

Central Park Elementary School—Broward County

KEY THEMES:

- Use of data to monitor instruction
- Principal knowledge of curriculum
- Looking at each child's needs
- Spending on programs that directly impact students
- Research based or best practices model of decision making
- Listening/responsiveness practices of the principal

BEST PRACTICES:

- A variety of individual programs have been effective, such as, Calendar Math. The benefits of Calendar Math are many:
 - Daily review of the five math strands
 - Interactive participation where students can ultimately take over the presentation of vocabulary development
 - Exposure to many concepts before, during or after students meet them in the text
 - Emphasis on patterns and number sense
 - Students love Calendar Math and teachers feel it has made a real difference in their approach to mathematics.
- The teachers have created a writing book. The writing committee came up with a writing grid that spans across all grade levels. Something is provided for the students on each level each month. New teachers are given a copy of the writing book to use as a springboard to support the writing program.
- Teachers feel they have administrators that are open enough to let them reach their full potential. They also have parents who support learning. They do not feel boxed in. They take their students achievements personally and are proud of their school and the key role they play in its success.

LEADING CHANGE: CREATING SCHOOL CULTURE

Leadership

The principal has been at Central Park for the last three and a half years and is a veteran administrator with five years experience as an assistant principal and ten years as a principal. The principal believes the overall success of the school results from collaboration and a common vision and further believes that teachers, staff and parents should work together to analyze data, plan curriculum delivery, monitor results, and make adjustments. Finally, all funds, including budget, internal accounts, donations, and parent fund raising support the instructional design by securing materials, equipment, training, and hiring needed to achieve a common vision.

The principal encourages staff to assume leadership roles. The principal considers her role as part of a team, not as the boss of the school. This attitude results in respect and a willingness by the staff and parents to become involved in the leadership process. Ideas are planted as seeds to grow. The staff accepts and nurtures new programs. They buy-in and are empowered to run with a program that they believe in and have researched. All programs must be beneficial for their students.

The principal provides support and encouragement by regularly meeting with teachers to discuss their goals and test results. She shows genuine caring and appreciation for what the staff does for children.

Personnel

New teachers to the school are selected by trying to match candidates to the specific needs of the school. Factors such as personality, training, and experience are used to choose the best teachers. Teachers, district staff, and occasionally parents make recommendations. This helps to identify team players that will blend in with the philosophy and climate of the school.

Professional development at the school emphasizes teachers as leaders. They are empowered to reach out and share their best practices with other staff members. New programs are explored and training is offered to the staff, for example—fourth grade teachers felt writing scores of their students were not as good as they should be. They felt they were just plugging along, working hard but not seeing results. Through an informal learning community in the county, they identified a consultant that was successful at increasing writing scores in other schools. They hired the consultant and came away “born again” writing teachers. They are sharing their newly acquired skills with the third grade teachers and are excited with the results. The school is very proud to be part of a team that works very hard to meet the needs of all students.

Setting

Central Park Elementary School is located in Plantation and is centrally located in Broward County. The school opened in 1999. The school site is located in a middle to upper class residential neighborhood. The outside of the school is well kept with good landscaping and signage. The school is primarily a neighborhood school with only six busses that bring students from beyond the two-mile limit. The school is somewhat overcrowded with nine portables to handle the extra students. A sixteen-classroom addition is scheduled to be built next year.

Climate and Culture

The school climate is extremely positive. There is a very high expectation that children can do an outstanding job when challenged. The teamwork between parent, students and staff results in a desire to do better and improve above and beyond what was previously done. The culture of the school is reflected in its understanding of individual differences. The staff has the ability to recognize and deal with differences and sets goals to fill in the learning gaps that individuals have. This allows the school to achieve school-wide goals on a consistent basis.

BUILDING KNOWLEDGE: DATA DRIVEN DECISION MAKING

Resources

The principal believes that in these days of tight budgets that money has to go back to the kids in some form, decisions are made with the needs of the students in mind.

