

SOUTH CAROLINA SCHOOL TO WATCH



Palmetto Middle School



Designated in 2008;

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 School Web Site: <http://gcms.eagleschools.net>

2014 School Statistics

Community: Rural
 Enrollment: 809
 Grade Levels: 6-8
 School Schedule: Traditional

Student Demographics

8% Hispanic
 83% White
 1% Asian
 6% African American
 1% American Indian (Native American)

61% Free/Reduced Lunch
 48% English Learners
 8% Mobility Rate

South Carolina State Report Card Summary

Year	Absolute Rating	Growth Summary
2013	Good	Average
2012	Good	Good
2011	Good	Good

School Characteristics and Replicable Practices

The individual needs, background and developmental level of each student serves as the framework for all of Palmetto Middle School's activities. Sixty-one percent of our students qualify for free or reduced meals, and many others come to school with pressing family and personal issues that impede their ability to focus on school work. Therefore, the major commitment of the staff is still *academic excellence*. Continuing with our fundamental philosophy that *Failure Is Not an Option*, we have added new academic initiatives and refined those initiatives proven effective over the past six years:

Academic Excellence

- *SBG* (Standards Based Grading) is the driving force behind not only what we do, but why we do! Our teachers are solidly behind the concept of holding all students accountable for their learning based on South Carolina State Standards as well as Common Core State Standards.
- *ESPN* (**E**xtra **S**upport **P**rovided **N**ow) is not a sports channel. It is, however, an opportunity for students having difficulty to be assigned to *ESPN* for on-on-one or small group instruction during the school day.
- *LTL* (*Lunch Time Learning*) is another academic intervention. This program requires students to attend a work session during lunch time to complete assignments and/or practice academic skills.
- *SSR* (*Silent Sustained Reading*): After lunch/recess, each grade has twenty minutes of *SSR* for reading self-selected materials; this is an addition to the emphasis placed on reading before school. To enhance our reading opportunities for reluctant readers, we initiated an audio-book session in several classes in each grade level. This allows the non-reader and slow reader to follow along in the book while listening to the book.
- *ESL Intervention Teams* work together to assemble practical classroom-friendly interventions for our limited English language proficient students. Since the inception of our ESL program, student Lexile scores have increased, and many ESL students are now at a Level 5 Language Proficiency.

Refined Existing Initiative

- *L.I.F.T.* (*Letting Individuals Fine-Tune*): Identified students are LIFTed weekly based on MAP scores, RIT bands, PASS scores, and/or teacher recommendations. Groups are comprised of students on the border line of advancing from one PASS category to the next, as well as students that have not mastered current classroom skills.
- *Second Chance* meets on Thursdays. Students use this opportunity to retake summative assessments to show proficiency of material. The program is administered by our principal.
- *F.I.D.O. Day*: Students who are doing well in academics are rewarded on F.I.D.O. Day. Students with *F.I.D.O.* (*F's, Incompletes, D's, zerO effort*) return to their teachers to receive extra assistance.
- *Academic Enrichment, Content Mastery, ELA and Math Enrichment* are programs to provide assistance to students that have not met the standards. *LAUNCH, ProTeam, Algebra, Honors English*, as well as advanced classes at each grade level, are designed to meet the needs of our academically gifted students.
- *PLC*: Our *Professional Learning Communities* have common planning time to develop lesson plans and assessments. These communities also work closely to examine student data.
- Many students show success in areas outside of the traditional academic setting. These students are provided with the opportunity to participate in programs that enhance these skills, including *Advanced Art, Band, Chorus, Drama, Gateway to Technology* and *Strings*.
- *LDC*: *Literacy Design Collaborative Modules* are being implemented in academic and related arts classes. Developing a “module” involves Common Core/State of South Carolina Educational Standards for each specific curriculum to reinforce literacy in all subjects. Modules involve informational text or historical fiction to enhance science or social studies standards. The modules focus on real-world problems like government control, animal extinction, and alternative heating options. This learning style is student centered, requiring innovated thinking and collaboration in the classroom.
- Science teachers are in partnership with Clemson University in the *Inquiry in Motion Professional Development Institute*. Teachers spent four weeks the past two summers undergoing training in implementing the 4Ex2 Instructional Model. This model incorporates inquiry instruction, formative assessment and reflective process. Teachers are creating exemplar lessons which follow this format of Engage, Explore, Explain and Extend. Benefits include an increase of: student motivation, student communication, formative assessments and a transfer of skills to other disciplines.

