



## Georgia Lighthouse Schools to Watch Team Summary Report Re-Designation

**School Visited:** Rising Starr Middle School

**Dates of Visitation:** September 19, 2018

**Site Team members:**

Camille McElroy, Team Leader, Christie Barnes, Jina Chapman

### ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE

#### *Strengths*

- Rising Starr is moving to Passion Based Learning, which embeds creative arts in the curriculum.
- Students participated in a project to re-design the media center.
- Teachers and leaders have seen the positive impact creativity has had on achievement.
- The diversity of classes accommodates all levels of learners.
- Many classes had Learning Targets and Essential Questions posted.
- Rising Starr is to be commended for implementing Standards Based Grading that helps inform parents of their child's progress toward achieving specific learning standards. Standards based grading provides clearer and more effective feedback.
- Teachers had high expectations for students and gave examples of how students grasp components of quality work.
- Students are shown exemplars and teachers use time in class for one on one feedback using the "blackboard" program.
- Teachers gave examples of showing models of good and poor products, peer review, rubrics, timely feedback, conferencing one on one with students, and returning work for students to expand for higher quality and better understanding.
- Teachers provided examples of using real life experiences in teaching and learning.
- Teachers discussed two interdisciplinary units. A seventh grade team spoke about the Food Truck Unit and explained how subjects were interrelated, while an 8<sup>th</sup> grade teacher gave the example of the Mock General Assembly.

- Students said that their classes are challenging, but not too hard.
- Teachers utilize various teaching strategies and during observations several strategies were used such as direct instruction, project-based learning, and one to one technology use. Students were highly engaged in the learning process.
- Rising Starr is a One to One Chromebook school. Teachers use programs such as Quizlet, Dream Box, Moby Max, No Red Ink, and USA Test Prep.
- Teachers appeared genuinely engaged in students' learning and success. There were multiple demonstrations of respectful and positive teacher interactions with students.
- Rising Starr has embraced school-wide literacy and teachers include skills such as writing, notetaking, and listening.
- During teacher interviews, one teacher indicated that teachers think outside the box without a fear of failure.
- As team members visited classes, it was clear that instruction was aligned to GPS and there was evidence of common assessments and performance tasks.

### *Areas of Growth*

- It is recommended that teachers be provided with time to observe their peers for their own growth.
- While current team interdisciplinary units are excellent, it is recommended that grade levels explore ways to include the entire grade level in units.

## **DEVELOPMENTAL RESPONSIVENESS**

### *Strengths*

- It is commendable that staff understands the benefit of flexible scheduling. Sixth and seventh grade teachers said that they could flex schedules easily because students are on team throughout the day. Eighth grade indicated that using a flexible schedule was more of a challenge due to students going off team for world language.
- Passion based learning was discussed as part of the school philosophy.
- Students have some choice in connections, especially in 8<sup>th</sup> grade.
- Each hall has developed a unifying theme and during 8<sup>th</sup> grade interviews, teachers discussed their Survival Days including Survival activities.

- Teachers' knowledge of and care for individual students is evident in the school culture. A high level of commitment of the faculty based on what is best for students helps ensure student success and well-being.
- The counselor is supportive of the mentor program and coordinates it for the county.
- The President of Pinewood Studios came and spoke to students in the creative community group about opportunities for creative arts in the local community.
- The counselors teach an SOS lesson every year for suicide awareness. Community support exists from outside agencies to speak to all students that indicated an issue on the survey at the end of the lesson.
- In October counselors and the assistant principal from the feeder high school have an assembly to discuss pathways.
- Rising Starr is the last school to develop PBIS and it is being implemented.
- Students indicated that they feel safe at school and are proud to be part of Rising Starr. They also said if they were struggling with anything their teachers were always there to help them. In addition, students indicated that they are valued and accepted.
- There is a sense in the school that each child is cared for by the adults in the building.
- A large variety of PAWS (Play, Achieve, Work, and Succeed) courses meet each Wednesday afternoon for forty five minutes and are available for students to choose an area of interest.
- During team visits to several PAWS classes, it was clear that students were very engaged and interested. In addition, this is a way for PAWS teachers to get to know students.
- Students have a voice because they can make suggestions for new PAWS classes. While students missing work are assigned a room to complete work, PAWS is so popular that students missing work dramatically decreased because they wanted to participate in PAWS.

#### *Areas of Growth*

- As the new PBIS program is implemented, the school should continue to evaluate and grow the program.
- While PAWS teachers get to know students, with groups changing each semester, it may be helpful to designate time in an advisory format once a month or every other month.

- It is commendable that faculty book studies have been conducted, such as *The Engaged Classroom and Grading Smarter Not Harder*.

### ***Areas of Growth***

- The school should explore ways to increase student voice opportunities.
- The school should continue to refine Standards Based Grading for consistency.

## **GROWTH FROM PREVIOUS DESIGNATION PERIOD**

### ***Strengths***

- The addition of the Community of Creativity provides real life opportunities and incorporates art into the curriculum.
- Rising Starr is piloting Creative Careers and will pair with mentors in careers of interest.
- PAWS classes are a highlight. Course offerings are extensive and cover a wide array of topics to meet the interests of students.

### ***Areas of Growth***

- The school should continue to expand advisory through including additional soft skills opportunities. While homeroom teachers serve as advisors, it may be helpful to have some organized advisory activities through homeroom, Literacy, or PAWS.
- Explore ways to increase student voice in significant areas.

## **OVERALL FEELING ABOUT THIS SCHOOL**

Rising Starr Middle School is a school community that has already achieved a high degree of excellence, but continues to evaluate all programs and practices and readily provides new initiatives to more thoroughly meet the needs of the school's young adolescents. Many programs and structures are in place to help students explore options and prepare for their futures. Under strong leadership and a committed and competent faculty they are meeting the educational goals of students. Opportunities are available for teachers to grow professionally and for students to attain social and academic growth. A wide variety of challenging and engaging instructional strategies, activities, and methods are used to guide learning and to assess student performance. There is an overall commitment from the faculty and staff to help all students achieve. High expectations are the norm and it is clear that standards are being met where students seem happily engaged. A warm and supportive environment permeates all areas of the building. Staff members and students are courteous and positive in their interactions. Rising Starr exemplifies a big family in a culture where a sense of pride and overall comradery exist and teachers enjoy working at Rising Starr.

It is a pleasure to Re-designate for the 5<sup>th</sup> time Rising Starr Middle School as a Georgia Lighthouse School to Watch. Congratulations!