

Flamingo Elementary School—Miami-Dade

KEY THEMES:

- Shared leadership style of principal that includes reading leader and curriculum coordinator in administrative team
- School technology support that includes distance learning, six computers per classroom and an open access computer lab
- Comprehensive Reading Plan with emphasis on guided reading component
- Pacing schedule, in all subject areas and grade levels, aligned to Sunshine State Standards
- Strategies for instruction that include class-wide peer tutoring, CRISS strategies in all curriculum areas, technology and hands-on activities
- Extensive remedial instruction that includes before school, after school and Saturdays with certified hourly teachers, as well as during school with paraprofessionals and reading leader
- Collegiality as evidenced by collaborative working together, and leadership activities, of staff members
- Partnership with University of Miami as a Professional Development School
- Grants received
- Parent communication in English and Spanish
- Emphasis on attendance (best in district for past two years)
- High level of parent involvement, including attendance at workshops, employment in the school, and activities of Parent Outreach Center
- High school-wide expectations of excellence and student achievement

BEST PRACTICES:

- Infusion of technology as a motivating force to support instruction
 - media center and computers available for student use before school
 - distance learning
 - paperless classroom
- Constant monitoring of student performance
 - principal and teachers meet several times a year to discuss individual student performance
 - before and after school tutoring programs
 - in-school remedial program called Intensive Care Unit for students who are critically low
 - retention used as a tool if necessary with students immediately promoted when ready to move on
- Using support personnel effectively
 - resource personnel with expertise available to assist teachers
 - paraprofessionals trained to work one on one with students during language arts time, not to do clerical work
 - releasing teachers to serve as a buddy and assist teachers new to the school
- Encouraging professional development and tailoring it to meet the needs and interests of individuals
 - teachers share their training and model lessons and strategies for others
 - a means is found to provide substitutes
- Creation of grade level pacing schedules
 - timely coverage of Sunshine State Standards
 - expansion of curriculum through the grades
 - reinforcement of skills by special area teachers
- Scheduling that provides daily common planning time for each grade level
- Affiliation with a university as a professional development school
 - made instructional research an integral part of the school's activities
 - source of considerable resources
 - opportunity to train their own future teaching force
- Emphasis on using proven effective instructional strategies
 - 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
 - interactive, hands on instruction
 - Criss Strategies
 - technology
 - class-wide peer tutoring
- Providing strategies, books, and activities to parents for use at home
- Uniform recycling program for students in need
 - a bank is established of clean, outgrown uniforms

- students are provided with several uniforms
- all students feel good about their appearance

LEADING CHANGE: CREATING SCHOOL CULTURE

Leadership

The principal of Flamingo has a master's degree and was appointed to Flamingo 22 years ago with a total of 29 years experience as an administrator. The assistant principal is new to the school. The principal indicated that over the years her leadership style has evolved from extensive monitoring and micromanaging into a more effective leadership style of not working in isolation. She now works with a staff that shares a similar philosophy. Attitudes towards students and a work ethic emerged, where leadership became a shared process.

Teachers described the principal's style as resourceful, highly effective and with high expectations for all stating, "the principal has a vision and tells it like it is...shares expectations, knows that we'll get it done, trusts us as professionals, and lets us do our thing." They say, "The principal always finds a way to ensure that students get what they need."

It appears that everybody is a leader at some point or in some activity. Teachers concurred that they were made to feel comfortable assuming leadership roles. These include chairing committees, managing faculty meetings, and serving as interviewers of prospective teachers.

The adage that nothing succeeds like success seems to permeate this school. While personnel implement a variety of programs and practices that they have evaluated and found effective it is the school climate and an overall positive, collaborative, and professional approach to things that appear to be the foundation of what occurs at this school.

Administrators, teachers, and parents all seem to share a strong belief in excellence. They believe they are the best and have the expectation that all their students can achieve. All of the people we spoke with felt a personal responsibility for high student performance and were confident in their ability to ensure this.

Personnel

Astute and knowledgeable about budgeting and with the assistance of Title I funds, the principal has been able to hire needed personnel to assist the students and staff at the school. Many teachers are former student teachers that have had field experience and student teaching on site and through the University of Miami. Many clerical, cafeteria, paraprofessionals, and security personnel are parents, or former parents, of Flamingo students; they have a vested interest in the school. The high morale, low turnover, and mentoring provided for newly-hired personnel make the school a desirable place to work.

A reading leader is supplied by the district for all Title I schools; this teacher supervises, monitors and coordinates the reading program and the many facets of remediation offered. The reading leader instructs low-level students during the school day.

