys, teacher and parent surveys, parent conferences and a complaint log that is maintained by the administration. The complaint log is a systematic way to list and analyze the type of concerns the parents and/or community may have.

Continuous improvement operates on a turnkey model approach to staff development. Teachers are trained and return to the school site to train others. Organizational and instructional systems are regularly monitored and modified through use of the PDSA improvement cycle.

A safe, clean and aesthetically pleasing school environment is created and maintained under the direction of the Organizational Leadership Team (OLT) through the School Operational Action Plan. The elected membership of the OLT includes representatives from instructional, paraprofessional, clerical, food service, and custodial staff in addition to the principal, assistant principal, lead teacher and EESAC/PTA parent representative. The OLT addresses the needs of all stakeholders as they relate to non-academic organizational performance; its primary function is to improve efficiency and effectiveness. Internal audits and "walk abouts" are conducted to identify and address custodial staff and safety issues.

Confidentiality and privacy of school records are maintained through strict guidelines and limited access by key personnel to records.

Standard 4: Collaboration with Families and Communities

Relationships with community leaders are identified and nurtured through the Dade Partners program and through correspondence with the elected school board representative who represents the school. Key partnerships include WalMart, Sedano's Supermarket, Tony Roma's, Hot Wheels Skating Center, and Amy's Hallmark, among others. The school and community serve one another. The community provides awards and incentives for honor rolls; the school supplies the students for participation in various community programs.

The school reaches out to business, religious, political and service agencies and organizations through a United Way campaign drive, Red Cross School Chest project, a toy drive for homeless children and a can food drive for the Salvation Army. A network of community resources and Dade Partners work together to solve problems and achieve school goals. Teachers participate in cohorts for advanced degrees through local institutions of higher education. Effective media relations are maintained through submission and publication to the local newspaper of school news, honor roll recipients, teacher awards, volunteer recognitions and class activities.

Collaborative skills of staff are developed through grade level meetings, staff meetings, and membership on school committees and EESAC. Professional meetings and presentations provide additional opportunities for collaboration. The professional day each grading period allows every teacher to meet with like colleagues and participate in horizontal articulation.

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

By listening to and observing all staff members, the principal is able to examine personal and professional values of employees. By analyzing the complaint log a great deal of information is gained about the community. All members of the Dante Fascell family evaluate the principal's personal and professional values on a daily basis. Each encounter and resulting decision sends a message to all participants. To demonstrate an acceptance of a diverse school community's values, no harassing or bullying is permitted by any student.

Values, beliefs and attitudes that inspire others to higher levels of performance are demonstrated by empowering the staff to be autonomous. Staff is encouraged to take risks and to be instructional leaders in their classrooms or core groups.

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

Communication occurs through email, school website, memos/flyers, newsletters, quarterly report cards and progress reports, staff meetings, and the community bulletin board and marquee. An ongoing dialogue with representatives of diverse community groups takes place in EESAC and PTA meetings. As of April eight parent workshops have been held this school year to inform parents about such items as third grade retention, *No Child Left Behind*, testing, reading activities, among others. Staff participates in articulation meetings with the middle schools in the feeder pattern and in community events such as the community book fair. The principal and assistant principals regularly serve on committees at both the region and district levels.

DATA, DECISION MAKING & DESIGN

Student progress is assessed through both formal and empirical data. Some of the assessments used are pre/post tests, teacher made tests and observations, rubric graded projects and reports, Standardized Test for Assessment of Reading (STAR), plus FCAT and standardized, norm-referenced tests. Student performance data is reviewed on a school created student profile during grade level meetings and professional days to determine the focus for instruction. Teacher-made assessments and informal assessments are reviewed daily and used to tailor instruction to students' needs.

This school year some teachers are piloting The Classroom Performance System (CPS), a computerized student appraisal system that engages all students while collecting performance data seamlessly and effortlessly. CPS works by allowing teachers to assess students electronically and give them immediate feedback about the responses the students have given. Each student is given a hand held device that electronically tells the CPS unit, monitored by the teacher, what answer has been chosen. The use of the CPS has made learning fun and allowed the teacher to be sure all students are on task, thus no child is left behind.

Teachers are trained to use assessment data through workshops, staff meetings, grade level planning days, and Professional Development days (one day every quarter). On these days best practices are shared; data are analyzed; technology workshops are planned; and speakers give meaningful talks. The topics for the Professional Development days are teacher- or team-generated and determined by collaboration among the teachers involved. During preplanning in August data analysis training was conducted. Topics included were: FCAT data (how to measure gains and analyze students' scores); Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) Profile; and the Current Class Testing Profile (the Fascell-developed profile). Teachers were taught to read their "Class Record Sheet for Learning Gains" and to make and record on an Excel spreadsheet. The teachers have access to assessment results from the office and online; data is shared and reviewed regularly.

To determine if school goals are being achieved, the teachers participate in a mid-year review to look at assessment data recorded as a result of pre and progress tests for reading, math and writing. A technology log to ensure that at least 70% of the students in each class are working with technology (an SPEP objective) and Accelerated Reader results are also considered. Empirical data is used in the selection of programs, software and textbooks. Collected data helps to determine what the strengths and weaknesses of the present instructional program are and which strategies are producing positive results and should remain in place or be adjusted. Continuous academic improvement is the goal of the school.

If data from a specific pre test given at the beginning of the school year indicates that students need help in one area more than another, then that area(s) is targeted using strategies that will facilitate the teaching and learning of that specific topic(s). The teacher considers the demographics of the children in a specific classroom so that the teaching strategies address the appropriate needs. Accommodations are made. Intervention strategies used at Dante Fascell include grouping, advanced materials, peer teaching, books on tape, multiple intelligences, manipulatives, nine week grades, pre/post tests, among others.

