Stuart High School
Falls Church, Virginia
Prepared by International Center for Leadership in Education

A Model of Literacy
Focused, Visionary Leadership
9th Grade Success
Academic Interventions
Use of Data
A/B Block Schedule
Rigor and Relevance
Sustained Continuous Improvement

Rigor/Relevance Framework

By the Numbers
1,500 students
86% minority
30% mobility
70% born outside U.S.
13% with disabilities
54% free/reduced price lunch
25% English language learners
96% attendance rate
90% on-time graduation rate
90% to postsecondary

Executive Summary

If one were to design a formula for a mid-sized urban comprehensive high school to fail, Stuart High School would have been such a school less than a decade ago. The school had a high rate of student mobility; it had many second language learners; the majority of students qualified for a free or reduced-price lunch; there was ethnic tension; a majority of the parents were low income; it was located in a gang-infested neighborhood; and at the same time, the school was going through an extensive renovation. Stuart had all of these, yet today is a remarkable success story.

"Given time, all students can learn," is the motto practiced on a daily basis by the administrators and faculty at this highly diverse school where students are viewed as a reason for the school's success. Barriers to learning are not accepted as excuses for low achievement. In 1997, Stuart was a poorly performing school with some of the lowest test scores in Virginia. A new principal initiated an aggressive approach to improving literacy and established a clear focus on continuous improvement that created a culture of high expectations, rigor and relevance for all students. There was one priority — enroll students in the most rigorous, appropriate classes as soon as possible and provide the necessary time and support to help them achieve success.

The instructional program, organized in an A/B block schedule, is supported by an aggressive professional development plan. Each teacher and administrator concludes the school year with an improvement plan in place for the next year. Teachers use a consistent lesson design, instructional delivery model. The rigor and relevance of the instructional program is supported by a total faculty commitment to personalized and positive relationships at all levels. An impressive International Baccalaureate (IB) program, beginning with a pre-IB program (Middle Years Program) for grades 6 through 10, enrols over 40% of the juniors and seniors in at least one class. The IB program has become the source of school pride and recognition and has raised the intellectual rigor of the entire school.

Stuart High School is a model of a diverse school where people are treated with respect and dignity. In many ways, the school is a mini-United Nations. With a total commitment to leaving no student behind, the principal states, “We must concern ourselves, not with what we teach, but with what our students know and are able to do as a result of our teaching.” In other words, being a community of learners – students and adults – is the priority.

J.E.B. Stuart High School in Falls Church, Fairfax County, Virginia, a suburb of Washington, D.C., is a model school in a changing society. It has a comprehensive grade 9-12 program with about 1,500 students who are 39% Hispanic, 14% white, 24% Asian, 12% Middle Eastern, and 11% black. Fifty-four percent of the students qualify for free or reduced price lunch; 13% are students with disabilities, 25% are English language learners, and 70% of the students were born outside the United States. There is a 30% mobility rate and a 96% attendance rate. The community served by the school in
many ways is a magnet for families moving from different countries and as a result, Stuart is like a mini-United Nations with a majority of students born outside of the United States.

School leaders say that using the term “sustain” is not appropriate for their school’s culture. Rather, the demographics dictate that sustained continuous improvement is essential. Each year, when a new entering 9th grade class is combined with the mobility of other students, 48% of the students are new to the culture, which requires an extraordinary commitment by the educators to continue the school’s reputation for high achievement. Key to success is a diverse faculty that includes a healthy mix of veteran dedicated teachers, a core of highly motivated and fairly recent college graduates, and another core of teachers who have less experience in education but come with many years in business and industry.

1. School Culture

Educators at Stuart spell hope “R-E-A-D.” The school is driven by a mission, vision, and core beliefs with an understanding that if these three components are in place, anything can be done with and for students. Staff believes that given time and support, all students can and will learn. There are no free handouts and students must earn their success. Department chairpersons are a very strong, experienced and influential group with a commitment to excellence that is indicative of the culture. The chairs believe that if 92% of the students are passing the state tests, 8% are still in trouble and the school must find a way to reach that 8%.

The culture reflects the motto that “There is always a way.” Administrators initiated a process supporting professional responsibility and decision making that led to recognition of Stuart by the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) as a Breakthrough High School in 2001. The principal, the 2006 NASSP National High School Principal of the Year, provided a structure and established high expectations for student success. He put in place a cycle of assessment, analysis, allocation of resources, and high achievement. He challenged staff to create a student-centered environment that asks, “What are the students’ needs, and how can we best address those needs?”

