

California Center for Effective Schools

Connections for Success

A project of UCSB's

Gevirtz Graduate School of Education



Effective Schools Process Having Significant Results in Oxnard

The Effective Schools Process began in Oxnard only a little more than a year ago, and three to five years of strenuous work will probably be required before the full benefits for students become apparent. Nevertheless, promising changes are occurring in Oxnard. One significant change is a shift in attitude among teachers. As an assistant superintendent recently commented, "At the beginning of the year (August 2000), in our first workshop on language arts standards, I heard lots of 'Our kids can't do that.' Now, as I go out to schools, I am hearing a lot fewer 'can'ts.' That is a real culture shift."

A second change is that the perceptions among teachers participating in the first year differed significantly from those in other matched schools. Participating teachers engage in leadership team training and facilitated grade-level meetings. On a district-wide survey about the level of implementation of the Instructional Redesign process, teachers receiving this in-depth training reported that they were more knowledgeable of content standards and that they felt they had the ability to teach to the standards and to help students master them. These data were supported by a significant difference in the percentage gain on the 2001 SAT-9 Academic Performance Index between the two groups of schools. The average percentage gain in the seven intensive participating schools was 10.4%, compared to 5.1% for the other eight district elementary schools. These are encouraging results.

Perhaps most significant is that, although each school did some test preparation for the SAT-9, the real focus has been on improving the depth and quality of student learning and work by teaching to the standards and collaboratively designing units that require higher-order thinking and the completion of complex tasks. The comprehensiveness of the initiative, the focused attention to creating alignment and coherence, and the work by leadership teams and classroom teachers at each grade level may mean taking the slow road to school improvement—the one we believe will lead to true and lasting school effectiveness.

[This entire article can be found in the Jan. 2002 issue of Phi Delta Kappan.]



Oroville and Hilltop Effective School leadership teams gather for team training in Seattle.

California Center for Effective Schools Teams Up with Washington State Schools

Hilltop Elementary School in the Highline School District in Seattle, and Oroville Junior/Senior High in the Oroville School District in Oroville have entered into partnership with the California Center for Effective Schools (CCES) to implement the Effective Schools Process for school improvement.

Leadership teams from both schools began meeting in June 2001 with facilitators from CCES to frame the work on developing teacher leadership, while redesigning instruction to align with Washington State content standards.

Robin Lamoureux, principal of Hilltop, remarks, "We feel so blessed to have the California Center for Effective Schools helping us in our school reform effort."



Book Briefs

Classroom Instruction That Works: Research-based Strategies for Increasing Student Achievement by Robert J. Marzano, Debra J. Pickering, and Jane E. Pollock.

Classroom Instruction That Works distills decades of information into a clear plan of action which identifies nine categories of instructional strategies that are most apt to maximize student learning. This K-12 book provides a feast of research evidence, statistical data, and case studies of teaching strategies that raise student achievement.

One Day, All Children . . . The Unlikely Triumph of Teach for America and What I Learned Along the Way by Wendy Kopp.

One Day, All Children . . . tells the remarkable story of one woman, Wendy Kopp. From her dorm room at Princeton University, Kopp set about creating Teach for America, a program that sends outstanding college graduates to teach for two years in the most dilapidated and under-resourced urban and rural public schools in the U.S. Since the first group of teachers entered classrooms in 1990, more than 5,000 Teach for America members have proved that it is possible for children in low-income areas to reach the same level of academic achievement as children in more privileged areas. Kopp's inspiring story challenges schools and educators to take notice that excellence is possible.

Grade Level Meetings Focus on Teaching and Learning

One of the challenges of school reform is finding time for teachers to meet to share ideas, design curriculum, discuss instructional strategies, learn new skills, and reflect on their practice. A significant design element of the Effective Schools Process is the reliance on grade-level (or interdisciplinary team or departmental) meetings. Teachers share instructional strategies, design standards-based units, discuss how to provide rich learning opportunities for students, and analyze student work generated from standards-based lessons.

Interviews with teachers indicate how important these grade-level meetings have been in helping school reform enter the classroom door. One reported, "I have been teaching for 11 years, and this is the first year that I have had the experience of really being able to work with other teachers. I have noticed that when we set our goals, we truly strive to meet those goals."

Teachers repeatedly echo such views about the value of having time to share and to gain a deeper understanding of the curriculum. As one teacher comments, "I felt it was an invaluable experience creating a social studies unit with my peers in grade-level meetings. We started with a group decision and followed through by looking at the curriculum map to determine our performance indicators. All our grade-level teachers shared as we developed the unit. There was a continuous process of sharing and helping each other. Personally, this has made the work environment a friendly workplace where 'judgment' has been replaced with collaboration."



