

## West Shore Jr/Sr High School—Brevard County

### KEY THEMES:

- Creative and active teaching styles encourage creative enthusiastic learners.
- Keep small and personable in order to help each student accomplish his/her maximum potential.
- Extensive and sincere interest in students. Teachers keep the same homeroom throughout junior and senior high school years.
- Community interest and involvement—Parent's are sold on the goal of higher academic standards and commit students to the school. Parent interest engenders traditionally motivated.
- Principal models instructional leadership through comprehensive knowledge of curriculum.

### BEST PRACTICES:

- The culminating senior project—Parent group, faculty and administration mentioned that this activity was rigorous and provided a positive learning experience.
- Teach research skills in each grade.
- Students work in the higher orders of Bloom's Taxonomy.
- Comprehensive analysis of test scores and prescription for better instructional strategies.
- Parents and teachers communicate learning needs on confidential access to website.
- Professional development centered around Advance Placement Tests
- Professional development centered around FCAT instruction
- Constant review and reinforcement before proceeding with concepts.
- Extensive planning and monitoring of sunshine state standards.
- After-school tutoring for students who need to catch up and for students who want to further excel

### LEADING CHANGE: CREATING SCHOOL CULTURE

#### Leadership

The principal has completed six years at West Shore Jr/Sr High with 33 years of experience: 18 as an administrator and 15 as a teacher. The principal has a Doctorate Degree in Educational Leadership, a very strong academic background and a focus on high academic standards. As the first principal of West Shore, a strong curriculum and prior high school position as administrator and teacher were important. The principal is very enthusiastic regarding the mission of the school and completely in charge. A rhetorical question posed was, "where can regular students find an opportunity to put a positive effort on high academics and not be afraid to go into the restrooms". Also noted was the expression of pride in the headlines generated by the mean S.A.T. score of 1134 and the local reputation the school has gained in a relatively short time. The faculty described the leader as "firm but fair" and said that the principal encourages new ideas and active participation.

Although there is a high degree of respect shown to the principal for their comprehensive knowledge, the faculty expressed confidence in expressing their own opinions and ideas. The principal feels there is better buy-in to ideas by showing interest in the faculty and their ideas. A very high standard is set; the principal communicates it well and monitors the application of the mutual goals. Confident leadership style nurtures the development of assistant principals, department heads and potential teacher-leaders. With considerable success toward accomplishing the superintendent's goals for the school, the principal is given considerable autonomy in leading the school.

#### Personnel

Department chairs interview teachers from a district pool. The department chairperson usually submits the top two candidates to the principal and discusses their perceived qualities. The principal makes the final recommendation and the board makes the final approval. Depth of knowledge in the discipline taught primarily determines success as a teacher at West Shore Jr/Sr High. Ability to impart your academic knowledge to students and sincerely caring about students' success are other qualities that matter to the administration". Intellectual curiosity, willingness to work with others, student centered flexible, creative, well rounded", are all the adjectives teachers used to describe components of their success.

The principal is aware of the union contract and provides everything within the guidelines. The faculty does not seem militant in that they are pleased with the subject they teach and with the students to whom they teach it. The principal respects the

faculty and makes every effort to provide good working conditions within the resources available. Turnover is not a significant problem at West Shore. There is a waiting list of teachers throughout the district who would like to transfer to West Shore.

The climate of the school is businesslike, yet friendly. Everyone knows they have a job to do and seems confident that they can do it well.

### **Setting**

West Shore Jr./Sr. High School is located in the south area of Brevard County. It occupies the facility originally built in 1957 as Eau Gallie Junior High School and later converted to Central Junior High School. The facility was vacated in 1997 while a new Central Junior High School was constructed. The facility was then utilized as temporary housing of Sherwood Elementary until December 1997 while Sherwood was under construction. In the winter of 1998, Brevard County Schools began remodeling the facility to accommodate the present school of choice. Renovations in the first year exceeded \$4.6 million and included: a new kitchen; new air conditioning; new windows, blinds, lighting and ceilings in all classrooms; new flooring or upgrades to existing flooring; "smart-school" wiring; media retrieval system throughout the school with television access in all classrooms; new furniture and equipment in all areas; and an entire new media collection. Two more phases followed which renovated the athletic facilities and parking lots for students. The cost for these phases was approximately \$700,000. Parents described the school as, "better than a private school" in reference to the atmosphere and the academic achievement. Parents are required to provide 20 hours of volunteering which are easily facilitated.

