

U.S. Department of Education
2017 National Blue Ribbon Schools Program

[X] Public or [] Non-public

For Public Schools only: (Check all that apply) [] Title I [X] Charter [] Magnet [X] Choice

Name of Principal Mr. Victoriano Rodriguez

(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., etc.) (As it should appear in the official records)

Official School Name International Studies Charter Middle School

(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 2480 S.W. 8th Street

(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City Miami State FL Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 33135-3016

County _____

Telephone (305) 643-2955 Fax _____

Web site/URL http://www.ischs.net/ E-mail vicrodriguez@dadeschools.net

I have reviewed the information in this application, including the eligibility requirements on page 2 (Part I-Eligibility Certification), and certify, to the best of my knowledge, that it is accurate.

Date _____

(Principal's Signature)

Name of Superintendent*Mr. Alberto Carvalho E-mail acarvalho@dadeschools.net
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Miami-Dade School District Tel. (305) 995-1000

I have reviewed the information in this application, including the eligibility requirements on page 2 (Part I-Eligibility Certification), and certify, to the best of my knowledge, that it is accurate.

Date _____

(Superintendent's Signature)

Name of School Board
President/Chairperson Ms. Ileana Melian
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

I have reviewed the information in this application, including the eligibility requirements on page 2 (Part I-Eligibility Certification), and certify, to the best of my knowledge, that it is accurate.

Date _____

(School Board President's/Chairperson's Signature)

The original signed cover sheet only should be converted to a PDF file and uploaded via the online portal.

**Non-public Schools: If the information requested is not applicable, write N/A in the space.*

Part I – Eligibility Certification

The signatures on the first page of this application (cover page) certify that each of the statements below, concerning the school’s eligibility and compliance with U.S. Department of Education and National Blue Ribbon Schools requirements, are true and correct.

1. The school configuration includes one or more of grades K-12. (Schools on the same campus with one principal, even a K-12 school, must apply as an entire school.)
2. All nominated public schools must meet the state’s performance targets in reading (or English language arts) and mathematics and other academic indicators (i.e., attendance rate and graduation rate), for the all students group and all subgroups, including having participation rates of at least 95 percent using the most recent accountability results available for nomination.
3. To meet final eligibility, all nominated public schools must be certified by states prior to September 2017 in order to meet all eligibility requirements. Any status appeals must be resolved at least two weeks before the awards ceremony for the school to receive the award.
4. If the school includes grades 7 or higher, the school must have foreign language as a part of its curriculum.
5. The school has been in existence for five full years, that is, from at least September 2011 and each tested grade must have been part of the school for the past three years.
6. The nominated school has not received the National Blue Ribbon Schools award in the past five years: 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, or 2016.
7. The nominated school has no history of testing irregularities, nor have charges of irregularities been brought against the school at the time of nomination. The U.S. Department of Education reserves the right to disqualify a school’s application and/or rescind a school’s award if irregularities are later discovered and proven by the state.
8. The nominated school has not been identified by the state as “persistently dangerous” within the last two years.
9. The nominated school or district is not refusing Office of Civil Rights (OCR) access to information necessary to investigate a civil rights complaint or to conduct a district-wide compliance review.
10. The OCR has not issued a violation letter of findings to the school district concluding that the nominated school or the district as a whole has violated one or more of the civil rights statutes. A violation letter of findings will not be considered outstanding if OCR has accepted a corrective action plan from the district to remedy the violation.
11. The U.S. Department of Justice does not have a pending suit alleging that the nominated school or the school district as a whole has violated one or more of the civil rights statutes or the Constitution’s equal protection clause.
12. There are no findings of violations of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act in a U.S. Department of Education monitoring report that apply to the school or school district in question; or if there are such findings, the state or district has corrected, or agreed to correct, the findings.

PART II - DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

Data should be provided for the most recent school year (2016-2017) unless otherwise stated.

