

Nova High School—Broward County

KEY THEMES:

- Principal's Knowledge about Curriculum
- Cultural Sensitivity
- Keeping a Safe Environment
- Strong Parental Involvement
- Interpersonal Skills of Principal
- Involvement of All in Decision Making
- Parents—The Connection with the Home
- Good Assistant Principals
- Passionate Teaching Staff
- Administrative Involvement in Teacher Evaluation

BEST PRACTICES:

- The involvement of all staff members in decision-making
- Exceptional leadership of the principal
- Administering the Tower Test for appropriate placement in reading
- Having teachers use a flip chart for critical thinking based on Bloom's Taxonomy
- Providing FCAT Reading Camps and ESOL Camps
- Mentoring at all levels—administration, faculty, and students
- Having the curriculum connected to a sequenced learning plan
- Developing the Academic Prep Program
- Free after school tutoring programs by the teachers, Peer tutoring, and Lunch time tutoring for those who have transportation problems
- Increasing the number of students in AP classes and decreasing the number of students in regular student classes.

LEADING CHANGE: CREATING SCHOOL CULTURE

Leadership

The principal of the school has been in the position for the past three years, formally a teacher for nine years, and an assistant principal for seven years before coming to Nova High School. Leadership style is self-described as being “up front”, with emphasis on being authentic and a firm disciplinarian. The theory is that if a school is well disciplined, safe and secure, student achievement is going to be that much more successful. The appearance of the facility is also very important and the principal believes the school should have curb appeal and that the facility needs to be neat, clean and attractive so students feel they are respected.

The faculty states the school is fun to work in and very open. They feel comfortable going to the administration. They appreciate the fact that there is always an opportunity to grow and working toward a leadership position is encouraged. The principal strives to identify teacher leaders and potential administrators for the county. In fact, teachers are given time off to spend as an administrator to groom them to become future leaders of the county. The administration is always available for any discussion, however, the focus is always on the student and their success. Parents said within the first semester of school, with the new principal, there was a drastic change in behavior, for the better. They also appreciate the fact that campus was closed for lunch.

Personnel

The District has a department that manages personnel. There is also a yearly two-day event, Experience Broward, where there are 700 to 800 qualified teachers that are ready to be hired immediately. At the school level, department chairpersons and administrators are involved in hiring. It is a shared decision making process. The principal believes that the hiring process must be taken seriously, stating, “one bad teacher can hurt a child for two or three years”.

An educator must be passionate about what he/she is doing at Nova to be successful. There are high expectations among the staff and accountability has to be understood. Parent involvement is high which causes some stress for the teachers.

Mediocrity isn't accepted. The principal states, "There are students who are geniuses and teachers can't bluff." Teachers feel that flexibility and patience are important, also. They feel teachers at Nova High School should be able to "step out of the box". Parents are pleased that teachers are willing to go the extra mile including: staying later in the school day, coming back for training, etc. They feel teachers need to feel empowered and that the principal does a good job at that.

The principal states that very few decisions are made without including the building steward. Good relationships and getting along with everyone are important.

Recruitment and Retention

As mentioned previously, Experience Broward is one way of recruiting teachers. There is also a paraprofessional scholarship program, which allows paraprofessionals to get their degree and have their schooling paid for. It is with hopes that if you educate your own they will stay with the same school.

Mentoring goes on at all levels. Clinical education training on how to be a mentor is offered by Broward County. Every member of the Nova staff is a mentor.

Nova's principal feels that classroom management is the main reason teachers leave the school. They need to be equipped with competencies when they come into the situation. Also, helping them and treating people professionally reduces the turnover. The principal believes that good teachers are hard to find and you must find a way to keep them happy. For example, teachers select their own schedules and can work an extra period for extra pay. Teachers need to be supported in any way that is possible.

Setting

Nova High School is located in Broward County. The school is clean and neat in appearance with the administrative offices in a building apart from the classrooms.

Climate and Culture

The principal has been at this school for three years and each year the grade of the school has risen. The school has become a very safe and secure environment for students. It is attractively decorated and kept extremely clean. The administration feels that is essential for student success.

BUILDING KNOWLEDGE: DATA DRIVEN DECISION-MAKING

Resources

Eighty-five percent of the budget at Nova High School is spent on teachers and personnel. The decisions that drive the budget are made with regard to teachers. The more teachers that are hired the smaller the class size will be. There are very few non-contact people at Nova, everyone should have some contact with students.