An initial priority was to improve attendance. The school initiated a model computerized check-in system that is being replicated by other schools. This system led to an improved attendance rate that has risen to 96%, a decline in suspensions, and a 95% decrease in the number of dropouts. Next, a reading assessment program was initiated to assess reading levels of new students. Reading teachers were hired, as was a reading coach who was given responsibility to work with teachers on development of reading strategies for content classrooms. Through the Literacy Program, staff members identified 10-20 key content area reading strategies, which were published in a manual that has become the foundation for a high school literacy course used within the county. Stuart’s literacy program is also featured in a new NASSP publication, Creating a Culture of Literacy: A Guide for Middle and High School Principals.

High achievement and student-focused instruction is reflected in the school’s mission statement: “The J.E.B. Stuart High School Community — staff, parents, and students — is committed to providing our students with an education that prepares them for the global economy and life in the 21st Century. Our mission is to provide educational programs and resources for our diverse population in order to promote academic success; social, emotional, and physical growth; and the development of productive and responsible citizens. In order to achieve this mission, we will provide a safe and orderly learning environment; maintain effective teaching strategies; integrate technology as an effective learning tool, and; encourage a positive school climate that recognizes diversity and promotes cooperation.”

The school has an A/B block schedule of seven classes with 90-minute periods and one 45-minute class that meets daily. The grade 9-12 general education structure includes regular academic and IB classes. There is a program for English language learners, and services to students with disabilities are provided in both self-contained and inclusion classes and through special education resource assistance instruction. Teachers use a variety of strategies to address different learning styles of students. The lesson structure includes demonstration of learning strategies, focus questions, teaching strategies, guided practice, and closure. The consistency of lesson structure among teachers prepares students to use their time effectively across disciplines.
Stuart is a learning-focused school with teachers engaged in a professional learning community. Administrators and teachers have made strides to move from the “what” to the “how” of teaching and learning. Staff is encouraged to explore, revise, and update curriculum and lesson content regularly. Department chairpersons meet regularly with staff to review programs, student needs, curriculum structure, and use of resources. Most decisions are made at this level and are supported by administrators, which encourages decision making at the level closest to the delivery of services to students.

The staff prides itself on improving student achievement through the development of relevant curriculum in a rigorous setting. The principal cited seven key factors for the success of the school:

1. shared leadership
2. learning focus
3. instructional delivery
4. literacy training
5. staff relations
6. extended learning time
7. use of technology.

Despite barriers to learning, student achievement continues to improve. As an example, a reading assessment of 8th grade students scheduled to enter Stuart in 2002 demonstrated a need for strengthening literacy skills to help students succeed at the high school. Literacy training was initiated to address these identified needs and has resulted in improving reading skills of students.

Student leaders make up the Principal's Executive Council. With the principal being the only adult in attendance, this group meets 60 to 90 minutes once a month and serves as a vital means for the principal to measure the pulse of the school. There is a very active student government and a rich history of student excellence in music, drama, journalism, and art. Stuart also offers sports, performing and fine arts, and club activities, but students readily agree that these activities support their academic achievement and that learning comes first. All juniors and seniors are involved in service-learning activities, and the IB program has a 150-hour service requirement. There are clubs for sub-groups of students including Muslims, Vietnamese and African-Americans; separate honor societies; and a gay-straight alliance.

Stuart has a safe, orderly, and drug-free environment. Student differences are few and students indicate that there is little evidence of gang involvement in the school or bullying behavior. There is no obvious vandalism or graffiti in the school. Programs are in place to intervene with second chance options for students if drug issues surface. Although there is no formal character education program, the guiding principles of character are embedded in the daily instructional practices of the teachers. Students report that the educators serve as excellent role models in this school that is a model of civility. There is a culture of caring, and an emphasis upon personalization. Students respond to the high expectations of teachers because they know how much everyone cares.

2. Core Academic Learning

The outcomes (Core Academic Learning) are impressive: over 90% of entering 9th graders graduate in four years and over 90% of the graduates enroll in a postsecondary program. Over 40% percent of the students take at least one IB course and many average students enroll in three IB courses. On the Virginia Standards of Learning (SOL’s) assessments, 80% of the students passed all 11 exit exams. The curriculum, programming, and schedule reflect the school’s core belief that every student can learn. Seven guidance counselors work with teachers to ensure that students are placed in classes that best help them achieve.

