

Dante B. Fascell Elementary—Miami-Dade County

KEY THEMES:

- Dynamic interpersonal skills of the principal
- Strong partnership with the community, local businesses, and professionals
- Media are used as an avenue to increase reading resources and the love for reading
- Technology is used as an effective tool of communication and learning
- There is a high performing workforce as a result of ongoing staff development
- Parental involvement is strong
- There are extensive community service projects such as Camillus House, The United Way, Dade Partners Program and Farm Share to name just a few
- There is evidence of the School community connection—attaining the Golden School Award
- Written parent communications are in English and Spanish
- Parent workshops are offered in Spanish and English
- The school opens the Saturday before the first day of school for meeting the teacher(s) and finding the classroom(s)
- There is a strong PTA
- There are many school volunteers
- There is a strong formative Leadership Committee
- Strong commitment to ongoing professional development
- Focus on integrated curriculum
- A number of the faculty are bilingual
- The use of teacher made tests
- Focus on student reflection of learning
- Recognition of achievements
- Vividly displayed school mission
- Consensus management
- Strong fine arts program
- Dedicated teachers
- Everyone a leader
- Strong collaborative, cohesive culture

BEST PRACTICES:

Technology is infused into the student's curriculum to enhance the delivery of instruction and increase students' ability to access, analyze, interpret, and disseminate data and/or information

Most programs offered are delivered using an inclusion model, which allows for a decreased teacher-student ratio

Staff members are involved in decision making

Through the annual district waiver staff stipends are reallocated to training dollars

Several times during the year, substitutes are hired so grade levels or department faculty can plan together

There is a "cascading leadership system," which distributes leadership broadly throughout the school

The Performance Excellence Plan aligns the school's goals with state and district goals

Professional Development Plans are required for all instructional personnel

Fourth and fifth grades are departmentalized

Higher order thinking is ensured using Bloom's Taxonomy

Fourth and Fifth graders are given agendas to assist in organizational skills

There are tutoring programs for third graders

Paraprofessionals are hired to help in the kindergartens

Teachers write many grants that are funded and provide the school with additional resources

There is a mentoring process in place for all new teachers

Use of bilingual programs

The role of guidance that is proactive in solving student problems

The immediate availability and accessibility of teachers and administrators to parents as needed

LEADING CHANGE: CREATING SCHOOL CULTURE

Leadership

Leadership is best described as democratic. Administrators expect all members to bring their expertise “to the table” and the information is utilized. Opinions are respected and all have a voice. The principal considers her responsibilities to be disseminating information and making final decisions based on “consensus management.” Questions are often asked about procedures, but not in a threatening manner. Everyone is considered to be a professional.

Dante B. Fascell has a Leadership Committee, which is composed of administration, secretary, paraprofessional, cafeteria worker, custodian, two teachers and a member-at-large. Their own constituents elect the representatives to this committee. They meet monthly and discuss any and all topics. For example, teachers felt the custodians were not cleaning the classrooms thoroughly, so a professional cleaning company came in for two days and gave directions on cleaning to the custodians. There continued to be a problem with dust, even when the custodians were cleaning thoroughly. It was eventually discovered that the airflow in this building had to be cleaned differently than other schools. So both custodians and teachers were correct and the problem was solved.

The principal had a dream: to create a nurturing school environment where students would achieve their full potential. This dream, which was shared with an educational planning team, was then translated into the Saturn School Proposal. In 1996 the principal was awarded Dante B. Fascell Elementary. The principal has 32 years of experience in education and holds a master’s degree. There are two assistant principals.

Personnel

The selection and placement of personnel is linked to the needs of the school. There are four gifted classrooms so teachers specialize in Language Arts and Math/Science in order to accommodate their needs. ESOL students share the same curriculum as other students. For the past two years, the school has had inclusion and feels that it is successful.

Administrators and staff state that flexibility is one of the most important qualities to have at this school. Also mentioned is being a team player and having a sense of humor. Most of the staff holds advanced degrees and the paraprofessionals have college degrees.

