

Nova High School—Broward County

KEY THEMES:

- Parental Involvement
- *“Inspected is Respected is Expected”*
- Early Recognition of Graduation Requirements
- Interpersonal Skills of Administration
- Student 1st Approach to Decision Making
- Data Targets Specific Weaknesses/Strengths
- Powerful Dedicated Leadership
- Safe & Clean Learning Environment
- Celebrate Successes
- Acknowledge Cultural Diversity
- Passionate Staff
- Discipline
- Common Planning
- Recognition of Faculty & Student Accomplishment

BEST PRACTICES:

- Accountability of Faculty
- High Expectations of Staff & Students
- Literacy Plan
- Teacher Hiring Reflects School Demographics
- Data Interpretive Administration
- 60+ Extracurricular Activities
- Saturday FCAT Reading camp
- Open Enrollment For Advanced Placement Classes
- FCAT Explorer
- Virtual Counselor
- COMPASS Learning Software
- SAT Preparation
- Academic Preparation Program
- AP Teachers Instructing at All Levels
- Community Partnership with Coca-Cola

THE PRINCIPAL

The principal of Nova High School has 20+ years of experience in education, 3 years as a principal and 9 years as a teacher. He is both personable and approachable while maintaining a strong sense of discipline. Highly regarded by faculty and parents, he is forthright, honest, and passionate about Nova High. His passion extends to the very building itself, where he deems it a priority for the school to be neat, clean and orderly so that students take pride in where they are as much as what they are accomplishing.

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

Nova High School's Mission Statement extends beyond its own definition into its feeder middle and elementary schools. It states, *“The mission of Nova is to train pre-service and experienced educators to teach our culturally diverse student population to be literate, productive citizens, using a seamless K-12 curriculum, in collaboration with parents, the community, and partners in higher education.”* This ambitious mission is the result of input from every source listed in the Mission Statement itself and was a year in the making.

Nova utilizes its extensive website to reach out to a considerable faculty, parent, and student base (2000+ students alone) to communicate its broad vision as well as the small steps leading to its culmination. There are electronic versions of the school's newsletters and the School Improvement Plan on-line, hard copies of which are also available. Additional formal progress is relayed to SAC at bi-annual meetings conducted for that expressed purpose.

Apart from communicating progress toward the school's mission, Nova takes advantage of celebrating the milestones along the way. In order to acknowledge the great many volunteers (who make up for financial shortfalls) Nova organizes a Volunteer Luncheon to recognize the outstanding contributions of its extended school family.

The Mission takes root in the form of Nova's Literacy Plan. The Principal and others realized three years ago that students were coming to the high school not reading on grade level. Data supported what teachers already realized in their classrooms. It became imperative and obvious that the high school, in conjunction with its feeder schools, required an extensive literacy program. The Nova Literacy Plan was the result and touches students from kindergarten through 12th grade. Encapsulating in one program, the Literacy Plan addressed the school's greatest need, as demonstrated by data, and fulfills its designated mission at the same time.

An additional sidebar to the Literacy Plan was the Principal's determination that many of his faculty members were not sufficiently trained to incorporate reading into their individual programs. This fact spawned a partnership with local universities to utilize Nova as a training facility. As a result, staff development in literacy is the norm.

Standard 2: School Culture and Instructional Program

As touched on in the preceding section, professional development is one of the highest priorities at Nova High. Data analysis dictates the requirements of students, which, in turn, mandates the direction of professional development. This analysis determined the literacy issues mentioned and begat the reading training programs. And while the Literacy Plan continues to mature, it does so under the guidance of a continual source of data and subsequent analysis.

A pleasant outcropping of the reading training program for staff development is the mentoring process that follows - teachers teaching teachers. This interaction has proven beneficial to staff as a morale booster and they have commented that the comfort level of working with one's own is very high.

Standardized testing such as FCAT, along with specialty assessments as the Tower Reading Tests, provides staff and parents with the data necessary to make informed decisions relative to students. These may include program placement or material selection.

Diversity is a staple at Nova High School. The school draws students from a wide variety of backgrounds and cultures. Much to the administration's credit, it embraces cultural and ethnic differences through its hiring practices. Under examination, it is apparent that the cultural and ethnic diversity of the student body is purposefully mirrored by the cultural and ethnic makeup of the faculty and staff.

