Executive Summary

Veterans Memorial Middle School
Newton County School System

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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?

Veterans Memorial Middle School (VMMS) is in its 12th year of existence and is located in Covington, Georgia, in the western region of Newton County. The school is one of five middle schools in the county and serves 667 students with 364 males and 300 females. The student population at Veterans is fairly transient and diverse with the following student population demographics: 63% - Black, 23% - White, 8% - Hispanic, 4% - Multiracial and 2% other minorities. Approximately 507 (75%) of the students are eligible for the federal free and reduced lunch programs. Veterans offer both gifted education (18%) and special education (12%).

VMMS has 24 academic instructors, 9 connections instructors, .5 ELL instructor, 2 counselors, 1 media specialist, 1 school technology assistant, 10 special education instructors, 7 paraprofessionals, 1 ISS instructor, 1 school nurse, 4 clerical, 3 administrators, 5 custodians and 8 cafeteria workers.

The academic teachers are structured in teams in all three grade levels with each team teaching ELA, Math, Science and Social Studies. Classroom instruction at VMMS is delivered with Research Based Instructional Strategies in a standard classroom environment where decisions are driven by analysis of student assessment data. Within 65 minute class periods, students are challenged with opportunities to investigate, analyze and synthesize information. Regular education teachers maximize the benefit of the common planning time through scheduled meeting of middle school teams and/or subject area professional learning communities.

Students with disabilities (SWD) are provided services through multiple academic and educational settings, while the IEP teams individually make setting determinations based upon student needs; many SWDs are served in co-teaching and instructional support (resource) settings.

The gifted learners (Quest) are served in an advanced content model where 8th grade students are teamed, while 6th grade students and 7th grade students are guaranteed two advanced content classes off team in Science, ELA, or Social Studies. In the 6th and 7th grade identified gifted and high achieving students have an opportunity to take accelerated math as part of the advanced content model for the advanced learner.

English Language learners are served through a collaborative model where the ELL teacher pushes into ELA classes, grades 6 - 8. VMMS currently shares a teacher with Cousins Middle School. Currently the instructor spends Tuesdays and Thursdays and every other Friday at Veterans.

Also, Veterans has classrooms serving students who are mildly and moderately severely intellectually disabled. The students in the moderate/severe classroom receive self-contained instruction. Both classes teach skills that are practiced within the community twice per month at local businesses.

Veterans offers multiple connections classes which include art, technology, band, family and consumer sciences, music, chorus, business and computer science, French, and physical education/health. Students have an opportunity to rotate through most of the courses each year. The exception is for students enrolled in band and/or chorus, which are both year-long courses. Students take the business and computer science course each year in order to prepare them for the State of Georgia required technology test.

Within the past five years, Veterans Memorial Middle School strengthened structures to provide additional shared governance and leadership within the school. A leadership team consisting of grade level and content area representation, as well as counseling, media, clerical and building administration was created and works with the faculty to facilitate changes at the building level. The changes may be a result of self-identified initiatives or those required at a local or state level. It is the goal of the leadership at VMMS to work collaboratively as a team to provide the best educational environment possible for our students.
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.

The vision statement for Veterans Memorial Middle School is: Veterans Memorial Middle School envisions high school ready, and college and career focused students who are able to think independently, communicate effectively, and demonstrate their skills to a global audience in order to be successful in the 21st century.

Also, Veterans has supporting belief statements that exemplify what the faculty and staff believes to be true for students and the school community. Those beliefs are as follows:

Our staff believes that:
1. All children can learn regardless of race, ability, or economic status
2. Education is the responsibility of the school, students, parents, and community
3. A positive, nurturing, and safe environment promotes a focus on learning
4. All students have the potential to become responsible, productive citizens with a desire for life-long learning
5. A balanced program includes curricular, co-curricular, and extra-curricular activities
6. Utilizing existing and evolving technology and instructional resources will enhance student learning
7. A variety of instructional strategies are necessary to meet the students’ individual learning needs and promote academic growth

In 2012 VMMS implemented the Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports Program (PBIS). Additionally, a school motto was identified. Our school motto is Veterans memorial Middle School Generals are: Accountable, Respectful, and Engaged. We believe this represents what we work towards everyday as faculty members, staff members, students and parents.

The structure of VMMS is designed to support the mission and motto of the school. The staff at Veterans works to communicate with stakeholders and students in many ways to promote responsibility and success for students. Over the past three years, the school has provided training for parents during Curriculum Nights on the use of the parent portal of Infinite Campus. This enables parents to have working knowledge of how to access their child’s grades as well as any comments/suggestions made by teachers. Additionally, teachers are making extensive use of E-Learn sites and MyBigCampus to keep students and parents informed and up-to-date with the curriculum and instruction taking place in classrooms.

In addition, a student produced newsletter (Generals 360) is circulated each month to stakeholders and District Leadership to provide information about events happening at Veterans Memorial Middle School.

