

Lowell Elementary School **By Dari Donovan**

Lowell School Mission

The Lowell School, with the active involvement of its families and neighbors, seeks to provide a supportive learning environment, which fosters academic excellence, encourages individual and collaborative endeavors, and promotes social responsibility and respect for diversity. We seek to support students in developing the knowledge, skills and attitudes that will serve them well in their lifetime. This requires all the abilities to effectively engage and contribute to society as they know it, and the imagination and sense of activism to change it for the better.

Who We Are

The Lowell School's current enrollment of 384 students has fluctuated within the last three years from about 375 to 402. The school serves PK through 5th grade.

- Male Students: 207 Female Students: 177

- Special education: 57 students (15%) and five non-Lowell students enrolled in specialized programs

- ELL students: 49 students (13%) with many different languages spoken in the homes

- Low Income: 95 students receiving free or reduced lunch (25%)

- Class size: Range of 16 to 25 students with an average of 19 students per classroom

Administration

The Lowell School currently has one full time principal and one full-time school secretary. We do our best to adequately serve the students, families, and faculty and staff efficiently and effectively. A concerted effort to "go paperless" has reduced consumption and labor involved in copying and distribution.

Class-based Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment

At the beginning of the school year the district introduced newly articulated curriculum expectations in comprehension and fluency. Professional development will continue to focus on curriculum implementation and effective use of resources. A plan for the remainder of this year has been put forward to finalize reading assessments, complete vocabulary expectations, complete toolbox with vocabulary materials, reading assessments and reading workshop resources. We also plan to develop a set of recommendations for ongoing implementation support. The next phase of work in our ELA department is further literacy development through grades 3-5, and shifting the K-3 focus from "learning to read" to the acquisition of writing skills and language usage.

FY 2010 marks the third year of Think Math for all three schools and is currently being implemented in all regular education classrooms. FASTT Math is in its fifth year of operation in the system and in its third full year of implementation for students in grades 2-5. The Math Task Force is currently investigating a Tier 3 math program for students who require an alternative math curriculum with an emphasis on “Life Skills.”

Educational Technology

The third, fourth, and fifth grade classes attended regular weekly technology instruction in the computer lab. The third, fourth, and fifth grade levels each have a shared laptop cart which allows for flexible use during the school day. Students in grades 3-5 access computer, web and server based programs to foster academic skills, explore concepts and create projects. Netbooks provide additional access within the learning commons and classrooms.

In addition, The IT teacher at the Lowell School is integrally involved in the development of our Primary Learning Support program. The IT teacher plans and works with self-identified classroom teachers and specialists to explore new resources, innovate on past practices and enhance teaching and learning. This year the IT teacher has also co-taught some targeted grade levels and special populations to expand the repertoire of content teachers.

Students in grades PK-2 made weekly visits to the school library. Our shared librarian had two days dedicated to the Lowell (Monday and Tuesday) and worked tirelessly to maintain our library and develop resources, as well as to meet integration needs of classroom teachers, and directly instruct fourth and fifth graders to foster information literacy and fluency in print and on-line sources. In addition, the librarian has taken on the challenge of working directly with third grade classes and teachers on the “Live Wire” partnership with Fablevision.

Special Education

In order to serve as many children within the district as possible, the Lowell has developed a multi-pronged approach to serving our special education students.

The critical role of Team Chair Leader is effective and efficient in managing the process of meeting all legal requirements (laws and regulations) to serve our special education population. The Chair also assists in the challenges of managing both personnel and materials responsibly. We are very proud of our array of programming options to best serve our students at the Lowell and the Chair’s leadership in their development has been greatly appreciated. The programs are:

Comprehensive Inclusion Support Program

Our CIS programming has evolved to meet the needs of students with complex needs requiring substantial, extended periods with a special educator. This program also provides consultation and direct service in social /emotional and behavioral regulation issues.

Language Based Partial Day Substantially Separate

For students with significant language based learning disabilities, this program provides intensive partial day instruction to develop essential reading and writing skills. The program needs to expand in 2010 to continue to meet the needs of these students as they advance. We hope to have a 4/5 class next year, in addition to the 2/3 class.

Primary Learning Support Program

PLS has been developed for students with neurodevelopmental disabilities to meet their physical and academic needs. It is a district-based program providing integrated services and supplemental educational experiences, along with tailored curriculum.

Specialized Instruction

A special educator provides specific instruction for students with learning disabilities in accordance with the plans outlined in student IEPs. The schedule is a hectic one, and requires the teacher to move from class to class, grade to grade, to meet the needs of all students.

Reading

In 2006, the district based ELA coordinator position was eliminated and the reading personnel began to operate under the direction of the principal. The need for reading intervention has become the focus of our reading program. Reading is a gateway skill to all future learning and we aim to provide adequate regular education reading support to children who have trouble in any of the major components of reading.

Guidance

The guidance role is complex and diverse in its reach. Class-based instruction addresses numerous aspects of violence prevention, such as tolerating difference, resolving conflict and preventing bullying. Guidance also conducts the pre-referral process. All state assessments, including proctor training, coordination of accommodations, scheduling, and materials management are handled by guidance. New students and their families are served by guidance through the kindergarten registration process and the transfer process for incoming and outgoing students. Our guidance counselor is called upon daily, often without advanced notice. Responding to child and family crises, consulting with parents, and resolving student conflicts are regular occurrences. Teachers often seek out consultations with our guidance counselor when challenges emerge around individual students. The guidance role is also involved in many other school functions, such as placement, team meetings, safety planning, and the development of protocols and new processes.

Behavioral Support

Many students, with and without learning disabilities, experience difficulty regulating emotions and behavior throughout the day. The Behavioral Support program, along with guidance and contracted services from the Academy for Physical and social development, provides proactive and responsive programming, respite, consultation and crisis intervention. Contracted services from the Academy for Physical and Social Development have been invaluable.

ELL

The Lowell has children with a wide variety of cultural and language backgrounds. Two ELL teachers currently provide services both in and out of the classroom, as well as family education and support.