With the exception of reading the curriculum coordinator coordinates the instructional program. He also provides reading comprehension instruction to selected critically low students during the school day. This teacher provides instruction after school for enrichment through the Academic Excellence Program.

The Community Involvement Specialist (CIS) is funded through Title I funds and works with parents and the community. Through the Parent Outreach Center, informative meetings, home visits and parent workshops are held. The CIS also seeks community resources that may be available.

Well-trained paraprofessionals work with students and teachers in preparing and conducting activities in the computer lab and the science lab. The paraprofessionals prepare lessons, organize materials and order appropriate software and other needed items.

Many of the 14 paraprofessionals who work at Flamingo have been employed for years and many are taking college classes to further their education. They work with children; they don't grade papers or do clerical work.

The professor in residence from the University of Miami is an excellent asset for the school. The professor coordinates the grant activities of *Project Succeed*, offers in-service activities and supervises student teachers.

Setting

Flamingo Elementary is housed in two buildings. The original structure is 46 years old; a new wing that houses the administrative offices, the media center and special areas (computer lab, science, music and art) was constructed in 1999. The school has been retro-wired to provide Internet and Intranet access to 100% of the classrooms. The media center houses a state-of-the-art closed circuit television (CCTV) system and Internet access via all of its computer stations. There are four relocatable classrooms. The atmosphere of the office and of the school is pleasant, businesslike and very courteous. The school is clean; the classrooms are attractive.

The school is the hub of the community and serves children from a variety of Central and South American countries. Title I services have been received for many years but the incoming students are increasingly poor. No students are transported to the school by the district.

Climate and Culture

School morale is high. Teachers feel they are the best in the business and expectations for students as well as staff are high. Teachers often stated, "we're like a family here." Every effort is made to hire skilled professionals, to place them in their area of strength and to provide mentoring and assistance. If each teacher succeeds, all succeed.

New students are provided an extensive orientation program as well as buddies to facilitate a smooth transition to their new school. Many of the teachers, including some living in the next county, have their own children enrolled at the school. The staff is quite stable. When a staff member leaves it is generally for a promotion.

Teachers indicated that, "we celebrate everything and feel that everyone is an expert in something and that all have something to contribute. It's important that as teachers we show our students that what's important to them is also important to us." Teachers also said that they take their students' learning as a personal challenge. Students are expected to do well and teachers are expected to provide the kind of interactive experiences that research confirms is absolutely vital for second language learners. Teachers agreed, "we just don't give up on kids."

All students are welcome to participate in enrichment programs. Labels do not keep a child from receiving a rich curriculum. While students are grouped to provide for them at their instructional levels, they are all exposed to grade level material as well.

Professional development is viewed as important and to ensure that all are on the same page. ESOL, bilingual, and ESE teachers are included in all FCAT reading training to insure that "what we're doing for our students, we're doing across programs".

It was generally believed that the qualities that made an educator successful in this school are: professionalism, a commitment to students and to themselves as educators, an interest in continuing personal growth and dedication. A comment heard several times was, "we feel good about ourselves and our students". Parents described the atmosphere as one of respect and mutual support.

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. Flamingo receives Title I funds; most of these monies are used to purchase personnel. The school employs 14 hourly paraprofessionals to work with students during the school day; certified teachers are used for tutoring in the before-school, after-school and Saturday programs.

Flamingo is a professional development school. A partnership with the University of Miami yielded a five-year grant titled *Project Succeed* in the amount of \$80,000. This grant has enabled the school to increase the amount of technology and teacher training in both technology (paperless classroom, distance learning and purchase of hardware and software) and school-identified areas of need such as inclusion for ESE students. A professor in residence offers ongoing support to preservice and veteran faculty members.

In addition to the University of Miami grant, other grants have been received. A grant to retrofit the school, received from the state in the early 90's, helped Flamingo to gain the reputation as being on the cutting edge of technology. Individual teachers have received smaller grants.

The PTA supports the school with fund raising and fills teacher “wish list” requests; they also support motivational and congratulatory events for both students and teachers. Flamingo has received the Golden School Award for 13 years based on the number of volunteer hours the school received.

The principal makes sure that monies received for special programs are used to support the students for whom they are intended, such as ESE and ESOL. Professional development, linked to academic goals, is a major priority. In addition to using school funds, the principal is always looking for region and district support to supply substitutes for needed workshops, to attend conferences, and to follow-up with practice in the classroom. For several years technology was a main focus; however, the focus now is on continuing the improvement of reading and hands-on science instruction.

Money received from the state for Flamingo’s “A” rating was distributed after input from teachers, staff members, parents and the Educational Excellence School Advisory Council (EESAC). Both full and part-time personnel received an amount equal to five times their daily salary. Previously, some of the money was set aside to purchase library books and technology.