Faculty and administrators have emphasized continuous improvement efforts to transform a very low-performing school to an average school when compared to the 25 comprehensive high schools in the county and three alternative high schools. Barriers to learning have been addressed, and staff has created an academic program that encourages student success. For the past four years, the school made Adequate
Yearly Progress (AYP) in all areas defined by the state. In fact, achievement levels are high enough that student performance would exceed AYP standards that will be in place in future years. The AYP is especially impressive for students with disabilities and English language learners. An analysis by the department chair for mathematics indicates that Stuart ranked 19th out of 23 county high schools in 1997, but today ranks 14th out of the current 25 comprehensive high schools. Using a statistical comparison based on student poverty and mobility, the analysis suggests that Stuart should be performing no better than 24th of the 25 high schools.

Statistically, the performance of Stuart’s students on the 11 Virginia Standards of Learning between 1998 and 2005 is impressive:

- Passing SOL’s – 1 in 1998, all 11 in 2005
- Reading/Literature – 64% - 94%
- Writing – 73%-92%
- Algebra I – 48%-100%
- Geometry – 63%-93%
- Algebra II – 55%-81%
- Biology – 55%-81%
- Chemistry – 46%-83%
- Earth Science – 68%-87%
- World History I – 60%84%
- World History II – 62%78%
- United States History – 50%96%

Stuart High School has received numerous recognitions the past several years. Among these are:

- In 2001, recognized as one of six Breakthrough High Schools in the country by NASSP.
- Selected as one of twelve national finalists by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation as a 50-50-90-90 high school following a study by the NASSP and the Education Alliance of Brown University. This requires serving at least 50% low-income, 50% minority students and sending at least 90% of both of these populations to higher education after high school.
- Selected as a Pilot High School by The Education Trust for a focus on the combination of course taking, curriculum, and instruction that can prepare all students for postsecondary education.
- In 2004 received the International Baccalaureate Inspiration Award.

3. Stretch Learning

Stuart has an uncompromising commitment to excellence for ALL students. As noted above, over 90% of all Stuart graduates pursue postsecondary education. “Quit” and “failure” are not options at Stuart. The evidence that Stuart is committed to Stretch Learning for all students includes the following examples.

Comparing the academic achievement on the SOL’s of the same students in grade 8 and 3 years later at Stuart, one finds the following gains:

- Reading – 59%-94%
- Writing – 65%-93%
- Civics/History – 70%-96%
- Math/Algebra I – 71%-100%
- Science/Biology – 84%-84%
The IB program was one of the first in the country to provide open access for any interested student. The results are impressive:

- Over 40% of all students enroll in at least one IB course.
- The average IB student enrolls in 3 IB courses.
- The total number of student IB exams completed has increased by 248% in 7 years.
- Over 80% of the exams resulted in students achieving a 4 or above. The average in the Fairfax County High Schools is 67%.
- At least 25 seniors each year are full IB diploma candidates.

The literacy emphasis at Stuart has resulted in over 75% of all students reading at grade level or above today. Considering the large second language population, this is significant. In 1998, 3 of every 4 students were reading below grade level.

4. Student Engagement

Student engagement is very high at Stuart. Instruction is focused around student interests, aptitudes and learning styles. This is critical because there is no majority demographic group of students, 25% are second language learners, and 70% of the students were born outside the United States. Noteworthy items include:

- Average daily attendance in 1989 was 89%. Today it is 96%.
- Beginning in grade 10, the extra-curricular programs at Stuart are flourishing. Participation has increased by over 50%. The total focus on 9th grade academic success is the reason stated by students and staff. Students are academically eligible and do not need to repeat core academic classes.
- The philosophy of the principal and staff is that “9th grade is the last chance for student success; not the first.”
- Student suspensions have declined from over 400 in 1998 to 155 in 2005.
- Student academic retention in grade 9 is 3%, and is declining each year. The national average is 14%.
- Student tardiness to class is an insignificant issue. The hallways in this high school are remarkably quiet once the tardy bell rings.
- The staff of Stuart High School believes that with time and support ALL students WILL learn. For most students, the normal 180-day year is sufficient. But, for those needing more time, classes are in session for 242 days. The modified college-like calendar features two summer sessions; all courses are semester courses, and there are many double block classes.
- The After School Academic Program (ASAP) extends the normal school day with mandatory tutoring for any student needing more time and support.
- Smaller classes, especially in grade 9, with every teacher being a teacher of reading, help engage students.
- The master schedule is built by the department chairs and the director of guidance. The focus is on student achievement, not adult convenience. Remarkably, the master schedule changes many times during the year.

