

## McIntosh Middle School—Sarasota County

### KEY THEMES:

- Philosophy of Holistic Wellness in Education
- Consistency of staff, protocol, & priorities
- Quality teachers—Entrusted & empowered by administration
- Contribution Recognition
- Nurturing Environment
- Faculty and Staff that consistently pursue grant funding

### BEST PRACTICES:

- Teachers treated as professionals
- Shared, informed decision making
- Aligned curriculum
- Vertical teaming & horizontal coordination
- School newsletter
- Low turnover—consistency of staff
- Embracing social culture
- Open minded, creative teachers
- Extensive Professional Development
- Data driven assessments
- Sensitivity to Total Student Wellness
- Student Agenda Handbook
- Employability Skills Emphasis
- Exemplary fiscal management & development

### LEADING CHANGE: CREATING SCHOOL CULTURE

#### Leadership

As with so many of the reasons behind McIntosh's success, the Leadership portion has multiple facets and it begins where it perhaps should—with staff. The administration and faculty exhibit a low-key approach to *FCAT Testing*. Their philosophy is one that if the curriculum in place is being addressed, the data will take care of itself. This tactic creates a wonderful working environment for all participants and the success is well documented in the scores.

The teachers' response specifically is to adhere to the *Sunshine State Standards* and promote the natural progression from these and more localized accepted benchmarks and maneuver transitions that fit McIntosh's student body. A great deal of this activity and resourcefulness is documented in the *School Improvement Plan*, which provides everyone involved with a framework of clear, concise objectives. Needs are recognized and laid out for all to acknowledge and contribute to—in essence, permitting each individual to be a leader in a given area and bringing all of this leadership together toward a common goal.

Beyond the local level however, is the District level of leadership. The *District Strategic Plan* is what it should be—a building block and guide for the *School Improvement Plan*.

The District agenda lays out ten specific areas and allows for the flexibility inherent in each particular school's demographic makeup to choose areas of concentration.

#### Personnel

Setting aside the anomaly of 2002-03, the turnover rate for McIntosh Middle School teachers is historically very low, <2% annually. This affords every component that comprises McIntosh—District, school, students, and parents, a consistency that is without equal. This consistency becomes an active force behind many other successes that are more readily and completely documented.

Part and parcel to the low turnover however, is the hiring practice that is in place. The principal has complete autonomy in the hiring process and stresses “character over credentials”. This affords the principal and current staff new faculty members that fit the strategies and goals of McIntosh.

Staying with the existing staff, *Teacher Surveys* indicate a high degree of job satisfaction, not the least element of which is a strong *Professional (Career) Development Program*.

The *Professional Development Program* incorporated by the District is extensive and provides for a myriad of workshops. In addition, a complete *Faculty Handbook* provides instant guidelines, which are further supported by a solid mentoring program within grade levels and/or departments.

Lastly, the District provides for a unique and interesting link to future staffing concerns. Students at the higher-grade levels can elect to take collegiate credit education courses that lend themselves to State Education Certification.

### Setting

McIntosh is currently undergoing a massive building program. Scheduled for completion in 2004, the construction process has presented many challenges to the staff and student body. From comparatively simple yet long term changes such as students walking 10 minutes out of their way in order to reach accessible entrances to classrooms, to more immediate but temporary events such as loss of water and electricity. With this major renovation underway and underfoot, it is remarkable that the faculty and 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup> graders performed so admirably on the most recent round of FCAT testing.

The school itself, nearly 30 years at the same location, is in a secluded area. The parcel of land owned by the District and associated with the school is 100 acres of open space and woodlands. This generates a comparatively isolated school community—buffered from detrimental street influence and also offers the chance at a number of impromptu and planned field excursions for the Sciences.

### Climate and Culture

The ambient climate of McIntosh Middle is embodied in a philosophy of total student wellness. There is a holistic approach to education at McIntosh that is without equal. Beginning with the principal, the scope of student success is measured by viewing not just test score data, but also the physical, social, emotional, and spiritual development of the youngster. By employing this *Philosophy of Wellness*, McIntosh Middle School is able to tap into and obtain the highest possible potential from each student. This emphasis is held together by McIntosh’s utilization of a *Coordinated School Health Program* to pull together the many varied aspects of its total wellness initiative.