The school wanted a better science program for its students and made a commitment to hire a science teacher. This commitment generated a search for funding. Parents and teachers were heavily involved through the SAC committee. The PTA also was committed to the program. This buy-in is an example of how all stakeholders are involved in making money flow to the students and improve the school program.

All types of funding sources are explored to enhance the budget. The PTA is involved in fundraising and the after school care program helps to pay for program needs.

Volunteers are used to help students and teachers. This program allows the school to spend resources normally earmarked for salaries, on materials and supplies for enrichment, remediation, and recognition.

The school would like to see more funding for technology and has to depend on the PTA and aftercare monies to try to stay up to date with equipment and training.

Information Management

Teachers attended training in data analysis so that they could better use the data that is available to them. The emphasis is on the overall picture of how they are doing, not just one piece of information. The county data warehouse offers a variety of student data. Students are tracked quarterly and information on their progress is available online.

Strengths and weaknesses are identified through data analysis. Areas needing improvement are targeted. A good example of this was involving the art teacher with teaching geometry after identifying a weakness in the fifth grade test scores in this area.

Data is shared with parents on a school wide basis and for their children on an individual basis. Parents can access data about the school online and everyone is made aware of the goals outlined in the school improvement plan.

Constant monitoring of data gives the school a good picture of what is happening in the classroom and how goals are being met. This approach is proactive and helps keep students on the right track.

COMMUNICATING CHANGE: PROFESSIONAL TEAMWORK

Instruction

The district mission and strategic plan are incorporated into the school goals. The district and school goals are refined to reflect the needs of the school. This alignment creates a focus of all resources, including budget and personnel, to achieve the goals of the school. The goals of the district and the school are reviewed on a yearly basis to ensure they are aligned and in sync with student needs.

Instruction is geared to challenge the students. The school emphasizes pre-testing of students so that teachers don't dwell on things that they already know. The school offers advanced math for fourth and fifth grade students and strives to keep things such as field trips, special programs, and clubs in the curriculum. All of these things create a well-rounded education instead of just preparing students for the FCAT.

Communication

Communication is a key component for success at Central Park. Teachers meet in grade level meetings, with ESE and ESOL staff, administration and support personnel to discuss children's needs. Articulation programs between grade levels and other schools are an important part of meeting student's needs and accomplishing goals.

Parents are kept informed of their child's progress through conferences, report cards, newsletters, and portfolios. Many parents are involved directly with the school as volunteers and members of school organizations such as the SAC and the PTA.

Decision Making

The Principal works closely with staff in making sure the lines of communication remain open. Teachers are an important part of the decision making process.

Teachers are expected to teach the Sunshine State Standards as reflected in the district's standards-based report card. Teachers feel empowered and able to make decisions that affect their ability to teach in their classrooms. They genuinely feel a sense of leadership and feel they have a critical voice in setting the goals and direction at Central Park. They especially are proud of their involvement with selection of new teachers, programs, and materials that are a key to the success of the school.

Parent and Community Involvement

A key ingredient in the success of Central Park Elementary is the commitment by parents to help out and be actively involved in their children's education. They are kept informed about their children's progress and are very supportive of the school's many programs. This support is in the form of cooperation, volunteer work, and financial help.

EVALUATING CHANGE: REFLECTION AND CELEBRATION

Accountability

The teachers at Central Park plan together so there is continuity and consistency in the curriculum within the grade level. This team planning results in having core activities and experiences that are equal in every classroom. The planning is child centered. The teachers consider the needs of individual students as critical to their success. Teachers analyze the test scores and decide the best course for each student.

Students are tracked quarterly and teachers don't wait for one specific assessment. Teacher made tests are also used throughout the year to assess student learning.

Results for most of the students are very good and the school is targeting ESE and ESOL students that are presently improving at a slower rate. Teachers look not only at the needs of students but also at themselves to see where they need to grow professionally.