4. Student Engagement

Finally, adults and students at Stuart recognize that the foundation for the success of this school is building positive relationships at all levels. Adult collaboration in a true professional learning community is a key. The delegation and trust from the administration allows the teaching staff to direct a total focus on student success. Teachers treat students as young adults and personalize instruction on a daily basis.
But, adults, not students, are always in charge. The positive relationships at all levels at Stuart represent the culture. They are ubiquitous.

5. Personal Skill Development

Stuart High School does an exemplary job of preparing students for life after high school – further education, citizenship, career, and family. However, specific character education or relationship building programs do not exist at Stuart. Yet, in focus group interview sessions, students report that personal skill development is what happens in every class at Stuart and is inherent in the extracurricular program. Examples include the following:

- Students and staff at Stuart spell hope R-E-A-D. All realize that reading is the primary personal skill they must have for life success. Literacy is the focus of this high school.
- Nearly all seniors have fulfilled a community service obligation and almost 30% of seniors have a community internship.
- Character education is how Stuart does business. Every adult accepts his/her job as a role model. Expectations for students to display traits such as honesty, integrity, respect, perseverance, and trust are built into classroom procedures.
- Because of the diversity of this high school, the social studies department is especially adept at teaching students how to lead, function as a member of a team, and respect diversity.
- The IB program requires higher order thinking skills and real-world applications. The Theory of Knowledge course, a senior IB requirement, is impressive. Students are expected to answer the question “How do we know what we know?” Students report that the questioning, reflection and thinking about thinking that they must do in this class prepares them for life after high school.
- Students and teachers at Stuart report that “our athletics are catching up with our academics at Stuart.” Winning is not the priority. Personal skill development is.
- The fact that there is no class rank at Stuart, and that every student with a 4.0 or higher GPA will be a valedictorian, prepares students for the real world. Stuart believes that class rank is a disincentive toward personal skill development.
- Finally, project-based learning, authentic assessments, cooperative learning, and other related teaching techniques clearly serve to help Stuart students learn personal skills.

6. High-quality Curriculum and Instruction

To reach all students, staff recognizes that the school must move beyond the “what” to the “how” of teaching. State standards and district curriculum guides are used for organizing instruction. Lessons and materials are shared among staff, and instruction is generally uniform in pacing and design. Staff uses a Learning-focused Model of Instruction called B.E.E.P. for Beginning, Engaging, Ending, and Practicing. The Beginning is reflected in the lesson focus, essential question, and activating strategies leading to acquisition of the lesson content. In the Engaging portion, teachers focus on acquiring of knowledge, higher-order thinking skills, cognitive strategies, graphic organizers, and peer accountability. In Ending, students summarize their learning; teachers ask for student assessment of their learning and bring closure to the lesson. Practice takes place within the lesson, in homework, and in after-school tutoring. In this delivery model, teachers change learning strategies and check for understanding every 13 to 17 minutes. Full group responses are encouraged throughout the distributed/guided practice segment of the lesson. Closure strategies have students participating by summarizing and assessing their learning. A goal is that by checking for understanding frequently, guided practice in the classroom will lead to independent practice at home. Teachers emphasize that homework is the application of already acquired knowledge.
The block schedule allows depth of instruction and extended time to address individual learning styles. Guidance and ESOL staff members use the flexibility built into the schedule to move students into higher-level courses as their English skills are strengthened, thus keeping course difficulty in line with student abilities. English core and concept science courses are offered at the same time, allowing movement of students into more appropriate courses in mid-quarter. Resources are clustered at 9th grade to build a foundation of early success. Across four years, staff employs a modified calendar, reading across the curriculum, pre/post annual reading assessments, semester algebra, and reading computer labs to support students. Teachers also organized new courses including structured English, concept biology, structured social studies, and wireless computer labs. The commitment to rigorous and relevant instruction is evident throughout.

Students graduate with one of four diplomas: standard diploma (22 credits), advanced diploma (24 credits), modified diploma (20 credits), or the IB Diploma. The IB Program has requirements set by the governing organization; the program at Stuart is monitored through exams submitted and a formal on-site review every five years. The issuance of an IB Diploma is based on a student passing six IB level courses with a mark of 3 or higher; completion of an extended essay and a course in Theory of Knowledge; and extracurricular activities that emphasize community service, physical activity, and creative skills. Proactive recruitment, open enrollment, and a variety of course offerings characterize the IB Program. Also, an IB middle-years program in grades 6-10 is a major part of the success of IB at the high school. The philosophy of IB gives a consistent focus to instruction in grades 9 and 10.

