

Lake Forest North Elementary School

319 East Main Street
Felton, Delaware 19943
Principal: Brenda G. Wynder

Lake Forest North Elementary is a Title I rural school with a fluctuating population of about 500 students. It has been rated “superior” for eight consecutive years by the Department of Education and has made great gains in its statewide assessment scores by having over 90% of its students meeting or exceeding the statewide testing reading benchmarks in 2009.

- ◆ Elementary (Pre-K–4)
- ◆ 71% White
- ◆ 23% Black
- ◆ 4% Hispanic
- ◆ 1% Asian
- ◆ 53% Free or Reduced-Price Lunch
- ◆ 1% English Language Learners
- ◆ 13% Special Education

The school’s mission is “to provide educational experiences that encourage and challenge all children to develop to their fullest potential academically, emotionally, physically, socially, and culturally, using quality staff, community involvement, and technological resources.” Lake Forest North works closely with programs such as the Early Childhood Development Center and Focus on Learning for the Academically Gifted (FLAG) to offer a wide variety of services and resources to students. Teachers focus on building effective home and community links and involvement. For example, families are invited to the annual Literacy Night where parents have the opportunity to see student projects such as book reports or the children dressing up as storybook characters. Literacy Night gives students the opportunity to show what they have read, how they comprehend, and what it means to them.

Planning and Teaching Reading Comprehension

Over the last few years, Lake Forest North has become a learning-focused school, with an emphasis on advancing student learning and instructional practices. Before introducing reading comprehension strategies, Lake Forest North administrators meet with grade-level teams to review reading scores and make sure the curriculum and lesson plans are aligned with the state standards. This allows for cohesive progress at each grade level. For example, when teaching students about the structure of narrative and informational text, one goal is using graphic organizers that are consistent for the text structure being examined. Pulling from various online resources and a teacher resource center, teachers at Lake Forest North identify an appropriate graphic organizer and use it as they plan their unit in their grade-level team. Each student keeps a copy of the graphic organizer at their desk, and teachers project it on the interactive white board so students have a larger visual to follow. In addition, these tools and thinking aids are posted on classroom walls as a visual reminder for students.

Students' Comprehension and Engagement in Reading

Teachers use modeling when first introducing a reading strategy. Through strategies like read-alouds, students become engaged learners, develop background knowledge, and increase their comprehension skills. Students are able to visualize the specific reading strategy by completing graphic organizers. Students are also assigned roles in small-group or partner work in order to extend their thinking on the comprehension strategy. For partner activities, in order to reinforce their comprehension, “there is always an element where students will think first, then they will write, then they will share,” explains the literacy coach.

Instructional support teachers work with students on comprehension strategies. This small-group instruction is especially helpful in targeting students who are struggling with comprehension and need additional instruction.

Instructional Support for Teachers

Principal Brenda Wynder is very involved as an instructional leader. Wynder and her assistant principal, Laura Lands, are visible daily throughout the school, in the hallways and interacting with students in the classrooms. In addition, Wynder and the reading coach, Anita Hart, are active during weekly articulation meetings, which focus on teachers collaborating and developing effective instructional practices. The grade-level planning meeting, which has been extended from 50 to 90 minutes as a result of Race to the Top funding, is an opportunity to deal only with instruction. In addition to this time, teachers have their contracted planning hours to work with as well. During articulation meetings, teachers and administrators review state assessment scores, Gates-MacGinitie reading and DIBELS fluency scores, and unit benchmark data. This review of data, along with teacher anecdotes and discussions, allows for heterogeneous classrooms to be built where differentiated instruction can take place. In addition, Wynder and the reading coach chart the data to identify areas of weakness and provide targeted professional development for teachers. During a learning unit on drawing conclusions, for example, several teachers were unaware that their teaching skills were weak in this area. After working with administrators on developing and implementing a professional development plan specific to this topic, teachers noticed a significant change in how students were grasping the strategy.

As part of Lake Forest North’s Reading First grant, the reading coach received extensive professional development opportunities around reading components, which were then extended to the teachers. In addition, teachers now receive professional development directly from the reading coach and principal through demonstrations, modeling, and walk-throughs. It is also common for teachers to model instructional strategies for teachers.

The reading coach models a read-aloud in every K–3 classroom so teachers can observe. Then, each teacher leads a lesson while the reading coach observes. The reading coach and teacher then meet to discuss strengths, weaknesses, what was observed, and what was learned. In addition, teachers are encouraged to observe their peers to better understand student learning in previous grades and reading comprehension goals in future grades.

When the administrative team conducts classroom walk-throughs during the middle and end of the school year, they work to ensure each teacher experiences success. One strategy the principal implements to boost morale and the school climate is to identify a particular approach or technique that each teacher does well. Wynder continually reminds her staff that they are a team, working together to improve student learning.