Cultural sensitivity is demonstrated throughout the year. There are many activities relating to different cultures. Each year a multicultural fair is held and parents are involved in sharing an experience of what life is like in other countries. Reading

assignments are given that deal with life in other countries and studies of other cultures are part of the curriculum. A multicultural mural is located in the breezeway of the school. There are thirty-three languages spoken at Central Park.

New staff, parents and students are welcomed to the school in several ways. New staff members take a walk through Central Park and are given a slice of what life is like at the school. Parents are invited in before school starts and are given an orientation tour. Teachers talk with new parents about their goals and expectations for their children at school.

Students participate in a "Pickle Pals" program started by the guidance counselor. This program pairs new students with two liaisons in the class. The liaisons help make the new students feel welcome and teach them the routine at school.

Parents are actively involved in the school improvement process. A diverse group is targeted and recruited so that the team is demographically represented. Parents are actively involved in the decision-making process serving on the school advisory council and the PTA. Both groups have direct input in the budgeting process. Teachers are involved through the grade chair process and make recommendations as to how monies should be spent.

Students are constantly monitored and assessed. Teachers emphasize pre-assessment testing and teaching is targeted to the individual needs of the student. This is done with publisher tests, IRI's and computer assisted instruction assessments. Students' reading is assessed in five areas: awareness, phonics, fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary. Portfolio assessments are utilized to help keep both teachers and students aware of their performance.

Open-ended questions, themes, and story testing assure that students are challenged with higher order thinking skills. Throughout the year teachers encourage written responses, both short and extended, in reading, writing and math. The state rulebook is used to score the responses. All teachers have a Bloom's Taxonomy book that was given to them by the principal. Emphasis is placed on higher order thinking rather than just strictly knowledge.

Accommodations for ESE and ESOL students are used in FCAT testing using county guidelines. These include smaller groups, one-on-one testing, translators, and extended time accommodations.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

School Demographics

Central Park Elementary is located in the Broward County School District in a residential neighborhood in Plantation, Florida. The school employs 59 instructional staff and two administrators. Central Park has approximately 1,300 students (7.5% African American, 3.9% Asian, 15.7% Hispanic, 2.0% Multi-racial and 70.8% Caucasian). 9.4% of Central Park students are eligible for free and reduced lunch. The average class size is 27.6. Approximately 6.8% of Central Park students are Limited English Proficient, 5.7 % are gifted and 8.1% of students are classified as having disabilities. Central Park has been designated as an "A" school by the Florida Department of Education for the past three years.

Ethnic/Racial %	
Caucasian	70.8
African American	7.5
Hispanic	15.7
Asian	3.9
Multi-racial	2.0

Goals**Goal 1:**

Readiness to Start School: 89.6% of Central Park's students met the State's expectation for readiness.

Goal 3:

Student Performance: In grade four, 205 students were tested on the FCAT writing assessment, with a school average score of 3.7. (District average was 3.5 and the State average was 3.4) FCAT Reading scores were higher than the State or district average. FCAT norm referenced test results were reported by median national percentile and were higher than the district and State in every category. On the FCAT accountability report, the percentage of students scoring at level 3 or above in Reading and Math, grades 3–5 ranged from 86% to 94%.

Goal 4:

Learning Environment: 10.2% new instructional staff were hired for the 2001-02 school year as compared to the district average of 17.5%. The student absentee rate was comparable to the state and district averages, while the school percentage absent 21+ days was slightly lower than state and district percentages. Leave days for teachers were the same the district average (9.6 days for Central Park and the district). Administrator absences were lower than the district's average, but higher than the state's average for the year.

Goal 5:

School Safety Environment: Reported a total of fifteen incidents for the 2001-02 school year.

Goal 6:

Teachers and Staff: Reported 36.8% of the instructional staff as holding a Masters Degree, and 3.5% of teachers hold a Specialist degree. Central Park's teachers have an average of 13.8 years of experience.