The principal has a lot of autonomy in the hiring process. It is imperative that any prospective teacher fit into the atmosphere that exists within the school. Even if someone comes highly recommended, they must show that they will contribute positively to the setting and be aware of the importance of multiple intelligences. Many of the teachers at the school also interned at Dante Fascell.

There is a mentoring process in place for all new teachers. Two people are assigned to greet and help them through the process and then they go into the classroom and give them ideas after noting what they are doing. Teachers are given time to visit the new teachers and they are also encouraged to see what their peers are doing. Each group helps to mentor the other. Personnel turnover is at a minimum. Usually when someone leaves, it is to become an administrator.

The teachers are continually updated using current technology, workshops and mentoring. There is a lead teacher and new teachers are encouraged to ask questions and get any assistance they need. Administration is sensitive to their needs. The lead teacher encourages team planning across grade levels so there is communication across and between grade levels. Classroom management training is available for the teachers and peer observation is utilized. Teachers are encouraged to attend workshops that will answer basic needs. Technology is emphasized along with science and the multiple intelligence theory.

The School Improvement Team has been trained in the use of technology and critical thinking. Students are taught to read and think using projects and collaborative construction.

The District Mission and Strategic Plan are developed after the previous year’s plan has been addressed. It is then readjusted as a joint venture within EESAC, the teachers and the parents. The students are made aware of the school’s mission.

Setting

Dante B. Fascell is located in one of the fastest growing areas of Kendall. The surrounding area includes single-family homes, rental units and HUD housing. The school is very attractive, especially the main office which is brightly painted and decorated with stenciling. There is one primary entrance, which makes it easy to secure the building.

Climate and Culture

The school has representatives from every Central and South American country and each representative brings a bit of their culture into the school atmosphere. In addition to Hispanic week celebration, Black History is celebrated by bringing in speakers such as Miss Black America, and holidays around the world are also celebrated. Contests in writing, poetry, and oratorical competitions also are a way cultural sensitivity is demonstrated.

BUILDING KNOWLEDGE: DATA DRIVEN DECISION MAKING

Resources

Dante B. Fascell was designed as a satellite school and therefore the budget is spent a bit differently from other public elementary schools. From the inception seven years ago, the principal and teachers wanted the school to be technology oriented. At the present, due to computers, the school is virtually paperless. A few years ago the State's program "Matching Funds," allowed Dante B. Fascell to become the technology-oriented school they are with 300 computers available to students and staff.

The second priority of the school was reading. Their theory is knowledge is not learned in a vacuum and books are needed to become a good reader. Even the students at the school realize that knowledge is critical, technology needs to be utilized and that everyone needs to be able to read.

This year a tutoring program was begun. After reviewing the scores, focus was given to a group of students that needed extra help and money was provided. The kindergarten was also provided with extra help.

Teachers feel the priority is the students are going to succeed regardless of what it takes from the administration, faculty and parents. They feel very good when they are involved in the budget decision process and treated as professionals. Being asked, "What can I do to improve the school and how should the money be spent?" by the principal makes teachers feel like they are professional and a part of a large, caring family. Teachers say there is never a time when "we can't do that" is accepted.

Motivation and generosity comes from the top, filters down to the staff and then to the students. When this is exhibited students want to do well. Teachers feel money is always provided for conferences and in-service and the money doesn't come from their own personal pockets. The budget is geared for professional development as well as special music programs, costumes and field trips. Ultimately, the principal makes the final budget decisions. However, it is always done with input from grade levels, parents and staff.

Even though students in special needs programs generate their own budget, the administration feels that all students are part of the school and should be treated equally. Therefore, if the ESE budget doesn't allow them to provide for all of the student's needs, the general budget of the school provides what is lacking.

Adjustment was made for reducing class size this year so funds were appropriated for more classrooms and teacher's salaries. In addition, attention was focused on how students in the third grade would do on the FCAT. So more tutoring was provided for third grade.