DISTRICT

1. Number of schools in the district (per district designation):
- 0 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
 - 71 Middle/Junior high schools
 - 0 High schools
 - 0 K-12 schools
- 71 TOTAL

SCHOOL (To be completed by all schools)

2. Category that best describes the area where the school is located:
- Urban or large central city
 - Suburban with characteristics typical of an urban area
 - Suburban
 - Small city or town in a rural area
 - Rural
3. Number of students as of October 1, 2016 enrolled at each grade level or its equivalent in applying school:

Grade	# of Males	# of Females	Grade Total
PreK	0	0	0
K	0	0	0
1	0	0	0
2	0	0	0
3	0	0	0
4	0	0	0
5	0	0	0
6	58	45	103
7	51	55	106
8	53	54	107
9	0	0	0
10	0	0	0
11	0	0	0
12 or higher	0	0	0
Total Students	162	154	316

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school:
- 0 % American Indian or Alaska Native
 - 1 % Asian
 - 1 % Black or African American
 - 75 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 22 % White
 - 1 % Two or more races
 - 100 % Total**

(Only these seven standard categories should be used to report the racial/ethnic composition of your school. The Final Guidance on Maintaining, Collecting, and Reporting Racial and Ethnic Data to the U.S. Department of Education published in the October 19, 2007 *Federal Register* provides definitions for each of the seven categories.)

5. Student turnover, or mobility rate, during the 2015 – 2016 school year: 1%

This rate should be calculated using the grid below. The answer to (6) is the mobility rate.

Steps For Determining Mobility Rate	Answer
(1) Number of students who transferred <i>to</i> the school after October 1, 2015 until the end of the 2015-2016 school year	2
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2015 until the end of the 2015-2016 school year	1
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	3
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2015	311
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.010
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	1

6. English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 10 %
33 Total number ELL

Specify each non-English language represented in the school (separate languages by commas):
French, Italian, Portuguese, Spanish

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 73 %
Total number students who qualify: 232

8. Students receiving special education services: 1 %
2 Total number of students served

Indicate below the number of students with disabilities according to conditions designated in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Do not add additional conditions. It is possible that students may be classified in more than one condition.

- | | |
|--------------------------------|--|
| <u>0</u> Autism | <u>0</u> Orthopedic Impairment |
| <u>0</u> Deafness | <u>0</u> Other Health Impaired |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness | <u>1</u> Specific Learning Disability |
| <u>0</u> Emotional Disturbance | <u>1</u> Speech or Language Impairment |
| <u>0</u> Hearing Impairment | <u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury |
| <u>0</u> Mental Retardation | <u>0</u> Visual Impairment Including Blindness |
| <u>0</u> Multiple Disabilities | <u>0</u> Developmentally Delayed |

9. Number of years the principal has been in her/his position at this school: 8
10. Use Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs), rounded to nearest whole numeral, to indicate the number of school staff in each of the categories below:

	Number of Staff
Administrators	2
Classroom teachers including those teaching high school specialty subjects	16
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading, math, science, special education, enrichment, technology, art, music, physical education, etc.	1
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a licensed professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	0
Student support personnel e.g., guidance counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	4

11. Average student-classroom teacher ratio, that is, the number of students in the school divided by the FTE of classroom teachers, e.g., 22:1 20:1
12. Show daily student attendance rates. Only high schools need to supply yearly graduation rates.

Required Information	2015-2016	2014-2015	2013-2014	2012-2013	2011-2012
Daily student attendance	96%	96%	96%	96%	95%
High school graduation rate	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

13. **For high schools only, that is, schools ending in grade 12 or higher.**
Show percentages to indicate the post-secondary status of students who graduated in Spring 2016.

Post-Secondary Status	
Graduating class size	0
Enrolled in a 4-year college or university	0%
Enrolled in a community college	0%
Enrolled in career/technical training program	0%
Found employment	0%
Joined the military or other public service	0%
Other	0%

14. Indicate whether your school has previously received a National Blue Ribbon Schools award.
Yes No X

If yes, select the year in which your school received the award.

