

CALIFORNIA “BEST PRACTICES” STUDY

SUMMER 2004

CASE STUDY:

IRA HARBISON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

*National School District
National City, CA*

*Presented by the Bay Area School Reform Collaborative in association with
National Center for Education Accountability and Just for the Kids - California*

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**CALIFORNIA BEST PRACTICES
STUDY: AN INTRODUCTION**

The California Best Practices Study is being conducted by the Bay Area School Reform Collaborative (BASRC) in collaboration with the National Center for Education Accountability (NCEA) and Just for the Kids-California (JFTK-CA). The study offers a data-informed portrait of a group of high-performing schools and districts that serve a high proportion of students who qualify for free and reduced price lunch (FRPL)². The portraits are derived from in-depth research analysis of evidence gathered from both high-performing and average-performing schools and districts in California.

The study seeks to identify strategies that are common in high performing schools that serve a high proportion of students who qualify for FRPL. These strategies may be useful in similar schools and districts across the state and the nation. District, school, and classroom level strategies that we found to characterize high-performers are summarized as findings at the beginning of each case study. This summary aims to guide the reader to the particular practices that are distinctive. Of course, schools are complex systems, and particular practices and strategies often depend on others, so readers are encouraged to read these case studies as portraits of high-performing systems rather than as a list of disconnected “best practices.”

The two complementary questions guiding this study are:

- What are the strategies found at high-performing schools and districts that appear to foster high performance?
- What is the context for these strategies?

Following the NCEA framework, this study will examine the following key strands in an effort to understand how they may contribute to these schools’ success:

- Curriculum and Academic Goals
- Staff Selection, Leadership and Capacity Building
- Instructional Programs, Practices and Arrangements
- Monitoring: Compilation, Analysis and Use of Data
- Recognition, Intervention and Adjustment
- Factors Influencing Educational Practices

The study is projected to span three years and will profile ten high performers and five average performers annually, targeting elementary schools in 2003-04 and covering middle and high schools between 2004-05 and 2005-06. A California Best Practices Framework which summarizes cross-cutting themes will be posted on the BASRC website: www.basrc.org.

The California study focuses on several issues in addition to those identified in the NCEA Framework. These are:

- Support to English Language Learners
- Support to African American Students
- Instructional coherence
- Sustainability of the educational reform efforts underway

Findings on these additional issues will be reported over the span of the three-year study.

² Eligibility for the federally-funded free and reduced price lunch program is used by the education system as a proxy measure for poverty.

SELECTION CRITERIA

The research methodology for site selection outlined here was designed by NCEA/JFTK-CA. The following process and criteria were used to select high-performing elementary schools for this study. To begin, a profile code was assigned to each district based on demographic information. This code took into account three demographic variables:

1. Free and Reduced School Lunch Program (FRSL) enrollment percentages
2. Limited English Proficient (LEP) enrollment percentages
3. Ethnic Minority Group enrollment percentages

District performance was then analyzed using the most recent year of data available (spring 2003 test results). Grade level and subject area performance statistics in language arts and mathematics were used to determine district-wide scores in each of 6 “areas” (elementary math, elementary reading, middle school math, middle school reading, high school math, high school reading). These scores represent the total percent of California Standards Tests taken in either language arts or mathematics in that area that were scored either “Proficient” or “Advanced.”

Single regression analysis of this overall score at each area against the FRSL percentage was then run for all 6 levels. The residuals from these regressions (the amount above or below expected performance at that level) were then used to determine the statewide 75th percentile score in each area. A district with a score above the 75th percentile score was determined as “high

performing” in that area. A district that was high performing in at least 3 areas (out of the 6 maximum areas) was termed “high performing for the purposes of this study..

Eight of the ten high performing schools visited were chosen from this pool of districts. The remaining 2 schools were selected from districts that fell short of being identified as high performing districts. All ten schools identified were deemed high performing based upon the following criteria:

- The school had to have met Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP).
- The school’s weighted averages -- for both Language Arts and Mathematics across all grades -- had to be among the best compared to demographically similar schools with respect to the overall percent of students meeting the benchmark (percent reaching proficient or above) in each subject.
- The schools selected had to indicate consistent high performance over two years of data, and could not show significant declines in any separate grade, year or subject of the analysis.
- In addition, each individual grade, subject and year group had to have at least 11 or more tested students. Primary Center and K-1 and K-2 schools were eliminated from the dataset.

When selecting average performers, the main criterion used was that they had an overall rank (weighted average of all grades) in each subject of 45th to 55th percentile when compared to all demographically similar schools. In addition, each individual grade, subject and year group had to have at least 11 or more tested students. As with the high-performing list, all Primary Centers or

K-1 and K-2 schools were eliminated from the dataset.

