

*Change vs. Improvement: There is a difference!*

by

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Change is needed! Reform is long overdue! These statements are common in many organizations, especially in schools and school districts. Change and reform for the mere sake of *changes* and *reforms* may result in an effort in futility, if real, measurable, and substantive improvements are not made. You see, the aim should not be to simply *change*---it should be to *improve*!

Miami Northwestern Senior High School, in its endeavor to provide students with the best educational opportunities possible, has embraced the paradigm shift that promotes improving and enhancing teaching and learning as a continuous process. As professional educators, we are committed to continually improving our capacity to educate and uplift all children. This commitment is being demonstrated through a shared and broad-based leadership approach which recognizes that a school improvement effort requires more than the effort of a single leader; it requires the breadth of participation and depth of skill that teachers, administrators, support staff, parents, students, and community members bring to the education arena and learning experience of students.

The Assistance Plus Conference held in Tampa, Florida on October 16-17, provided additional resources and reassurances that our efforts are moving in the right direction. Consistent with current effective schools research, the model of continuous improvement adopted by our state and being currently implemented in our school, provides a framework by which we can plan, implement, and monitor our school improvement efforts. The keynote speaker, Dr. Gerald Anderson, reminded us that the key to continuous improvement is first recognize that it takes *time* and that it is, in fact, a *process*. His district implemented the Continuous Improvement Model from 1991-2000. The process took nearly a decade!

The utilization of data in improving student performance and achievement is the most widely used and popularized strategy among educators across the nation. At our school, an analysis of data was conducted for the performance of students on the 2003 FCAT. Upon the analysis of the test scores, there was clear evidence of progress and growth among the students. This data, however, provided a means by which areas of improvement could be made. There were considerable gains in all areas for tenth grade students; but for ninth graders, in which there is only approximately six months to prepare, the challenges that lay ahead are greater. We have committed ourselves to the strengthening of the ninth grade curriculum through required reading courses, the use of technology, Saturday school, and afterschool tutoring.

Efforts are being made to strengthen the articulation process with feeder middle schools to improve the preparedness of students. Finally, it became in the data that with over 200 ninth and tenth grade students with 30 or more days absent from school last year, that more needs to be done in the area of student attendance. A school social worker has been allocated our school as a part of the 4 High Plan and should greatly assist our efforts to identify, track, and monitor students who demonstrate excessive absenteeism. This is an area that we will be communicating with the state and working with the district to bring attention to.

In closing, “at the high school level, we are the gatekeepers of the child’s educational experience. As a high school principal and keeper of the key to the gate, the “buck starts and stops with me. Despite the real challenges that many of our children face and that we face in educating them, I shall not pass the buck or the blame. Though I know we are making progress, we are expected to do more, to get the job done. Trust me, we will. The FCAT is an obstacle that will not crush Miami Northwestern Senior; it will yield to our stern and uncompromising resolve. For now, we offer no excuse, we simply work to yield results!