Climate and culture are both gauged by *Student & Staff Climate Survey*. Much like the application of data to the curriculum, the results of these surveys are tabulated and from them are drawn adjustments and direction. One fine example is the *Miss Latina Program*, which provides a wide range of services—from computers to comportment training, to young Latina girls in a concerted effort to demonstrate the existence of additional options and avenues to success.

A broader definition of McIntosh’s focus on climate comes from their school mascot, the Eagle, and associated slogan—“Soar For Excellence”. This is embodied in the *Renaissance School Recognition Program*, which rewards students based on GPA and attendance.

McIntosh’s principal has been the principal of McIntosh Middle School for 11 years with 27+ years of experience in the field of education and possesses a B.A. and M.S. The principal is businesslike, friendly and exuberant in regards to the standard of education set at McIntosh. The principal has earned the respect of staff, faculty, and community by repeatedly demonstrating concern for the students. Moreover, the principal is highly adept in budgetary matters and has been awarded numerous grants—each utilized to the fullest degree possible by the students of McIntosh.

## BUILDING KNOWLEDGE: DATA DRIVEN DECISION MAKING

### Resources

Like many successful programs within the State, McIntosh readily admits to being data driven. There was, at all levels, an apparent sense that the staff had whatever resources they believed necessary to complete the task of educating their students. Apart from the District’s budget, McIntosh directly benefits from the resources generated by their own procurement of grants. The largest of which is from the Department of Juvenile Justice and totals approximately \$100,000.00. Additional grant money is petitioned for by individual teachers and departments, accounting for an increasingly significant amount of specifically earmarked funding.

An extensive portion of the local budget is allocated for the *Professional Development Plan*. The specific tendency of the District as well as McIntosh's administration is that empowerment of staff through professional enhancement is paramount to individual student success.

A final source of funding is the A+ monies received on the heels of FCAT testing. McIntosh, in conjunction with the local *School Advisory Committee (SAC)*, determine allocation and this year awarded the bulk of the money to faculty and staff based on a formula centered on seniority at the school.

### **Information Management**

This heading encompasses a number of powerful elements and mediums. There is the somewhat standardized *Individual Education Plan* in place for students, but this provides merely a framework. On a grander scale is *EQUIP—Sarasota's Research, Assessment & Evaluation Program*. Within the program is the *Educational Quality Improvement Profile* of the District. EQUIP clearly documents benchmarks as it breaks down a wide variety of demographics and their academic quotient improvements or declines. The District and McIntosh utilize the program to assess needs and make the appropriate adjustments.

Also incorporated under this heading is the *Test Tracker Program*. The objective of this program is to assist in the alignment of the curriculum and demonstrate where teaching needs are within the departments. *Test Tracker* targets weaknesses in an easy to comprehend format that affords both students and their parents, who may not be familiar with extensive data formulas, a concise platform from which to draw conclusions regarding their son's or daughter's progress.

## **COMMUNICATING CHANGE: PROFESSIONAL TEAMWORK**

### **Instruction**

Like many successful programs within the State, McIntosh readily admits to being data driven. The focus is on statistics generated by both State and local reports and the subsequent needs demonstrated therein. *Reading Assessments* are conducted on a yearly basis, and while the results may be rigid, the accompanying grouping remains flexible as students progress throughout the year.

Classroom curriculum is aligned across the board in conjunction with the *Sunshine State Standards*. This provides additional support to the continuity referenced in previous sections. Also, articulation exists across grades and departments, which serve to provide for and promote the communication incumbent in success.

Built into the curriculum at McIntosh Middle School is the opportunity for students to receive credit toward graduation in three separate subjects—Algebra I, Geometry, and Spanish. This advance placement of sorts at the middle school level provides a challenge to those students whose prowess warrants the same.

In addition, there are several unique educational experiences available for students at McIntosh Middle School. Not the least of which is Ornamental Horticulture (with a highly regional emphasis) and a retail Floral Shop for business education.

