

Preliminary Report, Highlights: Wahneta, Polk County

High Free and Reduced Lunch, 92%, and Limited English, 31%

In order to reach the top, this school knew they needed a strong ladder and the patience to climb it rung by rung.

SET THE FOUNDATION: The Wahneta School Family's goal is that all students show progress in skills, thinking and attitude—now and for the rest of their lives. It is a building block, foundation process that the school will only consider successful when the students achieve “lifelong learner” status. It starts with the macro: District and School Improvement Plans. It works down to the micro: individualized learning plans for youthful learners. The school also has strong builders: the administration, teachers, and staff. Strong partnerships reinforce the goals, and an ambitious staff is credited for forging these. They include a free Homework Club, courtesy of the Polk County Department of Parks and Recreation, and support activities from a local retirement subdivision.

Results: FCAT Reading: 77% of 3rd graders scored at Level 3 and above; 87% of 4th graders scored at Level 3 and above; 83% of 5th graders scored at Level 3 and above.

Practices that Promote High Performance:

- Hiring of teachers who are team players, can relate to a Hispanic population, and will make home visits
- Establishing an after-school FCAT tutoring program with 170 voluntary school attendees
- Promoting higher order thinking: “Questions for Critical Thinking” and “Activities for Multiple Intelligences”

READ TO SUCCEED: Reading is the key to unlocking the student potential according to the Wahneta staff. The school has marshaled all its resources to make students excellent readers and critical thinkers. They have a formal pre-K program to promote readiness and skill advancement. Programs used include Collier's Strategies for Reading, Thinking Maps, and Accelerated Reader. Ongoing assessment tracks student progress and the performance of the instructional programs as well. Vertical teaming is used to power instructional delivery. The Assistant Principal reviews Reading Progress Charts weekly. Parents are required to sign daily homework and “Friday Night Notes” are sent home to parents every week explaining progress or challenges.

Results: School grade 2000: C; 2001: C; 2002: A

Practices that Promote High Performance:

- Fine-tuning reading instruction to reach and teach students in the lower 25%
- Implementing a School-wide 90 minute daily reading block
- Following and individualizing a comprehensive district plan with built-in monitoring and other support

DYNAMIC ENGAGEMENT: One-third of the families served are migrant workers. Most parents in this group only speak Spanish. The staff knows when crops are picked. They can recognize geographic dialects within a language. They visit homes to contact parents working double shifts and weekends. Parent-teacher conferences are scheduled with harvest dates and places in mind. Translators are available at the school at all times. These are all indications that the school cares about, and takes care of, both the families and students that they serve. Much of the school's success stems from the relationship of trust between parents and school, and a mutual respect for education and achievement. The same respect and service is extended to all students and families.

Results: Low rate of out-of-school suspensions, low teacher turnover, high student population stability

Practices that Promote High Performance:

- Providing a bilingual computer program for parents to increase their skills and support their children
- Using Diversity in Literature to teach about and celebrate the Hispanic influence of the community
- Having all material bilingual, including school signage