

James W. Johnson Middle School—Duval County

KEY THEMES:

- o Distributive Leadership
- o High expectations
- o Team planning
- o School-wide team scheduling to allow for common planning
- o Specialized instruction for underachieving students
- o Parent and staff involvement in the decision making process
- o Enrichment Camp for entering students that are below the advanced requirement to be successful
- o A built in Research Program that gives students daily access to extra help
- o Back to Back teacher planning sessions
- o Good recruiting to insure continued success as a magnet program that has kept an excellent reputation over the last thirteen years
- o Mandatory Science Fair participation for all students

BEST PRACTICES:

- o Classroom teachers and administrators from each grade level meet with other grade level teachers to discuss strategies that will improve the vertical flow of instruction.
- o Involvement and support of parents a key to the success of the school
- o Common team planning times are provided to meet and discuss the total needs of the students with team members, special teachers and administrators.
- o High expectations for everyone
- o Constant recognition of student efforts

LEADING CHANGE: CREATING SCHOOL CULTURE

Leadership

The principal has been at Johnson Middle for the past 4 years. He believes in inclusive leadership and feels that “Power isn’t real power until you give it up”. He is a people person who shares his leadership, empowering his entire staff.

The principal believes in distributive leadership and setting high expectations for himself, his staff and the students. He empowers his staff by allowing each grade level team to raise the bar through good collaborative planning and decision-making. A strong parent group also is involved in setting the course at Johnson Middle.

Personnel

Teachers at Johnson Middle are very knowledgeable and eager to challenge their students. They are able to communicate well with both the students and their parents. The goals are set very high and cooperation is the key to success. This is a unique student body and the teachers that are attracted to Johnson middle thrive on working with students that are motivated, ready, willing and able to learn. The principal seeks out teachers that will reach out and accomplish goals that are set for the school.

Turnover is minimal and is attributed to teachers that find satisfaction working with students that are motivated. New teachers are adopted by the entire staff and especially by their team members and their respective department and acculturated into the school through a mentor teacher who is assigned to each beginning teacher.

Setting

Johnson Middle School is located in Jacksonville, Florida. The school opened in 1952 and has been a college preparatory magnet school for the past thirteen years

Climate and Culture

Students are naturally exposed to different cultural experience primarily through the student diversity established as a magnet school. They are encouraged to share their cultural differences on an ongoing basis throughout the year.

The school knows it has the raw material to be the very best. They expect nothing less from everyone at the school. This includes not only the students, but also everyone from the administration to the teachers and the parents.

BUILDING KNOWLEDGE: DATA DRIVEN DECISION-MAKING

Resources

The budget for Johnson Middle is worked on by the administration, teachers and parents. Parents and teachers participate in fundraising activities to enhance the school program. Much of the technology that students use is provided at home by their parents. The school is scheduled to receive four computers for each classroom in the 2003-04 schoolyear, which will augment the technology that is currently available in the library.

The budget is supplemented through various means including utilization of the Planning and Development Department at the district level. This department is responsible for overseeing the acquisition and management of all funds obtained through the submission of grant applications to a variety of sources including state, federal, and other agencies. These grants serve to supplement and enhance the learning experiences of the students.

The library is a valuable resource in the school as it provides a large, growing body of information and is a comfortable environment for students to study, view, and read. The library includes a wide range of materials in a variety of formats including books, periodicals, films, video recordings, computer programs, and networked computers.

An additional resource available to the school is "The Teacher Supply Depot." This is a joint effort between the Duval County Public Schools' Community Involvement Office, Warehousing Division and The Duval County Council of PTA's/PTSA's and is a warehouse of reusable materials donated by businesses and community members which is then distributed free to public school teachers to enhance instruction in their classroom and to promote student achievement.

Information Management

Teachers at Johnson Middle School have access to the district's Research, Assessment & Evaluation unit data that can be used to monitor individual student progress. This allows teachers to focus resources on areas where students need the greatest assistance. School Climate Survey data is also reported which allows administrators to view student, parent and teacher satisfaction with the programs and services offered by the school.

