



Raising Student Achievement: Practices that Work

A bi-monthly broadcast fax dedicated to sharing success stories

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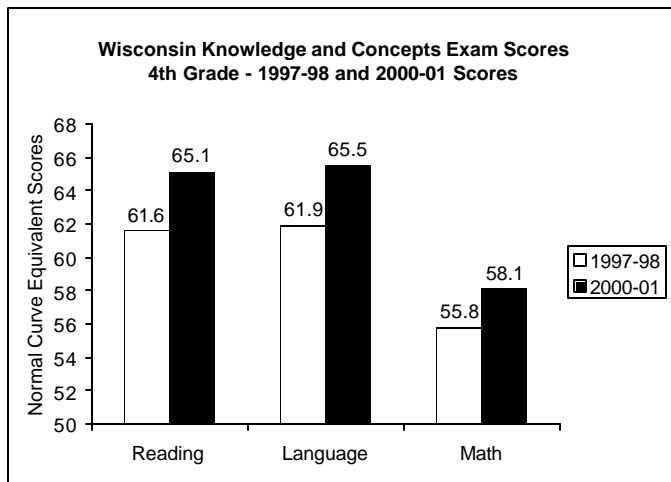
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Faculty-led School Improvement - Elm Dale Elementary School - Accredited since 1994

“School improvement does not happen in the principal’s office,” states Linda Wandtke, Principal of Elm Dale Elementary School. “It happens in the classroom.” Located in Greenfield, Wisconsin, Elm Dale serves 425 students in grades K-5. Since 1997-98, the school has experienced statistically verifiable gains in student performance in reading, language, and math.

Of note, the state changed the state exam and time of administration in 2002-03. On the new test, the percent of students scoring proficient or advanced was 95% in reading, 94% in language, and 85% in math (the state average was 80%, 78%, and 71%, respectively). **The school attributes this growth to its teacher-led school improvement process.**

Teacher involvement. The school uses the NCA CASI school improvement process to involve all staff members in improving student performance. Faculty members lead and serve on improvement committees. Their ideas and skills are tapped to develop improvement strategies and train their peers. “When teachers hear about other teachers doing something successful, it is motivating for everyone,” states Jan Rymaszewski, kindergarten teacher.



Shared goals based on data. The school faculty works as a team to analyze data from a variety of sources. They use the data to identify and agree on school-wide goals. “We’re all on the same page with the same goals, heading in the same direction,” states Ms. Rymaszewski. “We use the data to keep us on track and direct our classroom instruction.”

Shared responsibility for all students. The school is implementing NCA CASI’s Transitions improvement model, which requires students to be credentialed in key areas. The faculty established the credentialing expectations for each grade level. Teachers prepare intervention plans for students needing help meeting those expectations or needing enrichment. The plans follow students as they progress from grade to grade. “Sharing the intervention plans from teacher to teacher gives you a huge head start about where kids are, what they need, and what’s worked for them in the past,” states Debbie Mitchell, fourth grade teacher.

Systematic approach. The faculty is implementing a systematic approach to improving student performance in writing and problem solving. In writing, they are implementing the six trait writing framework. In problem solving, they have identified a set of common steps that guide the problem solving process. They trained all the staff members on both processes so that the same language and concepts are reinforced for students at every grade level. “The results have been fantastic. Every year, I get fourth graders that are better prepared than the year before,” comments Debbie Mitchell.

Institutionalizing continuous improvement. The faculty maintains ongoing conversations on school improvement through faculty meetings and committee meetings, where they regularly rotate membership to allow for fresh ideas. “School improvement is so much a part of our daily lives,” states Joette Shannon, second/third grade looping teacher. “It steers us in the right direction for doing what is best for our kids.”

When asked to offer advice to other schools, Ms. Shannon stated, “Keep your focus on the objective of school improvement. This is not about meeting NCA requirements; this is about helping kids learn.”

North Central Association Commission on Accreditation and School Improvement

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