

ORCHARD KNOB MIDDLE SCHOOL

As the 2006-2007 school year approaches, Orchard Knob Middle School is faced with a number of issues that impede the educational process of its students. Tennessee State¹ (2004) data reveal that a disproportionate number of juvenile males with criminal records in the Hamilton County Court System (1,248/2618=48%) are black, when compared to the total population of black juvenile males across the state with juvenile records (16,797/51,625=32.5%). The 2000 Census report reveals that about 20.1% of the Hamilton County population is black. This data reveals that a disproportionate number of blacks are represented in the Juvenile Court System. The pregnancy rate² of the Orchard Knob community among girls between the ages 10-17 (4.5% in the 37406 and 2.5% in the 37404 zip codes)³ compared to the county's Total population rate of 1.5% is a tell-tale sign of the teen pregnancy dilemma which assigns many of the students to a young female headed household, or often a student who is left with another caregiver. In the 2005 State Report Card, male students were responsible for 73% of the suspensions recorded by the school. Subsequently, while the achievement level of the student body is significantly below the county average, the average male student at Orchard Knob Middle School is performing at a significantly lower level of achievement than his female counterpart. There is a need to address the issues that are seen as the underlying causes of this discrepancy, as well as, seeking means to close the achievement gap between male and female students. Orchard Knob Middle School will develop a program that will train teachers in the use of skills and strategies to address the needs (academic and social) of black male adolescents.

Tennessee State juvenile court records further reveal that Hamilton County black females (947/1864=51%) are disproportionately represented in the court system when compared to black females in state statistics (11,922/34,987=35%). Many of our students are trapped between trying to be a responsible parent and childhood. The pregnancy rate of the community is an issue that permeates the school walls. The number of under aged parents we are charged with educating highlights the number of students engaged in sexual activity. Education must be relevant for them to propel them toward positive life options.

Orchard Knob Middle School is presently working with a number of community agencies (Why Know, A Better Tomorrow, The Fortwood Center, Stop the Madness, East Side Task Force, Partnership of Family and Children Services) to address its students' needs. While the efforts of these organizations are welcomed, there is a need for coordination of these programs to prevent duplication of services, and assure that the needs of the population is addressed rather the special interests of the group. School personnel are needed to coordinate these services particularly when offered beyond the school day. The implementation of an Alternative Day Schedule (10:30-5:30) would be a welcome addition. The alternative schedule will allow flexible scheduling of students within the regular day and enable the school to extend the student learning beyond the academics and the regular school day. Targeted students would be able to start school at a later time and/or continue the day after the other students have left. Special services provided by community agencies for students to address emotional, physical and psychology needs that may be affecting academic achievement. The Family Partnership Specialist would serve in training staff and parents in areas targeted and coordinate alternative services. The Family Partnership Specialist serving as a liaison between the school, the family, area businesses and community service agencies. An alternative schedule will allow for the coordination and oversight of extended day programs and community services.

We will also develop a transitional program for our 6th and 8th grade students to facilitate ease in the movement from one culture to another. We have noted that little and sometimes-negative growth occurs during students' first year at middle school. This trend is not unique to Orchard Knob Middle School or to 6th graders. The process of moving from one school setting to

another often results in a lack of growth. To formulate a smoother transition, we will collaborate with schools in our feeder zones (Hardy Elementary, Orchard Knob Elementary and Brainerd High School) to provide programs that will bridge the gap between what happens in elementary, middle and high school that makes the transition difficult.

As we look at our educational plan for next year, we know that there must be a change in how we educate. Remediation cannot mean having students do the work they missed out on during previous years. The work must be age relevant and provide the student with tools that enable him/her to succeed inside and outside of the school setting. The school must find ways to meet the students' educational, developmental, and social needs. Meeting those needs must include the delivery of instruction that is relevant and, the students' interests as well as issues must be addressed daily. Fulfilling these needs also means flexibility in scheduling that will facilitate the altered schedules of the student lives. Orchard Knob Middle School will provide an alternate evening schedule to meet the needs of students with social and physical issues that prevent them from attending and/or achieving during the regular school day. These classes will include instruction that is relevant to the student needs socially, physically, and academically. The use of the Alternative Day Schedule will allow Orchard Knob Middle to effectively use its time and resources to address the student achievement goals.

Due to the overwhelming demands of this sizable portion of the student population, students with fewer problems often are not challenged to a degree that will encourage them to meet their full potential. As the school has seen an increase in student proficiency rates on standardized tests, the number of students who score in the advanced range has not increased. This data suggests that the rigor of the curriculum does not meet the needs of the students who are achieving at higher levels, further suggesting that teachers must be trained to meet those needs. Expected results include a reduction in the higher achieving/advanced students for Orchard Knob Middle who have opted to go to other schools. Embedded professional development is essential to the emergence of a professional learning community that is attuned to the needs of the students. Because of the demands of teaching in an inner-city school including physical and mental drain (Teachers are tired!), staff often is unable or unwilling to commit to extended-day staff development or extended-day contracts. Therefore professional development in strategies, skills, and activities that have proven to be successful will continue to be a part of the regular school day. This will be provided through flexible use of the school day. Planning time will include professional development that moves teachers toward instruction that creates an environment where students thrive.

Professional development in literacy will be provided for teachers of social studies, science and mathematics. While scores in Language and Math have met AYP expectations, science and social studies scores are well below the national standard. Consequently, science and social studies achievement at Orchard Knob has been significantly below expectations. Students often struggle with science and social studies texts, which are often written above grade level due to the specialized vocabulary. In looking at reading data from Gates MacGinitie testing, vocabulary scores are significantly lower than reading comprehension scores. An emphasis on vocabulary instruction in all classes as well as the use of writing as a learning tool will be provided to all staff. Students will be required to write to show learning in some way on a daily basis in each class. This will give each student an opportunity to summarize the learning and teachers an alternate means of assessing student learning. Research shows that summarization is one of the most effective strategies for students to learn and retain new information.

¹ Tennessee Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges 2004 Annual Juvenile Court Statistical Report

² Chattanooga Times Free Press, February 10, 2006

³The primary zip codes of students who feed into Orchard Knob Middle School