15. In a couple of sentences, provide the school's mission or vision statement.

Mission: International Studies Charter Middle School teaches students to think and behave as citizens of the world, make decisions with integrity, and graduate with a sense of purpose.

16. **For public schools only**, if the school is a magnet, charter, or choice school, explain how students are chosen to attend.

Students must demonstrate language proficiency in any language they select among English, French, Spanish, or Italian. If the number of eligible applicants exceeds the number of spaces available, a lottery is implemented.

PART III – SUMMARY

International Studies Charter Middle School (ISCMS) opened its doors in 2009, in a historic, urban neighborhood of Miami known as Little Havana. Unlike most new schools that open offering one grade level and then adding another each year, ISCMS opened by offering grades 6 - 8 simultaneously. This aggressive endeavor resulted in the hiring of an entire school's worth of faculty to service the 123 students in attendance. Within 5 school years, the school approximately tripled in size and reached its current capacity of 312. This rapid growth has not impeded the school's success. ISCMS has received a school grade of A, as determined by the Florida Department of Education (FDOE), for the past 6 years.

ISCMS has a small, family feel; unique to the school is its international culture and curriculum. Walking through the corridors, one may hear students engaged in conversations in a multitude of languages including French, Spanish, Italian, Portuguese, and English. With over 40 countries represented among the student body, ISCMS offers a truly international experience. French humanities, literature, and mathematics teachers are selected by the French Ministry of Education and undergo a rigorous interview and examination process in order to teach at ISCMS. European curricula, methodology, and materials are used to immerse the student in his/her program language and culture. The entire school community benefits from experiencing the best of both American and European teaching methodologies and practices. The blending of these systems has contributed to ISCMS's success, accolades, and charm.

ISCMS has been a Title I school for 5 years; currently, our economically disadvantaged (ED) population is at 73 percent. Most of our students are representative of our urban community with the exception of students enrolled in our French IS program. Many of our French students are foreign nationals whose parents are either Expatrié, business owners, or have been relocated to Miami; they tend to be more affluent than our general population. Fifty-eight percent of our students are, or were, English language learners (ELL) and the majority are bi-lingual. Despite our large population of ELL and economically disadvantaged students, we consistently perform well on state mandated exams. For example, since the inception of the Civics End-of-Course (EOC) Assessment an upwards of 94 percent of our students demonstrate achievement. Additionally, students enrolled in high school level courses, such as Biology, perform extremely well with 100 percent earning a passing score for the past 2 school years. Furthermore, we address the needs of our lowest quartile as evidenced by 77 percent learning gains on the ELA exam and 73 percent in math.

The school's leadership team, comprised of the school administration, activities director, athletics director, testing chair, and student services representatives, meets on a weekly basis to address the unique, ever-changing needs of our student body. During these meetings we discuss data, needs, events, interventions, and student concerns. The leadership team makes a concerted effort to ensure all students are academically successful, and physically and emotionally healthy. As a direct result of these meetings it was brought to the administration's attention that students were feeling an overwhelming sense of testing anxiety. To address this, assemblies were arranged to teach students coping strategies and to reaffirm that their mental well-being is of paramount importance. Other issues that are common among students, such as bullying, peer pressure, and responsible internet use, are addressed during assemblies.

To recognize and celebrate our students' achievements, one of our more notable traditions is to take our students on a reward trip. This trip incentivizes students to do their best on examinations. Another trip coordinated for our students is a "Close-Up" tour in Washington, DC. As many of our students are beginning to learn about the fundamentals of our government through their civics class, we arrange a trip to our nation's capital to bring their lessons to life at the roots of our democracy. The annual "Taste of Diversity" is an event aimed at celebrating the various cultures represented at our school. Students, parents, and teachers each contribute to this potluck event featuring student performances, exhibitions, and dishes from around the world. This free event helps create a strong sense of community, as all stakeholders participate in this beloved occasion. Cultural barriers are overcome as we sample each other's national foods in a family setting. These bonds are necessary when we participate in "Field Day" where the school encourages good natured, friendly competitions amongst students. Traditional events are also offered at the school. Student accolades are recognized at various times throughout the year, such as Honor Roll Breakfasts and year end ceremonies, culminating in an 8th grade graduation. Other traditional events include school dances such as our Halloween Dance and 8th grade prom.