- *MAZE* is our after school tutoring program for at risk. The program helps reinforce areas of weakness in math, writing, and English and prepares for standardized testing in a small group atmosphere.
- *Detective Summer Fun Camp*, a three week intervention program, is designed to help at risk students in grades four – eight in a safe and friendly environment. Students become instant crime investigators and use collaborative tools to solve crimes and overcome obstacles.
- *Mustang Mastery*, a pilot program for seventh grade students, is a thirty minute class used for remediation or enrichment. This program ensures that students have individualized time to master standards and offers enrichment opportunities as well.
- A new LAUNCH learning center has been added to maximize student inquiry, cooperative learning, as well as project based learning. Our gifted students now have the latest technology to effectively access information and space for completion of advanced activities and projects.

Developmental Responsiveness

The staff at PMS strives to meet the unique and diverse needs of our students. Therefore, the following programs are offered in an attempt to nurture the developmental growth of our students.

- *Guidance Counselors*: Our three guidance counselors serve as adult mentors to one grade level for the three years students are in the middle school. During this time, the counselors build a rapport by meeting with students in individual and/or group settings.
- *Student Council* and *Beta Club* allow students to participate in leadership roles, make decisions, and invest in the general welfare of the school. These students are extremely influential when it comes to having a positive effect on the school.
- *Recycling Rangers*: Students in self-contained classes form our *Recycle Rangers*, a group dedicated to keeping our school clean and environmentally friendly as they participate in team building and lifelong learning skills.
- *P.A.L.S. (Partners Assuring Learning Success)* is our advisor/advisee program. Students meet each month to discuss a variety of topics that are significant and applicable to the needs of our diverse group of students.
- *Breakfast in the classroom* provides the nutritional needs of our students and helps accelerate the learning process at the start of the school day.
- *Science Olympiad*, the *Olweus anti-bullying program*, and the *Jason Flatt Law* work collectively to support a curriculum that is both socially significant and relevant to the personal interests and needs of young adolescents.
- *Career Action Plan for Students (CAPS)* folders identify student interests and talents in the sixth grade, are updated at the end of each year, and are used as a consulting tool when enrolling in high school courses.
- *Thrive*:

Our staff develops alliances with families to enhance and support the well-being of the children, which is a key component to academic achievement.

- At the beginning of the school year, parents are informed of expectations at registration and open house. To ease transition, students and parents are invited to attend an orientation where they learn about expectations for the new school year. Parents and students tour the school to familiarize themselves with classroom locations, lockers, media center, cafeteria, auditorium, and gymnasium.
- The following modes are utilized to keep parents informed of student activities: Happy Grams, telephone calls, e-mail updates, Remind 101 text updates, progress reports, and SWOOSH (School

Wide Optimal Organizational Student Handbook). *Edulink*, an automated phone call or text message, is also used to notify parent when the need arises.

- *We're All in This Together* – School Improvement Committee / Parent Teacher Student Organization and faculty members are working to create opportunities for parents and the community to become an integral part of our school life. These groups are encouraged to volunteer, join the PTSO, and become active members in SIC.
- Our community business partner, Duke Energy's Lee Steam Station, provides resources and an outdoor science classroom for our students.
- In order to develop a sense of community service, students who wish to be recognized as one of our *Palmetto's Finest* are required to conduct ten hours of community service each quarter. Students must maintain a proficiency of eight percent or higher, receive no demerits, and have less than two absences per nine weeks.
- *Meals On Wheels* is supported by our school by student volunteers. Our students deliver meals each week, and this service gives our students an overall feeling 'of doing for others.'
- Through *Beta Club's First Friday Food Drive*, parents donate food and household items for families within our school and community. Patrons also donate snacks which are served to students in the after school program (MAZE). These monthly food drives generate tremendous responses from parents.
- Our school counselors saw many girls lacking self-esteem, yet longed to be successful in all areas of their life. *A Girl's Night Out* was planned for the following reasons: to give our girls a place just to be themselves, to hear from their peers and mentors, and to spend time with other girls just being girls. During the Girl's Night Out, a service project was completed to let them know that it is always important to give to others. Various speakers talked with the girls about self-esteem and what it means to be a girl on a mission. Our girls really enjoyed this night, and we plan to make it an annual event.

Social Equity

All students, regardless of learning levels, deserve equal access to highly qualified teachers. Our teachers and support staff are certified and trained to work with adolescents.

