



## POCOMOKE MIDDLE SCHOOL

Pocomoke City, Maryland

Caroline Bloxom, *Principal*

### THE STORY

*Pride* is the word the Pocomoke Middle School staff members choose to describe its school. And for good reason—visitors to the school are immediately surrounded by examples of pride and care and high expectations. Students are actively engaged in instruction, the classroom walls are covered with student work, and the halls are lined with pictures of students demonstrating success. There are corners in the library media center with bean bag chairs waiting for eager readers, the main office has rocking chairs for students who need a quiet place to chill out, and comfortable chairs and tables are available in the front hallway for teacher mentors to help students with knotty math problems. There is even a salt water aquarium and a small waterfall flowing into a fish pond. Students walk quietly through the halls so they do not disturb classes in the partially open space facility.

At this welcoming school, students are celebrated every day. For example, Pocomoke recognizes two students of the day as well as readers, writers, mathematicians, and scientists of the month. Each day on the morning announcements a student shares “words of wisdom.”

Pocomoke Middle School is a model for school systems to emulate. Worcester County Public Schools (WCPS) has provided resources to support the academic program and the sense of pride. The school, with its commitment to shared leadership and partnerships with the community, has leveraged those resources into a comprehensive program that provides for the complete development of each student. Noting the importance of continued support and diligence, Jon Andes, the superintendent of WCPS, told a local newspaper, “Success is never an end-all. Public education is a continuous pursuit—an endless process, with new challenges and new opportunities around every corner.”

### IN THEIR OWN WORDS

#### What Can Other Schools Learn From Pocomoke?

“Other schools can learn that pride is an essential precondition to learning; pride in the sense of a child’s feeling of self-worth; pride from an understanding that staff members genuinely care about them; and pride in having a place to learn that is safe, orderly and attractive,” noted Pocomoke’s principal.

#### Proudest Achievement

“Teamwork!” the principal replied when asked what makes her most proud at Pocomoke. Collaboration among all stakeholders is crucial to the success of a large number of committees, including those related to the school improvement action plans in the areas of academics, character education, technology, and parent and community involvement.

### PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

- **Collaborative leadership.** The school is a comprehensive professional learning community with shared decision making; instructional coaches provide regular and specific feedback to teachers and work directly with students; and the school has an active parent and community involvement committee.
- **Personalization.** Individual plans for success; a mentoring program for African American boys; a college prep program open to all students; peer mediation, and annual family and community events support students.
- **Curriculum/instruction/assessment.** A Web-based assessment platform for collecting, compiling, and analyzing student data is in place. The staff includes instructional coaches, a curriculum planner, and an arts immersion specialist. Quarterly benchmarks lead to regrouping of students, and all 8th grade students will take algebra in the 2008–09 school year.

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