

Design and Architecture Senior High School—Miami-Dade

KEY THEMES:

- Facilitative, consensus-building style of principal who leads by example and is proactive, innovative, open-minded, and flexible
- All-magnet school emphasizing design
- Extensive staff development
- Methods for instruction that include questioning using Bloom's taxonomy, project-based assignments, and rubrics
- Remedial instruction for students after school and on Saturdays
- High level of both community and parent involvement and support
- High school-wide expectations of excellence and student achievement
- School technology support that includes over 240 microcomputers (one computer per two students) in three labs, the media center and classrooms; digital still/video equipment, television production lab, laptops for teachers, and academic classrooms that feature technological support equipment

BEST PRACTICES:

- Emphasis on using proven effective, research-based, instructional strategies
 - Bloom's taxonomy questioning
 - Portfolio assessment
 - Infusion of technology as a motivating force to support instruction
 - Teaching students how to think independently, to apply learning strategies to real life situations, and to make informed decisions rather than to teach to a test
 - Parent/community involvement
 - Active PTSA
 - Friends of DASH
 - 36-member Advisory Council of design professionals
 - Parent communication
 - Email
 - U.S. mail for academic reports
 - DASH FLASH newsletter
 - Technology used throughout curriculum
 - Staff laptops
 - Intraschool email
 - Wireless network
 - Computer-assisted instruction/support
 - Certification in web design via Apple Computer Lab
- Professional development on early release days
- Constant monitoring of student performance

LEADING CHANGE: CREATING SCHOOL CULTURE

Leadership

The principal has been at DASH for four years, with 31 years experience in education as an art teacher, lead teacher, assistant principal and now a principal. The principal is a proactive, innovative, facilitative, open-minded leader who leads by example and who also participates as a teacher in a daily sculpting class. Besides teaching a class, the principal sets standards for the students and for teachers to observe.

Leadership is a negotiated exchange of ideas, talents, and skills among all stakeholders. Members of the leadership team, in addition to the principal, include the assistant principal, lead teacher for operations, lead teacher for the magnet program, chairperson for student services, activities director, and lead teacher for community specialization. Input by the Advisory Board, EESAC, department chairpersons, grade level chairpersons, teachers, support staff, and students is sought and encouraged.

The small size of the student population and staff allows a continuous series of conversations, both formal and informal, with many groups meeting biweekly. "Everyone's a leader" was echoed throughout the teacher interviews.

Friends of DASH and the industry-related Advisory Board are outstanding examples of community involvement. It is quite evident from visiting this campus that parents are very comfortable with the administration and faculty and consider DASH their school. Teachers also express this same comfort level in dealing with parents. The principal has discovered how to energize all stakeholders in the school and achieve exemplary results with the students who attend the school.

Personnel

Astute and knowledgeable about budgeting and with input from staff members, the principal has been able to hire needed personnel to work with the students and staff at the school. Supplies and materials are plentiful. The high morale and low turnover indicate the school is a desirable place to work. Due to the highly specialized focus of this school the principal is constantly alert to hiring qualified personnel to serve the students.

Staff development is a priority and money is available to hire substitutes. According to teachers, the professional development opportunities that made the most difference are technology training and the ability to travel to symposiums and to visit colleges. The principal indicated that it is essential for teachers to know the college requirements of schools that are most often chosen and attended by the students.

To be a successful educator at DASH one must be flexible, creative, energetic, a team player and able to motivate students. Teachers indicated that “a sharing of knowledge permeates the school” and we enjoy a “collegial atmosphere”. A parent shared that “artistic people sometimes are lost in a regular program, but at DASH students are allowed to reach deeper inside themselves to find their potential.”

The Setting

Design and Architecture Senior High is a public, magnet high school in Miami-Dade County, Florida, with an integrated liberal and applied arts education in industry related design fields. DASH came into existence in 1990 through a Saturn Proposal for a magnet high school program to address the needs of artistically talented students who sought specialized instruction in the design areas of architecture, interior design, industrial design, fashion design, visual communications and entertainment technology.