For a full description of the research methodology used for site selection please refer to: www.basrc.org

One of our ten high-performing case study sites was Ira Harbison Elementary School, which is part of the National School District located in Southern California, just south of San Diego.

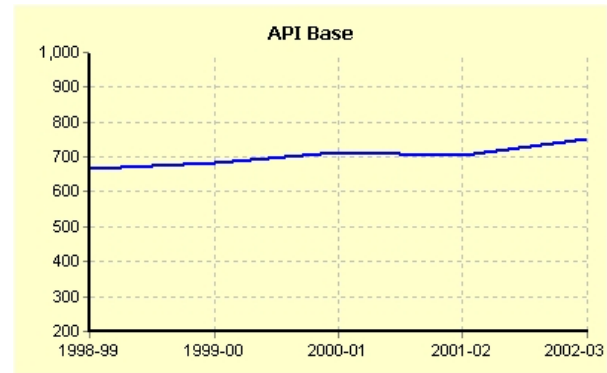
DATA ABOUT HARBISON

Harbison is a high-performing school that has successfully overcome many barriers in its quest for academic excellence. Harbison receives Title I funding but it is not designated as Schoolwide Title I school³.

School Profile
Student Enrollment: 605 ⁴
Free/Reduced-price School Lunch Percentage: 100%
English Language Learner Percentage: 38%
District Characterization: Urban Fringes of Large City

During the 2002-03 academic year, the school successfully met its AYP goals and significantly exceeded the Academic Performance Index (API) growth target as a school and in all significant subgroups. In 2004, Ira Harbison was named a California Distinguished School.

Harbison API Data 1998-2003



Ed-Data, Education Data Partnership <http://www.ed-data.k12.ca.us/>

Gains in Student Proficiency on state Standards (STAR 2002-2003)

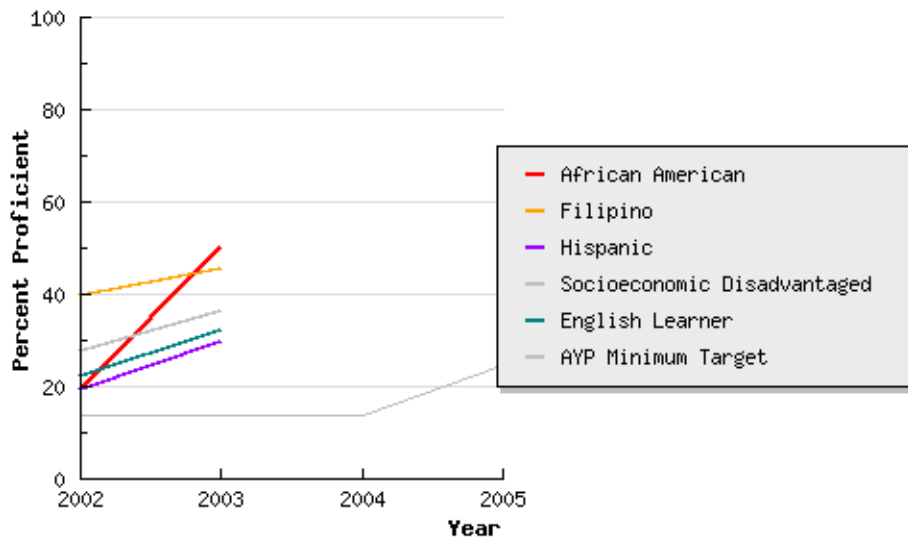
Grade	Proficient/Advanced Students in Language Arts		Proficient/Advanced Students in Mathematics	
	2002	2003	2002	2003
2 nd	29%	37%	43%	63%
3 rd	18%	47%	40%	53%
4 th	40%	47%	44%	61%
5 th	22%	30%	34%	40%
6 th	28%	33%	40%	36%

³ See <http://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/sw/> for more information on Schoolwide Title I Schools.