The parent advisory chairperson signs off on the budget. Teachers are given a copy of the entire budget. Once they are given the amount of money they can spend, they do so in whatever manner they choose. The principal meets with the faculty two times a year to go over the budget.

The Academic Prep Program is an example of how budget decision-making is related to student diversity and special needs. Students who are deficient in reading and math are given classes with no more than 25 students in them. Typically, these are students who scored in the bottom 25% on the FCAT. They were given 50 computers to help with remediation. Each computer is equipped with Compass Learning. A teaming concept is used and all of these students have the same teachers at the 9th grade level. It is a school within a school concept. The principal feels it isn't fair for an AP class to have 12 students (when they are the highest achievers) and then a regular student classroom having 35 students in it. Accordingly, the number of students in AP classes has been increased and regular student class size has been decreased. The ESOL population is given the smallest class sizes.

Parents say the principal has cut corners in many ways, benefiting everyone. Money is saved on the secretarial staff, for example, by hiring part time help from Broward Community College, which is next door to the school. This eliminates the payment of benefits. The parents have a Volunteer Bank and the principal will ask parents to come into the office and help out when necessary.

Nova High School is not classified as a community school; therefore it is hard to solicit help from local businesses. They are a county school and the students come from throughout the county. They have now entered into a partnership with the town of Davie and that is helping Nova build a football stadium. Donations have been given for the FCAT Camp and ESOL Camp, which are held on Saturdays. Teachers and parents volunteer their time for these camps.

Beyond the state allocation, sources of funding are slim. Nova receives a vocational and career grant that is spent on a counselor to help students who are deficient in reading. Two problems ensue with academic success: because test scores are high at Nova, people think the school has everything; and, when your school grade is higher, your funding is less than when you were a lower grade school.

Support

The principal provides \$4500 of staff development money for the teachers. The money is given to the department chairpersons and they use it as they see fit. A survey is given at the end of the year and teachers can respond as to what they would like to have offered the following year. Most of the staff training is conducted in house. Teachers are paid to plan workshops for early release days. The county also offers staff development, but the teachers regret that it is usually held on a Saturday. They dislike giving a personal weekend day for in-service.

The regular school budget provides for no incentives. There is a discretionary account that Coca-Cola donates which is about \$20,000 to \$25,000 per year. That is used as incentives for students such as "Lunch with the Principal" where 10 or 12 students are congratulated and treated to lunch for doing something good for the school. At the end of each sport season a lunch is provided to recognize student participation. Eight faculty lunches are catered throughout the school year as a small way to show appreciation to the teachers. The fund is also used for students who don't have money to submit with their college applications.

FCAT merit monies are dispersed by the SAC team. Most of the money went to staff bonuses with about \$20,000 coming back to the school.

Technology

The principal of Nova feels that technology helps the school in two ways, with the first part being the operational side of the school. They have a school wide database that is called Super Nova. It does all the nuts and bolts of the school and was created by a teacher that was hired just for this purpose. He developed the program for Nova High School. The principal feels this is one of the best things done during the three-year tenure at Nova.

The second way technology helps is by having students remediate themselves. Compass Learning, a software program, was purchased to help students in reading and math from 9th through 12th grade. The challenge is to make sure students are getting what they need in terms of the curriculum side of technology.

Information Management

Super Nova is the information system that is in place at Nova High School. It allows the teachers to access anything they want to find out about a particular student. Through the county there is Virtual Counselor and if you want to produce reports there is a county system called Data Warehouse.

FCAT data is also available and each year it becomes more specific. This is important in placing students in appropriate reading classes. The district also enforces the use of the Tower Test. Tower is a readability test which helps place the student by grade level.

Using the data collected is a big part of finding the strengths and weaknesses of the students. It is helping to drive the curriculum. Data helps to find and save the students who tend to fall between the cracks and get lost in the system. The principal of Nova feels there is sufficient data but would like more data provided as to why the guidance department doesn't see students individually.

COMMUNICATING CHANGE: PROFESSIONAL TEAMWORK

Professional Development

The HRD (Human Resource Development) department only does training for Broward County. In-house training is also provided at the local school. Every teacher has a professional growth plan. They identify an area in which they are weak and tailor the needs of their professional development around that plan.

Teachers would like more money in the budget used to hire substitutes so their training could be on school time and not their own time.

Instruction

A customer survey is done every year. It is the response to what is happening in individual schools. It is how the district gets their direction. The district's plan is data driven. District mission and strategic plans are aligned at the administrative level. The District Superintendent meets with the administrators monthly.