The Testing Department at the district level oversees the distribution and administration of all state mandated assessments such as the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT). In addition, the Testing Department is responsible for the distribution, administration, scoring, and reporting of all other district-wide assessments, such as the Stanford Diagnostic Reading Test (SDRT).

Teachers are provided with printouts of test results which give the schools information on what is occurring in the classroom and how benchmarks are being met. Data is analyzed on an individual student basis as well as how it pertains to the overall progress of the school. Item analysis is used to drive the curriculum, making necessary changes to meet the needs of students.

COMMUNICATING CHANGE: PROFESSIONAL TEAMWORK

Instruction

Students are selected to attend Johnson Middle School using a lottery. Anyone is eligible to attend the school. Students are recruited through a series of feeder school visitations, school tours and a recruiting CD ROM that is used to explain and promote the advanced programs offered by the college preparatory magnet. This recruitment and the reputation of the school results in a student body that is capable and ready for the vigorous advanced program offered at Johnson Middle. One of every three students is certified as gifted.

The school is organized into three teams for each grade levels. Two teams are considered advanced track and one of the teams in each grade level is exclusively for certified gifted students. Higher order thinking skills are emphasizes through a

concerted effort by teachers to ask questions that require reasoning instead of factual answers alone. All students are required to participate in the Science Fair.

To prepare students for college preparatory courses at the high school level, James Weldon Johnson offers only advanced classes in the core academic areas. Students also take physical education/health and one elective each year. Seventh and eighth graders may choose from eight electives. Sixth graders experience an overview of electives by rotating through an exploratory wheel. Johnson stresses a total-school experience for all students through participation in various sports, writing contests, concerts and art shows.

Students participate in a Research Program. The program offers a period in day that is set-aside for students to go to any of their team teachers to get extra help and information in a particular subject. Instruction is geared for advanced students and district and school goals are aligned with the Sunshine State Standards. The "Spirit" of the school is to raise the bar and expect more. The program targets a 6 (the highest score) on the state's writing test as the goal for test performance, not somewhere between 1 and 6.

Communication

Teachers regularly meet in meetings to discuss curriculum and programs during common team planning periods. The assigned administrator works closely with their grade level teams with the belief that input from staff and students are an important part of the grade level teams. Input from staff is encouraged and supported by the administration.

Parents are kept informed of their child's progress through frequent conferences, agendas, report cards, and phone calls. Many parents are involved directly with the school as volunteers and members of school organizations such as the Advisory Council and the PTA. The parents are very involved and influential. They value education and work closely with the staff to insure an exemplarily program.

Decision-Making

The principal believes in sharing leadership and the entire administration works closely with the staff and parents. The administrators often meet with team members as part of "House Meetings" to insure that a good line of communication exists. The teachers have a great deal of input, which makes them an important part of a good distributive leadership model. Administrators' willingness to share the decision making process is a key component in the team approach at Johnson Middle.

Parent and Community Involvement

Incoming students and their parents are invited to attend a spring orientation to learn about the policies and expectations of the school. Another orientation session is held in the fall before classes start. Parents are very connected with the school and are eager to support the efforts of Johnson Middle.

Parent support of the program is a key ingredient to the success of the program and the high attendance numbers. This is a school that parents seek out as an alternative to their neighborhood school. They are interested in their child's education and are willing to be personally involved and supportive. This support contributes greatly to the success of the school.

EVALUATING CHANGE: CELEBRATION AND REFLECTION

Accountability

Accountability begins at the district level with a Student Progression Plan that outlines the school district's academic guidelines and expectations. Students are expected to abide by the Code of Student Conduct and the Code of Appearance. Duval County Public Schools are also fortunate to have a Research and Evaluation Department, which provides data for both, school-based and district personnel; parent, business, and community organizations; and other educational agencies. The data are used primarily to monitor the progress of both students and schools and to help the classroom teacher focus in on those areas where students are in greatest need of assistance.

