



Executive Summary

Virginia Shuman Young Elementary School

Broward County School District

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Introduction

Every school has its own story to tell. The context in which teaching and learning takes place influences the processes and procedures by which the school makes decisions around curriculum, instruction, and assessment. The context also impacts the way a school stays faithful to its vision. Many factors contribute to the overall narrative such as an identification of stakeholders, a description of stakeholder engagement, the trends and issues affecting the school, and the kinds of programs and services that a school implements to support student learning.

The purpose of the Executive Summary (ES) is to provide a school with an opportunity to describe in narrative form the strengths and challenges it encounters. By doing so, the public and members of the school community will have a more complete picture of how the school perceives itself and the process of self-reflection for continuous improvement. This summary is structured for the school to reflect on how it provides teaching and learning on a day to day basis.

Description of the School

Describe the school's size, community/communities, location, and changes it has experienced in the last three years. Include demographic information about the students, staff, and community at large. What unique features and challenges are associated with the community/communities the school serves?

Virginia Shuman Young Elementary School (VSY) is the first public elementary Montessori Magnet School in Broward County, Florida. VSY is located in Fort Lauderdale, FL. The community (zip code: 33301) consists of a population of 13,536. The education experience of adults within the surrounding area include 95.5% holding a high school diploma or higher, 59.8% hold a bachelors degree or higher, and 26.4% hold a graduate degree or higher. The median home price is \$387,600 and the median household income is \$52,836. Population demographics of the surrounding area include 87% White, 8% Black, 2% Hispanic, and 2% Multiracial, and 1% Asian.

VSY is a one of 18 elementary schools offering a magnet program in Broward County. VSY is one of the 3 elementary schools in Broward County that uses a Montessori approach to education. VSY currently enrolls 712 students in grades Pre-k through 5th grade. The current population consists of 56% White, 24% Black, 13% Hispanic, 5% multiracial, and 2% Asian.

Using the philosophy of Montessori as our guide, while operating as a public institution can create some unique challenges. Many of our stakeholders benefit from additional training and support to fully understand the principles of Montessori. Students and parents often require a period of time to adjust to teaching strategies, classroom procedures, and individual learning paths that are different from a traditional approach to education.

Founded upon the philosophy and methodology of Dr. Maria Montessori, VSY embodies the vision of mutual respect and collaboration. Using a multi-grade level approach to each classroom, students are able to become independent learners based on individual need. Children are prepared to become lifelong learners by providing an innovative educational foundation based on Montessori philosophy and methods. Our teachers believe success is tied to the degree in which children are capable and independent. Our students set a pattern for effective work habits, self-discipline and a sense of responsibility. They engage in meaningful learning activities in a safe and equitable environment.

School's Purpose

Provide the school's purpose statement and ancillary content such as mission, vision, values, and/or beliefs. Describe how the school embodies its purpose through its program offerings and expectations for students.

Virginia Shuman Young Elementary School is committed to fostering the development of independent thinkers and lifelong learners who make a positive impact in a diverse global society. Through the philosophy of Dr. Maria Montessori, the mission of Virginia Shuman Young Elementary School is to prepare children for lifelong learning by cultivating curiosity, creativity and critical thinking. Virginia Shuman Young Elementary School follows students' individual needs to achieve personal academic excellence whereupon children respect themselves, others and the environment.

Virginia Shuman Young is a school-wide Montessori magnet. The magnet theme is integrated into all areas of the curriculum in all of our classes. Specific Montessori hands-on didactic materials for every subject area are used daily and are aligned to the Florida Standards. Through the Montessori philosophy and project-based learning, we offer many activities, lessons, field trips, enrichment programs, and remediation to address practical life and critical thinking skills. This method also incorporates collaboration and cooperative learning skills among students. When teaching reading, beginning readers start with concrete Montessori materials; these materials may include sandpaper letters, object boxes, and the movable alphabet. As students learn to read they are introduced to grammar and parts of speech using grammar boxes. Grammar boxes tie each part of speech to a symbol that children can use to label their sentences. Guided reading groups utilize a variety of materials including basal readers, Junior Great Books, specific novel selections for literature circles, fiction, non-fiction resources, Science and Social Studies texts and research articles from various resources. Classes participate in shared readings, read-a-loud, silent reading and Book Buddies to elevate the reading experience. In addition to the reading, all classes engage in writing across all learning domains. Lessons emphasize the six traits of writing: focus, organization, word choice, voice, sentence fluency and conventions. The writing process is presented in a multitude of writing forms at each developmental level. Word study, grammar and vocabulary enrichment are paramount to the language arts curriculum.

In order to develop the whole child, VSY focuses on a school wide life skill each week. The life skills serve as a model for all stakeholders; resulting in a learning environment conducive to maximized learning. Stakeholders throughout the week are reminded and given models of these life skills, in order to create lifelong learners that respect and care for the environment, others around them and themselves.

The five strands of mathematical learning: number concepts, measurement, geometry, algebraic thinking, data analysis and probability are emphasized in all classes using a multitude of physical and digital Montessori materials and mathematical tools. During mathematics, students learn concepts through the use of concrete materials and are then able to apply them to answer real life questions. All mathematics lessons are designed in sequential order and concepts are introduced after students have mastered the previous skills. The hands-on materials, coupled with lessons, allow students to truly see and comprehend how and why mathematical concepts relate to real-life experiences. Students are not merely giving answers through rote memorization, but developing an understanding of various mathematical concepts.