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Core Curriculum:

Students enrolled at ISCMS select a program of study that drives their core curriculum. There are two program options: International Education (IE) or French International Studies (IS). The IE program requires demonstrated language proficiency in at least one language but is program for beginners. Students select to learn French, Italian, or Spanish, which act as their primary electives throughout their middle school years.

Regardless of program enrollment, students take honors-level courses in language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies as well as physical education. To ensure we are preparing students for high school success, all core curricula are aligned to Florida Standards. ISCMS's curriculum exceeds state standards for students; in fact, students have the potential to earn up to 7 high school credits upon middle school completion. A typical middle school student only takes 6 classes; however, at ISCMS all students receive 7 classes each year.

The language arts curriculum is rigorous, and the textbook used (i.e., Springboard) is aligned to state standards. Students develop and refine their reading and writing skills via critical analysis of the texts they read; the Springboard textbook itself is geared towards laying a foundation for high school and post-secondary readiness (including Advanced Placement exam success and college-level work). Aside from text, students are taught to analyze and employ alternate media communication forms. All language arts courses guide students to be strong readers and writers, and critical consumers of media. Free, in-house tutoring is available throughout the school year.

The mathematics curriculum offers students a strong foundation in concepts and applications while providing them with opportunities to be critical problem solvers. Math teachers incorporate vast implementation of technology and manipulatives to illustrate mathematic principles. Due to the advanced nature of curriculum at ISCMS, most students complete Algebra I, and in many cases Geometry, prior to their middle school completion. Similar to language arts, the school offers free, in-house tutoring to those students who need additional support.

If students need remediation in language arts or mathematics, an intensive class is offered to them during the course of the school year for additional instruction.

The science curriculum provides students with the opportunity to be inquisitive while applying the use of scientific method for discovery and learning. Students are taught to think critically when solving real life problems. Virtual and physical labs are used to provide students with hands-on experiences. All students take Physical Science in their 8th grade year (a high school credit), and some are enrolled in Biology (also a high school course). Each year, there is a school wide Science Fair competition to encourage STEM exploration. In fact, our school is working towards earning a STEM designation. One step in this direction is combing the math and science departments this past school year into one STEM department, thereby encouraging collaboration and more project-based authentic assessments for our students. In the end, the goal is for our students to think analytically about the problems in our community, and perhaps become the innovators and agents of change.

The social studies curriculum is taught using a social, analytical, and critical approach. As our school's mission and vision state, students are taught to think and act as global citizens with an appreciation and respect for other cultures, customs, and heritages. Students are given a variety of opportunities to reenact historical events including mock trials and elections. Students take the three courses required by the FDOE: Honors World History, American History, and Civics. In the French IS program, students are enrolled in a French Humanities course in addition to the state-mandated classes. Interestingly, our multicultural students contribute their world-views to the classroom, making for a richer, more complete understanding of global affairs (even in the context of an American social studies curriculum).

2. Other Curriculum Areas:

Each year students take seven courses. In addition to the core content areas, program requirements, and FDOE requirements, ISCMS provides students with courses specifically designed to prepare them to achieve future goals. The culture of ISCMS is directly related to high school and college success. Students are taught to begin thinking about and preparing for their futures. Embedded within their civics courses is a college and career component that requires students to complete an online portfolio and design a career plan for themselves. As part of this, our students are administered the PSAT 8 during their 8th grade year as a precursor to their high school PSAT testing.

