

James Weldon Johnson Middle School—Duval County

KEY THEMES:

- Distributive Leadership
- High expectations
- Team planning
- School-wide team scheduling to allow for common planning
- Specialized instruction for underachieving students
- Parent and staff involvement in the decision making process

BEST PRACTICES:

- Classroom teachers and administrators from each grade level meet with other grade level teachers to discuss strategies that will improve the vertical flow of instruction.
- Involvement and support of parents a key to the success of the school
- Common team planning times are provided to meet and discuss the total needs of the students with team members, special teachers and administrators.
- High expectations for everyone
- Constant recognition of student efforts

LEADING CHANGE: CREATING SCHOOL CULTURE

Leadership

The principal believes in distributive leadership by empowering the school's staff and assistants. She empowers her grade level teams to raise the bar through effective collaborative planning and decision making. Described as inclusive leadership, the principal feels that "Power isn't real power until you give it up". A strong parent group also is involved in setting the course at Johnson Middle.

Personnel

Teachers at Johnson Middle are knowledgeable and eager to challenge their students. They communicate well with both the students and their parents. Goals are set high and cooperation is the key to success. This is a unique student body, and teachers that are attracted to teach at Johnson middle thrive on working with students that are motivated and willing to learn. The principal seeks out teachers that will reach out and accomplish goals that are set for the school. Turnover is minimal and is attributed to teachers that find satisfaction working with students that are motivated.

Setting

Johnson Middle School is located in Jacksonville Florida. The school opened in 1952. It has been a college preparatory magnet school for the past thirteen years. The school is an old two-story plant in need of repair and renovation. There is a lack of space for special programs and a lack of resources for technology is evident

Climate and Culture

The school knows it has the raw material to be the very best. They expect nothing less from everyone at the school. This includes not only the students, but also everyone from administration to teachers and parents.

BUILDING KNOWLEDGE: PROFESSIONAL TEAMWORK

Resources

Administration, teachers and parents work the budget for Johnson Middle. Parents and teachers participate in fundraising activities to enhance the school program. Much of the technology that students use is provided at home by their parents. The school is scheduled to receive four computers for each classroom in the 2003-04 school year.

The faculty makes good use of their limited facilities and technology at the school.

Information Management

The district provides reports for teachers to use for evaluating progress of students on FCAT tests. Hopefully this resource will be available to teachers on an as needed basis when computers become available at the classroom level.

Teachers and parents do not have direct computer access to test results and test analysis for students at this time. This information must be received from the district and shared with teachers and parents in written form.

COMMUNICATING CHANGE: DATA DRIVEN DECISION MAKING

Instruction

Students participate in a research program. The program offers a period in day that is set aside for students to go to any of their team teachers to get extra help and information in a particular subject. Instruction is geared for advanced students. The “Spirit” of the school is to raise the bar and expect more. The program targets a 6 as the goal for test performance, not somewhere between 1 and 6. The district and school goals are aligned with the Sunshine States Standards.

Communication

Teachers regularly meet in meetings to discuss curriculum and programs, they have common team planning periods. The assigned administrator works closely with their grade level teams, they know the students well and are an important part of grade level teams. Input from staff is encouraged by the administration.

Parents are kept informed of their child's progress through frequent conferences, agendas, report cards, and phone calls. Many parents are involved directly with the school as volunteers and members of school organizations such as the Advisory Council and the PTA. The parents are involved and influential; they value education and work closely with staff to insure an exemplary program.

Decision Making

The administration works closely with staff and parents. Administrators often meet with team members as part of “House Meetings” to insure that a good line of communication exists. Teachers have a great deal of input, which makes them an important part of a good distributive leadership model. Administrators willingness to share the decision making process is a key component in the team approach at Johnson Middle.

Parent and Community Involvement

Parent support of the program is a key ingredient to the success of the program and the high attendance numbers. This is a school that parents seek out as an alternative to their neighborhood school. They are interested in their child's education and are willing to be personally involved and supportive.

EVALUATING CHANGE: REFLECTION AND CELEBRATION

Accountability

The staff at Johnson Middle embraces the principal's distributive leadership style. They participate with administration in house meetings and are instrumental in the decision making process regarding the curriculum and policies that govern the school. They communicate with administration and are held accountable for their teaching responsibilities.

The teachers show a genuine concern for the success of their students. They are sensitive to the input of parents and believe that communication holds the key to good teamwork and understanding when it comes to accomplishing goals. Parents have high expectations for their children. According to the teachers “they and we are accountable”.