Curriculum and assessment are related at Stuart. Teachers include department-designed formative assessments in their courses and have frequent checks for understanding. Within departments, teachers work towards common assessment tools. The administration endeavors to have every teacher a member of one or more teams as part of the concept of professional learning communities. Teams manage the learning process in their areas of responsibility. Teachers also seek interdisciplinary approaches as ways to enhance learning and to have higher levels of applications of learning.

The Literacy Program was initiated to address low reading skills of 9th grade students. The high school administers a reading assessment in 8th grade that is used to identify those who need interventions through a summer academy program, program modification in 9th grade, computer-assisted instruction, or after-school tutoring. Staff shares reading strategies and best practices across departments. A reading coach works with teachers to build instructional techniques that are effective with content area comprehension and learning of information. Additional reading teachers were hired to reduce class size and target students most in need of assistance. The school gathers anecdotal evidence and other assessment information on incoming students from the feeder middle schools as part of the Literacy Program. Teachers espouse the philosophy that there is a need for continuous improvement, saying “We are either green and growing or ripe and rotting. There is no static equilibrium state.” Others comment that, “We all walk the talk of continuous growth and improvement through curriculum and program revision. That is the only way we know to make a difference for each student, one by one.”

Instructional and administrative use of technology is evident throughout the school. Students swipe their identification card through a computer system as they enter the school. A picture appears on the screen, and attendance is taken automatically. Adult monitors welcome each student, taking the opportunity to identify and talk with students who have disciplinary obligations. Nearly all classrooms have interactive televisions, electronic white boards, a telephone, a teacher’s computer, and a printer. Many classrooms have additional computers and there are several up-to-date computer labs for student use. Special keyboarding and software applications are available for English language learners. The use of technology is critical to these students and is viewed as contributing to their academic achievement. Several departments have individualized technology available, such as two portable keypad labs used by social studies that interact with classroom televisions. Teachers routinely use e-mail throughout the day for communication. Stuart is now a wireless campus for technology and the Fairfax County Foundation chose Stuart for its KNECTS II initiative. Already a strength of the school, use of technology continues to improve each year.
7. Use of Data at Classroom and Building Levels

There is extensive use of data for programmatic and curricular decisions. Administrators use the statement, “time is relative, outcomes are absolute” as a guiding principle for staff. Staff takes pride in how they collect, discuss, and use data to assist in decision making and identifying how well students are performing. Data is also used to highlight areas in need of improvement.

The principal opens each year with a “State of the School” PowerPoint presentation to the faculty. He highlights the successes using available data and focuses attention on the goals for that year. Data has become a useful ally to depict the outcomes of teacher work and to mobilize energy for new challenges. The principal uses data in a monthly parent newsletter, grant applications, and requests for additional support. Data demonstrates how Stuart is closing the achievement gap between student abilities and test performance and reflects how the school “does the right things, the right way, for the right reasons.”

The passing rate on Standards of Learning tests was the starting point for analysis and decision-making. The individual test results are charted for a six-year period to note the gains and to establish an instructional emphasis for the current year, using phrases such as “continue the emphasis on the writing process; continue to analyze all relevant math test data to ensure departmental improvement; modify a science sequence for at-risk and students with disabilities; and expand use of LearnStar and Social Studies lab.”

The reading levels of incoming 9th graders are a major concern, because low reading skills negatively affect achievement in high school classes. Reading scores are distributed to all staff members and staff development activities focus on literacy training for reading across the curriculum. Faculty engages in a sharing of best instructional practices for reading strategies. Over the past seven years, reading scores have improved and now 70% of students are reading on grade level upon entering the 9th grade.

The efforts of staff in promoting college aspirations has resulted in the number of students taking the SAT exam steadily increasing with a net gain of 104 points in scores over the past six years. The school now has 100% participation in the SAT Prep program among its students. The high academic standards and program rigor are reflected in school participation in the IB program. The number of exams taken by students has increased by 248% and 82% of the students earn a 4 or above on the exit exams for the individual courses. The school now averages 25 IB Diplomas each year and these graduates frequently begin college as second-year students because of the rigor of the program.

