



Essential Elements Schools to Watch Model School – Visitor’s Guide

School Name: Farnsworth



Initial Designation in 2012
Re-designated in 2015

District: Guilderland Central School District

Principal: Michael S. Laster

School Address: 6072 State Farm Rd.
Guilderland, NY 12084

Phone: (518) 456-6010

Email: lasterm@guilderlandschools.net

Website: <http://www.guilderlandschools.org/farnsworth/>

School Statistics

(Source: New York State Department of Education)

Community: Large suburban

Enrollment: 1,451

Grade Levels: 6th – 8th

School Schedule: Flexible Block

Student Demographics:

52%	Male
48%	Female
2.6%	Hispanic/Latino
79.9%	White
.08%	American Indian/Alaskan Native
3.5%	African American
11.4%	Asian/Pacific Islander
2.5%	Multiple races
16.4%	Students with Disabilities
15.4%	Economically Disadvantaged
1.8%	English Language Learners

2010 Performance Index: ELA 189 Math 194

2011 Performance Index: ELA 169 Math 180

2012 Performance Index: ELA 172 Math 184

2013 Performance Index: ELA 144 Math 140

2014 Performance Index: ELA 139 Math 152

School Characteristics and Replicable Practices

Academic Excellence

- Lessons are expanded and enriched in all disciplines through project based learning, interdisciplinary study and by integrating technology.
- Teams meet daily to plan instruction, talk about student needs and explore ways to differentiate instruction to meet the needs of all students. Behavior plans are developed to assist in supporting students with social-emotional/behavior needs. Teams look at ways to use time to foster caring and acceptance.
- Skills learned in one subject area are reinforced and built upon in others as teachers share the development of literacy, numeracy and citizenship across the board.
- Professional Learning Communities are an integral part of our school environment helping to educate and improve our knowledge as professionals.
- At the sixth grade level, a section of reading is taught every other day using a co-teaching model with both core teachers and a reading teacher.
- The 7th and 8th grades utilize a four core teacher model. There are many opportunities for integration in the academic areas, as well as support for reading and writing across the curriculum.

- An activity period is provided at the end of the school day three days a week to provide support for all students in every area.
- Special education services are located in each House as students are integrated into teams. Additional time is set aside periodically for team teachers and special education staff associated with the team to collaborate regarding student progress, co-teaching and program development.
- The district employs a Data Coordinator who analyzes student achievement and helps to inform our instruction as well as an Instructional Technology Specialist who works with teachers to further integrate technology in learning.

Developmental Responsiveness

- Students are placed on a team in one of three Houses. Each House contains grades 6, 7 and 8, with a House Principal, Counselor, and one of three Social Workers who follow the students through their three years of middle school.
- The district provided extensive learning and training opportunities for staff helping to foster their understanding of the continuum of developmental characteristics of middle level students, as well as teaching strategies that maximize the potential of every student.
- Our master schedule is designed to maximize student-teacher contact time, as well as provide opportunities for professional collaboration.
- The flexible block schedule provides teacher teams the opportunity to regroup students as well as rearrange the core schedule to best meet the needs of the students.
- Within the classroom setting as well as beyond, lessons are purposefully designed to be engaging and relevant and group work is highly encouraged as students learn to work cooperatively with one another. In cooperative learning atmospheres students have created “flash mobs” seen on You Tube, entered contents sponsored by C-Span, and participated in Future Cites competition.
- Beyond the classroom students receive a taste of real life applications of their work through participation in our FMS TV studio and a myriad of clubs and after school activities. We share our daily student TV News broadcasts with our community via local television and our Farnsworth MS YouTube channel.
- School counselors and social workers play a key role in the daily lives of our students providing groups and individual counseling services as well as facilitating National Coalition Building Institute (NCBI), Mix it Up Day and Career Inventory activities throughout the year.
- Development of strong character and a commitment to community is woven into everyday life with service learning activities available for all students. We have our Butterfly House and Organic Garden programs that are open to the surrounding community. We also have a partnership with the Albany Pine Bush Commission where students help maintain the eco-system in order to sustain the rare Karner Blue Butterfly. Additionally our students regularly participate at a local soup kitchen as well as the Ronald McDonald House.
- We foster a working relationship with parents and have a variety of events that bring parents/families into the school. Parents serve on our building level shared-decision making team that is charged with the task of continuous school improvement. We also have a very active PTA, which supports a number of important activities and initiatives.

Social Equity

- FMS maintains a heterogeneous mixing of students across all teams and houses.

- The structure of the building establishes a proactive environment where each student is known by several adults throughout their middle school years.
- Teacher teams meet on a weekly basis with the house principal, school counselor, and social worker to discuss student needs. Parent conferences take place throughout the course of the school year.
- We have an Instructional Study Team that meets to make recommendations and provide supports to struggling students.
- Our student government program allows students to have a voice in the functioning of the school as they participate in our shared-decision making team (Building Cabinet) and meet with the building principal as needed throughout the school year.
- We offer a variety of programs and support services for our special needs students. The majority of these programs integrate students into mainstreamed classes in a co-teaching model.
- We host a regional BOCES Deaf and Hard of Hearing program at all grade levels. These students are mainstreamed into our academic programs.
- One Enrichment teacher coordinates with classroom teachers and a local BOCES to enhance the curriculum and to provide additional activities for students interested in enrichment opportunities, before, during and after the school day.
- We maintain five computer labs that are available to all students. We have two mobile laptop carts and one mobile Chromebook cart. Five classes are currently piloting a 1:1 Chromebook implementation and integration plan.
- Throughout the year we offer a variety of events to celebrate the accomplishments of our students, as well as the cultural diversity of our student body.

Organizational Support

- Teachers have the opportunity to participate in professional learning communities on a daily basis by having embedded collaboration and team planning time.
- Staff members are encouraged to use their expertise to develop and initiate learning opportunities for staff. Superintendent's Conference Days frequently feature our staff as presenters. Teachers also facilitate our collegial inquiry (PLC) sessions occurring once a month after school.
- To help our newest staff members transition to our building, we offer a summer orientation program. In collaboration with our Teachers Association we also offer a new teacher mentor program
- The FMS leadership team is comprised of the Building Principal, two House Principals, and Instructional Administrators 6-8 and/or K-12. There is also a District level leadership as well as a Principals leadership team. All teams meet weekly and/or once a month with a focus on academic improvement.
- FMS has two transition committees, one for the incoming 6th graders and the other for our outgoing 8th graders. Each committee is made up of administrators and teachers from all three levels, elementary, middle and high school. Multiple programs are offered to help students and parents transition both in and out of middle school.
- The Building Principal, House Principals, and Instructional Administrators all evaluate teachers and provide supportive feedback and ongoing/daily support to staff.