

Section 6: Implementation of the Plan and Documentation of Results

Annual Progress Report on the Implementation of the School Improvement Plan

School Name: Brevard Middle School
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I. Introduction

A. General Comments

During 2007-08 the Brevard Middle School School Improvement Team (SIT) focused most of its attention on improved reading performance and on creating advanced level courses that would challenge our strongest students. Additionally, alternative scheduling structures were examined for adding PE every day and an enrichment period for classes like SRA, while simultaneously minimizing time lost in core academic classes.

The School Improvement Team was reconstituted so that the faculty representatives all served on the Academic Review Committee (ARC). The ARC is comprised of elected department heads and grade level chairs, and each serves on a committee of the SIT. In general, the Team found it unnecessary to make major changes in either goals or objectives of the School Improvement Plan.

Progress towards the Plan's goals was mixed, though generally positive, as will be elucidated below.

B. Globally-Competitive Students

Our Globally Competitive Students focus addressed two specific goals: 1.1 Rigorous and relevant academic standards and assessment systems are in place for every Brevard Middle School student; and, 1.2 Every Brevard Middle School student masters essential knowledge and skills.

The school improvement indicator for this priority area will be that Brevard Middle School will become an Honor School of Excellence achieving High Academic Change and meeting annual AYP targets.

Achieving the first goal, developed primarily in response to the fact that positive academic change had been elusive in our AIG population over the previous two years, required we focus on strengthening the rigor of our advanced classes. To achieve the second, we placed a great deal of emphasis in 2007-08 on strengthening student reading since that was the area of AYP deficiency for the previous two years. Further, 2007-08 saw a change in the reading test and its scaling which we knew would result in a drop of the scores. We felt that trying to bolster both reading and math in the same year would dilute our attention to both, and that emphasizing the reading would have a salutary effect on math scores.

Action steps that have been accomplished include: developing and implementing pre-AP syllabus in Communication Skills for advanced particularly capable students; implementing SRA and Foundations of Reading in every classroom so that literacy may grow in all classes; implementing SRA Corrective Reading in general education Communication Skills classes to provide skills training for students who may be weak readers; providing Wilson Reading therapy for EC students in need, when Corrective Reading simply does not meet the actual needs of the child.

Action steps that have been initiated but not fully accomplished include: developing and implementing pre-AP syllabus in Mathematics and Science for advanced sections; employing MindLadder Learning Guides to diagnose learning needs of individual students and to plan remediation; implementing fully the 2007-08 Safety Net Plan.

While not listed as an Action Step in our SIP, Brevard Middle School is slowly beginning to develop predictive capacity for targeting Academic Coaching using EVAAS, a web tool provided by the DPI that allows us to predict the likelihood of any child or group of children to achieve at least expected growth. This is a new tool for us, but it will become a more evident one as we gain facility with it.

C. 21st Century Professionals

The 21st Century Professionals goal is that every Brevard Middle School educational professional will have a 21st Century preparation and access to ongoing high quality professional development aligned with district priorities.

Our indicator is that 100% percent of Core Academic Subject Area Teachers will complete "High Quality" professional development taught by in-house staff. Major emphasis was placed on reading across the curriculum, with numerous external and internal staff developments, with a unified plan for implementation, and with intermediate assessments established for all three grade levels.

Action steps that were completed included: training a core group of teachers in "Foundations of Reading" with Lynn Bailey (4 Special Education teachers, 6 Communication Skills teachers, the librarian, and the principal); implementing a series of workshops by staff for staff, from Bailey's "Foundations of Reading"; and, training additional Special Education staff in the Wilson reading system to establish remediation programs where that was appropriate; training regular education teachers (all of the "Foundations" class along with two more regular education Communication Skills teachers) to implement SRA's "Corrective Reading", a program of direct instruction that has shown remarkable benefits.