⁴ Unless otherwise referenced, all quantitative data in this study is drawn from the California Department of Education website: www.ed-data.k12.ca.us

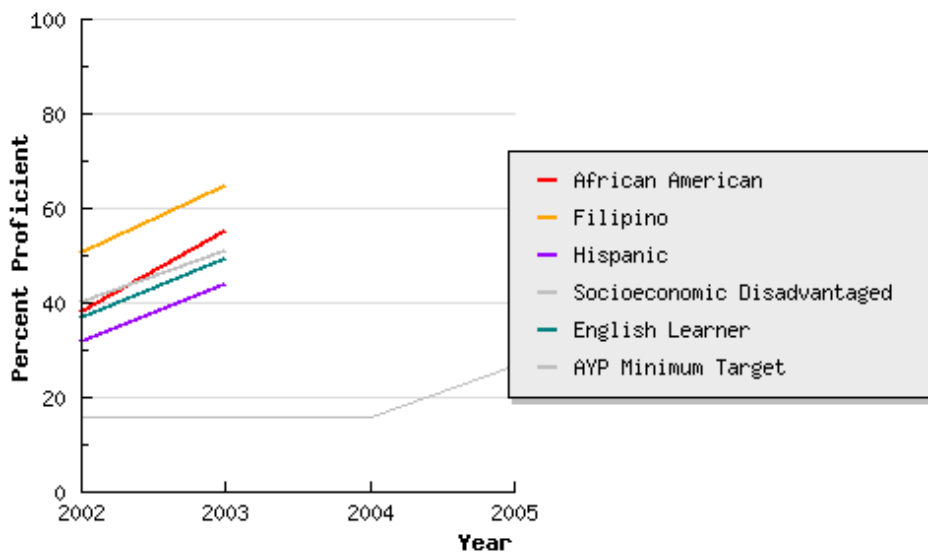
These graphs track the rate of Harbison student improvement in Language Arts and Math disaggregated by subgroups

Language Arts 2002-2003 California Standard Test (CST) Performance Summary by Subgroup



www.jftk-ca.org

Math 2002-2003 California Standard Test (CST) Performance Summary by Subgroup



www.jftk-ca.org

DISTRICT CHARACTERISTICS

National School District is small district, serving 6,590 students in ten schools: one primary (K-2) and nine elementary (eight K-6 and one 2-6), a preschool program, and a child development center.

National's student population faces significant challenges, with all students qualifying for free/reduced-price lunch, more than double the state (48 percent) and San Diego County (42 percent) averages. One in three students lives below the poverty line. All schools in the district participate in the Title I Program. More than half of National's students (55 percent) are English language learners (ELL), more than double the state average. Three-quarters of National's students (78 percent) are Hispanic/Latino. The district also serves a significant percentage of Filipino students (12 percent). The remaining students in the district are white (3 percent), African American (3 percent) and with small percentages (under 1 percent) of Asian, Pacific Islander, and Native American students.

National Elementary School District is characterized by strong district leadership with regards to standards and curriculum, assessment, and principal and teacher evaluation. The rationale behind this centralization lies in National's student population: because there is a great deal of movement of students from school to school, the district tries to ensure program and assessment consistency.

Through its own early reform efforts, National got a jump on California's standards-based accountability system. For example, the district had done initial work

with standards before the creation of the California state standards, which meant that National's teachers made a smooth transition to standards-based reform.

SCHOOL CHARACTERISTICS

Harbison Elementary is part of the National School District, located just south of San Diego, California. All 605 of its students qualify for free/reduced-price lunch which is twice the state average of 49 percent. Just fewer than 40 percent of the students are English Language Learners, in contrast to the state average of 26 percent.

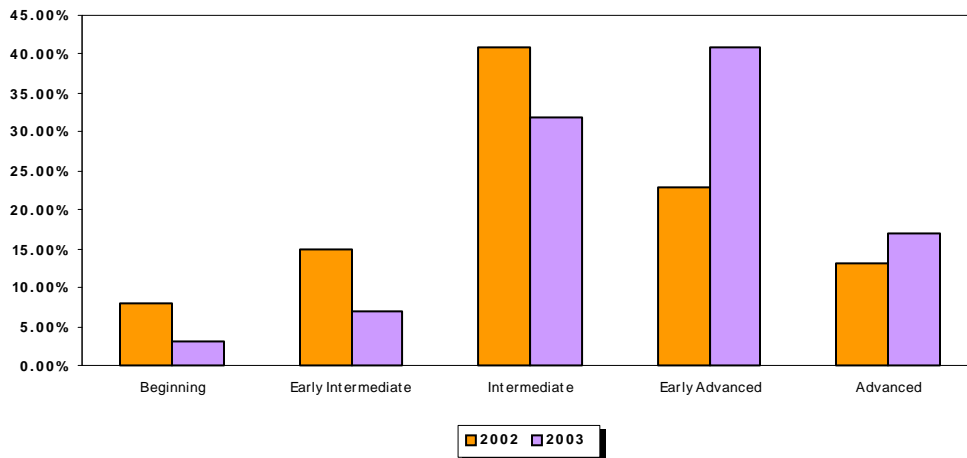
The school's track record in terms of gains is impressive. In just one year, between 2002 and 2003, it moved from an 8 out of 10 API ranking compared to like schools to a 10 out of 10 ranking. Their API scores increased from 666 in 2000 to 714 in 2001 to 749 in 2003. This 44-point increase was almost 40 points greater than their 5 point increase target.