In addition to state allocation of funds Dante B. Fascell relies heavily on their PTA to provide for motivational activities. The administration believes the key to leaning is motivation. They have brought in experts in kickboxing for perfect attendance. For the Honor Roll there are three activities a year such as teaching salsa dancing by a dance instructor. The PTA secures their funds by soliciting from area businesses, selling candy and school supplies, to name a few funding activities. The PTA is nationally known for the amount of money they contribute to the school.

Grants are another part of securing funds beyond the state allocation. Teachers have written many grants and were awarded a high percentage of what they submitted. The administration is happy to provide substitute coverage for a day and that allows the teacher to remain at home and write the grant.

Teachers feel that the Dade Partners Program keeps them apprised of possible grants and funding. Businesses such as Publix, Eckerd's, Wall-Mart, K-Mart and Target have all been receptive in helping the school and individual students. It just takes people who are willing to go to the businesses and request help for the school. The PTA is very willing and eager to do this for the school. Research is done on the Internet by faculty in addition to learning about opportunities from the district administration.

Due to Dante B. Fascell being a satellite school a waiver was granted based on the innovative idea of local intelligence. The administration is not tied to the usual budget structure such as department chairpersons. Instead of paying extra money to department chairs, the principal and the teachers distribute leadership among the faculty. The money is then targeted for professional development for the faculty.

FCAT data is very instrumental in what direction professional development will take as well as teacher input. The faculty and administration decided Power Point presentations would be beneficial so over the summer they offered classes where teachers were paid stipends for attending. In addition, surveys are presented to find out in what area teachers feel they need the professional development.

In addition to professional developments at the local level teachers are working on State Board Certification. Dante B. Fascell has five teachers who are Board Certified. State and national conferences are also attended by at least one representative of the school. The favorite comment of the teachers was, "If there's a workshop, we're there!" Teachers are expected to share their learnings and pool their expertise to solve problems.

FCAT merit monies were dispersed through the EESAC committee. The school administration, faculty and staff agreed that nobody works in isolation, but rather as a team. Therefore everybody in the school was awarded a monetary amount in proportion to their job description.

This year the FCAT enhancement money was put into a tutorial after school program. This targets the lower students to try and bring them up to grade level. Since the state has made retention mandatory in third grade this is a way to help the students who are below grade level.

The budget is linked to technology in that training is provided for programs like Outlook, PowerPoint, using digital cameras and ILOLI (Interactive Learning Online). There are digital cameras for every grade level, 4-5 computers in every classroom, 1-2 printers, and computers in the library. EESAC has donated all of their money in the past three years for technology and this school was the first school in the county to be wired for the Internet in every classroom.

Information Management

Everyone has access to the school improvement plan, along with pertinent news and EESAC information as it is on the Internet along with student assessment data, which are used to make instructional decisions.

Strategic planning utilizes all of the data acquired through the various programs. District data are also used to determine the areas that need improvement, or a change in means of instruction. Comparisons are made with other schools; students are apprised of their reading levels and the range of books they can read. A database is available in the classroom for the teachers, including ESE and Gifted. A survey system gives educators ongoing information. There is also a website available for parents to access information.

Data are used to make decisions regarding tutoring of students. Students in the lowest twenty-fifth percentile in reading are selected using SRI and Star records. Data are also used to determine reading groups and team classes. It is taken into consideration that some teachers will have higher performing students than other classes but achievement goals are verified by viewing the professional development plans of the teachers. It is felt that additional information from the FCAT and increased health information for their profile would be beneficial.

COMMUNICATING CHANGE: PROFESSIONAL TEAMWORK

Instruction

When Dante B. Fascell was opened the faculty came up with a mission, vision and goal. Everyone is aware of that and when you enter classrooms, children will be able to tell you what the mission is. It is a screen saver on their computer and is also on the web page.

EESAC has the mission of the school in mind and they are able to ensure the mission and the School Improvement Plan is aligned. They meet quarterly to assess achievement toward the goals.

