

## Sunrise Elementary School—Volusia County

### KEY THEMES:

- ITI
- Lifelong guidelines
- Principal's commitment to professional growth
- Teacher empowerment
- Parent involvement

### BEST PRACTICES:

- ITI
- Lifelong Guidelines
- Saxon Math
- Saxon Phonics
- Waterford Reading

### LEADING CHANGE: CREATING SCHOOL CULTURE

#### Leadership

The principal at Sunrise is a strong, supportive administrator that has learned from vast past experience. Sunrise's principal has been an educator for 34 years and has been at Sunrise Elementary since its opening 11 years ago. Previous experience includes teaching first grade for ten years, resource for a year and a half, assistant principal for three years, middle school principal piloting year-round schooling, and two years in the district office with curriculum and instruction. The principal's first year at Sunrise Elementary ended with recognition as Volusia County's first "Principal of the Year". The present Superintendent was one of the parents from that first principalship. The principal is an educator who believes strongly in being visionary, a continual learner and role model, and empowering teachers.

Staff sees the principal as a hands-on life long learner, cooperative, patient, positive and purposeful. Everyone is a valued member and equal partner in this community. As confirmed in the parent interview, "whether you're a student, parent, volunteer or employee of this school, you will find a very nurturing, warm, welcoming environment here". "Dr. Sapp's legacy" the teachers said, "will be the strength that will remain through the teachers and staff that she has trained."

A creative, visionary principal, teacher empowerment, and parent involvement and training are key factors that can be attributed to the success of Sunrise Elementary. Implementation of the ITI model has required teachers to re-evaluate their educational approach in their classrooms. Another significant component has been the numerous on and off-site staff development in many newly brain researched areas. These are but a few of the practices that have put Sunrise Elementary at the forefront of educational excellence in Volusia County.

#### Setting

Sunrise Elementary is an eleven-year-old single story building in a residential neighborhood filled with many moss laden oak trees. Eighty-five percent of the children who attend this school are within walking distance from home. An "A" school with an excellent reputation, Sunrise received national recognition as a Blue Ribbon School in 1996. Street signs with names chosen by the students are on every walkway intersection. In each classroom children are engaged in learning and teachers who are pleasant, acknowledge our presence, yet keep their focus. Every room has table or floor lamps, which give the rooms a cozy glow. The principal and faculty feel, along with supporting research, that this type of lighting is better for learning than the harsh glare of fluorescent lights. We get a true "sense of community" as we walk around this tidy campus where kids are celebrated.

#### Climate and Culture

From day one, the principal saw the need to build a community at Sunrise Elementary. This has been accomplished as parents, teachers and district personnel report Sunrise is "a desirable place to be". The principal has put that vision in operation through planning, studying together, group decision-making, continual assessment, peer coaching and professional growth.

## **BUILDING KNOWLEDGE: DATA DRIVEN DECISION MAKING**

### **Resources**

Volusia County was the first Charter District in the state providing more financial flexibility with budget decisions. The principal admits to being a big proponent of teacher empowerment thru staff development. Resources for training (cognitive coaching, cooperative learning, Parent-to-Kid and positive discipline to name a few) of both teachers and parents are accomplished through the efforts of Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) fundraisers, an extended day program that enrolls 180 students and the principal's creativity. Grants are secured through numerous business partners. A committee researches and writes grants and teachers participate in FLARE, Florida Literacy And Reading Excellence.

The teachers reported their technology needs were met in various ways within the district, first in the area of professional development in the use of technology and analyzing data and second, in the acquisition linked to student learning and academic goals and objectives. In grades K, 1 and Exceptional Student Education (ESE) they make use of the Waterford Reading Program, a computerized self-monitoring system where each student gets 15-30 minutes a day. In the upper grades they utilize computers for FCAT Explorer, No-Zone, Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI), Reading Counts and Power Point presentations just to name a few.

### **Information Management**

According to the principal and teachers, a tremendous amount of information is available via the county website. That information is available to anyone. It includes assessment data, as well as other information that might be of importance to schools. Teachers also talked about the availability of student data from the cum folders. Cums include information about student skills, excel spread sheets that track the progress of students for example, "where they placed at the beginning of the year, the middle of the year, and at the end of the year, to show growth." There is access to information via the school-based computers, for example, Reading Counts, SRI, Waterford, and other assessments for each child. All of the teachers have internet access in their classrooms and can access the county system to examine the county-wide computerized IEP program, for example.

### **Personnel**

The district office interview states that in Volusia County the characteristics that make an educator successful are the love of kids and a command of the subject. The teachers and parents report that a successful educator must be flexible, follow the Lifelong Guidelines, and be a team player. The principal states caring, competency and commitment are the key components of a successful educator at Sunrise. Also, the willingness to grow professionally, hence training opportunities are available to both teachers and parents. Training in cognitive coaching in a non-threatening atmosphere is one of the strongest mechanisms they use in addition to mentoring personnel at all levels. There is very little turnover at this school and many drive long distances to be here. The parents report that no one wants to leave and teachers state this is largely due to teacher empowerment and strong leadership within an atmosphere of care and respect.

