

California School Recognition Program
Holly Oak Elementary, Evergreen School District
Data Driven Instruction and Student Support

1. Rationale/Basis of the Practice

It remains true that Holly Oak teachers create a caring climate that focuses on the social and academic success of their students. The culture of high expectations, student responsibility, and family support is a hallmark of the community. There is not a high turnover of teachers, so families get to know the teachers, and the teachers know the families. It is often the case for teachers to meet and talk with students long past their time together, checking up on their progress, and providing motivation and assistance when needed.

But as the accountability requirements increased, it became even more apparent that knowing how well students are achieving academically throughout the year, as opposed to waiting for results to magically appear in late August, became the rationale to begin to understand and use data analysis. The need to have benchmarks and common assessments became not a mandate from others, but a group decision.

An improved ability to describe student academic success in quantifiable terms, to look at subgroups and their achievement levels separate from the whole school results, and to find discrete areas for program improvement is extremely difficult without a good tool. In other words, it did not get done well, if at all, because the task is overwhelming if done by paper. The goal was to have teachers analyze their own data and their grade level data over time, and to recommend areas of improvement.

As a Title I school, meeting the NCLB mandates in the early years was not a problem. However, the staff began to understand the enormity of the task when the “hockey stick” started to accelerate at a rate of nearly eleven percent per year starting in 2009. Clearly, this was an issue to begin to tackle before the accountability became so difficult, demanding a 10% annual growth if not at the benchmark already. Three years ago, based on the 2009 accountability targets, the Hispanic and SED populations would NOT make the ELA or the Math AYP targets if we merely continued our same practices.

ELA AYP	06-07	07-08	08-09	Growth
All Students	51.1%	54.9%	60.2%	9.1%
Asian	63%	65.3%	68.3%	5.3%
Hispanic	33.2%	38.8%	46.4%	13.2%
EL	43%	50.7%	53.2%	10.2%
SED	41.3%	42.2%	50.2%	8.9%

Math AYP	06-07	07-08	08-09	Growth
All Students	54.8%	55.2%	65.9%	11.1%
Asian	70.4%	69.4%	79.2%	8.8%
Hispanic	37.9%	36.1%	46.9%	9%
EL	54.8%	55%	63.3%	8.5%
SED	46%	45.7%	57.2%	11.2%

Four years ago, the district began to train teachers in the use of a data analysis tool that allowed them to disaggregate data by subgroup and standards. The tool had been used for

several years before that by the principals, who then “translated” the data. The teachers knew the value of analyzing student work to help them make decisions for improvement.

With the AYP benchmark nearly 10% greater than current achievement, it became extremely important to be able to calculate the actual number of students that would allow us to meet the subgroup goal, and to pinpoint the individual students who were not proficient. Then, the staff needed to learn how to find the areas of weakness in student results, and evaluate their current practices and resources, looking for ways to improve.

Although programs and school wide structures help to give continuity to school success, the majority of student progress happens in the classroom. It came time to train the teachers in the use of data analysis, for it is they who meet the needs of students on a minute-by-minute basis. They are the ones who can see immediately the effective practices, the need for additional resources, and the power of targeted teaching.

Our overall school “report card” was positive, yet our subgroups vacillated up and down, and showed a real achievement gap. Our Hispanic population consistently struggled, and were a constant focus area for our teachers. Our EL students achieved well enough, but the students who stayed in EL status for more than five years were a challenge for the teachers.

API Growth	08-09 #Tested	06-07	07-08	08-09	API Growth
All Students	517	786	796	821	35
Asian	196	843	846	867	24
Hispanic	214	710	716	748	38
EL	230	765	767	800	35
SED	219	743	737	779	36

Again, the approach to meet the high accountability goals needed to be addressed long before the actual year of need. It is too hard to make adjustments in the year of change. You have to have clear descriptions of the problem, evaluate strengths and weaknesses honestly, research what to do, put it into place, and make improvements based on results.

2. Description of the Practice

Four years ago, the staff used a quick and efficient data tool called Cruncher to analyze CST and CELDT data. Over the years, they became proficient at reviewing their own class results broken down by sub-stands of the standards. Looking specifically at the students who were not proficient, they began to mine the data, looking for strengths and weaknesses in the students and their own programs. We engaged in a purposeful dialogue between grade levels.

At the same time, they became much more familiar with the actual assessment instruments, and reviewed the Released Questions provided by the CDE. During their analysis, and reviewing the research, they determined that academic vocabulary would help all students in all curricular areas, especially the EL students. Every grade level included the strategies of Front Loading and explicit instruction in vocabulary, especially in the content areas. The District provided many workshops in this area, and the staff put the ideas into place. We practiced the EMMTG recommendation of teaching reading in the content areas.

We also agreed to use formative assessments in reading that gave us an indication of which students were struggling so that we could pinpoint them for intervention services. We use BPST, Running Record, High Frequency Word Recognition, and Reading Fluency assessments, and we have all second through sixth graders take a computerized assessment

called STAR. Using all this data, we assign students to Extended Day, Guided Reading groups, and specialized tutoring. We implemented aggressive intervention strategies.

