

Preliminary Report, Highlights: Darnell-Cookman, Duval County

HIGH STANDARDS/PLENTY OF SUPPORT: Darnell-Cookman Middle is a college prep magnet school located in a low-income urban neighborhood. Teachers at Darnell-Cookman approach the advanced academic standards with a rigorous academic pace. They agree the bar should always remain high and students should be supported in reaching it in a “Kid Warm & Child Friendly” environment. Students are offered multiple “safety nets” such as an extra period with an additional teacher and supplemental academic instruction to help ensure they can reach academic goals and an Academic Advisor period. A wide range of extra-curricular activities are provided for students to help balance academic demands. Students are recognized and rewarded for their hard work through the help of local partnerships with area businesses. Teachers believe that successful teaching includes being passionate and respecting kids and their hard work.

Results: School Grade: 2000 – 2003 A.

Practices that Promote High Performance:

- Passionate teachers who respect students and the hard work needed to achieve
- Maintaining a supportive, warm environment and including a wide range of activities for students
- Creating “safety nets” to be sure each student can keep up with a rigorous academic pace and high expectations
- Recognizing and rewarding student accomplishments

GRADE LEVEL TEAMS AND VERTICAL PLANNING: The three teaching teams at each grade level are at the heart of the educational process. Teachers plan and act as one in delivery of the academic curriculum, made possible by common team planning. Vertical progression is also a key topic during planning. Teachers visit other teams and feeder schools to support what the principal refers to as “Big Picture” that drives the academic program. New teachers are welcomed by their team members and are quickly exposed to Darnell-Cookman’s philosophy for success. Many teachers refer to their school team as their second family; they are proud of what has been accomplished.

Results: High teacher morale; Low teacher turnover.

Practices that Promote High Performance:

- A team approach to curriculum delivery
- Common team planning time built into the schedule
- Alignment of curriculum across teams and grade levels to include feeder schools

DATA-DRIVEN DECISION MAKING: The principal works closely with staff to analyze data and fine tune the schools program for optimal learning. Student achievement is reviewed at monthly team meetings with the principal. Data is analyzed on an individual student basis as well as on a school level. Item analysis is used to drive the curriculum, making changes as needed to best meet the needs of students. The principal believes the school’s goals and plans are “living documents” and employs an assertive proactive approach to meeting them. There is good communication between teachers and administration and teachers report feeling empowered and supported. The bar for students is set above district and state standards and teachers take pride in the outstanding achievement of their students.

Results: FCAT: Writing assessment average of 4.5; high percent of students scoring at level 3 or higher (8th grade reading, 83% and 8th grade math, 94%).

Practices that Promote High Performance:

- Data analyzed at school and individual student levels to drive decision making
- Teachers empowered and supported to make decisions that best serve the needs of students
- School goals and plan kept visible and used as “living documents”