The curriculum is connected to a sequenced learning plan for all students through articulation. Sequential learning comes from the county. They are offering some vertical team training this summer for curriculum mapping. They are trying to link 6th, 7th, and 8th grades to prepare them for high school.

Communication

Effective communication is certainly a goal at Nova High School. There is a very active PTA, which helps to promote communication. Newsletters are sent out on a timely basis. The principal meets with department chairpersons on a regular basis and has faculty meetings for the entire staff. In addition, an open door policy and communication among the staff is encouraged.

Parent nights are held as well as orientations. There is a May orientation for incoming 9th graders. There are special sessions for students who are new to Nova. Parents are given many opportunities to become involved and communicate with the school. The school embraces parent involvement. The Web site offers information that would be helpful to parents.

Decision-making

All staff and personnel are involved in decision making. The SAC committee plays a major part of decision making also. Faculty Council hears the concerns of the teachers. Department chairpersons meet monthly to outline the direction and faculty meetings are held bi-monthly.

The number of teachers hired drives budget decisions. Eighty-five percent of the budget is spent on teachers and personnel. The parent advisory chairperson also signs off on the budget.

The principal knows that ultimate accountability for decision-making resides with the principal's office, but many resources are involved in those decisions.

Parent and Community Involvement

Parents are given many opportunities to become involved. They can work on the school improvement plan, committees for discipline and curriculum and the SAC committee. Parents are extremely verbal and say they would be there whether they were invited or not. The over-ride policy allows parents to become influential in the curriculum of their child.

Parents are given each teacher's planning time so they can have contact with the teacher. Email and voicemail is also another way to have parent involvement.

It is a challenge to get community support since Nova High School is a Broward County school and not a neighborhood school. Local businesses feel parents won't frequent their stores since students live throughout the entire county.

Davie has now entered into a partnership with Nova High School to build a football stadium. There has been some support from Publix to provide refreshments for the FCAT Camp. In addition, teachers and parents at Nova have given up their time to volunteer on Saturday for a tutoring program.

Coca-Cola provides a discretionary account to be used on incentives and appreciation luncheons for teachers. In addition this fund is also used for students who can't afford to apply for college.

EVALUATING CHANGE: REFLECTION AND CELEBRATION

Accountability

Parents are socialized to the school through the PTA and newsletters are sent out frequently. There are tours of the school that are offered at different times throughout the year and a "New To Nova Night" is also held for students who will be new to the school the next year.

Principal makes sure that all teachers teach at least one regular class to insure that across the curriculum all students are getting the school's best teachers. Data is analyzed to make sure weaknesses are identified early in the year and the teachers then can revolve the curriculum around those weaknesses.

Cultural sensitivity is demonstrated in the classrooms by continually reevaluating and using reading to reach many different cultures. When teachers are hired the principal does so based on the diversity of the school. It is administration's belief that teachers should reflect the student body in terms of diversity.

At Nova High School everybody is involved in decision-making. Parents are extremely verbal and are given many opportunities to become involved, such as the School Improvement Plan, curriculum committees, as well as discipline committees. The school embraces parent involvement and the parents are a highly motivated group. There is a Faculty Council to hear the concerns of teachers. Department chair meetings are held at least monthly and faculty meetings are held bimonthly. Department chairpersons are involved in the selection of teachers as well as other teachers being involved in the selection. Administrators meet weekly to encourage communication.

Informal assessments, other than those mandated, include using teacher driven tests and quizzes. Teachers design the tests they produce to represent the FCAT in design. There are also the informal assessments such as projects and participation. It's not just the academics that are assessed; it's the entire child. Extra-curricular activities are pushed because research shows that students who are involved in these are more successful academically. The Paideia Program Seminars for English as well as the flip chart of Bloom's taxonomy help measure higher order thinking.

The Academic Prep Program encourages reading across the curriculum. A library for all the classes in the school from Barnes and Nobles helps ensure this goal. Curriculum maps are provided by the county based on subject area and grade level. The school follows up with that by having vertical team training in which curriculum is aligned so that almost everyone gets the same thing. Administrators are in the classrooms every other week. The principal embraces the following philosophy, "Inspected is respected and respected is expected." If administrators are inspecting what teachers are doing, then the teachers value what they are doing. Administration at Nova High School is involved in accountability even though it isn't always popular.