DASH reflects the unique multicultural community-at-large; the student body in grades 9-12 represents the diversity of Miami-Dade County, although the school’s population represents less than 1% of the total student population in the district. The school is situated on three acres within the downtown Miami Design District and is housed in a renovated showroom designed by a renowned architectural firm.

“Education by Design” describes the DASH philosophy. The mission of the school is to provide a high level, integrated education in design and academics using both traditional faculty and career professionals to facilitate learning within a well-designed, state-of-the-art educational environment. The four-year design career program culminates in design internships matching students with design professionals throughout Miami-Dade County. The year-long student internship, for one to two periods a day, is an overwhelming success. The experience exposes students to the real world of design and provides a truly unique perspective.

The state-of-the-art equipment and facility that houses DASH offers unique features including a college preparatory program within an extended school day which utilizes semester block scheduling, extensive dual enrollment opportunities with local colleges and the use of adjunct instructors who enhance the students’ learning experiences.

Climate and Culture

School morale among all stakeholders is high. Everyone feels very fortunate to be members of the DASH family. A continuous effort is made to hire skilled professionals, to place them in their areas of strength, and to provide support. A relaxed and collegial atmosphere exists where each student is known and recognized as an individual. A friendly and hospitable atmosphere permeates the school. Formal and informal communication networks support this atmosphere. Parents are visible and active throughout the building.

The evening of the site visit was the premium event of the year—DASH’s twelfth Annual Fashion Show and Silent Auction. A collegial atmosphere was evident wherever you turned. Students had designed the fashions, the staging and the props; they had written the scripts, chosen the music and were modeling the fashions. Students and staff were busy practicing for the big event. Parents, too, were everywhere; they were helping with stage decorations, lighting and setting up the items for the silent auction, the major PTSA fundraiser of the year. This school enjoys a culture based on mutual respect and camaraderie.

BUILDING KNOWLEDGE: DATA DRIVEN DECISION-MAKING

Resources

Linking the budget to academic goals and student achievement is the underlying goal of all resources received by the school. Advanced placement courses and dual enrollment classes bring in substantial resources. The principal ensures that money received for special programs supports the students for whom it is intended, such as ESE and ESOL. The leadership team meets regularly with the administration. Needs are presented and resources required to meet those needs are discussed.

In addition to an active PTSA there is an industry-related Advisory Board that meets monthly to promote internship and mentor programs, community relations and outreach opportunities, fundraising, participation in school/industry/education opportunities and curriculum ideas that keep abreast of design industry standards. The Advisory Board is composed of 36 professionals who give input into curriculum and design and serve as a vital link between the school and the community at large.

Apple Computer donated \$200,000 to establish the web academy lab that focuses on web design. The teacher serves as a part-time trainer and consultant for Apple on weekends and during the summer. In return for the donation the students produce web sites for nonprofit organizations. The sites are of such high quality that currently there is a waiting list from companies desiring a student-produced site.

The school has many community partnerships, *Friends of DASH*, who sponsor events; bring in live performances by internationally renowned artists; create press releases; provide mentorships, internships and sponsors for both students and activities; provide awards/trophies for academic achievement, attendance and special events; and donate art supplies and materials. As a member of the leadership team said, "If you need something, you ask for it."

Additionally, an Annenberg grant for \$240,000 was received for Arts Related Technology for Entertainment Careers (A.R.T.E.C.); the focus of the program is to prepare students for technical careers in one of the city of Miami's targeted growth industries, film and entertainment.

Money received from the state for DASH's "A" rating was distributed equally to all employees after input was received from teachers, staff members, parents and EESAC.

Information Management

The school has access to online data in a multitude of areas, including student data (health, report card grades, test scores, psychological data, attendance, discipline referrals), budget, and demographics. All teachers have laptop computers and can access the Internet at any time via the school's wireless connection. The staff communicates through email; forms and letters are accessible on the school network.