Professional development for teachers new to the school is ongoing. In August before school starts a day is set aside for training for new teachers. Some of the items covered this past August included multiple intelligences, time management, classroom management, mentoring, and technology requirements. Each new staff member is given a "buddy" who has similar teaching responsibilities.

FAMILY/COMMUNITY

The school's philosophy and goals are displayed in most classrooms; they are distributed through the school handbook at the beginning of each school year; and they are found on the school website. Parents are encouraged to look at the site as it contains valuable information regarding the school. All of the programs, policies, and procedures are explained in detail in the handbook. Parents are asked to read the handbook and sign and return the form inside the handbook to indicate that they've read and understand the information. Information regarding procedures for grading and what is considered adequate progress are included. Open house and parent workshops also inform parents about what is expected and how they can help.

Families/community partners are given the opportunity to express their ideas by being active participants in the PTA or EESAC committee. Parents are encouraged to give their opinions at workshops and conferences; individual parent meetings may be

scheduled. School committees have parent/community representation and members may ask questions, express concerns, present problems and seek solutions. During school improvement planning, committees review progress as it applies to current goals and then set new goals for improvement. At all times the goals must be in line with the school mission.

At the beginning of the school year the school is open the Saturday before opening day specifically for new families. Students and parents are oriented to the school and important information, such as uniform requirements, backpack rules, attendance and tardy regulations, pertinent to Dante Fascell is explained. School policies are clearly explained before the student begins the new school year.

Teachers and parents are encouraged to communicate regularly by email, telephone, written notes and conferences. Each child is treated as an individual. Various ethnic and culturally related activities are incorporated into the curriculum. Students discuss differences as well as likenesses of their heritage. Communication is the key to working together positively to handle differences that may arise. When necessary, any action taken involves the teachers, parents, students and administration so that all people involved work together toward the solution of the concern. The friendly staff makes an effort to know the families and encourages them to attend workshops and PTA meetings to make all stakeholders feel welcome.

Parents are encouraged to participate in the school through the PTA, community partners and volunteering. A parent/student handbook issued at the beginning of the school year outlines all the programs and ways parents can participate at the school. The information is reiterated at the annual open house in September, at PTA meetings, in newsletters and flyers. Parents are well informed; all communication is in both English and Spanish. A marquee in front of the school lists upcoming events and important information. The PTA provides an agenda for fourth and fifth graders that list not only homework and behavior information but also special events in the classroom and school. Parents know to expect the agenda to come home on a daily basis; parents are encouraged to write notes to the teacher when necessary. In addition to the agenda given to each child, some classes offer a daily progress report. Phone calls are made when students are not picked up punctually, when behavior is inappropriate or when an injury occurs.

Parents and teachers work together through daily written communication in the agenda and through parent conferences when necessary. Concerns are discussed and goals are developed to assist the student in his instructional program. A conference can be requested at any time but they are generally held at the beginning of each grading period.

Information regarding program and/or policy changes are communicated through newspaper articles and letters sent home from the school board or state agency. A bulletin board displays current flyers that have been distributed. The school website has links to sites with information regarding changes that affect the students. When it is time to ensure a smooth transition to the middle school, parents, teachers and middle school personnel maintain close communication to ensure adequate dissemination of information via meetings, articulation fairs, and tours of the middle school.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

School Demographics

Dante B. Fascell Elementary is located in Miami-Dade County Public School system in the southwest area of the county. The school employs seventy-one instructional staff, with three school based administrators. Dante B. Fascell enrolled 1239 students, with the majority of the students Hispanic (85% Hispanic, 9% White, 4% African American, 2% Asian, <1% American Indian, and 1% Multiracial). The school report grade for 2002-2003 was an A. 61.6% of the students were on free/reduced lunch. The average class size for K-5 classes is 26.7 students. 11.3% of the students are classified with disabilities, 9.3% are gifted, and 36.1% are LEP. Dante Fascell has a stability rate of 94.9%, and the teachers have an average of 5.8 years of experience.

Goals

Goal 3 - Student Performance

In grade 4, tested 192 students in FCAT Writing Assessment, with a school average of 93% of the students scoring three or higher as compared to the district's average of 89% and the state's average of 90% scoring three or higher. Scores range from 1.0 (lowest) to 6.0 (highest). FCAT reading and mathematics scores were higher than the district and state scores for all grades with the exception of grade 4 mathematics; it was higher than the district but lower than the state. FCAT norm-referenced test results were reported by median national percentile ranks (NPR) and were higher than the district and state except for grade 5 reading; it was higher than the district but lower than the state. FCAT school accountability data in grade 3 reading tested 196 students and had 70% scoring at Level 3 or above, grade 4 reading tested 192 students and had 72% scoring at Level 3 or above and grade 5 reading had 232 students tested with 66% scoring at Level 3 or above. Grade 3 mathematics tested 197 students with 66% scoring at Level 3 or above, grade 4 mathematics tested 192 students with 62% scoring at Level 3 or above and grade 5 mathematics tested 232 students with 62% scoring at Level 3 or higher.

Goal 4 - Learning Environment

Reported 2.4% of the students had absences of 21+ days as compared with 5.1% at the district and 6.1% at the state.

Goal 5 - School Safety and Environment

Reported 20 incidents at the school. There were 14 incidents of fighting and harassment, 1 violent act against persons, 4 against property, 1 classified as a nonviolent incident and disorderly conduct.

Goal 6 - Teachers and Staff

Reported that 84% of the staff held Bachelor's Degrees and 16% held advanced degrees. Nine teachers have National Board Certification.