The school uses this data in meetings that include administration and teachers. Decisions are made regarding curriculum and policies that govern the school and the administration then uses this information as accountability measures for teaching responsibilities. Teacher accountability is insured by administration through the Small Peaks Program that features unannounced classroom visits. The administration plays a very important role in supporting the teachers and can mentor each teacher effectively as each administrator is assigned to the same teacher for three years. This continuity allows a relationship to be established which helps foster mutual trust, respect and the sharing of ideas.

The teachers at Johnson Middle are very proud that the students consistently score significantly above other district and state students on standardized tests. They believe that each student needs to be and feel successful and that this can be done through modeling and reinforcing motivation, organization and self-discipline. Teachers encourage students to focus on academic performance and goals by teaching them how to use their time wisely and accept challenges as well as responsibility for their actions through respect for themselves and others. According to the teachers “They and we are accountable”.

Student placement and progress is determined using teacher made pre and posttests. Students that are not ready for the advanced curriculum at Johnson Middle School are placed in the “Enrichment Camp” that is offered in the summer. The camp runs for three weeks before the start of school. These level one and two students are offered intensive tutoring and evaluated for placement on a team where they will hopefully be successful. Although all students are eligible to attend Johnson Middle there is an exit criteria set for students not achieving at least a level three after their first year.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

School Demographic Information

Johnson Middle is located in the Duval County School District in Jacksonville, Florida. The Duval County School District is the 20th largest school district in the nation and the largest employer in Jacksonville. Johnson Middle is a Gifted and Academically Talented Magnet School located in an urban, economically disadvantaged neighborhood, though the school draws students from all areas of Duval County. The school employs 58 instructional staff and five administrators. Johnson Middle has 1242 students. 17% of Johnson Middle students are eligible for free and reduced lunch.

Ethnic/Racial %	
Caucasian	51.0
African American	33.2
Asian	9.4
Hispanic	3.0
Multi-racial	3.2
Native American	0.2

The average class sizes are: Language Arts 31.2, Math 27.6, Science 28.7, Social Studies 28.7. Approximately 32.5% of the students are gifted. There are 0.03% LEP students at Johnson Middle. Johnson Middle has been designated as an “A” school by the Florida Department of Education for the past three years.

Goals

Goal 3 - Student Performance: FCAT norm referenced test results were reported by median national percentile and were higher than the State and the district in every category. The district was lower in every category than the state. The skewed intellectual student body at Johnson Middle cannot be overlooked when comparing test results with the district and the state.

In grade eight, 401 students were tested on the FCAT Writing assessment, with 98% scoring 3.5 or higher on a scale from 1.0 (lowest) to 6.0 (highest). Johnson Middle scored an average of 4.6 compared to the district average of 3.7 and the state average of 3.8. FCAT Reading scores showed 84% of 401 eighth grade students taking the test scoring 3 or better on a scale from 1.0 (lowest) to 5.0 (highest). Eighth grade FCAT Mathematics scores showed 90% of 401 students taking the test scoring 3 or better on a scale from 1.0 (lowest) to 5.0 (highest).

Goal 4 - Learning Environment: report 13.8% new instructional staff was hired for the 2001-02 school year as compared to the district average of 17.4%. The absentee rate was 8.5% lower than the district average for students absent 11-20 days

and 14.5% lower than the district average for students absent 21 days or more. Leave days for teachers were 0.4% higher than the district average. (12.1 Johnson Middle and 11.7 district) Administrator absences were 9.3 days higher the districts average for the year.

Goal 5 - School Safety Environment: reported a total of thirty-four incidents for the 2001-02 school year, with the majority of incidents reported for fighting.

Goal 6 - Teachers and Staff: Johnson Middle reported 25.5% of the instructional staff as holding a Masters Degree of higher.