The strategies that are used for FCAT were incorporated into the curriculum before FCAT was established. Teachers have been using the strategies for many years and teaching them to children so it is not felt that the curriculum only extends to the FCAT academic goals and objectives. Teachers assess the students by using questions similar to what would appear on the FCAT. Time is allocated for students to practice how to take the test, such as bubbling in of answers.

Instructional methods and materials are established through collaboration. Teams of teachers collaborate to determine what is being used and how they are going to present their information. The CBC guides contain the competencies and objectives, but how the material is taught or presented is up to the individual teacher.

Teachers determine the instructional groupings within the classroom and they are very flexible. Students are grouped in reading and math and sometimes in other areas. ESOL and gifted students are also grouped.

The principal feels the five steps of multiple intelligences have been used in making instructional and research-based decisions. The fact that teachers have the freedom as individuals and a group to choose the method of instruction and some of the assessment tools also requires them to justify what they do in the classroom. If those things aren't research based it is much harder to justify what they do and skills won't be taught as well. Often times at Dante B. Fascell State statutes are researched to make sure everyone is aware of what they really say. The faculty and the parents are educated as to what the law says.

Articulation does exist across grade levels, subject areas and feeder schools. There are meetings and conversations throughout the year, not just at the end of the year. The fifth graders have a presentation by the middle schools to inform them of the programs they will have. There is informal articulation between teachers all the time as they plan for the needs of each child.

Dante B. Fascell believes that active learning and hands on learning has contributed to their success in reading and math. Using the Accelerated Reader as a supplementary tool to the reading program has helped also.

Other factors that have contributed to their success are the environment of the school. The students achieve because they feel cared for, loved, and they know their success is celebrated. The teachers feel the administration gives them the sense they can do what they need to for the students and not feel like they are being micromanaged. They feel that their position is that of a teacher but they wear many hats at Dante B. Fascell Elementary.

Communication

Some of the parents of students are new arrivals to the country and the population of the area is transient so many parents are not proficient in the English language. All communication that goes home is sent out in both English and Spanish. Parent workshops are provided and parents are taught in both English and Spanish. The school newspaper is in both languages and contains a lot of strategies for reading that the parents can practice at home.

Decision Making

Committees of various types are used as a way for teachers and parents to take part in the decision making at Dante Fascell. A number of committees are formed that are representative of parents and teachers. Committee assignments are voluntary and not assigned, so as to encourage persons to become involved.

Many surveys are provided to parents so they have a voice in shaping the direction and goals of the school. This has proved beneficial and pleases all parents. The PTA is an important part in allowing the parents to have a voice in the decision making process. In interviewing the parents, they felt very comfortable and felt they had an equal voice in the decision making at the school.

Parent and Community Involvement

Dante B. Fascell relies heavily on their PTA to provide for the involvement of parents in the school. The PTA secures funds by soliciting from area businesses, selling candy and school supplies, to name a few funding activities and is nationally known for the amount of money they contribute to the school.

Teachers feel that the Dade Partners Program keeps them apprised of possible community partnerships, as well as grants and other funding. Businesses such as Publix, Eckerd's, Wall-Mart, K-Mart and Target have all been receptive in helping the school and individual students. The PTA is very willing and eager to solicit help for the school from businesses in the area.

Community resources are identified by "knocking on the doors of businesses in the area." The school has been fortunate to be awarded services and merchandise for themselves by local businesses. But in addition, the school has felt a compelling need to help others in the community. Kindergarten students made lunches for the homeless shelter, student government teamed up with the police department to take food to the needy, books were collected for the Charley Program, and Sedano's donated personal needs which were distributed to a women's shelter. Students learn the community helps them and they in turn help someone else.

EVALUATING CHANGE: CELEBRATION AND REFLECTION

Accountability

In order to ensure all students have equal access to the knowledge and skills they need, professional development for all teachers is provided. Grade levels meet on a regular basis and plan strategies for all children. Students are encouraged to become involved in activities that are offered after school and during school. Inclusion was begun at Dante B. Fascell before the State mandated it and it is done at all grade levels. Different learning styles and multiple intelligences are also taken into account, and are the school's centerpiece for what drives their teaching and learning philosophy.

