

Seminole Middle School—Broward County

KEY THEMES:

- Principal's Knowledge about Curriculum
- Cultural Sensitivity
- Creative Budgeting
- Keeping a Safe Environment (24 hour surveillance camera)
- Strong Parental Involvement
- Interpersonal Skills of Principal
- Involvement of All in Decision Making
- Data-Driven Groupings for Instruction

BEST PRACTICES:

- The involvement of all staff members in decision-making
- Exceptional leadership of the principal
- Hiring a bilingual teacher as ESOL facilitator
- Administering the Tower Test for appropriate placement in reading
- Having teachers use a flip chart for critical thinking based on Bloom's Taxonomy
- Using monthly writing prompts
- Providing a morning tutoring program
- Instituting the Saturday morning Writing Camp
- Mentoring at all levels—administration, faculty, and students
- Having the curriculum connected to a sequenced learning plan
- Hiring outside consultants, Mary and Craig Lewis
- Giving special education students the same practice books as regular students use

LEADING CHANGE: CREATING SCHOOL CULTURE

Leadership

The principal of the school has been in the position for the past three years. Originally, a teacher and assistant principal before coming to Seminole Middle School, the principal has 23 years of experience in Broward County. Upon arrival at Seminole Middle School it was a C school and in a period of three years with the principal's leadership it is now an A school.

The principal feels collaboration with everybody is very important. However, the principal is quick to point out that as a strong leader when I believe in something, I will go to no end to see that it happens. Brainstorming with department chairpersons and faculty at the beginning of the school year is also important. The principal likes all personnel to think of themselves as leaders. An advocate of modeling change is seen by personal example of not doing the same thing the same way twice in the hope that will reflect on the staff by not having departments always look and stay the same.

The principal believes that hiring outside consultants, Mary and Craig Lewis, as consultants for writing, is one of the best things done for the school. The consultants spend three days working with the staff at two different times during the year.

Teachers rated the leadership at Seminole Middle School as being phenomenal. They feel that every individual at the school steps up to the plate and those in leadership positions wouldn't ask the staff and faculty to do anything they wouldn't do.

Personnel

The characteristics that make an educator successful at Seminole, according to the principal, are the qualities of the person. They need to be caring, willing to be involved, be a team player, optimistic and willing to participate. The principal would prefer hiring a better quality person with good character than a person who has better certification qualities. The teachers agree and added that being sensitive to the needs of all students was also important.

Recruitment and Retention

The SAC committee is involved in the selection of the principal. Teachers are hired at the individual schools, depending upon transfers and surplus. The Web page has openings for positions.

Experience Broward is a day's conference where new teachers are interviewed and selected. The district's advertisement for recruiting new teachers is, "Teach at the Beach!"

Mentoring is done at all levels at Seminole Middle School. Principals and assistant principals are assigned a mentor. Teachers have the NESS program (New Educator School Support). This is for teachers who are new to the system in which they are assigned a mentor. There is also the New Teacher Academy for teachers who are new to the district. Students also have a mentoring program in which they are tutored by peers to get ready for the FCAT.

Personnel turnover is minimized by keeping everybody happy and maintaining a positive attitude while trying to fulfill the needs of each individual on the staff. The principal also has a very positive attitude if a staff member needs a change or doesn't feel he/she fits into the Seminole Middle School family.

Climate and Culture

The principal has been at this school for three years and each year the grade of the school has risen. There have been many changes and the faculty prides themselves on being a "faculty that accepts change." They know they have a principal committed to student achievement and that is felt by all. Sensitivity to teachers concerns and a willingness to purchase anything they ask for, by the principal (if justifiable), helps in student success.

The school was attractively decorated and all faculty and staff appeared to be happy, helpful and had a ready smile. Security was very tight with only one door unlocked for admittance. A guard was posted and visitors were asked to sign in.

BUILDING KNOWLEDGE: DATA DRIVEN DECISION MAKING

Resources

The principal's decision making linked to academic goals and student achievement is that after looking at the data, the school will purchase anything that is needed to help students. While other principals say they have no money in the budget, the philosophy here is never to say that and to find the money that is needed through a grant or donation.

Teachers have never been told there is no money. Everything they have requested to help a child succeed has been purchased. The principal meets with the department heads to find out what resources each department needs and then assumes responsibility for the budget. Any person who is interested is welcome to give their input.

A special position of ESOL coordinator was created by hiring a bilingual teacher to look after the interests of ESOL children. ESE students are given the same resources as the regular students and they have shown their ability rises to meet the expectations of the task at hand. All children are treated the same but if some children need more help it is given to them.