The number of English Language Learners who scored proficient in English Language Arts as measured in AYP scores rose by 10 points from 22 to 32. Between 2002 and 2003, measured by the California English Language Development Test (CELDT), the number of students in fifth grade that scored a 4 or above (early advanced or advanced) rose from 29 percent to 95 percent. The CELDT was developed primarily for initial identification-program placement and annual assessment and measures a student's progress in English. Harbison's overall CELDT scores made dramatic improvements with the amount of students placing as Early Advanced almost doubling.

California English Language Development Test results (CELDT)

Source: California, Department of Education, DataQuest <http://data1.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/Celdt/>

California English Language Development Test Results



A SNAPSHOT OF HARBISON

The motto of National School District “every child by name,” adopted from the RESULTS / California Reading Literature Project (CRLP) has been the guiding light for reforms at Ira Harbison Elementary School.

An additional goal of the CRLP is to create a bridge between the academic world of the university and the world of classroom and students. This relationship allows teachers to develop and improve their teaching practices and improve their students’ achievements linking the theory and research of the academic world to their classrooms. It is because of this collaboration that productive decisions have been made about both the content and design of the district’s staff development venues.

In order to meet the reading needs of California's diverse student population, an important focus to all the CRLP work has

been California's ELL population. Included in CRLP’s in-service models are institutes directed to the needs of students and teachers of both Structured English Immersion Programs and Bilingual Programs.

The California Reading & Literature Project (CRLP)

The California Reading & Literature Project's Pre-K-12 RESULTS program is a state-sponsored research-based, teacher-designed, professional development program built around the observation and analysis of student reading achievement. By CRLP design, in RESULTS Academies, CRLP teacher-leaders show teachers how to:

- Set goals based on the California Language Arts Content Standards;
- Assess students' reading skills so that teachers will know which students have and have not met grade-level standards;
- Work in school-site teams in order to look at assessment data and pool resources to meet the common goal of having all students reach the standards;

- Use the most effective research-based instructional strategies in their daily instruction

The CRLP has been a catalyst for reforms at Harbison. Five years ago, “standards” was an elusive term at the school. The absence of assessment was a serious impediment to academic growth. As the principal says, “Our focus on professional development has been a vital instrument to our success.” The school has also undertaken other creative strategies that collectively contributed to its success in raising student achievement to meet the standards, as the case study illustrates.

FINDINGS

Harbison exhibits a combination of practices, strategies and attitudes that this study found to be distinctively characteristic of high-performing schools when compared to their average-performing peer sites. The following practices are particularly well-developed at Harbison and/or within National Elementary School District:

District:

1. The district, with input from schools, sets explicit, measurable goals for improvement in student performance that include goals for grade, subject and student population subgroups.
2. District leaders set up structures and supports for recruiting and developing leadership among district and school staff.
3. The district provides a user-friendly district-wide set of assessments that includes formative, diagnostic, and progress monitoring assessments, that together reflect the standards and the adopted curriculum.

4. District staff, principals and teachers are holding themselves responsible to ensure that all children WILL learn.

School:

1. School leaders lead school staff to set explicit, measurable goals that are based on data and aligned to district goals.
2. School leaders and teachers use district-adopted standards to inform planning lessons, evaluating teacher practice, and assessing students.
3. School Support Teams offer a sustained layer of support. Schools often review support provided to determine if it is effective or needs to be adjusted in order to meet the range of diverse students.
4. Principal works diligently to involve the local businesses into school activities.
5. Principal meets with the district officials, officially and unofficially, at least once a week.

Classroom:

1. Teachers set explicit, measurable goals for themselves and with their students. Teachers identify low performing students and set and monitor progress toward these students meeting standards.
2. Teachers meet regularly with colleagues to learn how to improve teaching and learning using research-based resources provided by the district as well as additional resources that they sought out to improve student achievement.

3. Teachers participate in a data-based learning community that supports them to grow professionally.
4. Teachers monitor student performance, formally and/or informally at regular intervals.
5. Student progress during the academic year can be measured by student work posted in classrooms.