Student performance is monitored by collecting a final exam from every teacher at the end of the semester and making sure that it reflects critical thinking. Administrators are in the classroom on a regular basis and observing what type of instruments teachers are using. Interims are given every quarter and report cards go home every eight weeks. Credit checks for 10th, 11th, and 12th graders are given to see if they are on course for graduation.

Parents are assisted in the monitoring of student performance by having monthly parent advisory meetings where the curriculum and expectations are outlined. Parent Nights are held around FCAT time to educate parents as to what they can do to help their child. There is a web site that outlines the standards that are being tested.

Once a year a program called Parent University is held. A keynote speaker presents and then a variety of sessions are offered where parents can attend and get the information they want. For example, a session might be offered on transition from 8th to 9th grade, the types of remediation the school has for FCAT, or what to expect in an AP class. Email and voice mail to the teachers are also offered to parents as another way of communication.

Parents especially like the over-ride policy. For example, if a child wants to do AP English and the teacher recommends regular English, the parent, child, guidance counselor and teacher meet. They write down the pros and cons and then sign a contract knowing the class may be too difficult for the student.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:
School Demographics

Nova High School is located in Broward County. There are 114 teachers employed with 6 administrators. Nova High School enrolled 1,116 students. The school report grade for 2001-2002 was a B, being only 4 points from an A.

Ethnic/Racial %	
Caucasian	57.1
African American	25.3
Hispanic	12.1
Asian	5.1
Native American	0.2
Multi-racial	0.38

Goals
Goal 2:

Graduation Rate and Readiness for Postsecondary Education and Employment: There were a total of 455 students who graduated in 2001-2002 from Nova High School. The percentage of students who graduated within four years of entering ninth grade were 91.9%, as compared to the district's 65.2% and the state's 67.9%. There were a total of two students who dropped out of Nova High School for a percentage of .1%, as compared to the district's 1.3%. Graduates who took college placement reading tests numbered 237 with 195 of the students passing the reading placement tests. That is a school percentage of 82.3% compared to the district's 74.5%. There were 234 graduates who took college placement writing tests with 203 passing the writing tests. That is a school percentage of 86.8% and a district percentage of 79.7%. Two hundred thirty-four graduates took college placement mathematics tests with 201 passing them. That is 85.9% of school graduates compared to 71.7% of district graduates.

Goal 3:

Student Performance: The FCAT Writing Assessment tested 372 tenth grade students. The school average was 4.2, the district average 3.9 and the state average 3.8. Results for the FCAT Sunshine State Standards Tests were as follows: In grade 9 reading 590 students were tested with a school mean of 308, district mean of 289 and state mean of 287. Ninth grade mathematics tested 591 students with a school mean of 316, district mean of 288 and state mean of 286. Grade 10 reading tested 373 students with a school mean of 329, district mean of 307 and state mean of 303. Grade 10 mathematics tested 371 students with a school mean of 349, district mean of 323 and state mean of 319. The FCAT NRT measures student achievement of a test that was given to a national sample of students. Percentile scores on a norm-referenced test show a student's performance in relation to the performance of students in the national sample. Nova High School tested 587 students in ninth grade reading with a school median of 54%, district median of 42% and state median of 44%. Grade nine mathematics tested 586 students with a school median of 81%, district median of 64% and state median of 65%. Reading in grade ten tested 366 students with a school median of 69%, district median of 53% and state median of 50%. Mathematics in grade ten tested 366 students with a school median of 86%, district median of 69% and state median of 67%. The FCAT School Accountability tested 530 in grade nine reading with 45% scoring at Level 3 or above. Mathematics in grade 9 tested 521 students with 70% scoring at Level 3 or above. Grade ten reading tested 348 students with 58% scoring at Level 3 or above and mathematics in grade 10 tested 349 students with 87% scoring at Level 3 or above. Writing in grade 10 tested 348 students with 96% scoring 3.0 or high.

Goal 4:

Learning Environment: Twenty-five or 21.95% new instructional staff were hired for the 2001-2002 school year as compared to the district average of 16%. Absentee rates were slightly higher for the number of student absences of 11-20 days, and slightly lower for students absent 21+ days or more. Average leave days for teachers were lower, 5.1% than the district average of 7.4%. Administrators leave of 9.8 % was slightly higher than the district average of 9.3%.

Goal 5:

Teachers and Staff: Teachers and Staff reported there were 45 teachers with bachelor's degrees, 49 with master's degrees, 2 with specialist degrees, and 2 with doctorate degrees.