Improving student literacy is the major priority because of student demographics. As good as the school is, a recent analysis indicated that literacy efforts could be improved. As a result, student placements were modified, instructional staff was changed, reading strategies in the content area were upgraded, and an outside program auditor was brought in to answer the question: “Are we doing what we say we are?” During 2004-05, the core academic departments designed and implemented new quarterly formative common assessments. Using data analysis, the faculty attitude is we do not want to wait until our students fail. As a result, student success, or lack of success, on state-mandated tests can be predicted.

8. Transitions

Data collected by staff found that students who fail even one core class in the 9th grade were at risk to drop out of school. This supported national studies that found that students who are retained in the 9th grade are twice as likely to drop out of school. Further analysis of data revealed that 9th graders accounted for 60% of serious discipline referrals; students who failed one of three state exams in the 8th grade would fail 2½ core courses in their freshman year, requiring that they be retained in 9th grade. Furthermore, of the students who failed a state exam in 8th grade, only half had a reading problem as indicated by an 8th grade pre-test administered each year. Thus, at least half of the students were failing state exams for reasons other than ability. Based upon the analysis of data, a series of interventions had to take place early in the 9th grade to ensure that these students succeed in high school.
The faculty was asked, “What do we have to do to improve student achievement?” The response: the attendance rate and reading levels of 9th graders must improve. Teachers recognized that low reading skills hindered the success of even highly motivated students. The school began administering annual pre/post standardized reading assessments to all students in 8th grade. Results of the initial assessment were shocking. Seventy-six percent of the students excluding English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) students and students with disabilities read more than one standard deviation below grade level. One of four students tested in the 4th percentile or lower and only 24% read above the 40th percentile. Staff concluded that without strong intervention at the 9th grade level, the students and school would fail.

Eight years ago, the school initiated a comprehensive and wide-ranging series of interventions that focused on three general areas — time, setting, and instructional methods. Primarily, these interventions apply to 9th graders.

- **Time** was addressed by rejecting the “one size fits all” approach to the use of time. The school adopted the approach that all students would be given the time they needed to succeed. The school instituted a year-round, 242-day, college-like calendar that consisted of fall and spring semesters and two summer sessions. Students who mastered course content in the standard 180 days did not attend any extra days of school. Students who needed additional time to complete courses could earn two full course credits in the summer. An After School Academic Program (ASAP) provided mandatory after-school tutoring for students having difficulty in a specific course. Semester courses, particularly in math, gave at-risk students more time to succeed. Double-block courses gave students with known weaknesses in math, science, social studies, or English twice the normal time within a regular school year to master that particular subject. Student achievement increased across all subjects when students were given more time.

- **Setting** was addressed through smaller 9th grade classes and implementation of a differentiated instructional design with a more visual, hands-on approach conducted in smaller classes. Re-sequencing the curriculum to allowed more time for at-risk students to gain skills; a literacy program emphasized that all teachers are teachers of reading and that students had 1,000 days to reach grade level for the state reading and writing exams in grade 11. Increased personalization was sought through two summer academies conducted each year: one for students with potential who, with additional preparation and orientation, could succeed in high level classes, and one targeted to improve the behavior and study skills of already at-risk students.

- **Instructional methods** were addressed through an emphasis on a more structured, consistent, school-wide approach to teaching and learning through continuous, connected, and ongoing professional development; creation of a professional learning community where staff and administrators jointly identify the most pressing issues for the annual staff development activities. Department chairs were designated as the instructional leaders responsible for setting clear expectations that are applicable across classes and departments; a teacher observation form and procedures to promote consistency of instruction and quality teaching are used. A staff development plan was implemented in which each year builds on previous year(s) and leads to the next year.

In addition, computers and related technology were viewed not as replacements for good teaching, but rather as a means to enhance motivation and reinforce student learning. To that end, the school, beginning with the 9th grade and through school-wide reading programs, began to find ways to use the latest computer technology and software to capture student interest, support classroom instruction, and measure student progress in a continuous manner. A reading lab was established that all 9th graders visited on a regular basis regardless of their current reading levels. Likewise, Algebra I students were able to access a portable math lab that helped them reinforce their math skills.

The IB program is a significant influence on the achievement of all students. At least 40% of all juniors and seniors are enrolled in at least one IB class. Since the majority of the teachers have IB training, IB standards are present in non-IB classes. Courses are organized around 14 areas of instruction:
1. business and information technology
2. English
3. ESOL
4. family and consumer sciences
5. fine arts
6. foreign languages
7. health and physical education
8. health and medical sciences
9. industrial technology
10. marketing
11. math
12. social studies
13. trade and industry

For seniors, each area has advanced-level courses and most students “major” in one of the 14 areas. Advanced Placement (AP) is also a strong program for seniors.

