

Preliminary Report, Highlights: Valparaiso, Okaloosa County

Between 30-50% Free and Reduced Lunch

Continuous accountability—from the School District through the principal to the classroom—forms the foundation for student success.

CHECK and CHECK AGAIN: Valparaiso has a total commitment to data-driven decision-making, reflecting the district's focus. Teachers take a holistic approach to educational delivery that begins and ends with data assessment. The school benefited from training from the University of Central Florida in precision teaching, a curriculum-based approach with Reading and Math measurements. Students in the reading support program have weekly progress checks. The school cross-references data that the district supplies on a CD with in-house assessments and benchmarks. There is extra support from the Superintendent's quality assurance team that meets regularly with Valparaiso's administration to analyze data and the school's performance plan. All are held accountable.

Results: FCAT Writing, grade 4, 76 students tested, 3.5 above district and state; Grade 5 FCAT, Reading and Math higher than district and state

Practices that Promote High Performance:

- Providing high quality, detailed professional development on testing (scoring, trends, analysis, et al.)
- Sending home all assessment documentation to parents and sharing it with students
- Crafting individual, effective and immediate interventions and remediation for students not on course

TAKE SPECIAL CARE: The Superintendent claims, "This school wraps itself around the students." Almost 27% of the students have special needs. There are children walking with braces, in wheelchairs, and communicating through signing. They are an integral part of the school family participating in all activities and, insofar as possible, are mainstreamed into regular classes. When the new principal came to the school he was most impressed with the faculty's attitude that all children, regardless of background or ability, can learn. The parents also praise the school's outreach and caring philosophy for parents and students. Many of the students are familiar with different cultures through their parents' military travel (nearby Elgin Air Force base), and are credited with fostering diversity and acceptance of each other.

Results: School grades: 2000: A; 2001: B; 2002: A

Practices that Promote High Performance:

- Creating a mini-city (Mustang) within the school where students can apply skills learned in the classroom
- Establishing a health/wellness program through donations and grants: a contributor to learning
- Working with partners and mentors to provide extra assistance in the classroom for students

LEARN FROM EACH OTHER: There is a new Principal at Valparaiso. Elements for continued school improvement were in place from the former principal's leadership to build upon. The new principal's leadership style is evolving. He comes from a High School and has brought many of those techniques to the new setting. Among the styles and strategies he brings are: empowering staff, delegating responsibility, and monitoring shared decision making. Teachers also credit his decisive behavior management techniques with an improvement in discipline at the school. They share that the principal encourages them all to be problem-solvers. In turn, the teachers are helping him to work on transitioning and learning about the culture and operations of an elementary setting.

Results: FCAT norm referenced test results higher than district and state for Reading and Math in grades 3-5

Practices that Promote High Performance:

- Relying on guidance counselors to provide insight and contribute to planning based on data
- Meeting future directions (e.g., science testing) by seeking professional development in new areas
- Involving teachers and staff in decisions about curriculum choice and curriculum materials