Under this heading, it bears noting that McIntosh is a flagship school in respect to two varied programs. They are cutting edge in their approach to the Fine Arts, as a well developed program is thoroughly entrenched in the curriculum, and they have a highly maintained Holocaust Education component.

An additional feature of McIntosh Middle School is that a full 20% of all course grades are based on *Employability Skills*, ie. attendance, timeliness, completion of tasks, adherence to dress code, maintenance of Student Agenda Handbook, and preparation. This emphasis aids in producing a youngster better equipped to deal with high school and the workplace beyond.

### **Communication**

The principal does not micro-manage or impose his own style of teaching on individuals. Instead, quality people are positioned for success, including support with every resource. Reliance is on the selection process and the mentoring by existing staff.

This mentoring process, formal and informal, lays the foundation for Communication at McIntosh. Personnel from every level of the school report that there exists a family atmosphere that is highly conducive to sharing ideas, notions, and well-

researched applications for education. The goal is to improve themselves and one another, which in turn, leads to improved the student achievement.

On a more concrete level, McIntosh Middle School publishes a newsletter, “*Macattack News*”, which outlines upcoming events at the school, messages from the principal, guidance news, student information, and specifically references those students and staff deserving of recognition for outstanding achievement.

Moving more toward paperless communication, McIntosh Middle School has an extensive network in place for electronic communication including their school/district television system, email, and website. Each fills a different niche and presents a very complete information package to all concerned.

Additional examples of active communication are present in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade *Orientation Program* which exposes students and their parents to the school, the programs, and staff. This program outlines the standard Report Card timetable as well as the *Progress Reports* which are disseminated half-way between the more formal report cards. The *Progress Reports* provide an invaluable service by keeping parents abreast of their child’s development.

### **Decision Making**

McIntosh Middle, not unlike most schools within the State, maintains a *School Advisory Committee (SAC)*. However, at McIntosh, this group of parents, community leaders, and business partners work primarily with staff in the recognition of students. It is a high compliment to the school and community at-large that the representation of ethnic diversity on the SAC nearly exactly mirrors the diversity representation of the student body.

The *Shared Decision Making Team (SDMT)* is comprised of administration, students, teachers, staff, and parents. Its varied makeup affords the *SDMT* the luxury of countless perspectives on issues confronting McIntosh Middle School. On the heels of these perspectives come viable approaches, which the principal utilizes to the fullest extent.

Within the confines of McIntosh itself there exists both vertical and horizontal teaming, which, referenced in previous section, affords the school and staff the continuity through and across grade levels and departments.

Each of the aforementioned components are ultimately impacted and directed by the data-based needs of the students.

### **Parent and Community Involvement**

Apart from the previously mentioned SAC, McIntosh Middle School maintains an active *Parent Teacher Organization (PTO)* that is also active in fund raising and student recognition. In addition to involvement in these organizations, parents meet a minimum of twice a year with their child’s teacher to discuss face-to-face the student’s development.

Business partnerships are also present at McIntosh Middle School. Documentation is plentiful as well, as they are recognized in the school’s newsletter and through the PTO.

These acknowledgments culminate in the patronizing of the businesses, which then develop into a cyclic effect from which both the school and the business partner benefit.

The primary business associations are through the *Jewish Family & Children’s Center* and the *Sarasota Memorial Hospital*. Both organizations provide resources in the form of materials, expertise, and resources to support the wide range of student objectives at McIntosh.

As is often the case, a particularly strong area for McIntosh spills over into many segments of this report. It is listed here for its parental involvement and the overall impact it has on the program and the student. The program itself is known as *MARC*, the *McIntosh Alternative Resource Center*. Its purpose lies in its name—it is an alternative, but specifically, an alternative to out-of-school suspension. *MARC* is staffed by trained clinicians who provide individual and group counseling as well as academic tutoring. Parents are mandated to attend an introductory meeting relative to the program when their child enters. This insures their understanding and buy-in. The goal however, is to maintain the student-school contact lost during traditional out-of-school suspensions. The cost of the program is underwritten by a grant procured by the principal from the Juvenile Justice Department.