Rigor through 12th grade is ensured because of the IB and AP testing programs during the second semester, dual-credit high school and college opportunities, cooperative work programs in some vocational areas, and internship opportunities. Considering the challenges that this school has for high levels of student learning and a senior class featuring over 90% who move on to higher education, the emphasis in 12th grade is on the rigor and relevance that students must maintain until graduation in order to be successful at the next level of their learning.

9. Leadership/Systems Approach

The principal, Dr. Mel Riddile, was selected as the NASSP 2006 Principal of the Year. Dr. Riddile, four assistant principals, a dean of students, a director of guidance, and an athletic director provide school leadership. School leaders have well-defined roles and responsibilities and seek to build trust among the faculty as part of distributed leadership. The principal provides a vision of a high-performing school that he communicates to parents and the community. He builds the esteem of the faculty and secures resources to support their work.

Much decision-making responsibility is given to individual departments. The school has strong department chairpersons who are the instructional and curriculum leaders. They make academic, curricular, and programmatic decisions for their areas and are responsible for recruiting and hiring new staff in their departments. There is also a strong program of distributed leadership. Department chairpersons meet often, collaborate a great deal, and build on the mission, vision, and core beliefs of the school. Using a professional learning community approach to leadership, administrators and department chairs have a deep belief that people will do the right thing, given support and the necessary training. Control and micro-managing are not part of the culture. There is a significant willingness to share responsibility and accountability. Leaders teach each other. They also realize that systematic change takes three to five years. Each department functions as what Dr. Riddile calls “a skunk works.” By this, he means they are part of the whole, but they are able to experiment independently.

10. Professional Learning Community

Stuart prides itself on being a professional learning community and a representative of distributed leadership based on shared decision-making. The staff is a mixture of highly experienced and relatively new teachers. Many new staff members, although new to teaching, have business and industry training. Staff is highly trained in subject areas and brings this experience to the classroom. Department
Chairpersons seek to employ those who have extensive subject matter training. New teachers often come from occupations in business, engineering, and science.

Staff members and administrators jointly identify the most pressing issues for the annual staff development activities. The staff development plan is continuous, connected, and an ongoing process. The resources and time available to support teachers are combined and consolidated into a program designed to achieve a priority annual objective in areas such as literacy, instructional consistency or classroom management. Staff development also occurs in departmental and faculty meetings and in sharing and mentoring opportunities. The desired outcome of staff development is to ensure that all teachers have a common language, focus, lesson design, and motivation that promote student success.

The teacher observation form and procedures are also designed to promote consistency of instruction and quality teaching. The observation form reviews planning, assessment, instruction, learning environment, human relations, and professionalism. The specific classroom observation reflects the common lesson structure: bell work, activating strategy, essential question, teaching strategy, guided practice, and closure. Both forms model a rubric that states examples of the desired behaviors.

The new teacher induction program at Stuart is impressive. All first-year teachers have mentors, receive frequent support and advice from their department chairperson, and monthly new teacher sessions are held. Seminars on topics such as literacy and best instructional practices are held for first-year teachers. In past years, capacity was developed from outside resources. Teachers attended conferences, consultants came to the high school, and extensive coaching and training occurred. Today, the focus is on administrators and teachers being “in-house experts” with staff training and coaching each other.

11. Other

The school sponsors flexible programs to encourage parent participation and involvement. There is a PTA with 35 to 50 regular parent attendees; a 200-member Hispanic Parent Organization that meets five times a year; and other parent groups that meet periodically. There are numerous community partnerships, advisory committees, and fundraising efforts. Stuart is supported by a 501-C-3 foundation and on a yearly basis the PTA and other partners raise over $100,000. They also donate $30,000 in scholarship funds for low-income students. Up to $50,000 is donated each year for school projects. The PTA partnership goal is to develop an endowment fund for ongoing scholarships. A dinner/auction alone raises nearly $40,000 annually.

The Academic Council, a subcommittee of the PTA, works directly with administrators on issues related to curriculum with a focus on areas such as the IB Program. In concert with the leadership philosophy at Stuart, parent and community leadership emerges as situations occur. In addition, business partnerships have increasingly become a focus. Featured are partnerships with USA Today (as a blue ribbon winner), a partnership with the Defense Information Systems Agency, a special relationship with the Department of State, student internships through the Transportation Safety Administration, and award-winning partnerships with the local Rotary club.

