

Hawk's Rise Elementary—Leon County

KEY THEMES:

- Strong partnerships between parents, teachers and principal
- Open door policy
- Principal's strong leadership and monitoring of student performance
- Abundance of parent and business volunteers
- Partners in excellence
- Conflict resolution remediation process
- Principal support of professional development
- Powerful lines of communication
- MOM's and POP's

BEST PRACTICES:

- Accelerated Reader
- Accelerated Math
- Open Court
- Computer Labs
- SRI

LEADING CHANGE: CREATING SCHOOL CULTURE

Leadership

The principal at Hawk's Rise has been an educator for twenty-nine years with an Educational Specialists degree in Elementary Education and a postgraduate degree in Early Childhood Education. The principal is also certified in the following areas: Early Childhood, Reading, Elementary Education, and Administration and Supervision. Experience includes: fourth grade, first grade, Summer Resort Director of an Early Childhood Program, Prep Specialist, and Assistant Principal. This principal opened Hawks Rise eight years ago.

The principal has an open door policy where parents state they feel they are a valued presence in the school. The parents say, "You can't say enough good things about the principal, for example, the principal takes the time to write personal messages for each student on their report card." The teachers say, "The principal is the best leader they have ever seen who never asks you to do anything that she wouldn't do." Everyone comments on how the principal and assistant principal compliment and work well together, coming from different leadership strengths.

Personnel

The teachers report that a successful educator must have good personal skills to communicate clearly and frequently. They also must be open minded and willing to learn. Beginning teachers are mentored and have focus groups. The number of Nationally Board Certified teachers on campus is high. Teachers report that personnel turnover is minimized because everybody that works here gets so much support. A joy comes forth from teachers and is transmitted to their students about learning.

Two successful initiatives, MOM's and POP's, are the retired educators Mentoring Our Message and Promoting Our Profession.

The principal says a good educator is committed and hardworking, and must really want to see their students achieve their maximum potential adding "You have to like parents, maintain an open door policy and believe in the partnership between the parent, teacher, child and administration." Parents report that their children are "thrilled to come to school."

The strong instructional leadership of the principal has provided a nurturing, safe environment where respect for others is celebrated and all students achieve success through their diverse talents. Rising from a state ranking of 93rd in math to being first in Florida in only three years, is an example of the remarkable progress that has been made by Hawks Rise students. The school received the Golden School Award every year since 1996, with 18,000 volunteer hours. "The Hawks have continued to soar."

Setting

Hawks Rise Elementary is in a beautiful, wooded residential community where real hawks can be seen soaring in this environmentally preserved setting. A smiling parent on duty as a crossing guard greets us warmly and directs us to the main office, the “capitol of the campus”, Washington DC. We’re shown a map of the United States dotted with pins locating each teacher’s birthplace, thus naming their classroom by their state. Upon entering the office, we’re given the same fact sheet each new visitor receives, and taken to a conference room in the Media Center. The principal’s hospitality begins with homemade baked goods (made by the principal) and continues later in the day with a delicious luncheon prepared the night before. On our tour of the pristine campus, every fourth set of rooms has a planning area in its core, clearly the hub of cooperative teaching and planning. We meet the campus head maintenance supervisor and are told how important everyone is in welcoming all to the Hawks Rise community.

Climate and Culture

Hawks Rise is noted for their International High Scope Prekindergarten Model. It received International High/Scope certification, and was named one of their national model sites. Visitors come regularly to observe the excellent implementation of this outstanding curriculum model for young children. In a fast growing neighborhood, teachers utilize the diversity in their classrooms, by planning social studies units, to teach different cultures and to grasp the child’s interest and make learning fun.

BUILDING KNOWLEDGE: DATA DRIVEN DECISION-MAKING

Resources

Parents and teachers are involved to a great extent in budget decision-making through the School Advisory Council (SAC), Parent Teacher Organization (PTO), and School Improvement Plan (SIP). A set criterion is followed to assure these committees are demographically represented. A large PTO budget provides sources of funding beyond the state allocations with a great deal of money raised to help the school meet its goals. “Feeling as partners with our principal”, the parents say the PTO supplied a nice collection of books for AR in each classroom. There are almost fifty business partnerships in the “Partners in Excellence” program that donate money, volunteer or give products and services. The teachers state all their needs are met “with no problem”. The budget reflects allocation for student interventions, including enrichment and remediation through the Computer Curriculum Corporation (CCC), after school tutoring and classroom derived enrichment.

“**The best way to improve a faculty is through Professional Development,**” says the principal. “And the principal has to be involved with this development. I go to all the trainings the teachers go to as much as possible.” Parents are invited as well and feel strongly supported in this atmosphere. Through the district’s Teacher Education Center (TEC) specific individual needs of training are met. Professional Development opportunities that have made a difference at Hawks Rise are the CCC training, (to utilize every piece of software and get the most use out of it), AR, Writing and Reading Renaissance.

Information Management

Teachers and principal have access to student assessment data for instructional, professional and evaluation purposes from the department of Programs and Evaluation. Because the district’s system is not user friendly, the district staff does not have direct access and must use an analyst to obtain data. Hawks Rise utilizes additional data and “does a very precise job of monitoring that data for student academic achievement.” They also look at it for aide utilization and staff development.

