

Cornerstones

On Which Programs and Practices were
Built and Sustained

- A Consensus of Values and Beliefs
- A Commitment to Collaboration and Shared Leadership
- A Continuing Desire for Individual and Collective Learning
- A Culture of Respect and Support

Consensus of Values and Beliefs

- High Expectations for All Students
- Education of the Whole Child
- All Students will be Successful

The Whole Child

Standards and Developmental Responsiveness

High expectations and a focus on meeting standards, in and of themselves, do not pose a threat to developmentally responsive middle level programs. It is how the expectations and standards are interpreted and the procedures that are put in place to achieve them that determines their appropriateness in educating young adolescents.

Clark & Clark, 2003

Standards are not the enemy of developmentally appropriate middle level school programs. Nor are they “an excuse for narrowing a teacher's instruction to prepare students to pass a high-stakes test.”

Mizell, 2002

Commitment to Collaboration and Shared Leadership

- Principals viewed themselves as being collaborative and provided teachers with the time and opportunity to work together.
- Teachers were strongly committed to collaboration and collaborated with principals in making a variety of important decisions about their schools.
- Teachers were involved in school leadership.

Collaboration

“We are constantly interacting and sharing.”

“Teams collaborate, departments collaborate - we share lesson plans and bounce ideas.”

“We hope the kids see collaboration in us and learn from that.”

“You don't belong in this school if you cannot collaborate and work with other people.”

“Teaming is important in developing and sustaining collaborative relationships.”

“We have input on decisions around school. We also have Cadres where teachers meet in little groups so the principal is not doing everything.”

“Just about everything we do as a school we get together on.”

Continuing Desire for Individual And Collective Learning

- Principals characterized their schools as learning communities.
- Teachers talked about their commitment to learning and of multiple opportunities for learning.
- Professional development was embedded in the school.
- Teachers participated in planning formal professional development activities.
- Collaborative team planning activities provided powerful learning opportunities.

Continuous Learning

“Our faculty believes in continual staff development.”

“Professional development is very important to the principal and staff - every week it seems like there is a new professional development program or conference.”

“Normally the school district provides so many days per school year for professional development. Our principal has made a point to get us to our own meetings. Before that we might have to go to something that might not be of value.”

“We do building inservice that addresses specific needs and issues.”

Cultures of Respect and Support

- Teachers and principals reported that in their schools “Students are First.”
- Students were valued and decision making was predicated on “What’s Best for Kids.”
- Teachers were valued by principals who made special efforts to know teachers personally and provide them with appropriate support.
- Teachers valued and respected each other.

Relationships with Students

“The number one thing is relationships.” (P)

“We genuinely do care about kids and want to do what is best for them.” (T)

“caring and the desire to help each kid” (T)

“concerned and compassionate” (T)

“students come first” (T)

“We look at the teams to see if they are doing activities with children . . . and if I have a team . . . that is doing nothing, I will look at that to see if they are working hard enough on relationships with children.” (P)

“I meet with a panel of kids and we do a chart . . . about what would be some of the things you would change about our school.” (P)

Principal/Teacher Relationships

“I need them, they don't need me. I treat them right.” (P)

“I know how I felt as a teacher. I didn't always feel valued. I try to make sure that I tell them as regularly as I can. I have to make sure I don't take them for granted either or get caught up in what I am doing.” (P)

“I just think it is important that they realize I know them as individuals. I treat them the same way I expect them to treat children. Like a family. I value their opinions.” (P)

“I truly believe in the principal and his leadership.” (T)

“very approachable and a good listener” (T)

“top-notch, concerned about students and faculty”(T)

“listens and then make decisions on what's best for kids” (T)

“approachable and supportive” (T)

“up-front and honest” (T)

The Teaming Process

While all of the schools had implemented many of the programs and practices commonly found in middle level schools and supported by current research, it was teachers working together in teams that appeared to provide the most powerful influence on curriculum, instruction, and school improvement.

Teaming

- Provided teachers with the opportunity to collaborate and reflect regularly on issues of curriculum standards, appropriate instruction, and student learning.
- Allowed teachers to share and discuss data, participate in collaborative decision making, and to take on additional leadership roles in the school.
- Facilitated a culture of learning where a community of learners could regularly engage in a variety of formal and informal continuous learning activities.
- Allowed teachers to build strong relationships of trust, to create cultures of collegiality and support, and to develop core values and beliefs that led to successful adult and student learning.