Students are naturally exposed to different cultural experience primarily through the student diversity established as a magnet school. They are encouraged to share their cultural differences on an ongoing basis throughout the year.

Students are selected to attend Johnson Middle School using a lottery. Anyone is eligible to attend the school. Students are recruited through a series of feeder school visitations, school tours and a recruiting CD ROM that is used to explain and promote the advanced programs offered by the college preparatory magnet. This recruitment and the reputation of the school results in a student body that is capable and ready for the vigorous advanced program offered at Johnson Middle. One of every three students is certified as gifted.

The school is organized into three teams for each grade levels. Two teams are considered advanced track and one of the teams in each grade level is exclusively for certified gifted students.

Incoming students and their parents are invited to attend a spring orientation to learn about the policies and expectations of the school. Another orientation session is held in the fall before classes start. Parents are very connected with the school and are eager to support the efforts of Johnson Middle.

New teachers are adopted by the entire staff and especially by their team members and respective department. A mentor teacher is assigned to help new teachers through the beginning teacher program.

An active group of parents serve on the school improvement team and are actively involved in the decision making process at Johnson Middle.

Each incoming sixth grade class is assigned its own administrator. This administrator stays with his or her group of students until they complete eighth grade. The principal has an open door policy and is readily available to student, parents and staff.

Student placement and progress is determined using teacher made pre and posttests. Students that are not ready for the advanced curriculum at Johnson Middle School are placed in the "Enrichment Camp" is offered in the summer. The camp runs for three weeks before the start of school. These level one and two students are offered intensive tutoring and evaluated for placement on a team where they will hopefully be successful. Although all students are eligible to attend Johnson Middle there is an exit criteria set for students not achieving at least a level three after their first year.

Higher order thinking skills are emphasized through a concerted effort by teachers to ask questions that require reasoning instead of factual answers alone. All students are required to participate in the Science Fair.

Teachers stay in touch with parents with the help of planners/agendas that monitor students and report their efforts. Parent conferences, progress reports, and phone calls are a significant part of communication at Johnson Middle.

Teacher accountability is insured by administration through the Small Peaks Program that features unannounced classroom visits. Administration plays an important role in supporting teachers. They know the students well because they are assigned to the same ones for three years.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Johnson Middle is located in the Duval County School District in a low-income urban neighborhood. Johnson Middle is a College Preparatory Magnet School. The school draws students from all areas of Duval County. The school employs 58 instructional staff and five administrators. Johnson Middle has 1242 students. 15.2% of Johnson Middle students are eligible for free and reduced lunch.

The average class sizes are: Language Arts 31.2, Math 27.6, Science 28.7, Social Studies 28.7. Approximately 32.5% of the students are gifted. There are 0.02% LEP students at Johnson Middle. Johnson Middle has been designated as an "A" school by the Florida Department of Education for the past two years.

Ethnic/Racial %

Caucasian	53.5
African American	34.2
Hispanic	2.2
Asian	9.4
Native American	0.2
Multi-racial	0.5

Goals

GOAL 3:

Student Performance: In grade eight, 401 students were tested on the FCAT Writing assessment, with 98% scoring 3.5 or higher on a scale from 1.0 (lowest) to 6.0 (highest). Johnson Middle scored an average of 4.6 compared to the district average of 3.7 and the state average of 3.8. FCAT Reading scores showed 84% of 401 eighth grade students taking the test scoring 3 or better on a scale from 1.0 (lowest) to 5.0 (highest). Eighth grade FCAT Mathematics scores showed 90% of 401 students taking the test scoring 3 or better on a scale from 1.0 (lowest) to 5.0 (highest). FCAT norm referenced test results were reported by median national percentile and were higher than the State and the district in every category. The district was lower in every category than the state. The skewed intellectual student body at Johnson Middle cannot be overlooked when comparing test results with the district and the state.

GOAL 4:

Learning Environment: Reports that 13.8% of new instructional staff was hired for the 2001-02 school year as compared to the district average of 17.4%. The absentee rate was 8.5% lower than the district average for students absent 11-20 days and 14.5% lower than the district average for students absent 21 days or more. Leave days for teachers were 0.4% higher than the district average. (12.1 Johnson Middle and 11.7 district) Administrator absences were 9.3 days higher the districts average for the year.

GOAL 5:

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

GOAL 6:

Teachers and Staff: Johnson Middle reported 25.5% of the instructional staff as holding a Masters Degree of higher.