

Critical Issues Panels—Discussion Report

No Child Left Behind—Blue Ribbon Schools

2003 Awards Ceremony

October 30 – 31, 2003

Washington, DC



Introduction

What happens in schools where student achievement is high? A request for information conducted prior to the ceremony among the 234 2003 No Child Left Behind – Blue Ribbon Schools (132 schools responding) found that seven strategies emerged over and over, across all grades:

1. Teachers use multiple **assessments** to monitor student progress, identify priorities, and choose appropriate teaching materials.
2. **Curricula** are rigorous, aligned with state content and performance standards, and articulated across grade levels.
3. The school community articulates and shares a **common vision** of academic success for all students.
4. The entire **community** (for example, school staff, students, parents, citizens, etc.) is committed to excellence in education. **Families** are engaged in what their children need to know and do in school.

5. Students, school staff members, and families have **high expectations** for student academic success.
6. Administrators are **instructional leaders**.
7. **Professional development** is ongoing, based on research, and embedded in classroom instruction.

As part of the No Child Left Behind—Blue Ribbon Schools 2003 Awards Ceremony, principals from the 2003 Blue Ribbon Schools that demonstrated particular strengths presented their strategies and led discussions on strategies for student achievement. This report summarizes the key ideas from those discussions.

Syntheses and school data from other sections of the pre-ceremony request for information will appear on the Department's website in Spring 2004.

Strategies

Assessment:

Collaborations among teachers across grade levels ensure students receive targeted support; early informal assessments lead to success on formal assessments.

Presenters: Sheryll Klein, Mint Canyon Community School, Canyon Country, CA and Brezetta Bullock, Longfellow Elementary School, Mount Vernon, NY.

Mint Canyon Community School, Canyon Country, CA administers benchmark assessments each trimester to gauge students' strengths and weaknesses, identify low scoring students, and develop appropriate supports and interventions. Through the California Reading and Literacy Project, aimed at aligning teaching with assessment, teachers learned strategies to pinpoint needed skills for every student and to tailor their teaching to each student's specific needs. Teachers have continued this approach beyond the three-year funding cycle.

Beginning in first grade, teachers at **Longfellow Elementary School, Mount Vernon, NY** use a variety of informal language arts assessments to identify students' strengths and weaknesses well in advance of state assessments in the fourth and eighth grades. Collaborating across grades, teachers ensure continuity of support for each student, with one-on-one tutoring where needed. Recognizing the relationship between speaking and reading and writing, teachers also assess student speech. Longfellow students use rubrics to assess their own writing and use graphic organizers to learn how to take notes and listen actively. To engage parents in the importance of assessment, school officials invite parents in for "dinner" and a sample "test" to help parents understand the amount of work and preparation their children need to be successful.

Tips and Strategies from Other Participants:

(Lone Dell Elementary School, Arnold, MO) “The Fox School District uses quarterly assessment district-wide (K-12). Grade level leaders review the results with the principals to plan for needed interventions. The state of Missouri also has a reading-only-target in third grade with summer school, tutoring, and retesting to show gains. If gains are not made, students are retained.”

(St. Barnabas Episcopal School, Deland, FL) “We are firm-believers. . . in the use of different methods to teach the same lesson. It just takes time for teachers to learn how to assess students’ learning priorities.”

(Washington Park Elementary School, Laurinburg, NC) “We use periodic benchmark testing for all students. Students develop a notebook and list their strengths and weaknesses. The notebook is proofed by the teacher to redirect the student.”

Common Vision:

Academic success for all students begins with a common vision shared by the entire school community.

Presenters: Kimberly Boelkes, Eastview Elementary School, Canton, IL and Pauline Tressler, Circle View Elementary School, Huntington Beach, CA.

At **Eastview Elementary School, Canton, IL**, the school mission includes three factors for success: learning is teacher-directed, students are empowered to be learners and develop character, and parents are part of the school improvement process. The school’s focus is on success for all students and uses the “thirty-three and one-third rule” - parents, students and staff working together - to achieve this goal. Since the school established four committees to align the curriculum for success, 97% of the students met the math standards for 2001-2002.



Circle View Elementary School, Huntington Beach, CA’s vision is “Giving children roots (foundation) and wings (to succeed, fly).” With a common vision, the school community can focus on “going in the right direction together.” As Principal Tressler notes, “Vision is all about leadership. Leaders know where to go and are able to persuade others to go with them. . . . Good leaders create an environment for change.” To create a common vision, she says: identify key players and stakeholders; ask for input, listen and really get to know the talent available; understand perceptions and be able to change disbelievers; paint a picture of where you want to go by tapping into front-runner teachers; integrate state and federal guidance and embrace district support; and, constantly reevaluate where you are going by keeping a sense of humor and seeing all the good things around you.