Support

Areas of professional development and improvement are identified through a needs assessment. The teachers do a professional growth plan and then appropriate staff development is provided. It could be training from someone in-house or an outside consultant may be hired.

In addition to professional development at the local level, teachers and administrators attend conferences outside of the district, visit other schools when traveling and attend community-based programs.

Rewards for students are linked to the budget. For example, students were told if they got a 6.0 they would have their way paid for a Disney field trip. The budget also reflects student interventions. A morning tutoring program was set up and a Saturday writing program called The Writing Camp was initiated.

Technology

A technology survey is done every year. The principal would like to see more integration of computers in daily lessons. A model program in two advanced science classes is being set up so that other teachers can see how the computer can be used in content areas. Fifty wireless laptop computers were purchased for the project so each student can have them at

their desk during class. Computers are also used for writing. Compass Learning is a computer program based on reading and math that is widely used. In addition, elective keyboarding classes are given.

Workshops are conducted for teachers to enhance their knowledge and use of the computers.

Information Management

The information systems in place to access data are the school database as well as the district's data warehouse and the Virtual Counselor. This allows teachers to access the data of a student's test scores for the number of years they have been in the system.

The decisions made using the data collected, drives the curriculum of the school. In addition it helps the principal make decisions on the placement of teachers, purchasing supplies, staff development and technology purchases.

COMMUNICATING CHANGE: PROFESSIONAL TEAMWORK

Professional Development

The HRD (Human Resource Development) department provides two calendars—one for teachers and one for administrators. Every early release day, activities are planned by looking at school data and identifying what is needed most.

The Lead Program is a leadership program for those who want to be a principal or assistant principal. It is a two-year program. The NESS program teams up a veteran teacher with a new teacher. The veteran teachers get special training to help the beginning teacher and a stipend is given.

The principal feels giving the teachers the data and showing them how to analyze it has given them a new awareness and has made a tremendous difference in their professional development.

Instruction

The curriculum extends beyond FCAT academic goals and objectives by trying to give students as many experiences as possible as well as trying to integrate life skills and current events into classes also.

New programs such as advanced literature and pre-law are also offered to students. The principal wants to be sure that all of the offerings are not geared to the lower level child.

Instruction is adjusted to student needs and their grouping is very flexible. Students are moved where they need to be. They have reading for all, using three different reading series.

The curriculum is connected to a sequenced learning plan. For example, the plan has listed things students should know in the sixth grade, seventh grade and eighth grade, and that process continues when they get into high school. They are working on vertical teaming with the high schools this year. The curriculum is aligned to the textbooks by the county, which is a wonderful help for the teachers.

Communication

Effective communication is certainly a goal at Seminole Middle School. There is a very active PTA, which helps to promote communication. Newsletters are sent out on a timely basis. As mentioned previously, the Telerobot is a most effective means of communication, which can be tailored to fit the parents of one student or a group of students, such as reminding them of a chorus practice.

The principal meets with department chairpersons on a regular basis and has faculty meetings for the entire staff. In addition, the door is always open which encourages communication among the staff.

Parent nights are held and are informative and provide hands on experiences. Recently the school held their first carnival, which was a huge success and enjoyed by the entire community. The principal stated that if they didn't make any money the effort was worth it to see the community involved and communicating with each other.

The principal visits feeder schools to inform them of Seminole Middle School and encourages students to visit the school.

Decision Making

All staff and personnel are involved in decision making. The SAC committee plays a major part of decision making also. The principal realizes that for budgeting, final decisions rest in their office, but makes those decisions with input from faculty and staff. For example, an additional ESOL bilingual teacher was hired to help with the decisions of ESOL students and that has turned out to be extremely effective.

Parent and Community Involvement

Coca-Cola and Publix are community partners with Seminole Middle School and provide help as well as goods. Parent nights are held, open house and the Telerobot system are other ways of involving the parents. The SAC committee and the PTA are examples of parent and community involvement.

The first school carnival was held on a recent Saturday and the parents as well as the staff were very helpful. There were 1000 people in attendance.

Tutoring programs and The Writing Camp also facilitate parent and community involvement.

EVALUATING CHANGE: REFLECTION AND CELEBRATION

Accountability

Parents are socialized to the school through the PTA and newsletters are sent out frequently. An excellent source of informing parents is achieved through a Telerobot mentioned earlier. The Robot calls parents to inform them of special programs, tutoring opportunities, students who have not attended school, etc. If the Robot gets an answering machine, it calls the parent at another time until there is personal contact. There is a fifth grade articulation, a parent night, and an open house, and the principal visits other schools to speak to students about her school.

