

Tyndall Elementary School—Bay County

KEY THEMES:

- Work on the Work—This theme assumes that all students will not learn by the same learning style or teacher presentation. When a student does not understand a lesson the teachers know that they must learn to present it in a different way.
- Patriotism—The school was a Dept. of Defense school, which gradually became a part of the Bay County District. Since they are located at Tyndall Air Base and draw so many students from the homes of military personnel, one of the major themes is love of country and the need to pull-together to accomplish common tasks. Their identification with the United States is a source of pride and the military organization influences the way students relate to teachers.
- Collegiality—The theme that they are all in the same objectives together helps students and teachers accomplish the goals for the greater good.
- Data—The guidance department is very conscientious about providing teachers with information. Because of the high mobility rate it is necessary to let teachers know where a student stands academically as soon as he/she is assigned to a classroom. Teachers were very positive about the in-service program they had on understanding data. They mentioned a few times that students cannot be taken to the next level until we know which level they are on.

BEST PRACTICES:

- Tyndall Writes—Teachers use this instructional practice as a variation of the state's Florida Writes program. Students write in journals daily and work on various activities, which teach the structure of writing in progressively longer essays.
- Know The Author—Teachers and the media staff provide literature, which was written by the same author. Students are given some choice as to the author with whom they wish to become more familiar. Teachers have learned that students enjoy the style of some writers much as adults have these preferences.
- PACE—The Panhandle Area Consortium for Education has provided professional development for understanding data as well as academic programs to move students.
- Classroom Walkthroughs—An in-service program was given to school based administrators which suggested 14 points a principal could learn by spending 3 minutes in a classroom. The principal made it clear that walkthroughs are not for purposes of evaluation but to determine such matters as: teacher on task, students involved or attentive, level of instruction, etc.

LEADING CHANGE: CREATING SCHOOL CULTURE

Leadership

The principal is an outstanding leader combining a high degree of authority but a personal charisma that insures trust. The principal's knowledge of the school and personal skills in implementing programs to meet needs is vital. A self-description includes, "a good listener with an open-door policy". This, along with a sincere love for children and personal collegiality with faculty, are in large part contributors to the success of the school.

The principal of Tyndall Elementary has been there for 9 years and this is her first assignment as a principal. She has a Specialist Degree in Educational Leadership. The principal provides full support to the faculty and receives their support in return. An "open-door policy" extends to students as well as to teachers and parents. Every effort is made to be visible in the school—for example, the principal uncovered a window facing a corridor so students could, "see what's going on in the office". The principal said, "you are what you honor, monitor and pay attention to". A classroom walkthrough illustrated this with schedules that monitored everything from being on task to the higher points of Bloom's taxonomy.

Tyndall Elementary School has a high sense of purpose, a clear mission and a professional approach to the delivery of instruction. The school is appreciated by the community it serves and for good cause—high expectations of students combined with a caring attitude. They try to be inclusive of parents in their decisions and in their daily routines. The principal is a good leader and strives to serve the teachers, students and parents from her leadership role. Continual growth is demonstrated in that the school has gone up in all areas of performance in the past three years and there is a prevalent expectation to continue. Professional development programs are based on needs indicated by data and by teacher interest.

Personnel

The selection of teachers is primarily the role of the principal. The principal considers the specific nature of the position and the team with which the new teacher will be working. The district office provides a list of eligible candidates. This list is screened for the teachers most likely to fit the specific needs of the position. Grade team members participate in the interview process. The principal was very pleased with a written questionnaire designed to present applicants with hypothetical problems that might be faced in a school setting.

Turnover is a minor consideration at Tyndall as teachers are likely to stay and enjoy success in the school. The selection of non-instructional personnel has also been successful. Many candidates are chosen from their extensive volunteer program, which serves to help preview talents of workers prior to hiring.

Recruitment of teachers is a job of the district. They expressed the difficulty of competing with better salaries and benefits in Georgia and Alabama. Teachers told us that they could also make more money if they left the public system to go to some of the new charter schools, which are being built locally. This was not likely, however, based on their loyalty to Tyndall.

The district provides a new teacher orientation program using district personnel and experienced successful teachers. A demonstration classroom is also available. The principal understands the union contract and complies with it. Teachers trust this to be the case and union stewards seem to be in the position reluctantly ("their turn"). Teachers have input on the professional development plans and the School Improvement Plan gives strong consideration to their needs.

Setting

The facility is located on the main drive into Tyndall Air Force Base. It is in a busy but picturesque area in close proximity to the bay. The building is clean and neat but somewhat dated. Because of the close jet activity we noted the sound and asked if it was a distraction to instruction. The teachers told us that double insulated windows had recently been installed and that this feature considerably reduced the noise factor.

Climate and Culture

Everyone involved with the school seems to be of one purpose. The needs of students are at the center of the operation and teachers pride themselves on the professionalism of their efforts. The collegiality of administrators, faculty and staff is evident as all sense they are working towards a noble cause.

BUILDING KNOWLEDGE: DATA DRIVEN DECISION MAKING

Resources

The central theme relative to the use of resources is the consideration as to how it will insure student achievement. The faculty council and the School Advisory Council are given input into the budget as it is being created and the chair of the SAC signs-off upon its completion. However, the principal was recognized as the central figure of authority in budgetary considerations and was greatly trusted in this regard.

Staff development and student recognition are given consideration in this process. Although resources are limited, the community identifies with the school and is anxious to provide extra money as well as a great deal of volunteer time. While various groups contribute, the PTA and the Wives of the Officers were specifically mentioned.

