



New Jersey Department of Education, Office of Charter Schools

SOARING HEIGHTS CHARTER SCHOOL

Collection of Best Practices

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Name of Charter School: Soaring Heights Charter School
About the Charter School (Mission / Key Design Elements): The School’s Mission pledges to provide “quality inclusive education” and “to develop and maintain constructive relationships with children and their families.” These relationships are established through sophisticated listening and communication training provided by the Director (Supervisor). Through communication groups and individual communication sessions, the social and emotional needs of teachers are constantly monitored and addressed so that the teachers, in turn, can monitor and address the social and emotional needs of the children. Such academic and social/emotional assessments are pivotal to continuous educational reform and allow the staff to establish and maintain a serene and nurturing learning environment.
Best Practice Topic(s) / Performance Area within Organizational Framework: Governance/Shared Leadership
Summary: In order for Soaring Heights to function well, it must successfully accomplish many tasks requiring many decisions. This is done through a team effort, the Management Collaborative, which is composed of all of the full-time teaching staff, the school nurse, the office manager and any teacher assistants who sign-up to take part. It is facilitated by the Director/Supervisor. The Director/Supervisor works to ensure that the team members grow, together and individually, as they complete the tasks at hand which fosters strong instructional and managerial leadership. In this context, tasks become the major vehicles through which people increase their self-awareness and understanding of human dynamics. This system creates decision-making processes that continually improve. All full-time teachers at Soaring Heights serve in two capacities: first, as classroom leaders, and secondly, as school leaders. Soaring Heights considers every member of the teaching staff a school leader and is continually working to enhance the growth and development of these individuals. Evaluation of every teacher by both the Director and his/her peers includes a review of the teacher’s leadership development. At Soaring Heights, this discussion begins with how leadership manifests itself in both the classroom and school (one standard of the teacher evaluation process is devoted to school leadership development). Such a process results in a high level of growth and development on the part of the teachers, and the school’s approach to decision-making results in the fact that almost all teachers decide to make their careers at Soaring Heights where they develop strong feelings of ownership and commitment to the success of the children they work with and the success of the school. Further, teacher attendance remains consistently high, and the 17 full-time classroom teachers have served an average of 10 years at Soaring Heights. The emphasis on “teacher as leader” makes Soaring Heights unique in its organizational structure.
Partner(s): The school works with no partners in this regard.
Dates: 1997 - Present

School Contact:

Claudia Zuorick, Director

Resources:

“The Road Out of Blame” by Claudia Zuorick in *Schools: Studies in Education*, vol. 7, no.1 (Spring 2010).

“The Evolution of Shared Leadership” by Claudia Zuorick and Joan Incognito (unpublished article available from the school upon request).