It turns out that our initial assessment of the impact the "Foundations" class would have on pedagogy was somewhat over estimated, compared to the efficacy of "Corrective Reading". In order for the "Foundations" program to be implemented per se, it would be necessary to build a program from scratch. Thus, as a practical matter, we will emphasize SRA's "Corrective Reading", built around the same literacy fundamentals as "Foundations" teaches, uniformly.

The only action step not yet initiated is to train and implement Dynamic Assessment. Dynamic Assessment is a means of determining the specific learning needs of a child, and then prescribing remediation for them. It is content-independent, and addresses only the process of learning. We are due to begin that study this year.

D. Healthy and Responsible Students

Our school goal for this priority area was to ensure that Brevard Middle School promotes a healthy, active lifestyle where students are encouraged to make responsible choices.

Our indicator of success will be found in the results of Item STD12 ("I feel safe while in school") on the annual Stakeholder Satisfaction Survey which is to increase by three standard deviations to 91%.

Additional efforts were made to affect positive, healthy lifestyles by increasing focus on exercise and nutrition, and attempts were made to implement an activity period to fulfill the 2006-07 requirement that we provide a minimum of 30 minutes per day of physical activity for each child.

The lynchpin of our efforts in 2007-08 was implementing the Bully-Free program, which was accomplished. Likewise, the Physical Education department has fully implemented the Presidential Physical Fitness program.

Developing classroom projects that foster students' participation in healthy lifestyle activities in all classes and implementing anti-drug and mental health programs in classrooms is currently under consideration as unlikely action steps for this priority area. Instead, we are considering using the Peer Team to promote these goals for students.

E. Leadership

This priority area's school goal was to establish that Brevard Middle School's educational priorities are responsive to the needs of family, community and business customers.

The indicator for determining success will be found in the results of Item PRN21, ("Parents are given adequate opportunities to be involved in the decision-making at my child's school") on the annual Stakeholder Satisfaction Survey that is to increase by three standard deviations to 85%.

Three action steps were planned for here, all three of which were initiated in 2007.

A series of Parent Empowerment Workshops based on the DPI's empowerment model were offered, with light turnout for each. Though parental evaluations were strongly positive, no session ever had more than eight participants.

A newsletter was begun, but turned over to PTO as a project for them. That project continues for 2008-09.

Recruiting parents for inclusion on School Improvement Team, district level councils and PTO continues to prove a challenge. PTO Board has expanded to 17 members, the most successful recruitment, but only three have volunteered for the 2009 SIT.

F. 21st Century Systems

Our school goal for this area was that support processes within Brevard Middle School are perceived as aligned in order to achieve high performance.

Our indicator of success will be found in the results of Item STF24, ("The School Improvement Team is an effective vehicle for change within my school") on the annual Stakeholder Satisfaction Survey that is to increase by three standard deviations to 93%.

Planned action steps are all related to increasing the shared decision-making that is relegated to the Academic Review Committee (ARC). They are: reconstitute the new SIT, according to state and local guidelines, expanding representation by soliciting through Empowerment program (see Priority 4); develop faculty Academic Review Committee, charged with defining issues for the school, advisory to the principal; representative sits jointly on SIT; coordinate communication and decision-making between departments, grade levels and SIT through ARC. These action steps have been initiated, and will continue to grow in sophistication and responsibility as time progresses.

II. Summary of Results

A. Globally-Competitive Students

Brevard Middle School has a history of academic excellence, having met or exceeded expected growth since 1997. During 2003-04, however, we did not meet expected growth and, therefore, received no state recognition. During 2007-08, 84.4% of our students scored proficient on the revised Math EOG tests. In Reading, we achieved an overall 66% proficiency rate. More pleasing than proficiency rates, though, was a positive Academic Change rate of 58.9%, compared to 49.6% in 2006-07.

Since 1999-2000, we have analyzed data pertaining to subgroups and modified programs, with specific focus on higher ability and special education students. School improvement goals since 2001 have focused on all subgroups of students demonstrating expected growth in reading and math.