This post-secondary awareness is supported by many of the school's initiatives. First, students are encouraged to bring their own technology devices to school, marrying classroom lessons with the tools they will be using in the real-world. Students are taught to use devices responsibly, and be conscientious digital citizens. We support this effort by bringing in speakers from the State Attorney's Office to discuss cyber-bullying, sexting, and their ramifications with our students. The school also encourages the use of programs such as Turn It In.com (a plagiarism review site), which students will encounter in high school and college. Our hope is that students will become familiar with various devices and programs they will likely use in the future, providing a competitive edge as they continue their education.

Other technology-based programs have been purchased by the school to support students' individualized progress and growth. These include: iReady, IXL, Pearson Access, and USA Test Prep. Each of these programs provides tailored instruction and progress monitoring aligned to state standards, and student's personal needs. Because these programs are personalized, they serve two purposes: first, remediation when necessary, and secondly, as enrichment for students who are already achieving above grade level.

Unique to ISCMS is the number of foreign language courses for which a student can earn credit. Foreign language courses go beyond teaching students to read, write, and speak in another language. Students also learn to respect other cultures, traditions, and values. As previously stated, there are two programs that drive core curriculum: International Education (IE) and French International Studies (IS). Those enrolled in the IE program are registered each year in two foreign language courses (in addition to core requirements): a conversation class and reading and grammar course in their selected language. The French IS program requires applicants to be literate and proficient in French; these students are registered for humanities, mathématiques, and language and literature taught by French instructors.

All students have at least a half-year of physical education each year. This ensures that students get regular exercise during the day and consistent instruction on the fundamentals of healthy living. We believe in students being well-rounded; we want them to be at their best academically, as well as physically. In many cases, our students learn how to help manage their stress in their physical education class!

At the conclusion of each school year, the faculty meets and conducts a needs assessment, based on student performance data and teacher observations. Depending on the results, an elective course is implemented the following year to address the outcome of this needs assessment. For example, at the end of the 2014-2015 school year, we noted a dip in overall writing scores. To remedy this, a writing course was included in each student's schedule for the following year.

Given that student elective options are restricted by the foreign language program requirements, we offer creative alternatives to fulfill student's artistic interests. For example, we do not offer an art class, but we do have an Art Club, as well as a Music, Drama, and Dance Clubs. Administrators also encourage teachers to offer artistic authentic assessments when applicable. In past years, students have created models of famous historical sites, such as the Colosseum, the Duomo, the Eiffel Tower and more, as part of their social studies course. When students are learning about how countries around the world celebrate Carnival, some created Venetian masks in their classes. We also have hosted door and bulletin board decorating contests matching historical or literary themes in the school.

3. Instructional Methods, Interventions, and Assessments:

Many of the students at ISCMS are/were English language learners (ELL) at some point in their schooling. Therefore, multi-tiered interventions and instructional strategies have been implemented to expedite the process through which students become proficient in English. As mandated by our district/state, ELL students must take a Developmental Language course and a language arts class through ESOL (English for speakers of other languages). Language arts teachers are ESOL endorsed. All other teachers are META (Multicultural Education Training and Advocacy) certified or in the process of becoming certified. Additionally, as a school, ELL students are provided free tutoring in their core content areas, small group pull-out tutoring, and Saturday school in their home language. There are school clubs in French, Italian, and Spanish to help students assimilate and succeed. It should be noted that due to the nature of our school, there are often several students in any given class that speak the same native language; thus, it is easy to get additional support from peers in class, and it eases the assimilation process for these students.

Opportunities for acceleration and remediation are created for students even before the commencement of the school year. The master schedule is designed to address the needs of all students. Based on student performance data from examinations such as the Florida Standards Assessments (FSA) and/or EOC Assessments, the administration conducts a needs assessment, and at that point may decide to open additional sections of an intensive course, or more advanced courses for students. In the classroom, teachers use both formative and summative assessment data to individualize and scaffold instruction in an effort to ensure student success. Formative assessments include exit slips, bell ringers, think-pair-share strategies, and CRISS strategies are regularly employed in classrooms. Small group instruction is used to review previously learned material, reduce learning gaps, and enrich learning. Students also benefit from content acceleration. Students whose strength is math are given the opportunity to enroll in courses beyond that of their grade level; examples include several 7th grade students who are currently enrolled in Algebra I, and 8th graders enrolled in Geometry and Biology.