The high standards and expectations of Nova are another purposeful result of an active administration. At Nova High School, students are encouraged to register for Advance Placement and Honors courses - even if the data suggests at any other school they would be assigned to the standard curriculum. Students develop ownership in their academic placement as a result. The challenge is set out for them and should they elect to meet that challenge the success is truly theirs.

Faculty expect an influx of students who might not be overtly qualified and are implored to assist in their success. To be sure, they are held accountable for their students' academic experience. This accountability is reinforced by administration visiting the classrooms on a weekly basis. The bywords of administration are, "Inspected is respected and respected is expected." It is a strict accountability standard for staff, but they are provided the support necessary and, as the data suggests, are up to the task.

Teachers are further encouraged by materials on both Leadership and Educational Reform bought for them by the school. These materials keep Nova faculty and administration on the razor's edge when it comes to promoting student performance. Further technological support takes the form of DETA Training (Digital Education Technology Academy).

More than 60 extracurricular activities exist for students on campus. In addition, a full compliment of sports programs are in place. The range is immense and with purpose. Nova, is not a neighborhood school. It behooves the administration and staff to create a climate and culture of neighborhood on campus that may occur normally elsewhere based simply on location. This extra attention provides for the bonding and a sense of belonging that might otherwise be lacking.

District and school surveys of staff, students and parents assess the school's culture and provide valuable insight to areas in need of attention. Many surveys are followed up with small group discussion between the participants and administration in order to prepare an action plan based on the survey results.

Standard 3: Management

Decisions at Nova High School are based on student needs, determined by data, as witnessed by the Literacy Plan. Any concerns that arise from the review of data are initially addressed via the guidance department with parents and teachers. Weekly administrative meetings with department chairs address concerns and opportunities that surface from the classroom level. From this level, issues may rise further to SAC and the Nova Parent Organization for review.

Safety is a keen issue with a student population as large as Nova's. They conduct ten (10) fire drills annually and have practiced an Emergency Evacuation Terrorist Plan that was generated by students, parents, and staff. The grounds are kept neat and clean and are landscaped to be very pleasing. Student artists create murals on the walls of the school to add to the environment.

To remain in compliance with Federal and State guidelines all student records are kept locked in the guidance and administration offices. Computers are password entry only and change every 45 days. All lists of students are by name only and do not include social security numbers.

Standard 4: Collaboration with Families and Communities

Nova High School enjoys an active partnership with its parent groups. One example is the collaboration that occurred between the school and parents in the construction of a football stadium. As referenced earlier, Nova is not a strict neighborhood school, and as a result can suffer in many respects from lack of local business support. To overcome this obstacle, Nova relies heavily on its wide parent base.

Administration belongs to and attends Chamber of Commerce meetings, as they continue to muster support for the school and its programs. There have been some recent successes, especially in regards to athletics.

Nova's most visible Partner in Education is Coca-Cola. The soda giant contributes \$20,000 a year to the school to finance a wide range of activities. Some of which are a student trip to Disney World following FCAT Testing, student and faculty recognition, and assistance with collegiate application fees for students in need.

By far the most impact to the school comes from its association with local colleges and universities. As Nova moves toward its goal of becoming a national model with its Literacy Plan, the resources provided by these institutions of higher learning are invaluable. The partnership benefits both parties as Nova gains its training and the colleges have a developed testing/proving ground for their own initiatives.

Nova maintains an active relationship with the local newspapers, TV stations, and its own community relations office of the Broward County School Board in order to celebrate and self promote the school, its staff, and students.

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

Nova High School is a school of choice. That is, parents and students must want to attend. Students enter the Nova system either at kindergarten or 6th grade. Enrollment at the high school level is capped at approx. 2000. Gaining entrance is by lottery, and is not based on test scores as a true magnet school may be. The lottery format implies fairness from the onset and also provides the school with a marvelous cross section of the county's population.

Curriculum, program, and graduation requirements are openly addressed with each student and his or her family so expectations are understood. The young men and women of Nova High School understand that the bar of achievement is set high. Hence, when they opt for AP and/or Honors classes, the expectation is that they will perform to the level of the course - the course will not come to them.