CURRICULUM AND ACADEMIC GOALS

There is a strong consensus between the principal and the teachers at Harbison that the state standards are not only comprehensive, but they also provide a “perfect framework” for effective classroom instruction. However, meeting these standards is a different story, according to the school principal. “To maximize the academic growth for our students, we successfully aligned our instructional practices to the framework, the notion of academic growth seemed unattainable,” she adds. Because of multiple language arts specialists⁵ on site, alignment with the state standards for language arts was relatively more manageable than for math. There is an acute understanding of the difference between curriculum and standards at Harbison. The principal and the teachers are fully aware that “standards are guiding the curriculum and driving our instructional practices.” They understand that curriculum chosen by the district and enhanced by teachers must cover the material required by the state standards.

A district committee, representative of multiple stakeholders from teachers to board members, has developed a standards-based report card. Teachers report that because of teacher-support activities introduced several

years before, they were generally at ease in a standards-based environment. Teachers agree with the principal when she states, “Having standards is the right way to go. Everyone knows what students are expected to learn at each grade level. There is no guessing.”

The report card reflects current research presented in the *Reading/Language Arts Framework for California Public Schools, It’s Elementary, Every Child a Reader* and the *Mathematics Framework for California Public Schools*. The report card, available in English and Spanish, is developed for each grade level and is the foundation for communicating student performance to the parents.

According to the principal, “Goal setting is an on-going and an evolving process.” The school community, including the principal and teachers, collaborates extensively in assessing goals and identifying areas of need. Two committees, the School Site Council (SSC) and the English Learner Advisory Council (ELAC) play an integral part in this process. Both SSC and ELAC have equal numbers of parents and staff. The staff team typically consists of the principal, the Community Liaison and three classroom teachers.

The mindset behind goal setting is to ensure that all students master a comprehensive and balanced core curriculum that is aligned to the California Standards. Once performance data becomes available, the progress of raising student achievement begins. Classroom teachers and specialists meet together at the beginning of the year. They look at scores from tests such as The California English Language Development Test (CELDT),

⁵ More on this under Staff Selection and Capacity Building.

Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR)⁶, and local assessments. The information collected from these tests is used to set goals for the new academic year. These suggested goals are shared with the district superintendent during the principal's goal-setting conference at the beginning of the school year and become the focal point for follow-up conferences with the school staff and the district superintendent.

STAFF SELECTION, LEADERSHIP AND CAPACITY BUILDING

The principal, a twenty-five year veteran at the district, rose through the ranks from teacher and assistant principal before becoming the top administrator at Harbison in 2000. She gives high marks to her relationship with the district. A high frequency of interaction and meetings with the district has been instrumental in establishing and strengthening the bond between the two. Officially, the principal meets with the superintendent and the assistant superintendent three times a year. The agenda for these meetings revolves around goal setting, monitoring academic progress and comparing student performance to the previous year. Miscellaneous outstanding issues pertaining to school staff or the students are also addressed. The assistant superintendent of business lends his expertise and support to the principal on budgeting matters. The assistant superintendent of human resources provides support to the principal related to staffing issues and concerns.

⁶ The 2003 Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) Program included four components:
California Standards Tests (CST)
California Alternate Performance Assessment (CAPA)
California Achievement Test (CAT/6)
Spanish Assessment of Basic Education, 2nd Edition (SABE/2).

All teaching applicants in the district must have CLAD or a BCLAD⁷ in order to be considered for a position. A current teacher, in addition to a specialist, is always a part of the interview process. A parent may also be a member of the interview team.

All new teachers receive Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment (BTSA) training. Through this program, which is provided by the district, new teachers meet weekly with their coaches, receive release time for classroom observation, and are observed twice a year by their coach to develop an Individual Instructional Plan.

At the beginning of the school year, new teachers receive an additional week of training at the District's New Teacher Institute. The course reviews district assessments, classroom management and major adoptions. New teachers receive instruction in writing, English Language Development and RESULTS, as well as the use of technology tools and the district e-mail system. New teachers participate in the Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment (BTSA) Program for two years. The district estimates that they devote close to one day per month to new teacher development beyond what is provided through BTSA training.

While writing is a district focus this year, NSD continues to deliberately build capacity around one other key area, math. The district provides two days of training to support integration of math standards into the curriculum through a partnership with the University of California at San Diego. District Math Specialists from each school receive six days of additional training, after

⁷ Cross-Cultural Language and Academic Development Certificate.

school and on weekends. Their role is to work with principals and staff on site and to serve on the district's math committee. The coming year the district is changing its focus to science. The Science Specialist and a selection of teachers will work on new science curriculum adoptions. The science standards are already on display in the classrooms where science is being taught, along with examples of student work that meets the standards.