Over the past two years, the school has made significant investments in various computer-based programs, all aimed at supporting our students' academic needs. In fact, these programs, which include IXL, USA Test Prep, and iReady, all offer tailored, individualized instruction through their lessons. Teachers note that these programs are reinforcing classroom instruction, providing remediation when necessary, and acceleration for advanced students. Additionally, each classroom is equipped with a Promethean board and either computers, laptops, or portable lab carts. I-Pads/tablets connected to the boards facilitate teachers' ability to project information while continuing to interact directly with students. It is common to find students actively engaged on their devices in class, participating in competitive quizzes and review through applications such as Kahootz. The school also uses TurnItIn.com to prepare students for college-like submission of written assignments. Technology integration and implementation has contributed greatly to our students' success on state-mandated assessments.

As a high performing school, various measures are taken to ensure our students' continued success. Student data chats are required across all disciplines. Administration models data chats with Instructional Leaders who then model them with their department. It is vital that all stakeholders, including students themselves, know how to monitor, calculate, and achieve their desired assessment goals. The faculty has a firm understanding of how school grades are calculated, and how each faculty member's course is an integral part of the whole school's success. When, upon reviewing data, it is discovered that students need intense remediation, the school takes immediate action. For instance, last school year we discovered that some Algebra I students were struggling with linear equations. To address this, we organized several free, Saturday tutoring sessions (with lunch included!), focused on this area of deficiency. To maximize attendance, letters and phone calls went out to all parents, and the information was publicized throughout the school. Another measure that helps maintain our high achievement is incentivizing teachers and students. Teachers receive bonuses for being a high-performing school (thus encouraging targeted instruction in the classroom), and students receive rewards such as field trips, gift cards, and entries into raffles (keeping them motivated to do their best).

PART V – SCHOOL SUPPORTS

1. School Climate/Culture:

ISCMS's academic success would not be possible without creating an inviting, positive, and supportive environment for its students. We firmly believe happy teachers make for happy classrooms; thus, the school invests considerable time in nurturing its teachers. For example, all full-time teachers receive an additional monthly planning day (outside of school). This gives teachers time to catch up on grading, create lesson plans, or even explore new teaching methods. The administration also takes the time to give teachers one-on-one meetings (formal and informal) to celebrate that which they do well. Furthermore, teachers receive several kinds of formalized feedback: evaluative from administrators, supportive from instructional leaders, and nurturing from their peers. Additionally, the school regularly arranges team building and social events for the staff.

Creating this positive, supportive culture among teachers makes them more effective and motivated instructors, consequently making students excited about their education. Students are offered a variety of activities in their classes, with the goal being to differentiate instruction and meet the needs of multiple intelligences. Students are also engaged in semi-annual assemblies where they are provided with strategies on how to manage anxiety, treat one another with respect, and be a responsible digital user. Included in the agenda and minutes of each grade level meeting is to identify any students needing emotional, academic, or behavioral support. These meeting minutes are shared with appropriate school personnel, so they provide specific and appropriate interventions to the students in need.

If and when a student needs additional emotional support, students know there is a dedicated guidance counselor and student services representative who they can meet with to voice their concerns and receive assistance and encouragement. In fact, it is these same staff members who ensure that students with Individualized Education Plans and/or 504 accommodations are followed with fidelity by the faculty.