In addition, a wealth of information, for both the school and the community, is available through the district's website, www.dadeschools.net. Detailed FCAT results, EESAC information (including minutes of meetings, roster and bylaws), overcrowding and safety issues are some of the obtainable information. Each school's SPEP is online. All parents have access to the school improvement plan either at home or at school. FCAT data allow teachers to focus on the weaknesses of their students as well as on the strengths of the programs and strategies that are being used.

School personnel and a student's parents or guardian have access to student assessment data. Data is used to determine if additional assistance is needed to accomplish grade level goals and if probation may be necessary. Teachers meet regularly to review progress of students with data that includes benchmark testing, remedial instruction results, and daily work. Parent conferences are held to share information and to discuss continued strategies as needed.

COMMUNICATING CHANGE: PROFESSIONAL TEAMWORK

Instruction

The school district goals are: School to Career, Effective Learning Environment and Efficient Management Practices. The focus for each goal is (1) preparation of students for graduation, employment, postsecondary education and becoming responsible citizens and lifelong learners; (2) enhancement of safety of students and staff and increasing the quality of the learning environment; and (3) ensuring that school system operations conform to the highest business and professional standards of effectiveness, ethics and efficiency respectively. DASH's SPEP is aligned to the district's goals with special emphasis on increasing student achievement.

This school operates on an extended school day that utilizes 100-minute segments organized into lectures and seminars, studios and workshops, labs, and independent study. Many of the design courses are eligible for college credit through dual enrollment with local colleges and universities. In the past three years approximately 96% of the students attended college; over 80% were enrolled in four-year universities, 16% in two-year colleges and 77% in design-related fields. During the current school year the school had four semi-finalists for national merit scholarships.

The four-year curriculum offers outstanding opportunities in academics and in professional design fields. The school seeks to educate students who are prepared to solve problems and contribute to their community as they pursue higher education and a career in the design world. Academic programs include college preparatory courses at the standard, honors and advanced placement levels. Instructors from, and currently working in, the industry teach the featured areas of design; a four-year fine arts program is the foundation for all students. The combination of high academic standards and exceptional design curriculum allows DASH students to compete for admissions and scholarships to the country's finest colleges and universities. In 2002-2003 over \$5.2 million in scholarship dollars were offered to the graduating class of 121 seniors.

Students complete an internship program in their senior year that pairs design students with working design professionals. Senior students experience, for one to two periods of the school day, a professional mentoring internship experience in the industry at leading design labs and studios. The school's full-time internship and occupational specialists organize and facilitate this unique program.

Many students are enrolled in dual enrollment classes, advanced studies at Miami-Dade Community College and Florida International University, which often offer college credit. These classes offer a diversity of teaching styles and experiences as these industry professionals have the ability to teach from a perspective that brings real-world knowledge and application to the classroom.

Working with the EESAC the SPEP is a culminating effort based on input from teachers, parents, administrators, students and the community. The results of the previous year's testing and the current needs of the students determine strategies that will be undertaken to improve the instructional program. The Sunshine State Standards are the basis for the curriculum.

Continuous monitoring through the use of benchmark testing, teacher-made tests and remedial instruction assist the staff in assessing progress toward SPEP goals. Students needing remediation are tutored with money budgeted by the EESAC from FCAT-generated funds. Teachers facilitate student learning through specialized questioning techniques based on Bloom's taxonomy, independent and critical thinking tasks and by promoting independent thought. Teachers are encouraged to attend and share information gained from workshops and conferences at department and staff meeting. Continuous training and high expectations of and for all staff members yield excellent results for DASH's students.

Communication

DASH FLASH is a student-created newsletter distributed monthly to keep all stakeholders abreast of the school calendar, events, activities and news. The student editor is enrolled in the internship program and is responsible for the gathering of information, editing, printing and distribution of the newsletter. Often the newsletter is mailed home to parents along with interim reports (distributed every four-and-a-half weeks) and report cards (distributed every nine weeks).

