

## Mount Eagle – Leveraging Knowledge to Close the Gap

*Leveraging Knowledge – 2008*  
Office of Educational Planning  
Department of Accountability FCPS

*“I think, in general, that every staff member at our school is finally on the same page in terms of where we need to go. I feel that our goals are now streamlined, shared, and attainable. We seem to have a vision and everyone is on board to get there!”*

(Teacher, Mount Eagle)

*“Last year Mount Eagle ES students were taught by our SUM teachers to ‘explain’ their thinking on every math question using pictures, numbers, or words. Many of my students got into the habit of using all three explanations involving their problems. This process helped them understand fully WHY their answer was correct.”*

(Teacher, Mount Eagle)

*“ALL teachers are responsible for all children.”*

(Teacher, Mount Eagle)

**Commitment to academic achievement:** Administrators, teachers, and staff were committed to providing the resources and expertise to promote the academic achievement of their students. “Our goals are now streamlined, shared, and attainable. We seem to have a vision and everyone is on board to get there!” (Teacher) One teacher noted that team meetings allowed “everyone to be on the same page” and provided “for more sharing of ideas” and that “the administration actively participated in and monitored instruction through visits to the classrooms.” The principal and assistant principal “have brought many new ideas to the staff and the staff has supported them all. They do not sit in their offices, but come into the classrooms sometimes three or four times a day to see the students Learning.” (Teacher) “ALL teachers are responsible for all children.” (Teacher)

**Focus on reading:** The entire staff took Balanced Literacy training and Language Arts staff followed up with more training. Specific skills being targeted were comprehension strategies (e.g. context clues, inferring). All grade levels are becoming familiar with “word study” and conducted reading and writing workshops in their classrooms. “Students have learned what to expect during reading and writing times and, as they move through the grades, they can build their learning on a familiar structure.” (Teacher) Groups of reading students were rearranged every two weeks so everyone had an opportunity to assess student needs. “In general, we have taught our students to LOVE reading.” (Teacher) A well stocked book room supported a strong take-home reading program and access to useful technology that supported language arts. The staff at Mount Eagle developed monthly common assessments in Language Arts. One of the ways Mount Eagle fostered achievement on the SOLs was to “teach test taking as a genre” (Teacher) during the Language Arts block. This allowed students to learn how and why tests were written. One teacher noted the “our teachers are very good at making sure students learn vocabulary in an authentic way” through the “morning news show, math wall, math stops.”

**Focus on math:** In keeping with its emphasis on collaboration and the importance of staff “being on the same page”, the entire staff received training to strengthen math instruction. Much of the credit for improving student achievement in math at Mount Eagle was attributed to the SUM (Step Up Math) team who constantly planned with teams, modeled instruction, created common assessments, and kept teachers abreast of information that was posted “in Gateways as well as current trends in mathematics instruction.” (Teacher) The staff used cognitive guided instruction

which allowed students to solve math problems in their own way with the requirement that they had to explain their thinking using pictures, numbers or words. “We also implemented Math Toolbox Kits that had manipulatives at their fingertips for their use.” (Teacher) “We also have a math lab that is accessible and stocked with the necessary tools for learning from manipulatives to supplementary books and lessons.” (Teacher)

**Interventions:** “Our students took part in Project READS, participated in after-school programs such as our Sixth Grade Social Studies program that stresses reading strategies, and received additional support through volunteer tutors.” (Teacher) “We have become skilled ‘intervention’ teachers. My team has special groups running to help certain students achieve certain skills and to make sure that no one slips through the cracks!” (Teacher)

**PLC:** The staff at Mount Eagle strengthened their PLC process by building and sustaining a system of time and support to ensure that each and every child was being attended to. Team meetings became more consistent and included teachers, administrators and resource teachers. In the words of several teachers, “All teachers teach all children”, which meant that ESOL, LD, instructional assistants, and teachers taught all reading groups. Staff meetings were structured around the four basic questions of PLC: Are students learning? How do we know? What if they aren’t learning? What if they are? The staff at Mount Eagle focused on the last two questions and further use of common formative assessments and team-developed assessments. Teachers were involved in “constant checking for improvement... periodic observations, tests, review of daily work (and) discussion of progress.” (Teacher) “Through this collaborative process, we are improving on differentiating and adapting instruction.” (Teacher) “We really collaborated these past few years to make sure that every member of our team knew each student in and out. Everyone on the team had access to students’ Observation Survey results, DRA information, and writing samples. We revisit these results often to check for progress and reevaluate our students.” (Teacher) Clearly collaboration using the basic principles of PLC is catching on because, in the words of the principal: “We used to have PLC meetings. Now we just have meetings because PLC is a way of life.”

**Staff development:** School wide training in reading and math promoted discussions about student progress, common language and consistent teaching strategies across grade levels. Teachers used “lesson study” in which one teacher taught and others observed.