Another area of concern was the simple area of reading comprehension. Despite years of staff development and workshops on various strategies to attack this perennial problem, the specter of 46% proficient for ALL subgroups seemed overwhelming for our at risk students. After reviewing the research, we decided that we needed to increase the amount of reading the students did by choice. We needed to create a “culture of reading” to go along with the many effective ways of teaching reading we had in place.

Using a computerized reading log and motivation system called Accelerated Reader, we agreed to get ALL classrooms participating. We instituted an incentive program for grade level spans, and made the number of books read per day part of the daily announcement. The rewards were frequent and given publicly. Classroom competitions sprang up amongst the teachers, and grade level competitions soon followed.

The following year, we changed the grade level spans to match the reading ability of each grade, formalized the grade and class competitions, and challenged students daily to break the number of books read successfully, and added the number of words read successfully. The AR tool makes it very easy to report these benchmarks, and the students appear to like to hear the results. The parents and students now had a clear role to play in improving reading.

Three years ago, we merely had “point” goals for students to achieve, embodied in the incentive system. Our research told us that the more students read on their own, the better they would achieve. The first year reinforced the simple idea, and since then our students are showing a zeal to read that had not existed. This year, we are promoting with our students and parents that the number of words you read in a year will guarantee reading success. For the older students, it is the Million Word Challenge. For the other grades, it is keyed to the grade level: 1st: 100,000, 2nd: 200,000, 3rd: 300,000, 4th: 500,000.

In the area of Mathematics, our Hispanic subgroup remained a big concern, certainly. But when the staff became more adept at using the data analysis tool, they discovered a feature that easily displayed the growth of students in the curricular areas. Previously, we thought that we were doing well in mathematics, and all measurements pointed in that direction. Our percent Proficient was OK, but the overall API was suffering because of lagging mathematics achievement by our more able students.

Indeed, using the tool, we found that a clear majority of our students in the FBB and BB areas were growing to the next level, but we had a distinct slide in our students who had tested in the Advanced and Proficient levels. In other words, our program adjustments helped our needy students, but our more able students somehow seemed to be neglected. Fewer students were maintaining their Advanced level, and more than a few Proficient students were backsliding into the Basic category. This occurred school-wide, as well as in all sub-groups. Without benchmarks in mathematics, we arrived at the accountability measures somewhat blind. When we did analyze the data by strands, we found a weakness not in algebra, but in Measurement and Geometry. Further research found this area to be taught in earnest in the latter part of the year. This addition of ongoing assessment and analysis of student results certainly made a huge difference for intervention and achievement.

Luckily, our ability to put improvements into action was greatly aided by the district textbook adoption. Our research showed that our current textbook was not well aligned, the pacing of our teaching did not serve us, and we had no specific formative assessments. The district’s new adoption took care of our identified remedies.

Since then, we have clear pacing plans for each grade level, periodic assessments to identify students who need help and areas of pedagogic weakness, and our materials align

with the standards. The assessments are available for analysis very soon after administration, and the teachers can use their new skills of data mining and student evaluation according to standards. The staff development plan is now based on student performance.

3. Results of the Practice

We are extremely pleased that our efforts to meet the difficult AYP goals paid off. In addition, we closed the achievement gap for all sub-groups, given that the Asian population was our benchmark group. Title I schools that met the Distinguished School goals are few.

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It is now a common site to see students traveling back and forth to the library to get yet another book to read. Every student has an enthusiastic to the question “How many AR points do you have?” The culture of reading for success is embodied in the story of an EL 1 6th grade student who was struggling academically and socially. Working with his parents, we set up a clear path on how to improve his reading. After receiving the initial awards, he caught the reading bug. It was not unusual to see him reading walking on the way to school. He ended up reading nearly 80 books, and his CST ELA went from FBB to Proficient in one year. Because of his academic success and acknowledgements for reading, his social skills and classroom behavior improved dramatically as well.

Our library circulation went from 16,272 to 24,496 books checked out, and we are on target to surpass that goal. By December 2009, 12 students have already reached a Million Words.

Our review of the CST Released Questions tells us that we need to start concentrating on non-fiction reading with our students.

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In 2006, 112 students in the Prof/Adv categories slipped back at least on level. In 2009, only 52 Prof/Adv students slipped back at least one level, and only 13% lost Proficient status compared to 32% in 2006. All the other sub-groups showed similar results in the Proficient and Advanced categories.

In addition, we reduced the number of our FBB students in ELA from 44 in 2006 to 28 in 2009, and the number of FBB in Math from 25 to 17.

Given our success, the teachers set a goal to have ZERO FBB students in ELA or Math.

We also have targeted our sub-groups for reaching the new AYP goal, but have calculated the Safe Harbor goal to make it more realistic. Every teacher knows the children who are not Proficient, and what sub-group would benefit from their success.