The Eagle Eye Team, comprised of the school administration, test chair, activities director, athletic director, and head of student services, meets weekly to discuss ways to improve the overall student experience at ISCMS. At times, feedback from student leaders regarding activities is also solicited. As a result of this collaborative effort, events are planned to provide opportunities for students to interact and engage socially. For example, ISCMS hosts an opening of school breakfast where incoming 6th graders are paired with a current 8th grade mentor to ease the stressful transition from elementary school to middle school.

2. Engaging Families and Community:

Family and community involvement are paramount to ISCMS's success. Parents and community members are pivotal in our school's Educational Excellence School Advisory Council (EESAC). At quarterly meetings, the EESAC reviews data, discusses strategies for improving the school, and votes on matters that affect the teachers and students. Having a community member (who is not a parent of a student at the school) present gives other members a fresh perspective on school's issues, and has resulted in innovative solutions. Additionally, it makes it easier to spread the news of our success when it is shared with parent and community leaders. ISCMS also has a chapter of the PTSA, in which parents meet with other stakeholders to discuss achievement results, events, and initiatives aimed at engaging and supporting the school. It is at these meetings, for example, that it became evident that parents were not receiving information for some school events in a timely manner (e.g., our annual Field Day). The faculty immediately remedied this by the next school day, and the administration created new guidelines for information distribution. This response ensures that we keep our parents and students engaged and informed at all times, thereby increasing their rates of participation (and levels of motivation).

ISCMS has a diligent process, however, for sharing academic progress. On a school-wide scale, we publish our assessment results on the school website, and also send updates to stakeholders via email. Parents and students have real time access to grades via the Dadeschools Mobile application that they may download to their electronic devices. They are also able to set parameters for notifications of grades and

attendance. Progress reports are sent home at the halfway mark of each quarter and report cards are distributed at the end of the quarter. When students make notable achievements that are not reflected on a progress report or report card, it is included in our quarterly newsletters, which feature individual student accomplishments. We also highlight our students on school bulletin boards. Students who earn a spot on our Honor Roll are recognized at the commencement of each quarter with an Honor Roll Breakfast celebration (which is often sponsored by our PTSA and other community members). This is in addition to a traditional end of year awards ceremony, where students are recognized in front of their peers for exemplary performance in each of their subject areas of study.

3. Professional Development:

Professional Development plans for each school year are developed as a result of a collaborative effort between the school's faculty, administration, and instructional leaders. ISCMS kicks off each school year with a weeklong offering of professional development sessions targeting a variety of areas. This intensive week of professional growth is determined by completing a needs assessment that includes analysis of student performance data as well as input from Instructional Leaders. For example, 3 years ago we noticed a drop in students' writing scores; therefore, we researched professional development workshops targeting improved writing and commenced the year with "The 6+ Traits of Writing." The selection of this workshop had a direct impact on student achievement, as well school improvement as evidenced by increased student writing scores the following academic years. Similarly, teachers are also surveyed throughout the year regarding what workshops would most benefit their students. One year, several teachers identified a lack of training regarding multiple intelligences and cooperative learning. As a result, the school hosted a Kagan workshop addressing each of these areas. Aside from predetermined professional development, teachers are also encouraged to research and pursue offerings that they are personally interested in to support classroom instruction, or student development. This flexibility empowers teachers, and often leads to the sharing of new best practices at faculty meetings. ISCMS teachers have reported high levels of career satisfaction, which we believe makes them stronger instructors for our students.

To further nurture the faculty, the ISCMS looks to grow and develop the whole person. Therefore, workshops are often offered to assist teachers with personal goals, such as stress relief methods, time management, and financial planning. In fact, this past school year began with training on the "7 Habits of Highly Effective People." Aside from this, the administration has made it an annual professional development goal to continue empowering teachers by offering mini-workshops on grant writing, purchasing homes, and planning for retirement. Teachers have been grateful that school leaders have invested in them not only as teachers, but as valued individuals. We firmly believe that this investment will pay a large return, as successful, happy teachers will do their best for their students.