Technology plays an important part in communication for this school; parents and staff members use email extensively. Parents praised the effectiveness of the staff in timely communication through telephone calls, email and the DASH FLASH. When necessary, parent conferences with a team of appropriate staff members are held at the school.

Parent communication is necessary when the possibility of probation exists. Students must maintain a 3.0 design average and a 2.0 academic average. Students who are not meeting these standards have the opportunity to receive assistance and tutoring at the school and at the home school if the concern is academic progress. The design portfolio is an added indicator of the student's progress in design; a specified number of items must be added to the portfolio annually. Final decisions are made by the Magnet Committee (composed of classroom teachers, grade level teams, counselors and administration); other factors influencing this decision include test scores, attendance and behavior files. If progress is deemed unacceptable an exit letter is sent home and the student is returned to his home school.

Decision Making

The principal is a strong advocate of shared decision-making and does not believe in making decisions relative to the school and its stakeholders in isolation; instead, teachers should be empowered and involved in decision making processes. Departmental meetings are held regularly where decisions are made regarding instructional materials, curriculum, textbooks, and teaching strategies.

Using assessment data, school grades, and teacher recommendations, students are evaluated and decisions regarding placement, instructional materials, methods, and arrangements are made. Opportunities are provided for parents and teachers to have input into these decisions.

The principal's "open door policy" provides ample opportunity for anyone who has concerns or would like to contribute in the decision-making process to do so. Shared decision-making is strongly advocated. As a result of this practice, the staff values the contributions each individual makes to the school, as evidenced by their decision to share the A+ money equally with all staff members. All stakeholders expressed comfort in approaching the principal with concerns.

Parent and Community Involvement

As a public school, DASH is both rare and unique in that every single person associated with the school, especially the students, has freely chosen to be part of it. Students from across the county are admitted by a rigorous audition and application process. Applications are distributed via school mail, classroom teachers, magnet and career fairs, and personal contact. Auditions are scheduled for Saturday mornings to provide an opportunity for the applicant's parent to attend. The school administrators, staff members, parents and students are an integral part of the process. Although the school is an overwhelming success, student recruitment and retention is a major challenge and is facilitated through visitations and program presentations at the 53 middle schools in the district.

Parents and community people are invited to share their ideas and make recommendations. The EESAC, the PTSA and the Advisory Board are extremely active groups that meet on a monthly basis. The school is a source of pride for the area and parents are very supportive of the staff and their efforts to provide an excellent educational program for their children.

During the parent interview it was noted that the parents have the highest regard for the staff. The school was described as one large "family"—the students, the administration, the teachers, the support staff, the PTSA and the business community. The principal was praised for maximizing the use of the business partners' expertise and integrating their contributions into the school community.

EVALUATING CHANGE: REFLECTION AND CELEBRATION

Accountability

Personnel are held accountable for the achievement of goals and objectives through frequent monitoring of student work. During biweekly grade level and department planning meetings, data on students are discussed; students needing remediation are identified; and professional development opportunities are shared. Due to the small size of the school, it operates on a small school ratio of students to teachers. Because the teachers participate on many committees, they are able to know both the strengths and weaknesses of the majority of the students.

Parents are made aware of standards their children are expected to meet early in the school experience. Incoming ninth grade students attend summer school to become aware of the schedule for transportation, the unique school facility and the requirements of the curriculum. Ninth grade parents' orientation, open houses, pot luck dinners, and art shows set the stage for awareness and expectations for both parents and students. Email communication is used extensively with parents; interim reports and report cards are mailed home. Parent conferences are held as needed but email, telephone calls and newsletters are the major vehicle for parent communication. Although students come from a wide geographical area, parent involvement is a key element of this school.