An absolutely marvelous example of integrity and ethics surfaces as AP and Honors teachers are scheduled to instruct regular strand classes. This novel approach provides exposure of all Nova's student body to the very finest teachers the school has to offer.

The diversity of the school has been addressed several times at this point, so it should come as no surprise that variances in culture, background, economic status, and/or ethnicity are embraced as one on the Nova campus. Programs developed by faculty celebrate heritage from every culture represented.

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

Communicating change is accomplished via an extensive assortment of meetings prearranged with all major stakeholders in the school. These include the student body, faculty, support staff, athletic and art booster clubs, department chairs, and parents. The underlying purpose of these meetings is to promote open, two-way dialogue between Nova administration and the stakeholders. Communication is aided through Nova and the District's websites.

These venues cover the diverse representation of Nova High School and feed back to its administration a perspective that is unique to any particular group. The Nova Culture referred to earlier permits parents to drive change - permits parents to participate in decisions. To its credit, Nova administration acknowledges the contributions of all its decision makers by promoting an environment ruled by consensus. However, the Principal and his Assistant Principals take ownership of issues brought directly to their respective offices. This accountability reflects the accountability demanded from faculty and does much to aid in the general day-to-day processes of operating a high school as large, unique, and diversified as Nova.

DATA, DECISION MAKING & DESIGN

The academic progression of Nova's students is measured by utilizing standardized State tests as well as in-house quizzes, journals, portfolios, and projects. State testing may determine original placement and is essential as a student prepares for graduation. Continued placement however, takes a radical turn at Nova High. As has been seen, students and their families can opt for AP classes and accept the challenges incumbent with such a choice. Even more novel, a three-day override period exists for parents in reference to their student's courses. Interpreted, this means that once guidance has placed a student, parents and the student have a three-day grace period of sorts to appeal and conference with teachers, guidance, and administration for a change. It is often during these conferences where students elect to accept the responsibilities of AP classes. Over the course of the last two years, AP enrollment has grown from 400 students to 520.

Performance is measured and reviewed through 9-week report cards and 4 ½ week interim reports. All testing data, local and otherwise, is entered into the school's database system - Super Nova, for ease of access and review. Individual students, as well as classes and grade levels, can be broken down in order to ascertain success of programs and curriculum and to insure student needs are being addressed. Strengths and weaknesses of individual students and teachers can be trended and remedied as necessary.

For faculty and administration, the instant access to such a myriad of data allows them to see where they have exceeded school and District goals, or perhaps where they have come up short. Again, information is knowledge and affords them the luxury of making adjustment to style, delivery, and content in order to achieve the desired outcome.

Data is the foundation for change. The School Improvement Plan is the vehicle. All stakeholders have input, but each addition or deletion must be supported by documented data. Limited financial resources dictate that decisions be in the absolute best interest of the students. Based on data supported needs, intervention in programming within the curriculum will occur.

Examples of Nova's curriculum interventions include the SSR Program - Silent Sustained Reading and Word of the Day (school-wide). Individualized interventions are implemented by Reading & Math Pullout Programs, where students below FCAT Level 3 receive remediation classes. Students at FCAT Level 1 and 2 are entered in the Academic Preparation Program where electives are replaced with extensive remedial work.

Nova High's greatest advance as a result of data analysis is the creation of FCAT Reading Camp - an 8 week Saturday program that focuses solely on reading preparation. Free lunch is provided to all attendees, and students who come to all 8 sessions receive a \$25 gift certificate.

The bulk of this intervention work is accomplished by Common Planning Teams within grade level. Horizontal teaming is standard practice at Nova while vertical teaming is accomplished through programs such as the far-reaching Literacy Plan. These teams also focus on the mid-quartiles in order that the school's ideology of, "no student falling through the cracks", covers the needs of mid level performers as much as it does the Honors students and the lower 25%.

Though resource data is the intervention driver, faculty contend that the administration's stance toward accountability and discipline are the two most important factors in the Nova Culture. They recognize that like their students, they too must perform, much. Faculty also acknowledge the administration's zero tolerance for student-controlled issues such as attendance.