Information Management

The school is linked to the AS 400 data system. Teachers were provided a professional development program regarding the understanding and use of data. A few teachers mentioned this as a significant program for their needs. They seem to take pride in their ability to analyze data and to apply it to the needs of their students.

Two guidance counselors are active in providing information regarding the needs of students. Teachers feel confident they can identify the needs of a student and provide enrichment or remediation as necessary. Data is used by the administration and the faculty to help plan staff development.

COMMUNICATING CHANGE: PROFESSIONAL TEAMWORK

Instruction

The district and the school have a mission that is clearly communicated. A district committee with teacher and community representatives develops the mission and strategic plan of the district. This is presented to the school. The stakeholders of the school meet and design the mission and strategic plan of the school and the principal shares it with the district. Goals and plans are cross-aligned. Needs assessment data provides the basis for the plan. The need to link the Sunshine State Standards was frequently mentioned by district and school personnel.

Teachers expressed the confidence and intention to deliver instruction at a high level. They feel that in the last few years they have made the transition from just presenting information to utilizing and requiring higher order thinking skills. They have learned to work on the work and to teach for understanding.

Communication

The principal and her staff take the initiative to communicate with the faculty, parents, community, and students. The teachers in turn have a good telephone system in place to provide important information to parents. Parents have easy access to teachers when they are needed. Parents have input into decisions through the parent organizations. Everyone in the school seems to be “on the same page” regarding objectives. There is a daily Tyndall News show every morning on the closed circuit television system.

Decision Making

The principal is clearly in charge but uses her authority with a light touch. The principal regards the faculty as close colleagues having once been a teacher at Tyndall herself. The faculty has input on the objectives of the school and their classrooms. Since the vast majority of goals are correlated to student achievement, most decisions are made relative to that objective.

Teachers have a choice of which professional development programs that would best serve the needs of students. At the district level teachers also have input in choosing textbooks and academic programs. As a result of the shared decision-making there is a great deal of buy-in to the decisions for which the principal is ultimately responsible.

Parent and Community Involvement

The association with the military base was frequently mentioned as an advantage for the school. If a student was having great difficulty with attendance or compliance issues parents were readily available. Most parents would not hesitate to come to the school. In isolated times when this was not the case the school even felt the freedom to call a commanding officer who would speak with the parent of a child. Parents identify with the school and feel a pride in it.

EVALUATING CHANGE: REFLECTION AND CELEBRATION

Accountability

Everyone in the organization recognizes the importance of their individual role and understands their contribution to the success of Tyndall. The goals of the school are clearly stated and there is a common purpose evident in the daily efforts of the faculty and staff. The principal is the central authority in the building but is accessible to teacher and the community and has their complete trust. Parents are made to feel welcome by staff and new teachers are provided a comprehensive orientation program by the district.

The district has a formula for demographic representation on the advisory council and the school makes every effort to provide that representation. Parents suggested the military background of the community (80% of the students) was a positive factor in cultural and ethnic sensitivity. “Sunshine State Standards” was the teachers’ and principal’s answer to many of the questions we posed. It was clear that the goals and benchmarks of the state flowed through the district to the school.

Although funds were limited, the district and the school made every effort to determine what type of professional development would lead to the best gains in student achievement. Teachers had input in this process and in many of the professional considerations, which affected them. Parents were also surveyed in matters to determine how they and their

children could best be served. The district likes to put emphasis on the programs, which are known to work and supported by data. They emphasized that they are not likely to switch to the “new idea of the month”.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

School Demographic Information:

Tyndall Elementary is located in Panama City, Florida. The school was initially a Department of Defense institution on Tyndall Air Force Base. While it remains on the base and is predominately attended by students of parents assigned to the base, it has become part of the Bay County School District. Tyndall Elementary has an enrollment of approximately 900 students. Of this population, 72% are Caucasian, 14% are Black, 5% are Hispanic, 3% are Asian, 0.4% is Native American, and the balance of 5% are Multi-racial. The stability rate of the population, reflected by the percentage of students enrolled in October and again in February, is 89.6%. Only 1% of the students are classified as LEP. However, 38.5% are on free/reduced lunch. 16% are in classes of talented and gifted, 14% are classified as having disabilities. The average class size at Tyndall is 22.7 students. There are 44 instructional staff members, and the faculty average is 17 years of teaching experience. Tyndall’s school grade for 2001-2002 was an “A.”

Ethnic/Racial %	
Caucasian	72.0
African American	14.0
Hispanic	5.0
Asian	3.0
Native American	0.4
Multi-racial	5.0

Goals

Goal 1:

Readiness to start school: Was evaluated by observing all kindergarten students in their classroom. 147 students were evaluated and 137 met the state’s expectation for readiness.

Goal 3:

Student Performance: In grade 4, tested 127 students in FCAT writing with an average score of 3.3. The district average is 3.2 and the state average is 3.4. FCAT reading and math are above the district and state mean scores at all levels.

Goal 4:

Learning Environment: Reports 5 or 11.4% new staff were hired for 2001-2002 school year as compared to 11.6% at the district and 16% for the state. The student absentee rate was 16.2% in 2001-2002. This is approximately 3% below the district and state figures, and was based on students who were absent 11 to 20 days. Teacher Absences, Total days absent for all reasons, leaves and otherwise, were 8.7 days as compared to 9.5 for the district and 10.2 for the state. 3 of these days were for temporary duty elsewhere. Administrator absences for all types of leaves including sick leave, personal leave etc. was 14.5 days. There are 2 administrators at Tyndall.

Goal 5:

School safety and Environment: Reported 9 incidents.

Goal 6:

Teachers and Staff: Reported 28.6% of the staff with advanced degrees.