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Best Practices

1) One best practice that we use at Goza Middle School is differentiated instruction. Goza teachers have high expectations for all students and are meeting the needs of today's learners in the classroom using different learning styles, different abilities to absorb information, and/or different ways of expressing what they have learned. Differentiated instruction is not a program or a package of worksheets. Goza students are given multiple options for taking the information. Goza teachers facilitate and teach, ensuring that every student learns as well as he or she possibly can.

John F. Kennedy said "All of us do not have equal talent, but ALL of us should have an equal opportunity to develop our talent." Qualified teachers assess student learning, recognize individual strengths and weaknesses, and determine the best possible action for developing the talents of all students.

Among the instructional strategies that teachers use to help students find a good learning "fit" include:

- Curriculum compacting: Students who have already mastered a skill are given alternative assignments to strengthen or develop that skill.
- Tiered assessments: Varied levels of assignments based on skill level.
- Learning centers: Students work independently of the teacher in small groups, pairs, or individually to reinforce and extend classroom learning.
- Graphic organizers: Varied note-taking methods to help organize thinking, learning, and speaking.
- Flexible grouping: Grouping students according to need or compatibility for a lesson, not permanently.

- Independent contracts and projects: Allow students to use creativity to develop a way of learning a skill; it is carried out after an in-depth student-teacher conference.
- Complex instruction: Group work activities organized around a central concept or big idea. The tasks are open-ended, requiring students to work interdependently to solve problems.
- Webquests: A classroom-based lesson in which most or all of the information that students explore and evaluate comes from the World Wide Web, build around resources that are reselected by the teacher. Students spend their time USING information, not LOOKING for it.
- Questioning techniques: Asking more high-level questions, such as “How?” “Why?” “What if?”

At Goza Middle School, teachers and staff believe and adhere to the truth that our students should be held to the highest level of learning. We encounter our students where they are, encourage them to stretch as far as they can, and are there to guide and direct them.

2) Another best practice that has been implemented at Goza is setting high expectations and standards for the academic and social development of all students and adults. To help ensure that all students can succeed and achieve at high levels, as school leaders, we need to make all policy and decisions based on the belief that every child, regardless of their socioeconomic status, racial or language background, physical or learning disability, can and will achieve at high levels. To achieve this goal, we have to be able to communicate a clear vision that reflects the beliefs, values, and commitment of the school. We have to ensure that all students have adequate and appropriate opportunities to meet high standards and to develop a school climate that is flexible, collaborative, and supportive to improve achievement of all students.

One way we hold high expectations for all students at Goza is all classes are Pre-AP courses that provide research-based probability instruction strategies for all students regardless of their current performance levels. A culture of high expectations for ALL students eliminated the choice between challenging or less challenging courses, most students will likely choose the one that will be the easiest route. The students set themselves up for a less rigorous expectation of abilities, talent, creativity, accomplishment, and success. Instructors in grades, six, seven, and eight are trained in Pre-AP strategies. Each class is rigorously taught using Marzano’s High-Yield Strategies, strategies from Making Middle School Matter, the Common Core Curriculum, and the SREB.

One of Marzano’s high-yield strategies is to “Provide students with opportunities to interact with each other in groups in ways that enhance their learning.” When students are in a heterogeneous grouping, learning is enhanced. Everyone brings a viewpoint, an idea, or a solution to the table. Students are more likely to advance when they are challenged by a plethora of ideas. That diversity of ideas come from the diversity of students, not just those who are like-minded. All students must be prepared for either college or career. We see Goza as a preparatory school for secondary education. It is a special school, facilitated by special instructors who have gone out of their way to prepare themselves through wide and varied professional development in the areas of literacy, math, history, science, and the arts to meet the needs of the young adolescent students of whom they are in charge. We need all students to believe they are, or can

be, successful, to be able to access to the college or career of their choice. Goza Middle School students deserve the very best education that prepares them for what the real world has to offer.