Tips and Strategies from Other Participants:

(Meadowland Elementary School, Sterling, VA) “All segments of the school community are focused on one goal: student achievement. Every activity is designed to reinforce to students the

idea that hard work and effort lead to success. Without this shared vision, Meadowland would not have experienced such success.”

(Newport High School, Bellevue, WA) “Focus on quality, not quantity and stay focused on your objectives. Continue to model the expectations and reinforce what’s being done well and provide constructive comments. Support innovation and ignore those who say it can’t be done.”

Community Involvement/ Family Involvement:

Student success increases when community members and families are engaged in and focused on high achievement for all students.

Presenters: (Community Involvement) Gilbert Saenz, Antonian College Preparatory High School, San Antonio, TX, Don Ogden, Camellia Basic Elementary School, Sacramento, CA and Dennis Young, Meadowland Elementary School, Sterling, VA. (Family Involvement) David Finell, Summit



Middle Charter School, Boulder, CO, Thomas Brownfield, St. Albert the Great School, North Royalton, OH and Ruth Ann Palmer, Saint Petersburg Christian School, St. Petersburg, FL.

Helping students become “people of service” is a major goal of faculty and staff at **Antonian College Preparatory High School, San Antonio, TX.** Students have raised money to help keep another school open, organized clothing drives for the homeless, and recently started a childcare service for shelter residents.

Parent involvement is expected at **Camellia Basic Elementary School, Sacramento, CA** Each parent commits to work 40 hours per school year per family; a strong parent committee keeps track of hours and sends reminders. Families make up missing hours during summer school. Parents are invited to come up with project ideas for the school.

Meadowland Elementary School, Sterling, VA has created a ‘community of learners’ focused on student achievement. Through its Diversity Awareness Team, the school recruits talent from the entire community, while teachers work with struggling students after school, reach out to uninvolved parents, and ensure that parents involved in PTO events represent the entire student population. Parent volunteers work directly with students and help with incentive programs. Students volunteer, too: fifth graders work one-on-one with first graders on literacy and math; high school students provide tutoring services and “behavioral” advice. The school staff believes that achievement improves student’s self-esteem, rather than self-esteem improves achievement.

Parent involvement has been key to success at **Summit Middle Charter School, Boulder, CO.** School leaders get to know parents personally and involve them in meaningful activities. They ask volunteers how they want to be involved, give extra support to new volunteers, and brainstorm strategies with school staff and volunteers about involving reluctant parents. Other ways they stay in touch with parents include regular school to home newsletters, student art shows, school Family Recreation Center nights, parent-teacher conferences, spaghetti dinners,

and a yearly school survey. Summit staff members have seen a correlation between improved parental engagement and the high achievement of their students.

St. Albert the Great School, North Royalton, OH involves families through its TEAM philosophy – Together Everybody Achieves More. Active participants in the school community recently formed school partnerships with several art museums that led to a combined art and social studies lesson. The school gathers parent feedback through Open Forum and Meet the Teacher events; officials also conducted a course to help parents read test scores.



Saint Petersburg Christian School, St. Petersburg, FL

believes “a parent on your side is the school’s best ally.” Every classroom has e-mail; students are encouraged to communicate their accomplishments to their parents. The school encourages teachers to develop one-to-one relationships with parents, identifies volunteer coordinators, and uses a school advisory team to reach out to parents. Due to improved parent involvement, behavioral problems in the classroom have decreased. The school also credits its success with parents to an online, password-protected service that lets parents access their student’s records anytime.

Tips and Strategies from Other Participants:

(Turtle Hook Middle School, Uniondale, NY) “Family involvement is very flexible in our school community. Many of our parents work more than one job and it’s difficult for them to get to school. We . . . involve them in the educational process of their child by having common planning time for teachers when parents can attend. . . . We call working parents at work and conference during their lunchtime or break. . . [and] translate homework directions for [Spanish language parents] so they can stay involved with their child’s progress. We’ll meet before and after school with parents and celebrate who does show up.”

(Skidmore-Tynan Elementary School, Skidmore, TX) “Hispanic parents requested the opportunity to come to school to familiarize themselves with the school environment. Now there is a school wide Celebration for Skidmore Day and parents put on a reception for teachers and staff. They are proud they had worked to come together as a school.”