## EVALUATING CHANGE: REFLECTION AND CELEBRATION

### Accountability

A tangible form of accountability is found in the *Student Agenda Handbook*, which serves as a guide to the student's day and promotes time management development. Within its first several pages are found simplified and readily accessible rules, guidelines and expectations for students. There is also a section for parents with contact information and additional expectation regarding their role in the student's education.

The *Student Agenda Handbook* also details the Vision, Mission Statement, and Goal of McIntosh Middle School as well as outlining the discipline strategy and consequences. It has a place for each school day for parental signatures if required, a copy of the dress code, the attendance policy, and tips on studying. All of this information in one convenient place lends itself to utilization by every party concerned and therefore spreads the wealth of accountability among those that matter most - the students have a buy-in to their school day and their parents have an instant resource to answer the age old question, "What did you do at school today?"

On the school-wide front, McIntosh maintains a very flexible "living" *School Improvement Plan*. Staff and faculty reference the guideline as "living" because they are not opposed to the recognition of necessary additions, deletions, and modifications if and when they become apparent. A portion of this thought process is a result of the previously referenced construction program, which has forced change in many instances. But minus the building program, it is evident that McIntosh's approach to education is unique in many respects, not the least of which a *School Improvement Plan* that is pliable and flexible enough to meet the changing needs of staff and students.

At the County level one need only review the *District Strategic Plan*, which promotes unequivocally the *Standards of Excellence* expected from both student and staff alike. It is prefaced by Sarasota's by-words, "Every child, every day, whatever it takes." With this simple sentiment as a backdrop, the District's intention is clearly identified and within the pages of the *Strategic Plan* is the slogan in concrete form—outlining the partnership stratagem that measures both need and success.

### BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

#### School Demographics

McIntosh Middle School is located in Sarasota County School District—a county that boasts a population of 339,625 of which 53,725 were enrolled within the county's public schools for the year 2001-2002. Within the District there are 19 elementary schools, 5 middle schools, 1 K-8, 5 high schools, and 2 schools for the gifted. In addition, there are 12 additional special centers—which are made up, in part, of charter schools, alternative programs, an Adult & Community Education center and the Sarasota County Technical Institute. McIntosh's figures demonstrate a total enrollment for the 2001-2002 period of 1484, with an October enrollment of 1280. Ethnic/racial/gender breakdowns are as follows:

Ethnic/Racial	Female	Male	%
Caucasian	589	590	79.4
African American	78	63	9.5
Hispanic	58	60	8.0
Asian	8	15	1.5
Native American	1	0	0.1
Multi-racial	11	11	1.5
<b>Female</b>	<b>745</b>		<b>50.2</b>
<b>Male</b>		<b>739</b>	<b>49.8</b>

Average class size is 30.4. Students on free/reduced lunch are reported at 35.2%. 20.9% of the student population is disabled, 4.3% gifted, and 3.5% LEP students. Student population stability is high at 95%—referencing students enrolled in October remaining enrolled the following February.

Vital statistics of note drawn from the FDOE School Advisory Council Report.

### **Goals**

#### **Goal 3:**

**Student Performance:** When looking at Grades 6-8 FCAT SSS Reading and Math scores, it is noted that McIntosh Middle consistently scores above the state mean, yet sometimes falls slightly below distinct means. The same can be said for FCAT Grade 6-8 NRT scores; the percentile ranks are well above the state, and closer to the distinct scores.

Based solely on school accountability grading, McIntosh scored a combined 435 points on the FCAT Reading, Math, and Writing portions of the test, exceeding the State mandate of 410 points required for classification as an 'A' school.

Average years of teacher experience runs below the State average at 11.8. Turnover is historically low, based on interviews, however, for the school year 2001-2002, 15 teachers were new—accounting for 22.4%. Teachers with advanced degrees comprise 40% of the operating staff. Teacher absences nearly mirror the State average in every reporting category, whereas Administration absences are almost twice as high as the State mean.