



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

### Walter Johnson Middle School



### 2007-08 School Statistics

(Source: 2007 NC School Report Card.)

Community: Rural  
Enrollment: 594  
Grade Levels: 6-8  
School Schedule: Traditional

#### Student Demographics

63% White  
17% African American  
16% Hispanic  
5% Asian

54% Free/Reduced Lunch  
8% English Learners

2005 AYP: High Growth, School of Excellence  
Met 28 of 29 performance targets

2006 AYP: High Growth, School of Progress  
Met 23 of 29 performance targets

2007 AYP: High Growth, School of Progress  
Met 29 of 29 performance targets

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

#### Designated in 2006

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## School Characteristics and Replicable Practices

Walter Johnson Middle School is located in Burke County. They are a Title-One eligible school and host a diverse population of young adolescents from a variety of homes, cultures and socioeconomic levels. It is a relatively new school and is only a few years old. The school was created with faculty and students from several existing middle schools, and has done a very effective job of creating a strong, new identity. There are many things those opening new schools can learn from this school's success. As the school has grown, they have created a powerful and effective learning community.

### Academic Excellence

- ALL students at WJMS are expected to meet high academic standards. This was evidenced in classrooms across the school and there is a strong "no excuses" policy for achievement. Whatever it takes to help students learn, teachers and staff will help make happen
- Of particular note was their "no zero" policy. This policy is implemented for all students across all grades levels. The team found this policy in effect throughout the school

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### **Academic Excellence** *(Continued)*

- Curriculum, instruction and assessment are integrated and rigorous. Teachers meet children at “starting points” (wherever they are)
- Another particularly important feature is the exceptionally high growth at the 8th grade level on scale scores of AIG students
- Students are provided time to meet academic standards and do ALL work (before and after school time is utilized)
- Advisor-Advisee (AA) time is coveted and students aren't pulled from AA to do academic work
- Professional development was seen through book talk sessions with each grade level, lead by the principal. Based on the book, *Boys in Crisis*, each team, grade level and the school will make a plan on how to implement the ideas of this book in WJMS to benefit their student population

### **Developmental Responsiveness**

- Respect is a crucial feature of this school environment
- Programs, such as "Word of the Day" and classical music playing in the hallways provide stimulation for students, who are friendly and happy to be part of the school
- Students have access to services, primarily through the grade-level counselors. These counselors are the threshold to community and school services needed by the child. The counselors are also involved heavily with the In School Suspension (Bee Hive) program, working with students on character lessons on a daily basis
- A variety of co-curricular activities are provided for the students, and sporting events are important, popular, and well-supported by parents and the community
- The Advisory program is very strong, engaging, and well-liked by students and teachers. Meeting students' developmental needs is of great importance to the staff

### **Social Equity**

- Faculty and administration expect high quality work from ALL students and provide the structures to make this happen. This is evidenced by the differentiation for English Language Learner students and the no zero tolerance policy
- One of the significant features of this school is the feeling of “belonging” expressed by ALL students we talked with. When you enter WJMS, you don't see different cliques of students, you see students who feel comfortable with their peers and are treated fairly and equally. This is such a significant piece of this school environment
- The faculty reflects the student population in the school to the best of its ability
- The school is not happy with the overall suspension rate, and has been working hard to reduce it. Teachers tell us, "You can't teach and they can't learn when they're sitting at home watching TV." Suspension rates have dropped each year, and are down 50% from previous levels.

### **Organizational Support**

- The school is a community of practice and uses the central office resources to support school programs, curriculum and student and teacher development

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**Organizational Support** *(Continued)*

- The principal holds himself and the school accountable, and is a torch-bearer for the mission and vision of the school
- WJMS is a professional development school for Appalachian State University and also works with Lenoir-Rhyne College on grants and other programs
- Parents and the community were involved in the building of the school through numerous community meetings, and express a strong sense that, "This is OUR school."
- Overall, the organizational structures and processes are smooth and efficient and hold the focus of supporting and developing students