Curriculum:

A successful curriculum reflects the shared understanding of common goals by the entire school community (staff, teachers, students and parents.) It is an ongoing dialogue, reviewed and revised from year to year.

Presenters: John Barrera, Kaleidoscope/Caleidoscopio Middle School, Houston, TX, Luann Domek, Lone Dell Elementary School, Arnold, MO and Eileen Kleiser, Westmore Oaks Elementary School, West Sacramento, CA.

Kaleidoscope/Caleidoscopio Middle School, Houston, TX treats the district curriculum, Project Clear, as the “bones” of their curriculum and “adds meat” through input from the entire school community: both teachers and students create a curriculum that has meaning for all. For example, eighth grade students can fulfill their community service requirement by partnering with

elementary school students and helping them write their curricula. Kaleidoscope works to develop relationships with students to better assess their strengths and recognize skills that might not be obvious and includes parents in monthly meetings to plan and strengthen curriculum objectives.

The success of the curriculum at **Lone Dell Elementary School, Arnold, MO**,

lies in the shared understanding of the basic key skills students need to master at each level. Continuity between grade levels is crucial. The development of any curriculum involves: a shared understanding of state and district guidelines, an open dialogue of how best to set and accomplish goals, and the analysis of assessment data to identify problems and work towards solving them.



Twenty-seven percent of the students are special needs. Through inclusion in conjunction with a solid curriculum, achievement for all students at Lone Dell has increased. Students set a goal and achieve it. Different work stations provide opportunities for students to learn differently; through block scheduling, the school incorporated a reteaching time into the school day with three to four support staff per grade level. This allows teachers to reflect more on their teaching practices and allows time to teach differently to address different needs.

A clearly developed curriculum, shared at every level of the school community, is a critical strategy for student success at **Westmore Oaks Elementary School, West Sacramento, CA**. It strengthens students' sense of achievement and raises expectations by making them clear; promotes a common vocabulary among teachers and encourages them to share strategies and interventions; and gives parents and the community a clear understanding of the curriculum and how it aligns with state standards. The school takes a team approach with faculty, disseminates information frequently to parents and the community and partners students who are non-English speakers with students who can translate for them and help them stay on track.

Tips and Strategies from Others attending the Panel Discussion:

(Newport High School, Bellevue, WA) "Curriculum developers as well as principals are always in the classroom observing the teaching and learning."

(Park Spanish Immersion Elementary School, St. Louis Park, MN) "Our success goes back to learning content through language. Language immersion students are more flexible learners and greater risk takers. Critical thinking skills are used more, especially when encountering unknown works and information. Also having parents read to their children is key. Dual language programs promote higher level thinking skills."

High Expectations:

High expectations for all students increase student achievement through a clearly defined mission and measurable academic goals.

Presenters: Gerald Witt, Irmo High School, Columbia, SC and Elizabeth Ammons, Washington Park Elementary School, Laurinburg, NC.

At **Irmo High School, Columbia, SC**, all students, including learners with disabilities, are expected to meet high expectations. The school offers a strong academic curriculum that includes both honors and AP courses and a wide range of extracurricular activities through more than 80 different clubs and community service programs. Irmo has found that extracurricular activities, especially a strong fine arts program, promote academic achievement. High-profile awards banquets for academics as well as sports underscore that it is 'cool' to be a good student. The school is restructuring to offer ninth graders core classes in one central location with dedicated teaching teams and counselors. Tenth graders take the PSAT and PLAN to assess skills and begin planning for college. Irmo offers seniors a school-to-work component.

In creating a community of goal-directed learners, **Washington Park Elementary School, Laurinburg, NC**, has developed a mission statement for each grade level that sets high expectations for all students. Special education students are mainstreamed above the state bar of measurement. Emphasis is placed on creating a community of goal-directed learners. All students are expected to take the lead and set the agenda for their own school conferences. Teachers model as parents as the students prepare for their conferences.

Tips and Strategies from Other Participants:

(Newport High School, Bellevue, WA) "The higher our expectations are for our students, the higher our achievement levels rise – 85% of our students are in honors and AP classes. All of our teachers are required to teach 'high' and 'low' level classes – not all AP classes are given to tenured teachers. It helps also to raise the bar to measure students against national as well as state norms. We offer extended-day tutorials to help kids learn more...the atmosphere is one of excitement about learning. Kids are accustomed to seeing their teachers working together and 'modeling' this collaborative learning behavior, so they've adopted it, too."