Veterans has multiple student opportunities for extra-curricular and co-curricular activities. The school currently offers eight organized sports, three CTAE organizations, Beta Club, PBIS Ambassadors, Reading Bowl Team, Girls Engaged in Meaningful Service (GEMS) club, FBLA, Campus Life, FCCLA, and Peer Mediators. All of these activities are open and encouraged for all the students in the school.

Furthermore, Veterans has multiple support programs in place to meet the needs of all learners. There is an organized Response To Intervention (RTI) process to identify and support learners that struggle in the classroom. In addition, the school offers extended learning time during Connections through Title I Reading and Math classes. There is a fifty minute Enrichment period, which is the final class of the
day. The Enrichment period provides targeted remedial assistance to identified students in Reading and Math and enhancement services to students in Social Studies and Science. All of these services have been implemented to help support students with their learning.
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.

Veterans Memorial Middle School has made gains over the past three years in multiple areas. The school has experienced academic achievements, athletic accomplishments, and school culture growth in the midst of community change.

During the 2010-11 school year, VMMS implemented a school-wide book study of the text Classroom Instruction that Works. During faculty and grade level meetings selected staff members redelivered detailed information regarding the nine high yield teaching strategies listed in the text. Additionally, teacher leaders modeled the use of the strategies with the expectation that the strategies would be used by classroom teachers to help with student engagement, academic rigor and less teacher-directed lessons. All of the instructional staff at Veterans have began using Research Based Instructional Strategies within the classroom setting. However, there needs to be more consistency and fidelity with the use of the strategies. Ongoing professional development through Griffin Resa, Dr. Dan Mulligan, District-Based Academic Coaches, and School-Based professional learning will help in this area.

Over the past five years the faculty of Veterans has worked as a team to identify ways to acquire adequate and appropriate technological resources and streamline faculty and student technology usage for the school. A technology team was established in 2009 for the purpose of providing site-based training and development for staff on the use of acquired technology. Since 2009 Veterans has steadily increased its inventory of adequate and appropriate technological resources. All classrooms, with the exception of the Health/PE classroom, are equipped with Activboards. Additionally, there are three computer labs, a laptop cart, Ipad cart, and wireless connectivity to the internet. The addition of the Audio-Enhancement and ViewPath technology systems in academic classrooms caused us to restructure our technology team so that each hallway has a Technology Team representative to conduct weekly trainings on acquired technology resources. Finally, VMMS implemented Bring Your Own Technology (BYOT) during the 2011-12 school year and it has been a huge success primarily in the Language Arts classrooms. Our Media Specialist, who serves as our Technology Teacher Leader (TTL) was named the South Metro Media Specialist of the Year.

In 2012, Veterans Memorial Middle School’s leadership team reviewed the school’s discipline data and discovered that there were opportunities to improve on the number of students that were missing instructional time from the classroom setting as a result of discipline infractions. Therefore, the leadership team, with buy-in from staff, students, and stakeholders sought to establish a school-wide approach to discipline. Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) was implemented school-wide in 2012 and it takes a positive approach to discipline and provides rewards for positive behavior. It has made a positive difference in the discipline and behavior of students for the past year. Discipline referrals have decreased and significantly less students are missing valuable instructional time from the classroom setting.

Athletics at VMMS continues to be a point of pride for our students and community. The football, basketball, wrestling, track, softball, and competition cheer programs field competitive teams each year that compete for championships within the NewRock League. Our coaches work diligently throughout the year to ensure that their team members remain student-athletes while competing.

Certainly, Veterans has areas to improve upon in the future. A review of the student performance during the past three years reveal that a major emphasis should be placed on ensuring that the following subgroups are meeting state CRCT and writing performance standards: Students With Disabilities, Hispanics, Multiracial, and English Language Learners. Math and Social Studies are a weakness among all subgroups. Based on our data, focus on these areas will help close achievement gaps and increase student achievement within Veterans Memorial Middle School.
Additional Information

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

Veterans Memorial Middle School is always seeking avenues to improve communication and school access with stakeholders and the community. The faculty and staff, PTO, and School Council have worked very hard during the past three years to increase parental involvement at Veterans. Though involvement has improved, it still is not at a level that is acceptable to us. This school year we plan to address this area of concern by: 1) Making our Curriculum Nights more interactive; 2) The creation of a Fine Arts Department, which will host four Fine Arts nights showcasing student work in Art, Music and Band; 3) Hosting Title I Informationals during each nine week grading period; 4) Soliciting more of our parents to be guest speakers during our school Career Day; and 5) Hosting the first ever Rock-A-Thon event where students will spend a 10-12 hour evening at the school.

Additionally, we are in our first year of implementation of the Teacher and Leader Keys Effectiveness System. Administration and teachers are working hard to implement the new evaluation instrument and thus far have done so with positive results. However, the staff has voiced some concerns regarding the new evaluation instrument.