

Lincoln Park Academy—St. Lucie County

KEY THEMES:

- Parent interest and involvement in admission and success in academic areas provides high interest.
- The goal for students to learn at the highest possible level and to gain admission to the competitive university of their choice is a central focus.
- The participatory leadership style keeps the principal involved throughout all aspects of the school. The sincerity of the principal's interest in teachers and students keeps their morale at a high level.
- The reading and elementary background of the assistant principal for curriculum (new principal) provides heavy emphasis on reading.
- Administrative emphasis on teachers developing higher interest in students who could not perform at the highest level.
- Constant emphasis on Sunshine State Standards.
- The use of disaggregated data toward learning and prescribing remediation is a key element.
- A supportive and "visionary" superintendent who nurtures teachers and administrators.
- A collaborative school board.
- High expectation of students of students
- Academically talented teachers and students.
- Faculty dedicated to the school mission.
- Disciplined approach to behavior and academics.
- Continuity between grades 6 through 12.
- The administration supports faculty and provides a united front. This is particularly true in the middle school, which carries over to the behavior in the high school.

BEST PRACTICES:

- Traditional instructional methods applied to traditional auditory learners reaps high academic standards. (Although we saw evidence of creative "expert" teaching—Math teacher used basketball examples to learn probability. An "algebra rap" by the same teacher was a dynamic means of helping students remember algebraic sequences.
- "Breaking the (traditional) mold" to provide a reading class for all students.
- Providing good information to teachers regarding data and effective use of data. Reinforcing teachers desire to teach differently (more preps) as needed by students.
- Diagnostic reading materials and provision of remedial reading programs.
- Middle school teaming has been effective in meeting the needs of the whole child.
- Articulation of subjects throughout the 6th to 12th grade experience. A writing folder is maintained for each student from the time they begin at LPA. Cumulative records are well maintained in each academic discipline.
- Basic academic rules are reviewed before proceeding into higher order thinking skills.
- Work on the Work
- Self-directed study for FCAT simulation in the computer lab
- Departmentalization allows common lunch period and planning periods in which discussion of student needs and teaching methods frequently takes place.

LEADING CHANGE: CREATING SCHOOL CULTURE

Leadership

The principal has completed four years at Lincoln Park Academy (LPA) with 13 years of experience and a Masters Degree in Elementary Education. On the day of our school visit a public announcement was made that the principal was being promoted to the district office and the assistant principal in charge of curriculum was being going to become principal. The faculty and staff strongly endorsed the work of the principal and were pleased with the promotion of their assistant principal. It was clear that the new principal had been a central influence in the prior success of the school and projected an image of being "in charge" even at this early wearing of the new title.

The original principal's leadership style was collegial. The faculty respects the principal's decisions and trusts that their concerns were understood. Parents also feel included in the decisions of the school. While parents did not want to lose the principal, they expressed complete confidence in the assistant principal. Teachers were also congratulatory, as the assistant

principal had worked closely with them in providing instructional leadership. Both school leaders demonstrate that service to the faculty, parents, and students is a vital part of their role.

Personnel

The district searches for teachers throughout the state and the nation. Teachers are given contracts to teach in the district. Principals interview teachers to determine their potential for success within the given school. Teachers sometimes apply directly to the school and are given interviews. If they interview successfully, they are asked to make complete applications to the district and are hired by the school. A depth of knowledge in the discipline that one teaches primarily determines success as a teacher at Lincoln Park Academy. Ability to impart academic knowledge to students and sincerely caring about student success are other qualities that matter to the administration. The union contract is not an issue that administrators must consider, but faculty members feel that the principal is a colleague and has their best interest in mind. The principal understands the contract and provides working conditions therein as a minimum source of professional courtesy.

In the selection of personnel the principal takes input from department heads as the initial part of the process. Academic leaders play an important role in this process. Matching the candidates to the appropriate positions helps minimize turnovers and improve the quality of teaching. It is also evident that Lincoln Academy has been very successful in the selection of their non-instructional personnel. The district provides a quality pool of applicants. Turnover is not a significant problem at LPA. Teachers like the subject they are teaching, the students they are teaching and the collegiality they share with administration.

Climate and Culture

The climate of the school is businesslike, yet friendly. Everyone knows they have a job to do and seems confident they can do it well. The parents apply for admission at birth and remain interested in the education of their child. This provides motivated students. Teachers reciprocate the enthusiasm in the classroom and consider themselves a second family to the students.

Setting

The school building is a typical Florida high school, built in an era when function outweighed style and looks as though it has undergone many remodeling projects. Some of the construction was well done but it lacked continuity throughout. The new auditorium was well appointed and seemed to represent the pride the school has taken in the arts. Faculty and staff are on task and pleasant in the service of students and parents.

BUILDING KNOWLEDGE: DATA DRIVEN DECISION MAKING

Support

Professional development is provided and teachers have major input regarding which programs they need. CHRISS Training is one that stood out as a significant help to the faculty and indirectly to the students. Extensive training in the evaluation of International Baccalaureate and Advanced Placement courses is provided.