(Antonian College Preparatory High School, San Antonio, TX/Newport High School, Bellevue, WA) "We allow students to explore a variety of interests...through the career academy model and earn college credit through dual enrollment with area community colleges and universities. Each student in our school completes an 'IGP' – an individual graduation plan. Students take career inventories in the early grades...planning in middle school, including field trips to college...[and] participate in internships at the advanced level in their senior year. There are also career-related transition activities for learners with disabilities."

(Classen School of Advanced Studies, Oklahoma City, OK) "We are working together to build 'families' of schools with high expectations...we offer an IB program and visual performing arts program. Because we're small, our entire graduating class holds the title of valedictorian...and, as part of the valedictorian celebration each student brings a teacher they especially value."

Instructional Leadership:

Effective instructional leadership involves collaboration on clear academic goals for the success of all students at every level of the school community

Presenters: Ursina Swanson, Park Spanish Immersion Elementary School, St. Louis Park, MN and Stephany Bourne, Indian Village Elementary School, Fort Wayne, IN.

Park Spanish Immersion Elementary School, St. Louis Park, MN, a Spanish language immersion school, has a very specific mission: to provide bilingual education for all students. The school's instructional leadership emphasizes teamwork, with weekly grade level meetings to discuss instructional approaches and whole staff meetings to maintain alignment with K-6 standards. Viewed as a coach, the principal visits each classroom daily. Top priorities are hiring top teaching staff and holding all students to high expectations. Parent volunteers throughout the school help create a very committed school-family relationship.



At **Indian Village Elementary School, Fort Wayne, IN** all the stakeholders, from students to teachers, feel valued. Teachers maintain open relationships, discuss and implement strategies and best practices for student achievement, and attend highly visible, research-based professional development programs that support state standards. Students enjoy coming to school (97% attendance rate) and know their strengths and weaknesses through the sharing of test results. The school also requires students to set weekly goals aligned with state standards.

Tips and Strategies from Other Participants:

(Turtle Hook Middle School, Uniondale, NY) “We took the concept of teaming and having a common planning time and customized it with staff input. We differentiate topics to discuss by allowing certain days for each one. This way we are not always bringing up the same issues at every meeting (for example, discuss discipline on Thursdays only.) Teaming is key, to plan together. It helps us know what the students are doing and how they’re doing.”

Professional Development:

Effective professional development involves an ongoing commitment of time and money in educators to support students in achieving high expectations.

Presenter: Patty Siegwarth, Newport High School, Bellevue, WA.

Strongly committed to ongoing professional development **Newport High School, Bellevue, WA** has made it a contractual requirement of all staff and faculty. The school's motto is: “Excellence is worth what it costs.” Principal Siegwarth states, “The teacher’s job is to keep coming up with good ideas; the principal’s job is to find funding.” Teachers are given two hours a week to collaborate on projects based on material students are struggling with or that teachers aren’t sure students are grasping. Lesson development sometimes take a year to complete; lessons are classroom-tested, refined, and when finished they are published on the school website. Teachers receive monetary awards for producing outstanding lessons. The principal tries to spend two hours a day in classrooms modeling good teaching and often conducts as many as 90 formal teaching evaluations each year. Teachers at the high school have a strong relationship with middle school teachers.



Newport has developed partnerships with other professional development groups (for example, TIMSS, College Board, etc.) using their approved teaching tools. It also collaborates with local institutions such as the University of Washington and Bellevue Community College. Other strategies include weekly professional development staff meetings for teachers within disciplines (held in the morning when teachers are fresh), pairing new teachers with experienced mentors, and hiring staff with high expectations for achievement for themselves as well as their students.

Tips and Strategies from Other Participants:

(Lone Dell Elementary School, Arnold, MO) “We are facing losing seven million in funding, so we’re becoming more innovative. We make sure our website is updated to provide an open house highlighting each grade level and highlighting strategies in each level. We have teachers from other districts visit and share best practices. We recognize and see efforts that are well worth it and others recognize that it is also helpful, even though there is no cash attached to it.”

(Mint Canyon Community School, Canyon Country, CA) “We’ve started to share ideas with the school district. We have district level/grade level meetings four times a year where teachers can share best practices with other districts. The most valuable thing at the consortium is networking...sharing things done at specific schools.”

(Advanced Technologies Academy, Las Vegas, NV) “John Snyder will create a listserv for NCLB-BRS participants to use to share ideas and keep in contact. . . . Anyone wishing to be placed on the listserv, write him at jsnyder@webwiz-lv.com.”