
School Improvement—Just Do it!

St. Leonard Elementary School St. Leonard, Maryland

Our School Improvement Team serves as a decision making body in our school. Viewed in this manner it could be considered the "head" of our model. Our three Action teams could be described as its heart, hands, and brains. Each Action Team is chaired by an administrator who also sits on the School Improvement Team. Each Action team is responsible for a different facet of School Improvement: School Climate, Student Achievement, and School/Family/Community Partnership. Staff members and parent representatives are encouraged to serve on one of the Action Teams. Meetings are usually held once a month. Grade level representatives from each Action Team are asked to also serve on the School Improvement Team. Communication and integration of all groups is thus ensured. There is an overwhelming sense of ownership and cohesion that is achieved when everyone in the building is a part of an Action Team. Each part is important on its own but when added to the others becomes the sum that defines who we are.

Our Action Teams are organized in the following manner. The School Climate Action Team is chaired by our School Counselor. They concentrate on promoting our School motto: "The Three R's: Respect, Responsibility and the Right to Learn," and our emphasis on character education.

The Student Achievement Team is led by our Vice Principal who is also the building level Test Coordinator. They plan MSPAP (Maryland School Performance Assessment Program) nights, as well as oversee the development of grade level drafts of our Scope and Sequence. The team guides the implementation of our Portfolio Assessment and Latin programs. They are concerned with our Special Education/ Collaborative Teaching and multi-year student-teacher relationship or "looping" practices.

Our School/Family/Community Partnership Action Team is led by our principal. The goal of this Action Team is to facilitate communication and a positive working relationship between the school, community, and home. This is achieved using the following strategies: "Principal Points" Newsletter, our weekly Tuesday Folder program, and Parent Surveys. The Team is accountable for the dissemination of academic information through interim reports and Parent Conference Day activities. Business Partnerships and Mentoring and Tutoring programs are facilitated through the work of this team as well as other enjoyable community events such as our Chili Hoedown and Spring dances. The Team encourages the building to be used as a Community Center.

The Teams are conducted in such a way as to be autonomous yet connected. There must be communication and contact among the three groups and the School Improvement Team. We have found that having the chairs of the teams be the School Principal, Vice Principal, and Counselor has helped foster the desired relationship.

When St. Leonard first opened in September 1996, this design was adopted and implemented by the staff. Our most informative measure of success of the program has come through our Parent Surveys. Also, the results can be measured by the observable

characteristics of our school. When parents, community members, substitutes, grandparents, other teachers, and administrators in our county walk through the door they see our plans in action. We have had distinguished visitors including members of the Maryland Business Round Table, colleagues from other schools in the state, and representatives from the State Department of Education. All have commented on the whole demeanor of our school: the students, faculty, parent volunteers, and building itself. The success of the program can be attributed to several components: an administration that possesses a strong vision and leadership skills, a dedicated faculty, and caring parents who are committed to working together for the benefit of children.

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