The faculty meets primarily by departments to discuss improved instruction. Teachers are sent to learn more about I.B. instruction at workshops throughout the country. Outstanding performance on standardized tests by teachers and by students is frequently recognized. Faculty has input on how FCAT recognition funds are divided and voted to give everyone equal shares of those dollars.

The budget reflects allocation for student intervention, including enrichment and remediation. Students who are not strong in reading are given more reading courses with CHRISS training being central to that effort. Enrichment is commonly and thoroughly practiced because of the prevalence of so many high achieving students. Scheduling provides planning periods and the opportunity to meet as a department to fulfill professional responsibilities.

Technology

Technology is not a major focus in the school. Although there is good use of technology in the math and science departments, traditional learning techniques are given sway over more innovative methods.

Information Management

The guidance department and administration have access to student data and provide copies of information to teachers as needed. FCAT scores, A.P. scores, I.B. scores are all readily available. Use of this data is encouraged and often required. Student assessment data is used to premeditate students and to plan more effective teaching strategies for areas that are shown as weaknesses. Teachers and parents have access to the school improvement plan.

In this traditional setting, teachers have little use for more data. Standardized test provide an adequate record of academic needs. Teachers review tests results and adjust their lesson plans accordingly.

COMMUNICATING CHANGE: PROFESSIONAL TEAMWORK

Professional Development

A preponderance of veteran teachers provides a positive support base for new teachers. New teachers provide renewed enthusiasm to the veterans while veteran teachers provide their valued experience. Department heads and other teacher leaders are central in this role. The curriculum is largely determined by the A.P. and I.B. programs. The School Improvement Team receives no specific formal training, however the principal and SIT Chairperson briefly define the role of the committee prior to meetings. The professional development that has been the greatest help has been I.B. workshops, A.P. in-service and CHRISS training.

Instruction

The school has a mission that is well communicated. Parents understand that higher order academic skills will be the focus throughout the four-year course of study. Parents make transportation sacrifices and are supportive of the rigorous curriculum. L.P.A. conducts forums and has open discussions to secure feedback for their strategic plan. Parents and teachers are involved in the development of the school's plan. They look at student needs, assessment data and test scores to help. This plan is directly linked to the Sunshine State Standards. The curriculum, the purchase of materials and supplies, and teacher training all focus on student achievement. Instruction is made relevant through textbooks that relate to real world careers. A job fair and career day program is also used to make academic transfers to work.

Communication

The principal makes every effort to communicate with teachers through department head meetings, faculty meetings and by sending information. The principal also walks around the building and frequently visits classrooms. Meetings with parents are frequent in small groups and in large groups. A web site also provides constantly updated information regarding the school. Teachers communicate with parents through conferencing, mid-term reports and weekly grade level newsletters.

EVALUATING CHANGE: REFLECTION AND CELEBRATION

Accountability

The principal and faculty expressed the need to teach every student. A teacher described the need to be "up and down the aisle" in a constant effort to discern which students understand the concept being taught. Impressing upon each student the expectation of accountability was cited as the goal of teachers interviewed. An extensive review of cumulative records of students is undertaken. Pre and post tests are given to determine growth. The faculty monitors students for being on task and makes every effort to assess understanding. They realize that some students need more time to learn varying materials and more time is provided. Extra reading is provided for students who do not come to the school with a strong reading capability. Each student has a writing portfolio, which is constantly updated.

Cultural sensitivity is encouraged through various extra-curricular activities and within each academic discipline. While math is considered "universal" language arts is used to include multicultural enhancement. Respect for every child is encouraged by the faculty and by each student. Diversity is celebrated within classrooms and as a school. A program brought to LPA from Jacksonville helped to emphasize the need for cultural sensitivity in textbooks and all reading materials. A great deal of

emphasis is placed on the contributions various cultures have made in each academic field. Cultural fair programs further insure this aspect of sensitivity.

There is an orientation for new 6th grade classes and for new families to the school. Parents and students are given a tour of the school and insight into the culture of LPA. Handbooks are provided for each student and family and a new website also communicates matters of importance regarding programs. Volunteers and the parent teacher organization are encouraged to participate. Students and teachers help encourage parents to participate on the school improvement team. The School Advisory is active in management decisions including budget, academic, and behavior issues.

Classroom tests are individual and created by individual teachers. Student portfolios are commonly used and students are asked to defend their work through public speaking fairs. Long-term research projects are an expectation. Higher order thinking skills are monitored through lesson plans which department heads as well as the administration review. Blooms taxonomy is used frequently and students practice the various levels.