COMMUNICATING CHANGE: PROFESSIONAL TEAMWORK

Instruction

There is a strong alignment between the district’s mission, the goals of the SIP and the teachers Individual Professional Development Plans (IPDP). To ensure that the curriculum extends beyond required FCAT academic goals and objectives, AR was implemented in 1998 and has grown rapidly since then. In 2001-02 the school received the distinction of being named a National Model AR School. During this past school year fourteen classroom teachers received “AR Model Classroom” awards, and the media center received the “Model Library” award. Over 650 students participated in the program, accumulating 76,034 points for the year.

The technology rich learning environment at Hawks Rise includes three computer labs with 30 stations in each. The ratio of students per computer in the school is 4:1. Data driven programs include: NCS Computer Curriculum Corporation's SuccessMaker programs for Reading and Math, Accelerated Reader and Accelerated Math.

The parents say, "By giving the children the opportunity to read, they excel in other areas as well. They feel more comfortable in other subjects, like science or math."

Communication

New parents and students are socialized into the school with a carnival like Kindergarten Orientation that makes you feel good right away about the school. The parents have a chance to meet their new teachers while a day program offers babysitting and movies for their little ones. When new teachers arrive, a brief biography is published and put in the school newsletter along with a picture. Surveys are a big part of the communication process along with handbooks. A shared venture between the school and Public Relations Florida State University graduate students produced a video about Hawks Rise soon to be released.

Decision Making

Parents and teachers are involved in the decision-making process through the SAC, PTO, and SIT. The Conflict Resolution Remediation Process is utilized with parents, children and staff members. An effort is made to ensure both parties are heard and their information is written down and valued while coming to an agreement. The principal states, "Consensus making is pretty well routine throughout the whole school, we try to solve problems that way."

Parent and Community Involvement

A parent states, "At Hawks Rise, they are especially sweet and enthusiastic about getting more people involved and volunteering. It's obvious they love what they are doing." Being in the classroom is so special, the parents report, and is encouraged in this family atmosphere. One parent takes leave almost every week so I can volunteer. Many take things home if they are unable to come during the day.

EVALUATING CHANGE: REFLECTION AND CELEBRATION

Accountability

Hawks Rise Elementary assures that all students have equal access to the knowledge and skills they need through benchmarks, planning, and a precise job of monitoring student academic achievement and staff development. Star Reading and Math benchmarks are given three times a year assuring every student receives the necessary instruction regardless of socio-economic, ethnicity, bilingual and ability challenges. Accelerated Reader (AR) monitors the growth in reading comprehension on a daily basis. Planning with the teachers assures that the data drives the curriculum beyond the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT). That data is Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI), Open Court Reading Series, teacher observations and informal assessments. "You can see that teachers are always trying to do an application into higher order thinking," states the principal. They are always having students creating new things, graphing their data, applying the scientific process to all learning, thus assuring that assessments measure higher-order thinking.

With the philosophy of "catch them being good" the principal has a unique way of monitoring student performance called a "positive post card" It is sent home praising students and focusing on their achievements. The principal attempts to commit to memory every student's name and the areas in which they need help so that personal impromptu conversations can occur with students as they are met around campus. Parents spoke of a planner for fifth grade that at first seemed a "hassle". Once the teachers explained their reasoning, independence and organization for middle school, they bought into the concept. "Now everyone in the school has a planner." Teachers assist parents in monitoring student performance with Easy Grade Pro, e-mail and weekly progress reports.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

School Demographics

Hawks Rise Elementary School enrolls approximately 800 students in Pre-K-5th grades. According to the 2001-2002 Florida School Indicators Report, there are 48 instructional staff and 2 administrators. The school serves 8.7% free and reduced lunch population, with a 97.7% stability rate, 0.4% Limited English Proficient population and 8.8% Gifted. 78% of the students are Caucasian, 15.4% African American, 3.6% Asian, 2.2% Multi-racial, and 0.8% Hispanic. For 2001-2002, the

average class size is 23.6 students in grades K-5. Twenty-seven point four percent of the students have mild, moderate, or severe disabilities.

Ethnic/Racial %	
Caucasian	78.0
African American	15.4
Asian	3.6
Multi-racial	2.2
Hispanic	0.8

Goals

Goal 1:

Readiness to Start School Goal: Evaluated 96.1% of all Kindergarten students met the state's readiness criteria for 2001-2002.

Goal 3:

Student Performance: The school grade is A. Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) data shows the percentage of students scoring at Level 3 or above is: 99%, 98% Gr. 3 Reading and Math, 94%, 95% Gr. 4 Reading and Math, 93%, 93% Gr. 5 Reading and Math. Fourth grade Writing, which is graded using a 1 through 6 scale, is above district and state average at 3.8. The median National Percentile Rank for FCAT Reading and Math, where 50% equals the national average, is: 91%, 92% in Gr. 3 Reading and Math, 85%, 85% in Gr. 4 Reading and Math, 83%, 89% in Gr. 5 Reading and Math.

Goal 4:

Learning Environment: Reports 16% of the instructional staff as new. Teacher absences are lower than the district average, with an average of 7.0 days for all types of absences. Student absences are lower than the district average in both categories (less than 20 student days absent and more than 20 student days absent) at 6.5% and 1.4% respectively.

Goal 5:

School Safety and Environment: Reported discipline incidents is 18, significantly lower than the district and state.

Goal 6:

Teachers and Staff: Reported that out of 42%, 0.9% of the teachers have a Masters Degree, 4.8% a Specialist Degree, and the average years of experience is 13.9.