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

### **Resources**

Budget decisions "trickle down from the district". Pepsi grants, Eisenhower grants and the Harris Corp. have supplemented programs that might not have otherwise been provided. Dictionaries were provided to everyone in the school's language arts department. The community is supportive in activities such as career day. There is an extensive professional development plan and teachers have input regarding which programs are needed.

The faculty meets primarily by departments to discuss improved instruction. Teachers are encouraged to attend national conferences of the College Board in order to enhance instruction on Advanced Placement tests. They felt fortunate that they were all going to the National Conference in Atlanta because it was being held over spring break.

Outstanding performance on standardized tests by teachers and by students is recognized informally and in school-wide programs. The school gets extra money for taking the A.P. test and even more for doing well on the test. The PTA also pays for students to go to state and national academic competitions. There is a pep rally and a barbeque given before FCAT. These activities are intended to focus students on the importance of doing well on the test. The faculty has input on how FCAT recognition funds are divided. 75% of last year's dollars were given to the faculty and 25% to the school for academic enhancement. The faculty voted to give everyone equal shares of those dollars.

The budget reflects allocation for student intervention, including enrichment and remediation. Enrichment is commonly and thoroughly practiced because of the prevalence of so many high achieving students. Because the school is small, teachers have many preparations but the schedule provides planning periods and opportunities to meet as a department as a means of providing time to fulfill professional responsibilities. When asked what provisions are made for teachers to fulfill their professional responsibilities we were told that "we have a dedicated faculty and we stay late to tutor our students—most of us work 10-12 hour days". Intensive reading is provided to help students gain levels on FCAT.

### **Technology**

There is a technology committee and teachers and parents extensively use the websites. Last year the school participated in TAGLIT by the Bill Gates Foundation. This was a survey given to determine the level of the faculty and their needs regarding technology. Students research the web for their personal projects.

### **Information Management**

On-line student data cannot be accessed from the classroom or from teacher planning areas. The guidance department and administration have access to student data and provide copies of information to teachers as needed. FCAT scores, and A.P. scores, are all readily available. Use of this data is encouraged and often required. Student assessment data is used to remediate students and to plan more effective teaching strategies for areas that were shown as weaknesses. Teachers and

parents have access to the school improvement plan. Access is achieved upon request. Data is used to plan and develop the curriculum for student achievement. West Shore took a close look at FCAT data for level one and two and decided how to remediate students to take them above level one and two.

## **COMMUNICATING CHANGE: PROFESSIONAL TEAMWORK**

### **Professional Development**

Beginning teachers are assigned a veteran teacher. The experienced teacher help work on lesson plans with insight into the expectations of the administration. Veteran teachers provide a positive support base academically and socially. Department heads are central in this role.

The curriculum is largely determined by the A.P. testing, FCAT and Sunshine State Standards. Providing the excellent working conditions described above minimizes personnel turnover. The PTA shows appreciation for the faculty at many junctures. Goody-bags are given to teachers and other thoughtful gestures are frequently shown. The School Improvement Team receives no specific formal training, however, the principal and SIT Chairperson briefly define the role of the committee prior to meetings. The professional development that has been the greatest help has been the national Advanced Placement Conference.

### **Instruction**

When the superintendent originally envisioned the school and hired the principal, the first priority was to meet with the faculty for two full days to create a mission and a strategic plan.

Since that time the principal and staff have gone to elementary schools, libraries and other public places to share their concept. Parents have a good understanding of the school mission prior to making application. Parents understand that good behavior and higher order academic skills will be the focus throughout the 6-year course of study. Parents make transportation sacrifices and are supportive of the rigorous curriculum. Parents have input on the strategic plan of the school but see little room for improvement. The school plan is directly linked to the Sunshine State Standards. The curriculum, the purchase of materials and supplies, and teacher training all focus on student achievement. A customer satisfaction survey is provided each year and receives a high satisfaction rating.

### **Communication**

The principal makes every effort to communicate with teachers through department head meetings, faculty meetings and by sending information. Also, the principal walks around the building and frequently visits classrooms. These visits are informal as well as formal for purposes of evaluation. Meetings with parents are frequent in small groups and in large groups. A web site also provides constantly updated information regarding the school. Teachers communicate with parents through conferencing, mid-term reports and weekly grade level newsletters.

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

### **Accountability**

The school makes an effort to ensure equal access to knowledge through tutoring programs. This is particularly important in light of the rigor of the curriculum. Students who fall behind in basic skills areas would have a poor chance of maintaining the level required to stay in the school. Teachers often use the homeroom configuration of scheduling which allows students to get to know teachers better and encourage a mentoring relationship. Students remain in the same homeroom throughout their time at the school (even from seventh grade).