Application of academic concepts to everyday life problems is encouraged. Students are required to explain “why” regarding discipline problems they may encounter. Short answer tests are seldom given. Analysis and synthesis are commonly discussed and applied to FCAT practice tests. Extended thinking skills are frequently discussed and practiced. The explanation of a math process is as valued as a correct number for the problem. Although there are not many ESOL students, extended time is permitted when giving them FCAT and other examinations. These students are placed in smaller groups and teachers are allowed to read some parts of the questions.

Parent conferences and progress reports are readily provided for purposes of monitoring student progress. Teachers are held accountable for achievement goals. Test results are closely monitored. A personal professional development plan designed by each teacher with projections of how students will achieve on various standardized tests. This is done at the beginning of the school year and accessed later in the year. Lesson plans include which Sunshine State Standards are being taught. Teachers have little input on the county code of conduct but have reasonable latitude in the management of their own classroom. Teacher leaders, department heads and administrators discuss the school discipline plan. A faculty council made up of the same group discusses many other leadership roles in the school.

The school leadership is described by the faculty as collegiality combined with instructional awareness. Budget decisions are primarily made by the district and secondarily by the principal. The faculty is provided a “wish list” of materials and the administration provides all that is possible within the limited resources available. Resources for special needs students are more ample based on state funding formulas, although there are not very many special needs students at Lincoln Park Academy.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

School Demographics

Lincoln Park Academy is located in St. Lucie County, Florida and was recognized by *Newsweek* and the *Washington Post* as one of the most challenging secondary schools in the nation. “LPA” is a school of choice originally designed to solve integration concerns of the district. Their self-description is “a well-disciplined academic magnet school providing intensive instruction in the core subjects that are the foundation of sound, quality education. The mission of the school is “a development of students academically, socially, and personally in a safe and caring environment within a racially integrated setting”. The district is traditionally an agricultural and service oriented community and is one of the fastest growing areas in Florida with a 2000 population of approximately 195,000. Post secondary opportunities are available mainly through Indian River community. In addition, several colleges and universities including Florida Atlantic University, Barry University, University of Florida, Bethune Cookman College and Nova University, have satellite campuses, which offer limited coursework.

Lincoln Park Academy has an enrollment of 1854 students including approximately 800 middle school students and 1000 in high school. Of this population, 67% are Caucasian, 25% are African American, 4% are Hispanic, 3% are Asian and the balance are multiracial. Students in the high school program receive rigorous instruction in English, mathematics, science, and social studies throughout the four-year course of study. The population of the school is very stable with the dropout rate being reported as zero.

Ethnic/Racial %

Caucasian	67
African American	25
Hispanic	4.0
Asian	3.0
Multi-racial	1.0

0% of the student body is classified as LEP, 25% are on free/reduced lunch, 36% are gifted, and .02% are classified as having specific learning disabilities. Although the school is diverse, the fact that students and parents must be wait-listed for years helps ensure that students at LPA come from families that value education. The Florida school report grade for the school was an "A". The average class size at Lincoln Park Academy is 25 students. The suspension rate is 216 students suspended. Forty-two percent of the members of the faculty have advanced degrees. The faculty averages 18 years of experience.

Goals

Goal 1:

Readiness to start school: Will be evaluated by further developing the school's admissions application. There is also a goal to continue to develop family involvement programs to insure that all families are informed regarding services available in the areas of parenting, communicating, volunteering, supporting and representing other parents. Toward this end Lincoln Park Academy (LPA) disseminated information that promoted readiness to succeed in school. A website was created using 21st Century grant resources for new parents and students.

Goal 2:

Graduation Rate and Readiness for Post Secondary Education and Employment: Will be accomplished when 5% more students will earn the bright futures scholarships, and 100% will receive information on scholarship opportunities.

Goal 3:

Student Performance: FCAT math and reading scores will improve as evidenced by a 5% increase in number of students scoring above level 3 and 5% more students will receive their IB diplomas.

Goal 4:

Learning Environment: Will improve by maintaining a current maximum enrollment of gifted students at 125 per grade level. Absentee rate will not exceed 12.5% or above as evidenced by the School Accountability Report.

Goal 5:

School Safety and Environment: Gas lines to science labs will be repaired in order to meet sunshine state curriculum standards for science. 90% of type "0" deficiencies in accordance with OSHA, will be corrected within 30 days. A positive parenting seminar will be provided to educate families on drug awareness and violence.

Goal 6:

Teachers and Staff: Using surveys at least two professional development opportunities will be provided for all teachers in are of need. 100% of reading, language Art, and math teachers will receive professional development opportunities for Balanced Reading Initiative and Math Solutions. 100% of teachers will receive professional development opportunities in management.

Goal 7:

Adult Literacy: To increase by 50 % of the number of persons registering to vote on Lincoln Park Academy campus as evidenced by voter registration lot. An adult pre-literacy program will be implemented.

Goal 8:

Parental Involvement: Will continue to communicate with 35% of parents with direct contacts by phone, postcard, or e-mail as evidenced by communication logs. A school web site will be developed utilizing parent volunteers, educators, and students.