



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

Spring Hill Middle School

2007-08 School Statistics

(Source: 2007 NC School Report Card)

Community: Rural
Enrollment: 530
Grade Levels: 6-8
School Schedule: Traditional

Student Demographics

56% African American
31% White
11% Hispanic

65% Free/Reduced Lunch
4% English Learners

2005 AYP: High Growth, Honor School of Excellence
Met 25 of 25 performance targets

2006 AYP: High Growth, School of Progress
Met 23 of 25 performance targets

2007 AYP: High Growth, School of Distinction
Met 25 of 25 performance targets

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

Designated in 2007

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School Characteristics and Replicable Practices

Spring Hill Middle School is located near Laurinburg, in the Sandhills region of North Carolina. It is a beautiful new building in a rural part of the county. The school hosts the district's gifted magnet program, but has worked hard to create a sense of "one school." They have been surprisingly successful in this endeavor, and it is clear that the community and students all feel a part of the school's "Spartan Community." Although there are economic challenges in the community, poverty is not used as an excuse for not having high expectations--or student success.

Academic Excellence

- Expectations are high for ALL students.
- The superintendent reports that the school is very data-driven, and that members of the staff are key leaders in the creation of test items for the district benchmarking tests.
- Instructional strategies are strong and varied. Academic achievement has increased from 77% to 91% in the last five years.
- There is much use of current research and literature in this school. Teachers are aware of best practices and are, as one teacher remarked, "each other's best staff development."

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Developmental Responsiveness

- The school is clearly safe, orderly, and caring. The school is exceptionally warm and inviting. The visitation team each received a personal note from a student thanking them for visiting, and encouraging them to see something that the student felt was important about their school. This is indicative of the culture of the school.
- Students express excitement about the activities they are engaged in, and were able to describe a number of activities that they have been involved in throughout the year.
- The school does a very effective job of interacting with the local community. The sports card club has a discount card fund-raiser, and Wal-Mart supports the school's "Bringing Up Grades" effort.
- The school's student population is diverse, and they find themselves in the curriculum. For example, one social studies teacher was discussing the role of Native Americans in the Revolutionary War and asked, "How many of you are this tribe?" A number of students raised hands, and others talked about friends and neighbors.
- Families are clearly welcome, and the students are used to adults in the classroom. Most didn't even look up when we entered since they are so used to company.

Social Equity

- There is a strong child-family support Team that meets regularly to provide "wrap-around" services for students.
- Positive Behavior Support has been put into place, and teacher and administration have worked hard to provide structure and order in an equitable manner. Suspension rates are decreasing, and plans are in place to continue improving discipline while decreasing suspensions.
- Expectations are very high for all students. There is no apparent "let down" between the rigor of the gifted magnet classes and the 2/3 of the students in regular classes. In fact, the largest growth in achievement is occurring in non-magnet students.
- There are a dozen flags hanging in the hall-one for each nation that the school's students come from. Several students stopped on their way back from lunch to point out the flag "from the country where I came from before I lived here."
- The faculty is racially and linguistically diverse, and reflects the student population.

Organizational Support

- There is a clear and well-articulated vision that drives change. The principal is a highly-regarded leader who has done a very effective job of creating a community of empowered teachers who take ownership in the school.
- The school is exceptionally well-structured. They are organized for student success.
- The staff is unusually close and nurturing-a real community. One young teacher reported, "The only way a new teacher can fail is if she really tries hard to fail."
- The school works closely with central office and the community. It also works effectively with community agencies (family services, juvenile court, etc.).
- Data-driven instruction is the norm at Spring Hill. Teachers get benchmark data regularly, but more importantly, they discuss that data and use it to change how and what they are teaching.