Cultural sensitivity is inherent in the makeup of the school. Students are selected to attend DASH based on their potential in the arts; they come from all parts of Miami-Dade County and from all socioeconomic groups. The staff is ethnically diverse as well as the students; celebrating individuality is a major goal of the school. An example of how the school reaches out to the community is the recent hosting of the cultural arts and music festival for the residents of Lemon City, the largest Haitian community in the city of Miami. DASH students and staff participated in the varied events of the celebration.

Informal assessments, other than those mandated, include FCAT-type questions utilizing Blooms' taxonomy integrated throughout the curriculum. Portfolio assessment is stressed in most of the curriculum areas. Upon admittance all students begin creating their professional electronic portfolio that includes a resume that is saved on disk and updated yearly. In order to remain at DASH, students must earn at least a 2.0 grade point average in academic courses and a 3.0 grade point average in design courses. The 100-minute periods encourage the teachers to incorporate hands-on learning and project-based instruction. Critical and creative thinking is the focus of instruction.

Outstanding school achievements:

- National Blue Ribbon School of Excellence
- “A” school in Governor’s A+ Plan 2000-2001 and 2001-2002
- One of Redbook magazine’s featured 50 outstanding high schools in America
- Featured in Teen People Magazine as “Cool School of the Month”
- Tenth grade FCAT writing scores for 2001-2002 highest in the district
- Florida Teacher of the Year 2000—Ms. Stephanie King, Social Studies Chair
- Two teachers certified by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards
- Recipient of Annenberg Grant for arts-related technology for entertainment careers
- International Communicator Award of Distinction for the documentary film, “Florida’s Legends of Rock and Roll”, awarded to ARTEC students
- Inclusion in Governor’s Film Educator’s Exchange Conference
- “Magnet School of Distinction” award granted by Magnet Schools of America
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BACKGROUND INFORMATION:
School Demographics

Design and Architecture Senior High School (DASH) is a public, magnet high school located in the Miami Art and Design District in downtown Miami. Thirty-two instructional staff is employed with two administrators. DASH enrolled 486 students, with the students classified as 26.5% Caucasian, 23% African American, 47.7% Hispanic, 1.6% Asian, .6% Native American and 0.4% Multi-racial. The school report grade for 2001-2002 was A. 43% of the students were on free and reduced lunch in 2001-2002. The stability rate is 97.5%, with 0.8% of the students classified as LEP and 4.5% of the students classified with disabilities. Average class size for language arts, math, science, and social studies is 21.7, 18.3, 22.1, and 21.9 respectively.

Ethnic/Racial %	
White	26.5
Black	23
Hispanic	47.7
Asian	1.6
Native American	0.6
Multi-racial	0.4

GOAL 3:

Student Performance: In grade ten, 131 students were tested in FCAT Writing Assessment, with a school average score of 4.7, as compared to the district average of 3.8 and a state average of 3.8. (Scores range from a low of 1.0 to a high of 6.0.) FCAT Reading and Math scores were higher than district and state averages. FCAT norm-referenced test results were reported by median national percentile ranks (NPR) and were higher than district and state percentile ranks for reading and math in grades nine and ten. FCAT School Accountability Data in grade nine Reading and Mathematics, with 118 students tested, reported a mean scale score of 338 in Reading and 335 in Mathematics, as compared to the district at 270 and 265 and the state at 287 and 286 respectively. In grade ten, 132 students were tested with scores of 342 in Reading and 355 in Mathematics as compared with district scores of 284 and 302 and state scores of 303 and 319 respectively.

GOAL 4:

Learning Environment: Reported three or 8.3% new instructional staff hired for the 2001-2002 school year as compared to the district average of 12.3% and the state average of 16.6%. Absentee rates were considerably lower for the number of student absences of both 11-20 and 21+ days. Leave days for both teachers and administrators were slightly higher than the district average with teachers having 14.3 absences as compared to 12.7 for the district and administrators with 12 absences as compared to the district average of 11.3.

GOAL 5:

School Safety and Environment: Reported nine discipline incidents overall.

GOAL 6:

Teachers and Staff: Reported that 37.5% of the staff had master's degrees.