Over the last two years two particular subgroups have had a difficult time academically: special needs children achieving reading proficiency, and AIG children achieving positive Academic Change. In 2007-08, both subgroups met their goals.

An additional subgroup on which we are keeping a close eye is made up of children classified as Economically Disadvantaged. In 2007-08, 58% of those children showed positive academic growth in math. That is up from barely a decimal point over 50% in 2006-07.

BMS achieved School of Distinction (proficiency greater than 80%) status with High Growth (58.9% positive Academic Change). With new reading levels, we do not yet have growth calculations, but performance composite was high (68% proficient) relative to the state-wide cut-off of 43% for achieving AYP. Math scores met not only high growth targets, but Brevard Middle School also met all proficiency goals for all subgroups and 13 out of 13 AYP goals. Reading scores, newly scaled for a new test, were not included in ABC calculations, but Brevard Middle School did meet all its AYP targets.

B. 21st Century Professionals

Brevard Middle School offered five different staff development courses to achieve this goal: Foundations of Reading; Reading Across the Curriculum; Intel Essential Questions; Foundations of Mathematics; and, Corrective Reading. We achieved a 98% success rate, as only one teacher was unable to complete an HQ course of staff development.

While this figure represents a significant increase over the 2 out of 3 we posted in the prior year, it is noteworthy that No Child Left Behind mandates 100% of core teachers acquire at least one High Quality CEU each year. Because of the changes to school calendars and limited professional development funds, offering in-house staff development has become more difficult. As we move forward, we are developing Professional Learning Communities and using on-line resources to deliver content. Early indicators are that reaching that goal will be accomplished in 2008-09.

C. Healthy and Responsible Students

Growth in this indicator was not significant for 2007-08 (83% positive), and matches the 83% from 2005-06, a climb of but 2 points over that of 2006-07.

The percent positive respondents to the statement "I feel safe while in school" seems to us to be fundamental to the success of educational delivery. In spite of continued attention to this characteristic, we see very little change over time: 2000-84%; 2001-80%; 2002-87%; 2003-77%; 2004-82%; 2005-83%; 2006-83%; 2007-81%; 2008-83%.

Our analysis of this includes the common-sense notion that perhaps the adult community has not accurately defined the concept of "safe" in the same way that the students do. A very active and responsible Peer Team (including trained mediators) has agreed to help us develop an understanding of what this word means to students and to help us address meaningful concerns about it. That process is still unfolding, but at this point clearly includes cyber-bullying that does not occur here, but spills over to here; it includes fear of gossip; it includes fear of "drama" over matters that are artificially created for others' amusement; it includes parents' fears that are communicated to the children, both substantive and not; it includes not knowing how to get help when help is needed.

Developing a sense of safety is no longer just a matter of outlawing misbehaviors; it clearly involves a wide range of social and interpersonal factors. Having students help us grow safe will pay dividends in both the short and long term for the individuals, the school and the community at large.

D. Leadership

Growth in this priority area was positive for 2007-08, but does not yet reach a level of distinction. In both of the two prior years, 76% of the parents responding provided a positive response. That number grew to 79% in 2007-08.

This survey item ("Parents are given adequate opportunities to be involved in the decision-making at my child's school") has remained remarkably stable over the last nine years (2000-80%; 2001-78%; 2002-81%; 2003-80%; 2004-81%; 2005-80%; 2006-76%; 2007-76%; 2008-79%), during which time a number of different approaches have been employed to increase it. In 2008-09 we have a substantially larger participation in PTO as well as the School Improvement Team, and we are hopeful that the efforts we are making in communication and participation will pay off in developing a greater sense of efficacy and involvement on the part of parents here over time.

E. 21st Century Systems

Growth in this priority area was notable in 2007-08, but does not yet reach a level of distinction. In 2005-06 59% of staff respondents were positive, up to 65% in 2006-07, and to 75% in 2007-08.