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.

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 and are encouraged to use the computers in the media center and/or to check out laptop computers for use at home.

FCAT data allows teachers to focus on the weak areas of their students as well as on the strengths of the programs. Teachers stated, “we know the areas our students have difficulty with, and so we target them. The information is used in planning and preparation for instruction.” Teachers chart the results of FCAT pre and progress tests according to the benchmarks achieved, allowing them to identify exactly which skills they need to continue instructing. Flamingo uses results obtained from the FCAT Explorer technology program available from the state. FCAT Explorer uses FCAT-like questions to provide practice for the test. Additionally, the teachers compose tests that are criterion referenced, not just multiple-choice, in an effort to strengthen their students’ ability to do higher-level thinking.

School personnel and a student’s parents or guardian have access to student assessment data. Data is used to assist in grouping for instruction and to determine if additional assistance is needed to accomplish grade level goals. Teachers meet regularly to review progress of children with data that includes benchmark testing, FCAT pre/progress tests, remedial instruction results, and daily work. Parent conferences are held to share information and to discuss continued strategies that are needed.

COMMUNICATING KNOWLEDGE: 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. Flamingo’s SPEP is aligned to the district’s goals with special emphasis on increasing student achievement.

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, district-made pre and progress tests for FCAT, teacher made tests and remedial instruction assist the staff in assessing progress toward SPEP goals. The school has developed a pacing schedule, described in section titled *Accountability* that assures a sequenced learning plan for all students. CRISS strategies are employed in all subject areas to expose students to higher-level thinking. Instructional materials and methods are based on best practices training, provided by the University of Miami and the district, to guarantee current methodology.

Technology is an integral part of instruction at Flamingo. Each classroom has approximately six computers plus access to a computer lab. Instructional materials in both English and Spanish are available.

Continuous training and high expectations of, and for, both teachers and paraprofessionals yield good results for Flamingo's second language students. Hands on learning activities are the method, and not the exception, for instruction.

Communication

Effective communication between administrators and staff and between parents and staff is something the school family is very proud of. The guidance counselor has extensive orientation sessions with all new parents and students. A get acquainted tour is always included. She also has ongoing meetings and training sessions for parents. There are monthly orientation sessions for new volunteers to further encourage their active involvement.

Parents describe the school as being very open, "everyone knows what's going on and that helps a lot". Staff members are all out in front each morning before school begins. There is a family atmosphere where parents are welcome to communicate with them. Teachers said there is a mutual respect and that parents treat them as professionals. Parents indicated the teachers are most responsive, returning calls quickly, and meeting with them at the slightest hint of a problem or decline in performance. The teachers felt they can walk freely into the office at any time and know they'll be supported in dealing with problems that might arise.

The daily schedule is designed to provide the teachers at each grade level with an hour of common planning time each day. This facilitates planning, utilization of consistent curriculum, professional development, networking, and sharing of materials, resources, and ideas.

Decision Making

Parents and teachers serve on a very active School Advisory Council. Teachers are involved in determining the goals and objectives of the School Performance Excellence Plan (SPEP). They then identify the relevant Sunshine State Standards for each grade and subject and create a pacing chart for the year. This makes them responsible and accountable for what, when and how they teach. It also helps to ensure greater instructional congruence and continuity.

All teachers are expected to serve on both long term and short-term committees. The grade level chair rotates annually to provide leadership and decision making opportunities for more personnel.

All areas of concern are shared with the staff. For example, this past year there was a budget crunch and some difficult financial decisions had to be made. The situation was explained to the staff and they were asked to decide which of two programs was more beneficial to both them and their students. The choice to continue either an after-school tutoring program or the use of paraprofessionals who provided extra reading instruction to students during language arts time was a decision staff had to make.

Departments that receive separate budget funds (such as ESE or bilingual), are given the discretion to determine how they want those funds spent.

At the end of each school year teachers are surveyed to determine their thoughts about materials and/or programs they are using. Decisions regarding continued implementation are made based on what's helping them meet their goals with their students.

Parent and Community Involvement

Parents are actively involved in many facets of the school from volunteering in classrooms to serving on a very strong SAC. The parents often initiate recommendations that are then taken to the staff for discussion and consideration.

When paraprofessionals, clerical staff, and cafeteria personnel are hired, an effort is made to hire people who live in the community and either had or have children at the school.

School personnel, parents, and students have initiated numerous business and community partnerships and contacts. These include operating a student bank, obtaining truckloads of donated equipment for a science lab and affiliating with an anchor club at a local high school. The school has also been the recipient of contacts made by a University of Miami professor in residence at the school. Additionally, someone at the school initiated the Aesthetics in Education Project with professors from the University of Miami.