## **COMMUNICATING CHANGE: PROFESSIONAL TEAMWORK**

### **Instruction**

Sunrise sees itself as a hub of enhanced academic learning with high expectations for on-task, engaged behavior and cooperative learning. The ITI curriculum enhances learning by using real world situations for greater retention. The parents attribute the schools success to the welcoming atmosphere, home reinforcement and the principal's vision. Parents will come back to help out at the school even after their child has left.

Saxon Math and Saxon Phonics contribute to student's success at Sunrise Elementary because of its comprehensiveness and continuity as stated by both the principal and teacher interviews. Saxon Math is used to meet higher expectations on school-wide, district and state levels, building on prior learning as opposed to isolated skills. Saxon Phonics is a success oriented systematic approach to word attack skills and knowledge of phonemes. It enables students to build a solid foundation in phonics and become successful readers.

### **Communication**

Efforts are taken to ensure familiarity and understanding of the district mission and Strategic Plan through the school newsletter "Rise and Shine". The schools mission statement and school improvement plan is also visible in every class, on school calendars, and on their web site. Teachers communicate with parents on a regular basis with weekly folders

including the test scores, student's behavior and class assignments. They also send interim reports every 4-½ weeks to monitor student progress and conference at least twice a year on each student.

### **Decision Making**

The parents report they are extensively involved in budget making decisions through School Advisory Council (SAC), Round Table meetings and the School Improvement Team (SIT). The teachers report budget decisions related to academic goals, student achievement, student diversity and special needs are adequately met. At Sunrise, the PTO has awarded \$200 to each teacher through many fund raising projects. With the help of business partners, each child has received three new books this year and teachers have had wish lists fulfilled.

### **Parent and Community Involvement**

The parents relate that the school creates a very nurturing environment where they educate other parents to the school community and introduce them to a very active PTO. In addition, their SAC and round table meetings are held once a month with an open door policy, allowing parents to bring their concerns to the forefront.

## **EVALUATING CHANGE: REFLECTION AND CELEBRATION**

### **Accountability**

The process in place for the socialization of personnel, parents and students include a welcome packet, new student recognition buttons and individualized attention with a tour of the school.

Sunrise Elementary's commitment to cultural sensitivity, higher order thinking skills and different learning styles is demonstrated through the Integrated Thematic Instruction (ITI) model, which delineates developmentally appropriate curriculum within and between grade levels. Incorporated in ITI is the emphasis on Lifelong Guidelines: Trustworthiness, Truthfulness, Active Listening, No Put Downs and Personal Best.

These Lifelong Guidelines become the procedures all students K-5 learn and participate in throughout their school career and community. Teachers hail its success stating, "Students become the role models of academic excellence for new students" who acclimate quickly in their new environment.

Parent's report they are the life skills being taught and reinforced in their homes. They feel everyone is talking the same language and therefore have a hand in the development of the school's behavior management plan. These guidelines are posted throughout the school and parents and teachers report that their children even remind substitute teachers of them. All staff members have intensive ITI training.

## **BACKGROUND INFORMATION:**

### **School Demographics**

Sunrise Elementary School enrolls 838 students in Pre-K-5<sup>th</sup> grades. According to the 2001-2002 Florida School Indicators Report, there are 53 instructional staff and 2 administrators. The school serves 55.3% free and reduced lunch population, with a 94.5% stability rate and a 3.9% Limited English Proficient population and 0.2% Gifted. 64.6% of the students are Caucasian, 22% Hispanic, 9.4% African American, 3.8% Multi-racial and 0.1% Native American. 17% of the instructional staff is new, and one administrator was newly hired for the 2001-2002 school year. 30.6% of the teachers have a Masters degree and the average years of experience is 6.6. Teacher absences are lower than the district average, with an average of 8 days for all types of absences. Student absences are comparable to the district average in both categories (less than 20 student days absent and more than 20 students days absent) at 29.1% and 6.3% respectively. There were no school safety reported incidents.



## Ethnic/Racial %

Caucasian	22.0
Native American	17.0
Hispanic	9.4
African American	3.8
Multi-racial	0.1

For 2001-2002, the average class size is 24.2 students in grades K-5. 18.9% have mild, moderate, or severe disabilities. The school grade is A. Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) data shows the percentage of students scoring at Level 3 or above is: 82%, 86% Gr. 3 Reading and Math, 82% 80% Gr. 4 Reading and Math, 69%, 64% Gr. 5 Reading and Math. Fourth grade Writing, which is scored using a 1 through 6 scale, is above district and state average at 3.7, compared with 3.3 for the district and 3.4 for the state. The median National Percentile Rank (NPR), where 50% represents the national average, is: 61%, 65% in Gr. 3 Reading and Math, 67%, 71% in Gr. 4 Reading and Math, 55%, 66% in Gr. 5 Reading and Math. 85.8% of all Kindergarten students evaluated met the state's readiness criteria for 2001-2002.