This survey item, too, ("The School Improvement Team is an effective vehicle for change within my school") has remained relatively stable over time, (2000-74%; 2001-76%; 2002-78%; 2003-74%; 2004-73%; 2005-80%; 2006-59%; 2007-65%; 2008-75%), with two notable exceptions in 2005 and 2006. As a function of distributive leadership, this item is expected to grow as the Team sees its vision become more effectively actualized.

III. Reflections and Lessons Learned

Brevard Middle School does believe in leaving no child behind, though we believe the definition of "left behind" is not nearly as clear-cut as current structures would suggest. Thus, we find ourselves ambivalent about the success we experienced in 2007-08, when almost a third of our children did not pass the reading EOG and almost a fifth did not pass the math. We believe that implementing the "Corrective Reading" program was a major contributor to our success, and, given that it was only in place for a single semester, we feel that an additional full year of it will take many of our students to yet another level of achievement.

While we also posted gains in Mathematics, it was clear in 2007-08 that we needed to give math the same attention and focus as we gave reading. To that end, we began investigating best practices and curricula in the spring and summer, and anticipate steadily growing student achievement by solidifying instruction around the current best.

The third area of needed growth for the academic program came from the top, as we sought to add rigor to advanced courses. Three years ago Brevard Middle School made the decision to eliminate its challenge level classes and to focus on differentiating instruction within the classroom instead. To date, we have not had much success with that, as there is insufficient time to develop program from a model, implement the model, assess its effectiveness, modify it in response to assessments, and inculcate it into our habits.

To facilitate change, then, we have spread the responsibility for AIG students out among three teachers (one per grade level) and left it to them to work with their grade level teachers to effect differentiation. Early indicators are that this group of three will effectively institute the desired change.

One of the true benefits to the 2007-08 school year was the faculty response to change as growth. It was heartening to see the faculty embrace the new reading program, sacrifice and work to make it work, and come to understand that growth is the catalyst to increased effectiveness. Nowhere is this more evident than in the area of professional development, where all but one teacher achieved the goal of acquiring an HQ CEU.

Student's perception of safety is also of paramount importance to the ultimate effectiveness of a school. Upon reflection, it is clear that the disappointing results from the student stakeholder satisfaction survey comes from a lack of choice and control about how school life is structured, about relationships at school (adult and peer), and about participating in problem solving at school.

Engagement of parents at Brevard Middle has been exceedingly difficult. It is clear to no one if that is a function of confidence in the school, uncertainty about the school, the absence of a sense of welcome, or unrelated to the school. Currently we are working with an active and positive PTO to overcome this obstacle.

The ARC represents an opportunity to develop teacher leadership in its most overt form. We continue to be enthusiastic about the role this group will play in the future of the school.

IV. Next Steps

Most of our Next Steps are reflected in the action plans included in our School Improvement Plan.

Our students will increase achievement as we implement instructional and curricular recommendations in math, continue to provide reading coaching through "Corrective Reading" and institute a more rigorous load for our strongest students.

The faculty has committed to developing Professional Learning Communities, and are currently engaged in increasing their repertoire of high-yield instructional strategies by reading and developing plans around Marzano's work, "Effective Instructional Strategies". Following that, Schmoker's "Results Now" will be featured.

In 2007 we began to expand the concept of Peer Mediator to include the role of Peer Helper, a defined program of training and student volunteerism. That program will grow this year as we expand students' capacity to support each other. By assigning Peer Helpers to be available to support other students during times of conflict or need, we increase the emotional safety of the group as a whole.

PTO is proving to be a valuable resource for getting parents in to help, whether as volunteers or to serve on committees. At this point, our volunteer coordinator has over 130 parents ready to assist in numerous ways.

And, as a final thought, the Academic Review Committee, now in its second year, is expected to come into its own as the agent of implementing the School Improvement Plan. While the School Improvement Team develops the larger picture, the vision and sense of shared mission, it will fall on the ARC to actually implement the plan. By its presence and participation in developing the plan, the implementation is expected to become a true manifestation of the vision, thereby aligning all the arrows towards the common goal.