- Teachers meet weekly for team, grade, and subject area planning. Professional collaboration during these meetings yields more rigorous learning opportunities for our students. Common assessments are created and modified by the PLC for the special education, ESL, and the gifted populations.
- Our children with disabilities comprise sixteen percent of our total population. Mainstreaming, Content Mastery, and SRA reading/math programs help our special education students achieve success in the "real world." We strive to see the success of these students in the regular classroom by using mainstreaming techniques.
- To meet students' particular academic needs, specific instruction is provided in our advanced classes of ELA, math, as well as our self-contained special education classes. In all other academic and exploratory classes, our students are grouped heterogeneously. Teams of teachers tailor the curriculum and lessons to fit the needs of the students.
- Teachers have received training in developing lesson plans using Multiple Intelligences Theory practices: differentiated learning, brain-based learning strategies and active learning. These enriched lessons guarantee that each day multiple tactile styles of learning are incorporated for all students. A variety of assessment techniques is used to determine mastery of standards including: rubrics, projects, tests, note-booking, journaling, portfolios, digital storytelling, reviews and mastery units in addition to formative and summative assessments.
- Our classroom curriculum is aligned with South Carolina State Standards and Common Core State Standards. Our curriculum supports lessons being delivered with innovative techniques and strategies that place special emphasis on brain-based learning - the utilization of music, movement,

and color. We rotate our academic schedule on a monthly basis so teachers can better meet the needs of their students throughout the school year.

- The *PTSO* participates in schoolwide functions such as school dances, fundraisers, and special events. Parents support our *BETA* club with fall and spring cleanups on campus as well as First Friday Food Drives.
- Our *Thoroughbred Award*, sponsored by our *SIC*, gives each teacher the opportunity to select a student each quarter, recognizing them for sustained achievement, improvement in academics, or for special acts of character. The Thoroughbred Award winners and their families are invited to breakfast in celebration of their accomplishments.
- Firm, fair and consistent discipline is fundamental to making our school campus safe and secure. Established policies which contribute to a positive school climate are written in the handbook and are communicated clearly to the students and parents. Teachers reinforce these rules and classroom procedures throughout the school year.
- District and school ESL teachers provide community programs and resources for students and parents.
- Our full time School Resource Officer is very visible in the school/community and works hard to become a positive force for all students.

Organizational Support

***One School, One Vision, Our Success.* Palmetto Middle's motto seems to say it all. Our belief in this statement radiates throughout everything we do for our students. Our school family agrees that success is becoming the best one can be; this we seek in all we do.**

Palmetto Middle School is a dynamic learning community. To continue at this level, we consistently use self-evaluations for educational improvement and adapt to empower student learning, which requires time and commitment. Dedicated to remaining one of the finest middle schools in the state, we seek and give consideration to positive ideas from parents, teachers, administrators, and community members. Groups like the *SIC* and the *PTSO*, along with the results from the state report card surveys, offer insight and perspective for school improvement. The administration and teacher leaders devote their energies and expertise to facilitating improvement. Our stakeholders are steadfast in leading the district and state in learning innovations and achievement.

A school that holds itself accountable is one that states its objectives, assesses its success, and reflects on its achievements. This year, our theme has concentrated on "Change" in education. The imminent arrival of Common Core State Standards has necessitated additional changes in the organizational structure of our school. Some of the changes to note are: *Advanced classes* at all grade level in ELA and math, a pilot *Standards Based Grading Policy*, *back-to-back exploratory* classes, and an *after-school program* for struggling students (MAZE).

At the beginning of the year, administrators meet with teachers to discuss the previous year's test results. Teachers reflect upon strengths and weaknesses, and then set goals for the upcoming year. Data is also used with *MAP* testing and student grades on classroom assessments. One of the most important functions of accountability is the administration's formal and informal observations of classroom instruction. Feedback is immediate, and professional discussions follow.

Palmetto Middle School benefits from the support we receive from the board of trustees, the superintendent, and his staff. School level administrators work hand in hand with the staff to assess current programs and to develop new programs that will benefit our students and help us reach our overall goal.

We recognize the importance of being a part of a larger educational partnership. As a means of becoming more successful, teachers and administrators network with other professionals through membership organizations such as *South Carolina Middle School Association*, *South Carolina International Reading Association*, *National Council for Teachers of Math*, *South Carolina Council for Teachers of Math*, *The Upstate Consortium through Furman University*, and *Making Middle Grades Work*. These school leaders return to share ideas so everyone can benefit and grow. Presenting at conferences (*SCMSA*, *SCCTM*, *SREB*, *NASSP*, *NAESP* and *NMSA*) is yet another opportunity for teachers and administrators to develop professionally. Sharing their work with colleagues is a challenging and enriching experience.

Our school is a consortium for undergraduates who desire a career in education. We provide these future educators opportunities to observe, tutor and/or student teach at Palmetto Middle in order to prepare themselves to become highly qualified teachers. All teachers new to Palmetto Middle, whether first year or experienced, are assigned a mentor. Mentors help our new teachers face multiple challenges through reflective activities and professional conversations.

Respected as professionals, teachers are given the freedom to experiment with the latest ideas, methodologies, and strategies; they are encouraged to leave comfort zones and take calculated risks to improve and enrich student learning. It is through this educational philosophy that we have been able to implement many of the programs documented in the report and establish our motto:

One School, One Vision, Our Success.