School picnics and a spring festival also provide opportunities to mingle with the entire student body. Although the board has put pressure to admit more students into the program, the principal and faculty have remained adamant about the intimacy of a small school setting. They are proud of the small class size and the fact that most teachers and administrators know all the students in the school. The principal expressed pride in the fact that all students are taught using methods for gifted students (1/3 of the students are gifted) and added that the curriculum is designed for active, creative learners.

An extensive review of the cumulative records of students is undertaken at the onset of admission to West Shore. These records are well monitored and updated during the six years at the school. Pre and posttests are given to determine growth. The faculty monitors students being on task and makes every effort to assess understanding. They realize that some students need more time to learn varying materials and more time is provided. Extra reading is provided for students who do

not come to the school with a strong reading capability. Each student has a writing portfolio, which is constantly updated. Handbooks are provided for each student and family and a website communicates matters of importance regarding programs. Parents often log-on to find out what projects students are assigned.

The School Improvement Team has input on the budget, the dress code and the behavior management plan. There is a formula, which is closely monitored by administration, to insure that a good cross-section of parents is represented on the school advisory committee.

Teacher designed tests are given to supplement standardized tests. Much of the curriculum is research-based learning. Students have extensive portfolios and commonly make presentations of the knowledge they have mastered. Higher order thinking skills are monitored through lesson plans which department heads as well as the administration review. The Senior Project is rigorous and comprehensive and a requirement for graduation. Teachers, parents and administrators all mentioned the importance of this project. Students are encouraged to “think beyond the data given”. Social studies students were asked to create their own country reflecting on trade, taxes, laws and customs. Self-reflection and introspection are encouraged in all subjects. The middle school plans vertically using interdisciplinary scaffolding. ESE students are allowed small group testing with any needed provisions in guidance.

Department heads and administrators monitor teacher plans and classrooms to insure that all the Sunshine State Standards are implemented in lessons. Parent conferences and progress reports are available for purposes of monitoring student progress and the website is available. Teachers are held accountable for achievement goals. Tests results are closely monitored. Teachers have little input on the county code of conduct but have complete authority in the reasonable management of their own classroom. Teacher leaders, department heads and administrators discuss the school discipline plan. Budget decisions are primarily made by the district, and, secondarily by the principal. State funding formulas provide more resources for the limited ESOL and ESE population. Teacher leadership is encouraged. SAC participation is voluntary for teachers as well as is participation on the steering committee of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools.

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION:**

**School Demographics**

West Shore Jr/Sr High School is located in the city of Melbourne in Brevard County, Florida. The district serves students from Kennedy Space center families to retail; manufacturing and service oriented families and is one of the fastest growing areas in the United States. The school is Brevard County’s first public school of choice. West Shore was created to compete with some very successful private schools in the area. West Shore Jr/Sr High opened in 1998 with 602 students in grades 7-9. The current enrollment is 941. 4.2% are reported as receiving free /reduced lunch. Students in the high school program receive rigorous instruction in English, mathematics, science, and social studies throughout the four-year course of study. 29.4% of the population is classified as gifted and 2.1% as ESE (not gifted). Approximately 800 students make application to attend, of which 177 are chosen by a lottery system.

The Florida school report grade for the school was an “A”. The average class size at West Shore Jr/Sr High is 23 students. The suspension rate is 2.6% with 0.7% of incidents of crime and violence reported. Fifty-one teachers average 10.3 years of teaching experience.

Ethnic/Racial %	
Caucasian	87.0
African American	2.7
Hispanic	5.0
Asian	2.6
Multi-racial	2.7

**Goals****Goal 1:**

**Readiness to start school:** Is predetermined by the commitment parents and students must make in order to attend West Shore." Each student who chooses to attend and his/her parent, accept personal responsibility to adhere to all school guidelines and meet high academic expectations." Individual effort and good behavior are clearly expected. Further, students are committed to attend regularly, with no unexcused absences, arrive on time ready to learn and contribute to a safe and orderly environment and adhere to a school dress code. Students are encouraged to seek academic acceleration through dual enrollment, Advanced Placement courses, Florida High School on-line. The curriculum includes more science, math, foreign languages and communication than other schools in Brevard. A rigorous portfolio is required of seniors.

**Goal 2:**

**Graduation Rate and Readiness for Postsecondary Education and Employment:** Students graduate and are prepared to enter the workforce and postsecondary education.