

SOUTH CAROLINA SCHOOL TO WATCH



Castle Heights Middle School



Designated: 2011; Re-designated: 2014 & 2017

Castle Heights Middle School • Rock Hill School District III
• York County • South Carolina • Principal John Kirell
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2016 School Statistics

(Source: RHSD 3 PowerSchool)

Community: Rural

Enrollment: 792

Grade Levels: 6-8

School Schedule: 60-minute core classes, 45-minute elective/exploratory classes, and 40-minute RTI

Student Demographics

7%	Hispanic
54%	White
2%	Asian
31%	African American
6%	American Indian (Native American)
62%	Free/Reduced Lunch
5%	English Learners

School Characteristics and Replicable Practices

Academic Excellence

- Professional Learning Communities incorporating the Depth of Knowledge wheel and intense examination of the verbs to dominate the PLC discussion are a focus at Castle Heights.
- An action step for improving grade level content mastery is to define the Essential Learning Skills for each content area and create assessments to target them based on the philosophy of Mike Mattos of identifying standard by skill by student, the data is used to drive future instruction and determine re-teaching.
- An emphasis is placed on heightening rigor and differentiation during core instruction by way of collaboration and cross teaming during core content instructional periods as well as RTI time.
- Time for RTI (remediation and enrichment) is carved out of the school day schedule to provide support for students not meeting expectations in mastery of essential learning standards or to enrich and extend students beyond standard mastery.
- A level literacy intervention (LLI) reading program and reading interventionist are part of an RTI strategy to build stronger readers at the middle level.

- Teachers have created core content essential learning checklists and are documenting mastery of each skill for every student. The checklists are shared with parents to provide insight about a student's achievement. The information is also used for re-teaching purposes and intervention for individual students.

Developmental Responsiveness

- Castle Heights is increasing the number of authentic learning opportunities either by taking students on rich, profound off-campus learning experiences or bringing opportunities to the school.
- Castle Heights is sponsoring monthly club or special interest time to expand the interests and talents of our students within the school day to reach 100% of the student population.
- Spirit days are sprinkled throughout the year to promote positive messages pertinent to the adolescent mind and school spirit. Examples of the spirit days are superhero day, black out day, favorite college day, and favorite sports team day.
- Castle Heights is expanding collaboration with feeder schools at the elementary and high school levels seeking opportunities for vertical alignment through conversations from fifth through ninth grades.
- Castle Heights is implementing Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports beginning with an updated Code of Conduct. The goal is to focus on the positives throughout the building where more time is spent in celebration overall achievements in academics, athletics, and behavior.

Social Equity

- Students are recognized and celebrated in many ways at Castle Heights including attendance, positive behavior, academics, the arts, and athletics throughout the school year. Students with excellent behavior and attendance participate in a special event quarterly as are students with high academic achievement.
- Castle Heights has one-to-one technology. Using the technology to the fullest, most effective extent is vital to the progress and success of student learning.
- Castle Heights works diligently to provide heterogeneous instruction for students with special needs as much as possible while supporting their needs. RTI is being looked at more carefully for all of the Knights at the Castle. Student progress and mastery is consistently reviewed to determine the best intervention route for each individual student.
- A teacher-developed Code of Conduct provides a clearly defined discipline policy for all students.
- A standardized dress code promotes equity among students.
- Representatives from all three grades serve on a newly implemented student advisory board. The board platform supplies a voice for students and positively impacts school improvement.

Organizational Support

- Currently the school is in support of the initiative on a reading intervention at all middle schools. A staff position has been added to each middle school to address the state's mission on literacy needs.

- Structures for compiling and analyzing a variety of data sources are in place. Discipline, attendance, MAP, state testing, and common assessments are some of the sources utilized to guide the next steps and goals for Castle Heights.
- School leadership is delegated amongst members of the staff, including assistant principals, an instructional coach, department chairs, team leaders, and others who assist in evaluating content, programs, and schools goals. School teams such as the literacy team, safety team, and technology team have leadership roles and program evaluation responsibilities. All members of the leadership teams work collaboratively to plan, analyze, and reflect on the progress of the school.
- Students are also given the opportunity to participate in leadership roles through an updated student advisory board.
- The PTO and SIC support the school by meeting consistently to provide input from a family and the community. The PTO also financially sponsors events, trip scholarships, and resources for our students and teachers to maximize participation and effectiveness of learning experiences.
- Teachers and staff within the school participate in district Professional Learning Communities (PLC.) In Professional Learning Communities, teachers from our school collaborate and plan with common subjects in grades 5-9. Much of the planning within grade level transpires during content department and team meetings occurring multiple times per week.
- Castle Heights has continued to expand its professional network each year by encouraging staff members to take graduate courses at universities, as well as distance learning online. Teachers hold advanced certificates and degrees such as Master's degrees, National Board Certification, and doctoral studies and research. Intern teachers from Winthrop University and other universities continue to serve and learn at our school. The Teacher Cadet program with the high school has been more firmly established. Castle Heights is working with the high school Teacher Cadet instructor to implement a PROTEAM program next year.
- Castle Heights maintains key practices from Making Middle Grades Work of the Southern Region Education Board (SREB) organization. The staff gains and shares knowledge through participation in the annual SREB conference, the South Carolina Association of Middle Level Education conference as well as other district, county, and state level conferences throughout the year.