In 2003, the district adopted two new language arts programs – *Houghton Mifflin* for regular education students and *Open Court* for special education students. Two full days of training for the principal, teachers, and instructional assistants was provided prior to this adoption.

Typically, research and student data drives the professional development opportunities at Harbison. The principal and the staff review data in math, language arts, and English language development (ELD) to evaluate professional development needs. As part of a comprehensive, long-range professional plan to improve the school's literacy program, the principal and teachers attended a five-day RESULTS Institute and forty hours of follow-up sessions.

The teachers attest that many of the reading assessments they use come from the RESULTS project. (See next page for full description.)

There are plenty of opportunities for teachers to collaborate at Harbison. The principal, having served as a teacher herself, clearly recognizes the importance of teamwork and collaboration. Every Thursday students are on a minimum day schedule. This allows the teachers the opportunity and the time to meet

and work together as a team. The teachers, who meet in both horizontal and vertical grade groups, use this time to analyze student progress in language arts, math, and English Language Development. They also discuss their target groups, defined as at-risk students who are not meeting benchmarks, and discuss effective instruction strategies while sharing ideas, concerns, and solutions to their challenges.

The first Thursday of every month is set aside for district and staff development. These sessions generally focus on topics that affect the district as a whole. Some Thursdays are "site days" used by the principal to assist the staff to analyze school-wide data and set or review goals. Staff development is provided in the identified areas of need as determined by the school goals and also supports instructional programs and practices that the school staff has identified to receive professional development in as they continue to grow professionally to better meet the needs of the students. This according to the principal is "very critical to ensure students' continued academic growth."

INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAMS, PRACTICES AND ARRANGEMENTS

As stated earlier, standards are essential when it comes to implementing instructional programs.

The school district committee, which consists of teacher representatives from all ten schools, pilot the materials, checking for alignment to grade level standards. Once the materials are adopted, each teacher is expected to take into consideration the needs of their particular class. Teachers at Harbison have the opportunity to choose the relevant

supplementary material to complement the core curriculum.

Differentiated instruction is widely practiced by Harbison teachers. Students are typically broken into small groups, according to their skill level. To address the needs of individual students who continue to lag and struggle, teachers use one-on-one instruction. Gifted and Talented Education (GATE) students receive not only the core curriculum and work to state standards but are challenged to go beyond and do more complex work in class and for homework. Goals of the GATE Program include the acquisition of advanced subject matter, the mastery of skills including problem solving, creative thinking and logic and the development of ethical standards and social responsibility along with the skills to interact well with others.

Recently, Harbison adopted a new district science curriculum for grades 4 to 6. In addition to the district-mandated training by the Math and Science Coordinator, a full day of training from the publishers was provided for each grade level. In 1999, for over a three-year period, a California Post Education Commission (CPEC) grant made it possible to provide six release days of training in math standards and instructional practices for every teacher. A University of California at San Diego (UCSD) professor conducts these inservices for grade groups at the district office. This training is highly valued at Harbison and teacher participation is almost 100 percent. The teachers are updated on math test data, current research, and effective instructional practices. Presentations from the district ELD and technology leaders supplement the math content with ideas for providing access and enrichment to ELL students.

Given such a large percentage of English learners in the district, there is tremendous focus on writing. Twenty seven teachers from the district meet monthly to refine their strategies on effective writing instruction. These teachers subsequently share their findings and recommendations at school staff meetings.

Representatives from every school are provided the opportunity to serve on district committees for program adoption, to clarify standards, expectations, and instructional techniques. The writing committee has created grade-level specific notebooks containing an instructional pacing guide, teaching suggestions, anchor papers and assessment rubrics for each of the genres of writing.

The district has developed pacing guides linked to standards in mathematics and writing as a means to improve consistency. The guides are developed by content area committees to guide the instructional calendar and to provide tools and samples for various standards, e.g., graphic organizers and anchor papers in writing.

Trimester assessments in math, writing, reading comprehension and English fluency are given in every classroom and reported to the district office for feedback. In the primary grades, individual phonics-based assessments are also administered.

The principal has gone to great lengths to maintain a purposeful and resourceful library that supports the needs of students, parents and the staff. A library media specialist is on site to oversee the library operations. In addition to providing regular services such as circulating books to students, parents and teachers, the specialist teaches library skills to

the intermediate grade students that support the Language Arts Standards. The books in the library have been lexiled to support the students' reading levels. The Accelerated Reader program is used by the students to assist them to develop proficiency in reading and reading comprehension. Students read books at their appropriate lexile level, take an Accelerated Reader quiz on the computer and earn points that can be "spent" at the Parent Center on various items.