The philosophy of the administration and staff at Dante B. Fascell is that you never settle for what you have, but always strive to be better. Substitute coverage is provided at least two days per year for all day grade level meetings to do in-depth planning, check scores, and come up with a plan that will show continual growth for all students. Fourth and fifth grades are departmentalized and that has improved test scores. All teachers assume a small part of the role of being a grade level chairperson. Rather than giving a grade level chair a stipend for doing the job, those funds have been set aside for professional development.

One significant thing that is done at Dante B. Fascell to socialize new parents and students to the school is opening the school on the Saturday before school starts. Parents and students are welcomed to the school to find and meet their new teachers and their classrooms. Teachers tell parents about the expectations for the coming year. It is a time to acclimate children to their new surroundings so the first day of school will run smoothly and the children will not be afraid. There are two choruses and they put on two major productions a year. This involves everyone in the school and parents play a major role in making costumes and becoming involved in any way they can help. Volunteering is another way to become socialized to the school. This is a way for parents to become part of the program, get to know the staff better and be a part of their child's education. It also provides a social time for parents to get to know each other better.

At Dante B. Fascell new personnel quickly become a member of the family. They are all a team and from the first day they arrive at the school they are given their roles and responsibilities. Expectations and standards are set high and people who were selected to work at Dante Fascell are expected to meet or exceed expectations. The faculty provides many parent workshops, such as one on the Florida School Code and how it has changed for third grade this year, which in turn educates as well as socializes parents.

Having equal representation on school improvement teams does not appear to be a problem at Dante B. Fascell. They have very active EESAC meetings where the parents, teachers and administrators are involved. By ensuring everyone has a voice, cliques are prevented and planning is facilitated. Rather than assigning people to be on a committee, the administration tries to encourage people to volunteer where they have the most interest.

Various types of assessment are used other than those mandated. One used is the ILOLI Program (I-La-Lee) which is Internet based. This means that the students can use it in the classroom and at home as long as they have access to the Internet. Teachers also use testing that is performance based rather than just pencil and paper testing. In this way, students have the opportunity to show what they have learned using multiple intelligences. The teachers across grade levels meet to coordinate their assessments. The budget is also scrutinized to allocate funds innovatively. For example, a waiver was requested to use bonus money for professional development. In this way, teachers are allowed planning time each grading period. The bilingual department recognized their assessment materials did not follow the criteria used in the FCAT so they revised their materials to reflect these criteria.

Parents are frequently advised of student's progress through weekly progress reports and e-mail along with interim reports and report cards.

Higher order thinking incorporates Bloom's Taxonomy. Index cards are used, with the various ways to question, and teachers, including ESE teachers, refer to this when writing their goals and objectives. When the building was designed and built, Howard Gardiner's multiple intelligence theory was the model.

ESE and ESOL students are ensured any and all accommodations required for them to participate in FCAT testing. The IEPs are consulted and students are given additional time and smaller class settings as needed.

Consistent curriculum across grade levels in academic subjects is assured through the monitoring of grade level meetings and faculty meetings. CVC and Sunshine State Standards are used extensively and FCAT expectations are included at every grade level.

A student profile has been developed for each student. This profile includes their name, classification (if ESE or ESOL), the IEP review date, FCAT scores and SRI scores. Each teacher receives a copy of this at the beginning of the year and updates it during the year with FCAT pretest, FCAT progress test and final SRI scores. This is available on the computer and is in addition to progress reports.

Parents are assisted in the monitoring of the students in various ways. There are workshops, which are well attended, specific lists of accomplishments in language arts are given to first and second grade parents, and fourth and fifth graders are given agendas to assist in organizational skills. In this way, parents and teachers can communicate daily, if needed. The counselors are in contact with all parents and are highly visible.

Personnel are held accountable for goals and objectives through monitoring. Meetings are held after FCAT reports come out and discussions focus on what is being done differently in classrooms to assure success and strategies and activities are altered to improve delivery of instruction. If students do not show adequate progress, portfolios are reviewed and necessary changes to improve performance are completed.