First grade teachers collaborate and discuss student work at grade level meetings

Courageous Leadership

It takes a courageous leader to enter into comprehensive school reform and to build the leadership necessary to focus on teaching and learning for all students. This is reason enough for the California School Leadership Academy to present its Courageous Leader of the Year Award to Oxnard Elementary School District Superintendent Richard Duarte at its 2002 Convocation in Burlingame, California.

Mr. Duarte, superintendent of the 18,000-student, year-round, multi-track school district in Oxnard, California, was recognized for his leadership and courage in paving the way to eliminate the achievement gap and for building communities where teachers and principals can reflect on their practice and create a rich learning environment for all. He has forged significant and long-term partnerships with colleges and universities as well as with business and community agencies in order to bring additional support and resources to the work to improve student achievement.



Guest Teacher Program is Key Component of Effective Schools Grade-Level Meetings

Thirty “guest teachers” show up regularly at monthly Effective Schools Guest Teachers Training and Social to network with one another, share concerns and successes, and to be trained in standards-based lessons.

Oxnard School District administrator Michelle Dean and California Center for Effective Schools director Lynn Wallace host the monthly event for those substitutes dubbed “guest teachers” to get to know each other, learn more about the UCSB/Oxnard School District Partnership, and most importantly, to be trained in thematic standards-based lessons used in the classroom when they substitute for teachers released for Effective Schools grade-level meetings during the school day.

According to Lynn Wallace, “For teachers to be able to walk out of their classrooms to collaborate with their colleagues knowing that students are being taught a standards-based lesson developed by Oxnard Elementary teacher Lutecia Bustamante and trained on the best way to teach it, is real peace of mind. Without the guest teacher program, regular classroom teachers would be hustling to put together lesson plans in the hope that they would be taught effectively.”

As with all innovative programs, the guest teacher program had problems with some substitutes not being prepared or not having effective lessons. Teachers and administrators were frustrated at what was supposed to be purposeful for students and easy for teachers. Changes were put in place with extensive substitute training and teacher-created lesson plans. The monthly Guest Teacher Training and Social seems to have smoothed the way for continued and sustained improvement in having substitute teachers in the classroom. For more information on the Guest Teacher Program, contact Lynn Wallace at lw Wallace@education.ucsb.edu or Michelle Dean at mdean@oxnardsd.org.

Joining the Effective Schools Team

Joining the UCSB-Oxnard Effective Schools Initiative 2001 in are Curren, Drifill, and Harrington schools. These schools, along with already participating Oxnard Elementary District principals, leadership teams, and grade-level teachers, meet regularly with each other and with California Center for Effective Schools facilitators to collaborate on teaching and learning.



Drifill School leadership team shows their enthusiasm at their first Effective Schools Leadership team training.

Effective School Correlates

Effective Schools provides a framework for reform based on seven guiding principles, or correlates, derived from empirical investigations and case studies of school success.

- ☞ A safe and orderly environment for learning
- ☞ A clearly stated mission focused on learning
- ☞ Instructional leadership
- ☞ Uncompromising commitment to high expectations
- ☞ Frequent monitoring of student progress
- ☞ Coherent classroom opportunities to learn
- ☞ Strong home-school collaboration and communication



Donation Helps Buy Books

The California Center for Effective Schools has received a generous donation from **Santa Barbara Bank & Trust** to purchase books on reading comprehension and research-based instructional strategies. Many thanks to SBB&T!

Leadership Academy Off To A Good Start

Research indicates over and over again the direct correlation between strong instructional leadership and improved student achievement. However, principals indicate they are overwhelmed with management responsibilities and have little time to devote to instructional leadership.

Establishing the Oxnard District Leadership Academy is recognized as a key vehicle for helping redefine the job descriptions of principals and learning directors to focus more time on instructional leadership. The Oxnard District administrative staff has dedicated two administrative meetings each month to professional development. The California Center for Effective Schools' staff, under the direction of coordinator Maureen Yep, has assumed a leadership role in planning and guiding the sessions, along with key district staff.

Based on identified district priorities and needs and the new California Professional Standards for Administrators, multiple sessions are planned around themes that are central to the work of principals, such as teacher evaluation and professional growth, improving reading comprehension, using data to set achievement targets, and understanding how to use technology to enhance student learning.

According to coordinator Maureen Yep, "The Leadership Academy involves providing principals and learning directors with the knowledge, skills, and practice to enable them to be successful instructional leaders."

Get in touch!

For further information about the California Center for Effective Schools and how you can help support it, please contact:

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