Brainstorming with department heads and the principal at the beginning of the school year and analyzing data over the summer helps ensure that students all have an equal access to knowledge and the skills they need. Analyzing individual data to make sure students are placed correctly and to see if they need tutoring also helps.

Student's FCAT scores, as well as their NRT scores are analyzed and also a Tower Test is given. That test is based on fluency and decoding skills and that information allows students to be placed appropriately for reading. The content teachers are then notified so they can modify their curriculum to help the student be successful. Benchmark Tests are also given along with a monthly analysis of the student.

Cultural sensitivity is demonstrated by having a staff that is as diversified as the student population. Ethnic and multicultural programs and shows are frequently presented in school.

Informal assessments, other than those mandated, include using teacher driven tests, portfolio usage, and requirement of projects. A leadership resource book is used to assess children and use it as benchmark tests. The Star Reader is used as well. Each teacher is given a flip chart for critical thinking based on Bloom's Taxonomy. It gives sample questions that can be asked in every content area. This helps the teachers' word their tests so they are FCAT oriented. Monthly Writing Prompts are also used.

Personnel are held accountable for student achievement of goals and objectives through frequent monitoring of student work. Department heads monitor and stay in touch with the teachers. Evaluations are done regularly. This is all done through a school wide database.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

School Demographics

Seminole Middle School is located in Broward County. There are 68 teachers employed with 4 administrators. Seminole Middle School enrolled 1,649 students. The school report grade for 2001-2002 was an A. Forty-five percent of the students were on free and reduced lunch in 2002-2002. The stability rate is 94.1%, with 17.2% of the students classified as LEP, and 5.2% of the students as Gifted. The average class size for language arts is 28.7, math 27.2 science 29.6 and social studies 30.5 with disabilities classified at 13.6%.

Ethnic/Racial %

Caucasian	52.5
African American	25.0
Hispanic	19.5
Asian	1.9
Native American	0.3
Multi-racial	0.9

Goals

Goal 3:

Student Performance: The FCAT Writing Assessment tested 425 eighth grade students. The school average was 3.9, the district average 3.9 and the state average 3.8. Results for the FCAT Sunshine State Standards Tests were as follows: In grade 6, 399 students were tested for reading with a school mean of 291, district mean of 298 and state mean of 291. Grade 6 mathematics tested 401 students with a school mean of 303, district mean of 310 and state mean of 298. Grade 7 tested 486 students in reading with a school mean of 292, district of 298 and state of 294. Grade 7 tested 484 students in mathematics with a school mean of 299, district mean of 302 and state mean of 292. In grade 8, 438 students were tested in reading with a school mean of 294, district mean of 300 and state mean of 295. In grade 8, 437 students were tested in mathematics with a school mean of 305, district mean of 310 and state mean of 305. The FCAT Norm-References Test results (NRT) are as follows: Grade 6 reading tested 397 students with a school median of 51, district median of 56 and state median of 52. Grade 6 mathematics tested 395 students with a school median of 62, district median of 68 and state median of 63. Grade 7 reading tested 484 students with a school median of 53, district median of 59 and state median of 56. Grade 7 mathematics tested 484 students with a school median of 66, district median of 70 and state median of 65. Grade 8 reading tested 437 students with a school median of 58, district median of 61 and state median of 60. Grade 8 mathematics tested 435 students with a school median of 63, district median of 67 and state median of 64. FCAT School Accountability Report Data shows 278 students were tested in reading at grade 6 and 68% scored at Level 3 or above. Grade 6 mathematics tested 275 and 61% scored at Level 3 or above. Reading in grade 7 tested 352 students who scored at 60% at Level 3 or above. Mathematics at grade 7 tested 351 students and 59% scored at Level 3 or above. Reading in grade 8 tested 327 students and 59% scored at Level 3 or above. Mathematics in grade 8 tested 327 students and 64% scored at Level 3 or above. Grade 8 writing tested 318 students and 93% scored 3.0 or higher.

Goal 4:

Learning Environment: Sixteen or 23.5% new instructional staff were hired for the 2001-2002 school year as compared to the district average of 18.9%. Absentee rates were higher for the number of student absences of 11-20 days and significantly lower for students absent 21+ days or more. Leave days for teachers were lower, 0.5% than the district average of 1.5%. Administrator leave of 1.2% was slightly higher than the district average of 0.9%.

Goal 5:

Teachers and Staff: Teachers and Staff reported there were 36 teachers with bachelor's degrees, 24 with master's degrees and 2 with specialist degrees.