

## Suncoast School for Innovative Studies...

### *Finally Living Up to Its Name!*

SSIS... finally living up to its name? Suncoast School for Innovative Studies (SSIS) the brain child of SCF Professor Karen Young, opened its doors in the fall of 1998 as a self-managed charter school in Sarasota, Florida operating under the philosophical design of Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences. It was no secret that SSIS struggled through several years of academic and disciplinary challenges, instructional and administrative staff turnover and inadequate financial supervision which led to the dreaded, Florida deficit elimination plan in the fall of 2008.

At the close of 2008, Sarasota County School District reluctantly granted SSIS a three year renewal. The SSIS governing board, under the direction of President Larry Robbins, conducted a national search for a new Executive Director. In February of 2009, Stephen Evans was brought aboard to overhaul infrastructure and put new systems in place to "bring the vision to fruition." The SSIS governing board and Sarasota County Superintendent, Lori white clearly stated concerns, expectations and timelines. In just three short years, working collaboratively with Larry Robbins, Dr. Young and a truly outstanding, highly qualified group of teachers and support staff, the vision is closer now than it has ever been... Suncoast School for Innovative Studies is now living up to its name!

Stephen Evans is not new to the charter school movement. Evans successful track record in "charter school revitalization" encompasses 4 school reforms: serving 20 years in traditional and non-traditional education roles K-12 as a Teacher, Counselor, Principal, Executive Director and Superintendent. His expertise is further enhanced by credentials as a University Professor, Professional Speaker and Licensed Counselor.

Other keys to school reform is his ability to consistently build strong ties with families, local and state government, community agencies and local business consortiums. Evans has received a host of national accolades, honors and awards for his work in Title 1 schools, which includes being an unprecedented 3-time invitee to the Roundtable at the prestigious Oxford University in Oxford England both as a guest/participant and presenter. He has been a keynote speaker and presenter at state teacher conventions, guest speaker at community organizations as well as state universities around the country.

#### Academic Achievements during the last three years

- "A" Ratings in two of the last three years (first since its inception)
- Eighth grade 100% FCAT writing proficient for the last two years as measured by the state assessment FCAT categories (first since its inception)
- In 2010 100% of the third grade students successfully passed the FCAT, which is required for promotion (first since its inception)

- In 2010 100% of the fourth grade students successfully passed the FCAT writing (first since its inception)
- In 2010 82% of level 1 & 2 showed academic growth as measured by the FCAT

In three years the school has also addressed their building level concerns. SSIS has ....

- Increased its population by 100 students, thus alleviating financial concerns.
- Hired a school accountant, developed its first accounting manual in compliance with state reporting guidelines and scored near perfect on its end of year school financial audit as reported by Mark Escoffery, Independent auditor.
- The school divided its campus, moving the elementary school to a revitalized building, totaling over \$700,000 in renovations. This new campus provided SSIS amenities never offered before, gym, library, special needs classes, counselors office, art room, additional classroom space, multipurpose room, larger café, new computer lab and a much needed outside play area. A new playground was also added in October of 2011, its first in its school history.
- Parent center, meeting Title 1 Federal requirements
- The middle school also added a new computer lab, special needs classrooms, science lab and additional classroom spaces.
- The middle school program not having a gymnasium, now has a community partner, the local YMCA, just across the street. This partnership now provides access to a gym, weight room, swimming pool, racket ball courts. Oh, and scuba diving as one of their after school club.

How about technology? Three years ago SSIS used antiquated computers, for the staff and students. There were no computer labs and very little computer assisted learning opportunities for their students. In just three years, SSIS has increased their technology by leaps and bounds, arguably, some of the best technology in Sarasota County. In just three years, SSIS has made available to its staff and students.....

- Two computer labs, 25 units each, Microsoft Windows 7, large screen Dell desk top units with adjustable headsets and volume control. This can be found on both campuses. These labs also host 50 inch flat screen monitors by which Instructional Focus objectives are posted.
- The media center at the elementary campus is also equipped with the same Dells with three additional monitors, which allows for multiple assignments and learning activities.
- The staff members all have Dell, top of the line, laptop computers. A strong emphasis is placed on differentiated instruction. Being mobile and creative is now effortless. Also, depending on staff's instructional service, Dell laptops may be touch screen to make their efforts even easier.
- In 2011 the school also brought on IPADs and Kindle E Readers for its middle school. The staff is currently on a fast paced effort learning just how big this technology will be in the years to come.
- Success Maker academic enrichment computer program has also been recently added to support identified students. Working closely with Pearson Education, a national assessment

organization, SSIS is looking at new and innovative ways to differentiate instruction by using the web based program through push in efforts supported by the IPADs.

With all this new technology, increased academic performance, and building upgrades one may wonder just how the students and parents are dealing with these changes.

- In 2010 the school implemented a school uniform dress code
- Implemented a no bullying policy, which is enforced by the school's Dean of Students.
- Counseling support groups
- Zero Tolerance Policy on illegal contraband
- Community family support systems and partnerships such as Hole Foods partnered through All Face Food Bank of Sarasota County and Publics
- Lots of handshakes, slaps on back, hugs, and positive student validation

Without question, Suncoast School for Innovative Studies is living up to their name. Oh, we forgot to mention that SSIS is the only Title 1 School Charter School in Sarasota County, proudly embracing nearly 80% socio-economically disadvantaged families. SSIS is also the most diverse Charter School in Sarasota County proudly acknowledging their multiculturalism, and diverse population.

Who would have ever figured!