There is a great deal of emphasis on use of technology at Harbison. Each classroom has at least five computers. Besides the classroom computers, the principal has worked aggressively with the community and business partners to fund the computer lab, which contains 32 terminals which are networked together. Intermediate-grade students access the computer lab with their teacher four times a week. On Fridays, the lab is available through a sign-up process for primary teachers and their classes. Students work on the NCS Learn SuccessMaker software at least twenty minutes a day either in the computer lab or in the classroom. Technology standards, included on the intermediate-grade report card and the district Technology Use Plan, guide the use of technology. The technology program at Harbison provides additional evidence that every part of the academic program aligns to district and state standards.

**MONITORING: COMPILATION,
ANALYSIS AND USE OF DATA**

A committee consisting of specialists (math and language arts), administrators, district personnel and the union, is responsible for monitoring the student data system. The district has designed a system of assessing the students and reporting the data results on a

trimester basis. Individual student's assessments are reported on a class summary form. The teachers enter the results from the class assessments are entered into the Virtual Education System (V-Ed)⁸. V-Ed provides the school and the district access to student assessment information. Teachers are able to run reports for trimester assessments as well as previous years' STAR scores. The principal and teachers analyze this information, individually and in grade level groups, to plan and differentiate instruction as well as group their students. Teachers at Harbison break down the data further into different subgroups, especially for English Language Learners.

At the beginning of every school year, the principal provides the previous years' STAR results to the teachers. They collaborate with the school's Math and Language Arts Specialists to identify program strengths and gaps. Additionally, teachers use CELDT and SABE⁹ assessments on an ongoing basis to guide curriculum strategically and make improvements for effective instruction. These assessments are also utilized to differentiate homework assignments.

The school administers trimester assessments to coincide with report cards and parent conferences. The assessments provide data on students' individual proficiency in reading, writing, and math. In addition, teachers use Running Record assessments to assess students' accuracy, fluency, and reading rate.

⁸ Virtual Education System is a standards-based learning management system that uses the web to track the performance of every student in a school, district, or state.

⁹ As required by statute, the California Board of Education designated the Spanish Assessment of Basic Education (SABE/2) for use by districts in the assessment of Spanish-speaking students for the Primary Language Assessment component of the Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) program

**RECOGNITION, INTERVENTION AND
ADJUSTMENTS**

Harbison has well-defined strategies for recognition and intervention. More importantly, these strategies are applied swiftly to ensure their maximum impact. The time factor, according to the principal, is “very critical” when it comes to rewarding a good behavior or academic excellence and/or intervening if a student is exhibiting problems, academic or otherwise.

Recognition is part of the school culture at Harbison. Students who exhibit certain character traits are immediately recognized. Awards are distributed during a monthly awards ceremony, recognizing students for traits such as responsibility, integrity, respect, compassion, and for academic excellence. Students are also rewarded monthly for their attendance.

Academic interventions are typically tied to state benchmark assessments such as the AYP, API, and the STAR data from the previous year as well as the district trimester assessments. The principal meets individually with the teachers, specialists, counselor and the student’s parents to devise intervention plans for students who need extra academic support.

Harbison utilizes the services of its Math and Language Arts Specialists most extensively in the area of academic interventions. Because of the preponderance of English learners at the school, the services of the Language Arts Specialist are concentrated in the primary grades. Impact Teachers, credentialed teachers who work four hours a day 134 days a year are hired to support third through sixth grade classes in literacy, writing, and math. An Impact Teacher also supports each of the

intermediate grade teachers who teach a combination class.

The school offers daily intervention classes, before and after school. These classes focus on reading, writing and math for students who struggle to meet their grade level standards. At the beginning of each year, students who are performing significantly below grade level are identified as being at-risk of retention. Immediately, the academic intervention plan comes into play. As part of this plan, these students are given a priority placement in the before and after school programs as well as in intersession and summer school programs.

The Student Assistance Team (SAT) - consisting of the principal, classroom teacher, language arts specialist, psychologist, a resource specialist program teacher and a speech therapist - also assists students who need extra help. The SAT meets with the student’s parents to discuss areas of concern. Parent attendance at these meetings, according to the principal is “outstanding.” In addition to academic issues, students are referred to this team for a variety of reasons including social and medical concerns and attendance problems. The referral is comprehensive, requesting information on current scores in all academic areas, family history, attendance patterns, primary language, vision and hearing information, and a survey completed by the parents regarding their child.