The key stakeholders involved in the behavior management plan are the students, teachers, counselors, parents and administrators. Beginning teachers attend classroom management workshops; there is a Code of Student Conduct, and the Functional Assessment of Student Behavior and Behavior Intervention Plans are used. In this way, teams confer on a particular student's behaviors and decide on a plan when changes are necessary. The guidance counselor plays a pivotal leadership role in working with teachers to assess student behavior. An assumption the school uses when a child is "acting out" is that the child has a problem, not that the child is the problem. The motivation behind a particular behavior is then assessed and addressed. This includes assessing behavior in the after school program.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

School Demographic Information

Dante B. Fascell Elementary is located in Miami-Dade County Public School system in the southwest area of the county. Seventy one instructional staff is employed, with three school based administrators. Dante B. Fascell enrolled about 1,300 students, with the majority of the students Hispanic (84.8% Hispanic, 8.9% Caucasian, 3.5% African American, 1.7% Asian, 0.1% Native American, and 1% Multi-racial). The school report grade for 2001-2002 was an A. 59.3 percent of the students were on free or reduced-price lunch. The average class size for K-5 classes is 26.7 students. 9.5% of the students have been classified as disabilities, 9% are gifted, and 38.6% are LEP. Dante Fascell has a stability rate of 94.2%, and the teachers have an average of 5.4 years of experience.

Ethnic/Racial %

Hispanic	84.8
Caucasian	8.9
African American	3.5
Asian	1.7
Native American	0.1
Multi-racial	1.0

Goals

Goal 1:

Readiness to start School: Evaluated 195 kindergarten students, with 186 meeting the State's expectation for readiness.

Goal 3:

Student Performance: In grade 4, tested 238 students in FCAT Writing Assessment, with a school average score of 3.8 compared to the district's score of 3.3, and a state average of 3.4. Scores range from 1.0 (lowest) to 6.0 (highest). FCAT Reading scores were higher than the district and state scores for grades 3 and 4 but slightly lower than the states score for grade 5. Mathematic scores were higher than the district and state scores for grades 3 and 5, but slightly lower than the state score for grade 4. FCAT norm-referenced test results were reported by median national percentile ranks (NPR) and were higher than the district and state except for grade 4 mathematics and grade 5 reading. FCAT school accountability data in grade 3 reading tested 144 students and had 73% scoring at Level 3 or above, grade 4 reading tested 180 students and had 74% scoring at Level 3 or above and grade 5 reading had 149 students tested with 63% scoring at Level 3 or above. Grade 3 mathematics tested 146 students with 81% scoring at Level 3 or above, grade 4 mathematics tested 182 students with 63% scoring at Level 3 or above and grade 5 mathematics tested 149 students with 79% scoring at Level 3 or higher.

Goal 4:

Learning Environment: Reports 7 or 9.9% new instructional staff hired for the 2001-2002 school year as compared to the district average of 12.5% and the state average of 16%. One new school based administrator was hired for the 2001-2002 school year. Absentee rates were lower, 13.4%, for the number of student absences of 11-20 days as compared to 18.6% at the district and 19.1% at the state. Student absences of 21+ days were lower, 2.7% as compared to 5.9% at the district and 6.0% at the state. All type of teacher leave days was 18.8 days, but 7.7 of that was temporary duty elsewhere, compared to the district at 13.8 days and the state at 10.2 days. Administrator absences were 13.7 days, with 6.6 being temporary duty elsewhere, with 11.7 at the district and 10 days for the state.

Goal 5:

School Safety and Environment: Reported 17 total incidents at the school. There were 8 incidents of vandalism, 1 threat, 2 larceny/theft, 1 breaking and entering, 1 battery, 2 fighting and 2 unclassified offenses.

Goal 6:

Teachers and Staff: Reported that 57% of the staff held Bachelor's Degrees and 11% held a Master's Degree. Five teachers have National Board Certification. There were no Specialist Degrees and one Doctorate degree.