FAMILY/COMMUNITY

Each piece of information involving change or celebrating success is transmitted to parents and students in hard copy or on-line for easy access. *Nova Vue* is the school's newspaper. Parents also receive information at the monthly SAC Meetings, or can

email a specific teacher as the situation demands. Tele-Robot telephone messenger provides parents with current updates (especially beneficial in regards to absences).

Student progress is disseminated at the monthly meetings of the School Advisory Forum (SAF). Formalized report cards go out at 9-week intervals with interim reports being issued at the halfway point. Parents are also advised of FCAT scores etc. and can access their student's grades through the *Virtual Counselor* on-line.

Parents report that they feel they have a solid voice through the SAC, SAF, and the Parent Association as far as decision making is concerned and have ready access to faculty and administration should they request it.

Nova High School utilizes "Goodwill Ambassadors" - current students, to assist and welcome incoming freshmen and their families. As a countywide school of choice, Nova is cognizant of the fact that students are coming from well beyond what would be the school's reach if it were simply a neighborhood school. A proactive guidance department armed with an abundance of extracurricular activities meets this challenge.

Teachers attend the SAC and SAF meetings in order to promote communication with parents. There is also a great deal of positive contact between teachers and parents - a note or phone call needn't be an indicator that something is wrong. Parents also have listings that denote teachers' open periods so they can contact them at appropriate times. Should a personal conference be warranted, they can be arranged at any time during the school year.

There is an extremely active Volunteer Program at Nova. Parents are involved at every level from budgetary decision-making processes to club organization. At every step, parents report genuine interest on the part of Nova staff and a great deal of mutual respect. An example would be the input parents had in dispensing the FCAT A+ monies.

Parents of various backgrounds, cultures, and beliefs have an overwhelming sense of security about their children being enrolled at Nova. They believe all differences are respected and have faith that the school does more than is expected to embrace the nuances of difference. This manifests itself in the engaging orientation programs that exist for incoming 9th graders.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Nova High School is unique for a number of reasons. First, it is not a neighborhood school - it draws its students from throughout Broward County - yet still maintains a high level of parent involvement. The non-local student populace decreases significantly local financial support from community business. This apparent handicap does not demonstrate itself to the degree one might expect as it is overshadowed by an army of parent and teacher volunteers who, along with an extremely active administration, "find a way" to get the resources necessary to meet the goals of teaching Nova's students.

Nova High School portrays an excellent example of how tremendous accomplishments can be achieved in a comparatively short period of time. This program was a 'C' school three years in a row from 1999 through 2001. In 2002 it became a 'B' school. By 2003 Nova High School was an 'A' and by all appearances there will be no going back. Nova clearly exemplifies the changes that are possible. For many, however, the changes that were enacted may seem far too simplistic to be responsible for such a major shift. What one discovers on the Nova campus is not a magic bullet for success - no sparkling new program to set students aright - no influx of dollars to cure old ills, but rather a very basic approach to education, discipline, and caring that has become infectious and spread to everyone involved with the school. It is called, the Nova Culture.

School Demographics

Nova High School is located in Broward County School District - a county that supports in excess of 131,000 students. Within the Broward District there are 144 elementary schools, 38 middle schools, and 25 high schools. In addition, there are 58 additional special centers, including Adult, Vocational, Charter, and Department of Juvenile Justice Schools. Nova's figures demonstrate enrollment for the 2003-2004 period of 2,006.

Ethnic breakdowns are as follows: 49% White; 28% Black; 17% Hispanic; 6% Asian; <1% Am. Indian; <1% Multi-racial.

Average class size is 29.4. The gifted student rate is 11.8% and those with disabilities are reported at 4.9%. Percentage of in and out of school suspensions are reported as 6.1 and 5.9% respectively. Student population stability (from FDOE Ed. Info & Accountability Services) is listed at 97.5%. Percentage of LEP Students stands at 11.2%.

There are 6 administrators and 114 instructors at Nova High School. Average years of teacher experience runs above the State average at 13.2. Teachers with advanced degrees comprise a high 49% of the operating staff. The School Grade for 2003-2004 is an A

Goals

Goal 3 - Student Performance

Nova High School routinely and without exception exceeded both its District and State's averages in every measurable category. An example of such is carried forth within the results of the FCAT Math Scores for Grade 9, where Nova eclipsed the District average by 28 points.