



NORTH CAROLINA SCHOOLS TO WATCH MODEL SCHOOL—VISITOR'S GUIDE

Flat Rock Middle School



Designated in 2007, Re-Designated in 2010

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2009-10 School Statistics

(Source: 2009 NC School Report Card.)

Community: Rural
Enrollment: 791
Grade Levels: 6-8
School Schedule: Traditional

Student Demographics

79% White
15% Hispanic
4% African American

45% Free/Reduced Lunch
5% English Learners

2007 AYP: School of Distinction

Met 23 of 25 performance targets

2008 AYP: High Growth, School of Progress

Met 24 of 25 performance targets

2009 AYP: High Growth, School of Distinction

Met 25 of 25 performance targets

(Visit <http://www.ncreportcards.org> to view this school's data for prior years.)

School Characteristics and Replicable Practices

Flat Rock Middle School is located in the western mountains of North Carolina. It is a rural school located near a small town that has seen an increasingly diverse population in recent years. Poverty has been on the increase, and the area's Hispanic population has tripled in the last few years. The school has done a remarkable job of helping every student feel a valued part of the school community. Students love Flat Rock. Parents & community are likewise big supporters of the school.

Academic Excellence

- The school staff has made the commitment to move their focus from teaching to effective student learning, and that has had an immediate and profound impact on academic rigor. Lessons were rigorous and utilized a number of different strategies.
- Data is used to drive instruction and provide indicators for where differentiation is needed to help students meet competency goals. Each teacher has a web page, and students are often enlisted in updating them.

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Academic Excellence *(Continued)*

- Classrooms regularly have essential questions and objectives posted and teachers frequently refer back to them. Writing is pervasive throughout the building.
- The English as a Second Language Program is exceptional. The staff works closely with the ESL teacher to mainstream students and the result is a very effective program that keeps expectations high while providing all necessary supports.
- The school has a commitment to effective use of instructional technology-which includes a "Video Montage" package that allows teachers to pull from over a thousand video clips to construct and support lessons. Portable laptop labs are used everywhere. We observed students using them in Art elective classes.
- The staff noted that even with after school transportation, they had difficulty in getting students to stay for remediation, so they moved remediation into the school day.

Developmental Responsiveness

- A wide variety of instructional strategies are utilized to ensure student learning is occurring. We observed labs, small-group work, cooperative learning, direct instruction, PowerPoint presentations by students, controlled popcorn activities, and seminar activities.
- There was a clear commitment to instruction being relevant. When students reported, "I don't get it," each teacher found meaningful and relevant examples from students' experiences to help foster understanding.
- The student council leads a "Club Fair" in which students can go from table to table in the gym and learn about how they can get involved in the school's many activities. The student council is strong and active in meaningful events... a sundae party to welcome new students, Mix-it-Up days, etc.
- Teachers know and care for students. We repeatedly saw evidence of this throughout the building. Students have absolutely no doubt about this, and are very proud and supportive of their teachers. EVERY child we talked with stated that the best thing about the school was their teachers.
- Students report that after school clubs and sports are "amazing," and that the band/orchestra/music program is "the best."

Social Equity

- Given the increase in poverty in the community, the administration and support staff have worked hard to ensure that every child feels valued and has voice.
- Students participate freely and regularly in helping those less fortunate. The school contributed over 250 coats to the community coat-drive.
- We observed self-contained special needs classes with exceptional rigor. One student we talked with was very capable in math and, after being tested, was moved into a 7th grade math text as a 6th grader-and was doing very well.
- "Reedy's Reps" are a diverse student group who meet regularly with the principal and serve in an advisory capacity.
- Parents and families are a regular part of the school, and we saw many adults volunteering and visiting classes.

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Organizational Support

- The school-wide emphasis on literacy and focused learning has had a real structural impact. One teacher reported, "We were already on-board philosophically about having kids do well. Now we're on-board in a smarter way."
- The school has clearly organized for student success. Policies and procedures are integrated and leave little to chance.
- Across the building, we saw regular use of graphic organizers, Frayer model charts, word walls, and intentionality about writing and vocabulary development. As a result, reading pass rates have increased from 87 to 94%.
- There is a very strong "team" structure in this school. Team identity is strong and effectively used.
- Faculty and staff are appreciative of the leadership efforts of the administrative team. They report that they feel empowered and supported, and are particularly fond of their principal.