EVALUATING CHANGE: REFLECTION AND CELEBRATION

Accountability

Personnel are held accountable for the achievement of goals and objectives through frequent monitoring of student work. The teachers have developed a pacing schedule whereby all teachers on a given grade level cover the same Sunshine State Standards during a nine-week grading period. One teacher per grade level develops suggested activities for a given subject area. Information is made available to ESE, ESOL and special area teachers. All standards are presented before the FCAT testing takes place in March. During the common planning meetings data on students are discussed; students needing additional help are identified; professional development opportunities are shared. Teachers meet with the principal and the reading leader or curriculum coordinator to determine which students should be included in tutoring programs.

Parents are made aware of standards their children will be expected to meet early in the school year. Parent workshops are offered on a monthly basis. A variety of remedial services are provided on a daily and weekly basis. Both before and after school tutoring, plus Saturday classes, are provided for identified students by certified personnel. Hourly paraprofessionals assist with small groups during the language arts block. The Reading Leader and Curriculum Coordinator facilitate and participate in the additional instruction offered. Ongoing assessment is charted and maintained on the students. Inclusion program for ESE students is a model for the district.

Cultural sensitivity is demonstrated by sending everything home in both English and Spanish. Although the majority of the students are Hispanic, many cultures and ethnicities are celebrated. Various activities to learn about the Holocaust and to celebrate Black History are conducted. Artifacts in the media center, appropriate music and food, parades, literature selections and curriculum units are presented.

Informal assessments, other than those mandated, are utilized school-wide. CRISS (Creating Independence through Student-owned Strategies) strategies are used across the curriculum; all teachers have been trained. CRISS incorporates higher order thinking skills; the students are exposed to critical and creative thinking on a regular basis.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

School Demographics

Flamingo Elementary is located in Miami-Dade County School District on the east side of Hialeah. According to the 2001-2002 Florida Department of Education School Advisory Council Report, Flamingo enrolled approximately 900 students, with 97.4% Hispanic, 1.5% Caucasian, 0.9% African American and 0.2% Asian. The school report grade for the past three years has been A. In 2001-2002 81.2% of the students were on free and reduced lunch. The mobility rate was 24%. 48.3% of the students were classified as LEP and 10.3% of the students as Gifted. Average class size (K-5) was 25.2 students, with the percentage of students with disabilities at 10.1%.

Ethnic/Racial %	
Hispanic	97.4
Caucasian	1.5
African American	0.9
Asian	0.2

Based on the 2002-2003 School Performance Excellence Plan (SPEP), the school employs a total of 63 full-time staff members and 31 part-time staff members. Of this group, two are administrators, 48 are classroom teachers, five are exceptional student education teachers, one is a guidance counselor, fourteen are classroom paraprofessionals, four are clerical employees, seven are cafeteria workers, and six are custodial service workers. No teachers are new to the school; average length of time teaching in Florida is 12 years; and 26 have advanced degrees.

The students who attend Flamingo Elementary are predominantly Hispanic. They primarily come from a low socioeconomic area; the school is surrounded by residential homes and a few apartment buildings. Many students come from single parent homes. Many parents work more than one job and have limited ability to communicate in English. Most students do not have access to computers outside of school. A sizeable proportion of the student population is new to this country and consequently experience communication difficulties and adjustment problems.

Goals**Goal 1:**

Readiness to Start School: Reported the evaluation of 134 kindergarten students with 107 meeting the State's expectation for readiness.

Goal 3:

Student Performance: According to The 2001-2002 School Accountability Report, listed 74.6% of the students met high standards in reading; 72.3% met high standards in math, 88% met high standards in writing, 77% made learning gains in reading, 76% made learning gains in math, and 86% of the lowest 25% made learning gains in reading. These percentages resulted in a sum of 470 and earned the school an A grade. A score of 410 or higher is needed to obtain the top grade from the state.

Goal 4:

Learning Environment: Reported that 10 or 18.2% new instructional staff were hired for the 2001-2002 school year as compared to the district average of 12.9% and the state average of 16%. The school has the best student attendance in the district; student absences for 11-20 days were 9.3% as compared with rates of 18.6% and 19.1% for the district and the state respectively. Leave days for teachers were slightly higher (14) than the district and state averages respectively (13.8, 10.2). Administrator absences were lower (6.5%) than the district and state averages respectively (11.7, 10).

Goal 5:

School Safety and Environment: Reported only two incidents that would impair school safety—one of larceny/theft and one for weapons possession.

Goal 6:

Teachers and Staff: Reported that 19.6% of the staff had graduate degrees (includes master and specialist degrees).