**FACTORS INFLUENCING
EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES**

The active participation of the community in general and the parents in particular is highly visible at Harbison. Nearly 75 percent of the parents are involved with the school in some capacity, volunteering, attending school

events (such as Back-to-School Night, Open House, Family Fun Night, Family Math Nights and Family Science Nights) and attending parent education classes. Over 95 percent of the parents attend the parent-teacher conferences in the fall and the spring. However, the principal reports that “getting the parents to become involved in school affairs has been an arduous task,”

Harbison begins the school year with a Back-to-School Night where the entire school staff is introduced to the community. The principal informs the parents about the achievements and gains from the previous year and goals for the upcoming one. Following this meeting, the parents visit their child’s classroom and meet with the teachers. During this meeting, teachers set forth the foundations of the curriculum, classroom procedures, and homework policies. The evening continues with the Family Fun Night, which includes activities and games that require working in teams. Another well-attended semi-annual event is Family Math Night. The activities for this event are coordinated and presented by the math specialists. The program teaches standards-based math activities that can be played at home in lieu of TV. The school’s Spring Open House, another well-attended event, is designed to give students the opportunity to share their classroom activities and work with their parents. Most teachers plan special presentations to share during this event.

At the beginning of each academic year, the principal, parents, teachers and students discuss and sign the pledge acknowledging their commitment to success. The salient features of the pledge include:

- Students will complete all class and homework assignments to the best of their ability.
- Parents will send their child to school regularly and on time.
- Teachers will challenge students to do their best.
- The principal will reinforce the partnership between parent, student, and staff.

The principal has worked diligently to form partnerships with community agencies. These partnerships, referred to as the “support systems” at the school, include a relationship with the National City Police Department (NCPD), which purchased and provided Child Identification Kits for all of the school’s primary students. The school coordinates social services and health assistance by referring parents to the Family Resource Center (FRC). FRC provides case management, conducts comprehensive family assessments, and links families to services. Additionally, local businesses such as Home Town Buffet offers free dinner coupons to outstanding character winners. The neighborhood Wal-Mart donated a large sum of money for purchasing learning materials for the school, while Target donated bicycles for raffles. Success at Harbison is defined as “everyone’s effort.” “We provide a positive environment to ensure good student performance,” confirms the principal.

With the support of the parents, community and the district office, the school is able to offer students an instructional program that allows them a wide variety of opportunities to progress academically and reach their fullest potential.

CONCLUSION

The principal agrees that the district and state standards are rigorous and challenging, yet attainable. She has been instrumental in chalking out a plan and designating responsibilities to students, teachers and parents, so the instruction can maintain its focus on standards by means of close collaboration and strong leadership.

The assessment of student data is used to set explicit goals for the district, school, and in the classroom. These goals are in direct alignment with the state and district standards. This maintains a culture of accountability at all levels.

In particular, the school culture fosters a commitment that everyone be involved, from students, teacher, parent and the principal, is what will ensure the highest quality education for students. The principal has formulated an agreement that must be read and signed by all concerned parties at the beginning of each academic year.

The agreement is an excellent reflection of the accountability expected at all layers of the system. This system-wide accountability loop engenders district support for schools so that the principal and teachers may focus their attention on practices that improve teaching, the activity that has the highest-impact on student learning. The key features of this agreement are as follows:

Every student is responsible for:

- Attending school regularly, on time and in uniform with all necessary materials (homework etc.)
- Showing responsible behavior by following school rules

- Completing all class and homework assignments to the best of their ability
- Sharing their classroom work with their parents every day
- Limiting their TV and video game use

Every Teacher is responsible for:

- Adherence to standards
- Teaching grade level skills and concepts using effective teaching strategies
- Striving to address the individual needs of all students in their class by strategically implementing differentiated instruction
- Communicating to students and parents expectations for homework, class work and behavior
- Providing a safe and positive learning environment for the students
- Communicating regularly with parents regarding student behavior and progress
- Challenging students to do their best
- Pursuing appropriate professional growth activities

Parents are responsible for:

- Sending their child to school regularly and on time
- Providing a time and quiet place for reading and homework
- Attending parent/teacher conferences, school events and workshops
- Reinforcing the school and classroom rules
- Monitoring their child's TV and video game use

The Principal is responsible for:

- Creating a welcoming environment for students and parents
- Communicating to students and parents the district's and school's mission and goals

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- Ensuring a safe and orderly learning environment
- Reinforcing the partnership between parents, students and staff
- Acting as the instructional leader by supporting teachers in the classrooms
- Providing appropriate educational growth opportunities for teachers and parents
- Encouraging parent involvement in school activities