Lessons Learned

The following factors have been significant in the school’s success.

- **Focused and Visionary Leadership.** Leadership is shared, collaborative, empowering, and accountable. Department chairpersons are empowered to be the instructional and curriculum leaders. The principal assumes the role of resource provider, orchestra leader, cheerleader, and marketer, and models the leadership qualities he expects from others.

- **High Expectations for Rigor and Relevance.** There is an uncompromising commitment to high levels of literacy for all students. All students are welcomed in all programs, including the most rigorous programs such as the International Baccalaureate. Consistently high standards are maintained for English language learners and students with disabilities.
Time and Structure. Significant resources are devoted to implement the belief that, given time, all students can and will learn. The calendar allows the possibility of 240 days of student attendance, including days for 26% of the students enrolled in summer school. The library has extended hours before and after school. Department chairpersons provide major input in designing the master schedule and placement of students in challenging courses. ESOL classes parallel content classes to provide for flexibility in transferring students.

Variety of Academic Interventions. The After School Academic Program (ASAP) is a mandatory tutoring program for students in need. In addition, Stuart employs a reading/literacy teacher for students two or more years behind in reading who do not qualify for other support programs. Academic interventions include a computer lab with Plato software, additional resources placed in the 9th grade year and numerous double-block language arts and math classes. There is a Saturday school with an academic focus, several pre-grade-9 summer academies, mandatory after-school instruction for low-performing students, and an ESOL program.

Emphasis Upon the 9th Grade Year. Administrators and faculty recognize that success in 9th grade is a key factor for total high school success. As a result, numerous 9th grade initiatives are in place including a middle school bridge program; a summer pre-IB academy; double-block freshman English classes; a strong emphasis on using achievement data for placement; an emphasis on extra counseling; and a strong ESOL program.

Learning-focused Model of Instructional Delivery. Every teacher uses a consistent lesson design method that makes learning more focused and predictable for students while providing class-to-class consistency. The learning-focused model is data-driven with alignment to state standards and benchmarks. Students are aware of the objectives that are being taught.

A Continuous Improvement Professional Development Plan. A five-year connected professional development plan with activities based on a needs assessment is in place. Each certified staff member ends the school year with a professional improvement plan for the following year.

Relationships and Personalization. Cooperative, collegial, and sharing relationships exist among faculty members. Staff members are committed to personalizing instruction and knowing their students. They respect students and expect students to respect them as well as other students.

Commitment to English for Speakers of Other Languages. Because 70% of the students were born outside of the United States and many are recent immigrants, the ESOL program is critical to the school's success. There is significant integration and interface of these teachers and programs within all departments in the school.

Use of Data to Influence Curriculum and Instruction. This school is a model of how data can be used for school improvement initiatives. For example, faculty analysis determined that two-thirds of SAT vocabulary words come from science and social studies, and vocabulary work is now required in these two academic areas.

Principal's List of 3 Greatest Strengths

When asked to name the three greatest strengths of the school, Principal Mel Riddile provided the following list.

1. High Expectations for All Students. With a student population consisting of large numbers of low SES students, a high mobility rate, and 70% non-English speakers, Stuart consistently outperforms other suburban schools with very different populations. The staff is dedicated to the success of every student. Excuses for students not learning are not part of the culture.

2. Distributed Leadership and Collaborative and Shared Decision Making. Each staff member is a part of one or more teams. Each team works collaboratively to meet the needs of the students they
serve. Department chairs make key decisions on issues relating to the instructional program. Emergent leadership is related to expertise, not experience.

3. **Personalized School Environment.** Students and staff have a unique working relationship. Many staff members function as surrogate parents to students. National Geographic spent the better part of two years examining this diverse school community. Their staff found universal acceptance and appreciation for individuals and cultures.

Dr. Riddile also mentions two other areas that are critical:

*Integrated Model of Instructional Delivery.* Stuart has moved beyond the "what" of teaching to the "how." Each teacher has been trained to deliver lessons using that model. Observation and evaluation instruments are directly tied into the model. Teacher feedback has consistently indicated that they find the model among the most practical and useful initiatives in which they have ever been involved.

*Continuous, Ongoing, Connected Staff Development.* Stuart is in the seventh year of an ongoing staff development program designed to provide teachers with a wide variety of tools needed to help enhance student achievement. The staff development initiative provides teachers with the skills and strategies needed to implement the Integrated Model of Instructional Delivery fully.