Working for a peaceful community, global studies and history are central to our curriculum. Lessons are implemented in cosmological, geological, and human history. The sciences include human inquiry, physical science, biology and geology. The curriculum at VSY is unique. It integrates the goals of Florida Standards with the objectives of the Montessori curriculum. Curriculum is based on several important concepts as students move continuously from concrete to abstract understanding in their learning. Freedom to learn is a central theme in all classrooms. Learning is differentiated and activities are rich and engaging. There are ample opportunities for hands-on active learning that

bring the child to a deeper understanding of concepts across learning domains.

Instruction is delivered by differentiating the curriculum to meet the needs of the individual learner. Teachers are the facilitators, directing students toward lessons that challenge their individual growth by using a variety of materials and approaches. Simultaneously, teachers are creating an atmosphere that fosters creativity and respect for student interests.

Notable Achievements and Areas of Improvement

Describe the school's notable achievements and areas of improvement in the last three years. Additionally, describe areas for improvement that the school is striving to achieve in the next three years.

The high standards set forth by all our stakeholders has resulted in many achievements, both academically and socially. Most notably, the U.S. Department of Education has named Virginia Shuman Young Elementary School a National Blue Ribbon School. VSY continues to model the standard for academic excellence, resulting in performing in the top 15 among all elementary schools in Broward County and receiving a letter grade of an A for the 2014-15 school year.

For the 2015-16 school year, one of our very own students was awarded the Student Volunteer of the Year in Broward County, for her charitable work working with children in need. VSY was awarded the Broward County Public Schools 2015 Parent Involvement Award at the elementary level. Our Reading Readiness is Everybody's Business Program has more than 70 students enrolled. Volunteers meet with students twice a week to help develop a love of reading and work on reading skills and strategies.

VSY continues to participate in the Montessori Model United Nations Conference each year. This year, we sent sixteen 5th grade delegates representing the countries of Hellenic Republic (Greece) and United Mexican States (Mexico) to the Montessori Model United Nations Conference (MMUN) in March 2016. The MMUN Conference is a simulation of the UN General Assembly and other multi-lateral bodies. In MMUN, students step into the shoes of ambassadors from Greece and Mexico to debate current issues on the organization's agenda. While playing their roles as ambassadors, student "delegates" make speeches, prepare draft resolutions, negotiate with allies and adversaries, resolve conflicts, and navigate the MMUN conference rules of procedure - all in the interest of mobilizing "international cooperation" to resolve problems that affect countries all over the world.

Over the next three years, we will be working diligently towards improving our ability to meet the needs of all our students through a systematic approach to differentiated instruction in all subject areas. This will result in an increase of learning gains in English Language Arts and Mathematics. An action plan will also be implemented to address the disparity in academic achievement found among specific subgroups.

Using Broward County Public Schools Social and Emotional Learning Initiative as a guide, our Guidance Counselor and teachers will incorporate weekly lesson assisting students to recognize and manage emotions, solve problems effectively and establish positive relationships with others. Social Emotion Learning (SEL) provides direct instruction in skills that enable students to succeed in college, career and life by being responsible citizens and decision makers. By utilizing these lessons students will be able to see themselves and others in a positive light, manage emotions, set and achieve goals and solve problems they encounter effectively. It supports school cultures and climates to allow students to practice life skills throughout their school experience.

In addition, stakeholders will have the opportunity to participate in a wide range of professional developments and community forums that will address the social and emotional needs of students from various backgrounds.

Additional Information

Provide any additional information you would like to share with the public and community that were not prompted in the previous sections.

Assessment is an integral part of the Montessori method as teachers observe students daily interacting with the materials and record their mastery of the process. Aligning with the Florida Continuous Improvement Model, there is an ongoing system in place of diagnosing strengths and abilities and prescribing appropriate activities from remediation to enrichment. Teachers create Progress Monitoring Plans (PMPs) for students with deficiencies to assist with monitoring their academic performance. Informal methods of assessment include teacher observation, rubrics, and student-generated projects and presentations. These formative and summative assessments are in keeping with the Montessori curriculum and methods.

As a result, instructional strategies are differentiated to the needs of students to improve instruction in the classroom. Assessment methods are aligned with the school's vision/mission and curriculum by approaching test-taking as an integral part of the practical life. Formal assessments are viewed as diagnostic tools for improving curriculum delivery, programs and teaching techniques. These can include, but are not limited to, reading running records, reading inventories, and writing rubrics. Student assessment results are analyzed and used to make decisions regarding classroom teaching strategies and the staff's needs for professional development.

Students in grades 4 and 5 analyze their data and develop their own individual Student Growth Plans (SGP). With the teacher as their guide, they are able to define their own individual goals by completing periodic self-evaluations and portfolios in order to take ownership of their learning. Classroom test data and specific student concerns are discussed with members of support staff (Guidance, ESE and Literacy Coach and Montessori Program Coordinator) and administration during quarterly data conferences with each teacher. Reflecting on assessment results has bred a culture of understanding of interpreting data and applying the results to better meet the needs of our students.

Through educating the whole child and differentiated instruction we are striving to eliminate racial and socioeconomic disparities in achievement. Struggling students are monitored through the use of the Multi-tier Support System (MTSS) model. Teachers and support staff work together to use a tiered model to implement interventions within the classroom. These strategies have proven to be effective in improving student learning and achievement across all sub-groups. For student who meet and exceed grade level expectations, the curriculum is individualized allowing not only vertical enrichment but for horizontal enrichment as well. Project based learning opportunities are provided to deepen understanding of concepts in all grade levels. Additionally, cross grade level collaboration provides a myriad of opportunities for student throughout the school.