

Special Interest Group Descriptions

Each participant will have the opportunity to participate in two of the six special interest sessions. Each session will be approximately 25-30 minutes. These sessions were designed to address specific topics relevant to the school and provide a small-group format for discussion of those topics and other issues from the group.

Becker Middle School

“Creating Small School Communities In A Large Suburban Middle School”

Becker Middle School is a suburban school of 1,500 students in grades 6-8. Opened in 1993 as a “true” middle schools, BMS is located in the midst of a “master-planned” suburban community in Las Vegas, Nevada. Seventy-two percent of the students at BMS are Anglo-European/American, 9% African-American, 10% Hispanic-American, 1% American-Indian, and 8% Asian-American. Becker Middle School was organized and continues to be structured around a teaming approach that includes, in addition to the basic core subject teachers, related arts and special learning teachers who work together for a common group of students. The school’s schedule provides for teams of teachers at each grade level to have flexibility to block instructional time and plan together daily. The encore, exploratory program includes fine and performing arts, including dance and guitar. In addition, faculty sponsor 36 after school activities in which students can develop skills and explore areas of personal interest. Each faculty member is required to make a written commitment to the Unique School Plan which reflects the school’s philosophy of meeting the intellectual, social, emotional, and physical needs of young adolescents. By working together the principal and staff have created small learning communities from this large school of 1,500 students. Former principal Cathy Andrews will discuss the strategies she used for working with the school’s teachers to develop and maintain the true middle school philosophy and establish a student environment that feels small and comfortable in the midst of this large, sprawling school.

Lawton Chiles Middle Academy

“Fostering a Safe and Orderly Learning Environment Through Positive Parent Involvement”

Lawton Chiles Middle Academy is a magnet math, science, and technology middle school in downtown Lakeland, Florida. Formerly Lakeland Middle Academy, Lawton Chiles Middle Academy was renamed in the late nineties after a former governor who attended high school in the current middle school building. LCMA has 550 students with diverse ethnic and academic backgrounds. Some magnet schools have the opportunity to select each of their students. That is not the case at LCMA, where students from 22 elementary schools apply to attend and are selected through a lottery system. The student population is two-thirds Anglo-European/American and one-third African-American. Twenty percent of the students are on free or reduced lunch. All students wear school uniforms. Students and parents speak very positively about LCMA and its programs. Parent communication is exceptional and students and parents are actively involved in the life of their student learners. Principal Sharon Neuman will discuss the programs and practices she and her staff use to engage and inform parents and the resultant positive effects this involvement has on the school’s learning environment.

Freeport Intermediate School

“Turning Around Academic Achievement In A School of Poverty”

Freeport Intermediate School is a school of 590 students in grades 7-8. It is a school of poverty serving with a 50% Hispanic-American and 13% African-American population. Two-thirds of the students receive free or reduced lunch. For many students English is not the primary language. However, academic success has become the standard in this south Texas coastal school. Principal Clara Sale-Davis began at FIS in 1995 and in her first three years on the job she led the faculty of FIS in an amazing turnaround of attitude and commitment. The student success rate on the Texas academic assessment moved from the 55th percentile to the 99th percentile and it has remained in the high nineties. Clara Sale-Davis will discuss how she led her staff through this very difficult process in a school of poverty. She will share the change processes she and her staff implemented and describe some of the specific programs they use to ensure success for each student.

Independence Middle School

“Creating An Environment Supportive of Student-Centered Middle School Practices”

Independence Middle School is a relatively small suburban school of 309 students in grades 5-8. Independence, Ohio is a small, primarily European-American community of 7,100 residents about 15 miles south of Cleveland. Ed Vittardi began his principal tenure at IMS in 1999. He engaged the staff in the study of effective middle school practices and within two years the school was being recognized for its quality programs. The staff at IMS effectively implement recommended middle school practices of interdisciplinary teaming, advisory homeroom, exploratory curriculum, co-curricular programs, intramural programs and interscholastic programs. But what is highly interesting about IMS is how they arrived at these “true” middle school practices. Ed Vittardi will discuss the programs and practices they implement at IMS and the processes, including the professional development strategies, used to lead the faculty to those decisions.

South Shelby Middle School

“Using Data And A Teacher Leadership Team to Change Academic Success”

South Shelby Middle School appears to be a typical small, rural school serving a rural farming community in north Missouri. With an enrollment of 180 students in grades 6-8, the school is primarily European-American with a 40% free and reduced lunch population. In 1998 Tim Hadfield became the principal and initiated the school’s participation in a comprehensive school improvement process. Through his leadership and that of his school improvement team, SSMS began a multi-year process of change. Designing their change based upon a vision of success through best practices and using a variety of forms of staff and student data, SSMS has steadily improved their school culture, climate, instructional practices, and student achievement scores. Tim Hadfield will describe the processes he and his faculty used to place their school on their path of continuous improvement.

Julius West Middle School

“Embracing And Thriving on Cultural Diversity And Academic Challenge”

Julius West Middle School is a school of 1,050 students in grades 6-8 in Rockville, Maryland, a suburban community for Washington, D. C. Julius West Middle School is a true melting pot of diversity. Forty-eight percent of the students are European-American, 18% are African-American, 18% are Hispanic-American and 17% are Asian-American. Twenty-five percent of the students are considered “international” and 13% speak English as a second language. Twenty-nine percent of the students are on free or reduced lunch. The ability of the faculty to embrace and thrive on this cultural diversity sets JWMS apart from other schools with similar diverse populations. JWMS is also one of the first middle schools in the United States to adopt the Middle Years Programme of the International Baccalaureate Organization. MYP was selected as the program that would best support the school’s goals of challenging all students, improving reading scores, and closing the achievement gap. The MYP emphasis on subject integration, health and social education, critical thinking and problem solving skills, and community service were believed to fit the school’s beliefs and mission of success for all students. Principal Jim Fernandez will discuss his school’s implementation of the Middle Years Programme and impact the program is having on his students.

NASSP’s National Study of Leadership in Middle Level Schools
Highly Effective Middle Schools and How They Got There
Long Conference Pre-Convention Session
Orlando, February 27, 2004

Jerry Valentine, Middle Level Leadership Center, www.MLLC.org