4. School Leadership:

The leadership philosophy at ISCMS is to provide students with a challenging and stimulating education preparing them for success in an accelerated curriculum. Decisions are made with the students' wellbeing, interests, and success in mind. Leadership treats each child as their own, self-reflecting and asking "Would I want this person to be my child's teacher?" or "Is this schedule the most attractive for admittance to a challenging high-school?" As a result, curriculum decisions and resource allocations are aligned directly to student achievement. The leadership team consists of the principal, assistant principal, counselor, activities and athletics directors, test chairperson, and instructional leaders. This team meets bi-weekly with each member contributing to the agenda. In addition, during meetings data is analyzed (e.g., mid-year, interims); collaborative decisions and action plans are developed based on the information presented. The team makes recommendations regarding how resources are allocated to maximize student achievement.

Instructional leaders are provided coverage quarterly to observe colleagues and provide peer support. These leaders also check student folders to verify that assignments issued and feedback provided are relevant and constructive. Administration visits classrooms daily to ensure students are being challenged and stimulated. Student behaviors are observed to ensure they have the skills needed for future success. Observable behaviors consist of ways of thinking intelligently, ways of working, and communicating

effectively. In addition, a list of shared best practices was developed by school leaders. Administration confirms the implementation of these shared best practices during their walkthroughs as well as by using ELEOT, developed by AdvancED, designed to observe student behavior. Best practices consist of technology integration, maximizing student engagement, checking for understanding, and higher order questioning.

School leaders empower students to take initiative as traditions, clubs, and projects are student driven. Traditions include a homecoming picnic, a field day event, “ISCMS Factor,” and “Taste of Diversity.” Clubs include robotics, dance, video gaming, chess, and yearbook.

Representatives from each homeroom have monthly Student Government meetings where students voice their opinion, design new events, and vote on school related matters. For example, students expressed their concerns over the uniform and cell phone policy so passionately during one of these meetings, administration agreed to present their case to the ISCMS’ board. As a result, white sneakers have been added as an option to the existing uniform policy and students are now permitted to use their cell phones during lunch time to check email, study, and read.

Part VI – STRATEGIES FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

It cannot be said enough: a firm understanding of assessment data enables all members of the faculty to grasp their role in the school, and the integral part they play in our students' futures. Dedicated data chats between administrators, instructional leaders, teachers, parents, and students illustrate to stakeholders a student's areas of strength and deficiency. Areas of strength can lead to a child taking accelerated courses, thereby keeping him motivated and interested in school. Areas of deficiency, conversely, demonstrate to stakeholders the skills that a child needs to improve, which may result in additional /adjusted classroom lessons, tutoring, and support at home. Regarding assessments, we believe students should take to full-length practice tests, in conditions that mimic the actual test day. This gives students the opportunity to gauge how well they might perform on the exam, builds testing stamina, and exposes students to test day conditions. By the time exam day arrives, the student is well prepared for the test content and test environment.

Concerning academic success, interventions are early and frequent. Each year, faculty members partner with nominated students as part of a mentorship program. The pair discusses academic progress and obstacles, as well as the emotional well-being of the child. We have found that students who feel they have an adult advocate in the school feel secure, and progress more in their classes. Aside from this program, teachers also notify students and parents when students are encountering classroom difficulties via parent-teacher conferences, progress reports, and failure notices. In addition, teachers may refer students to the school counselor for a conference to discuss study habits or to host a parent conference to address any difficulties the child encounters. In fact, the counselor is a vital person who helps support students. The counselor facilitates meetings with teachers, parents, and students, and also gives students strategies for coping with stress, test anxiety, and any other emotional issues. The counselor may open (at the behest of teachers or parents) a Child Study Team to evaluate a child's emotional and/or learning needs, and prepare a plan to give the child appropriate accommodations to help him be successful in school. Furthermore, each counselor has access to community resources, which can help students who need assistance beyond that which our school can personally provide. Among these resources are homeless shelters, before/after school community sessions, and other programs aimed at supporting our students and their families.