

# **CALIFORNIA “BEST PRACTICES” STUDY**

**SUMMER 2004**

## **CASE STUDY:**

### **PRAIRIE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL**

*Elk Grove School District  
Sacramento, California*

*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)<sup>1</sup>. The portraits are derived from in-depth 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?

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<sup>1</sup> Eligibility for the federally-funded free and reduced price lunch program is used by the education system as a proxy measure for poverty.

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](http://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.

## 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 75<sup>th</sup> percentile score in each area. A district with a score above the 75<sup>th</sup> 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 45<sup>th</sup> to 55<sup>th</sup> 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.jftk-ca.org/bp-methodology](http://www.jftk-ca.org/bp-methodology) or [www.basrc.org](http://www.basrc.org).

One of our ten high-performer case study sites is Prairie Elementary School in the Elk Grove Unified School District (EGUSD) in Sacramento, California.

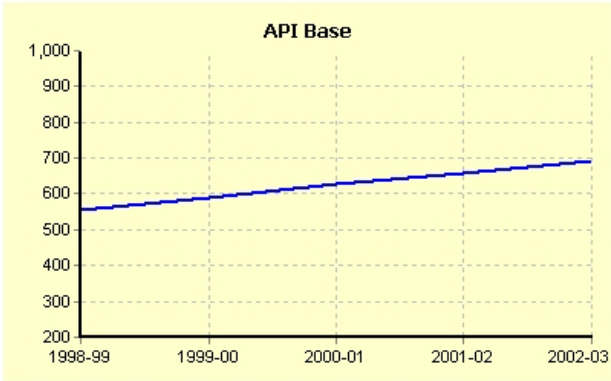
**DATA ABOUT PRAIRIE**

**School Profile**  
Student Enrollment: 1,064<sup>2</sup>  
Free/Reduced-price School Lunch Percentage: 77%  
English Language Learner Percentage: 41%  
District Characterization: Large City

Prairie Elementary is a high-poverty, high-performing school in which approximately 77 percent of the students qualify for free/reduced-price lunch, compared to the state average of 49 percent. The school is a Schoolwide Title I (SWP) School.<sup>3</sup>

During 2002-2003, the school showed significant improvement on the AYP. In Language Arts, the percentage of proficient students increased from 21 percent in 2002 to 30 percent in 2003. In mathematics, 40 percent were proficient in 2003 compared with 31 percent in 2002. The school also has shown growth in its Academic Performance Index (API) scores.

**Prairie API Data 1998-2003**



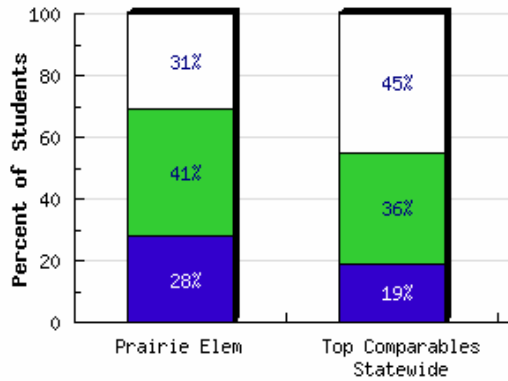
- API increased by 50 points from 2000 to 2002. In 2003, the school’s API was 696, a 40-point increase from 2002.

- Within the schools largest demographic group – Hispanic/Latinos – the API increased by 80 points between 2000 and 2002. In 2003, Latino students continued the trend by increasing their score from 643 in 2002 to 670 in 2003.
- The school increased its API scores for African American students from 622 in 2002 to 676 in 2003.
- The school increased its API scores for socio-economically disadvantaged students from 657 in 2002 to 697 in 2003.

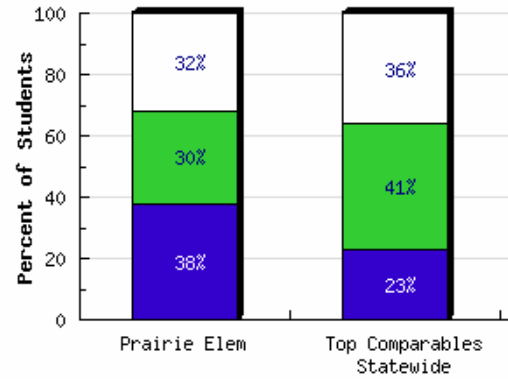
<sup>2</sup> Unless otherwise referenced, all quantitative data in this study is drawn from the California Department of Education website: [www.ed-data.k12.ca.us](http://www.ed-data.k12.ca.us)  
<sup>3</sup> See <http://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/sw/rt/> for more information on SWP Schools.

The following bar graphs show Prairie's performance on the California Standard Test (CST) compared to demographically similar schools

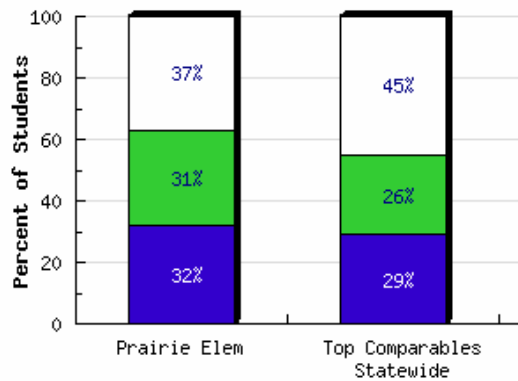
Grade 5 Language Arts 2003 Results



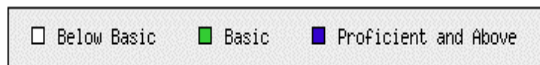
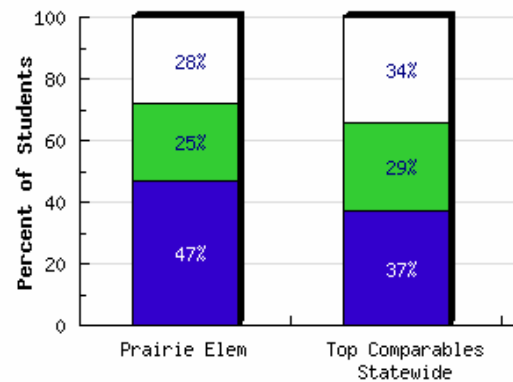
Grade 4 Language Arts 2003 Results



Grade 5 Mathematics 2003 Results

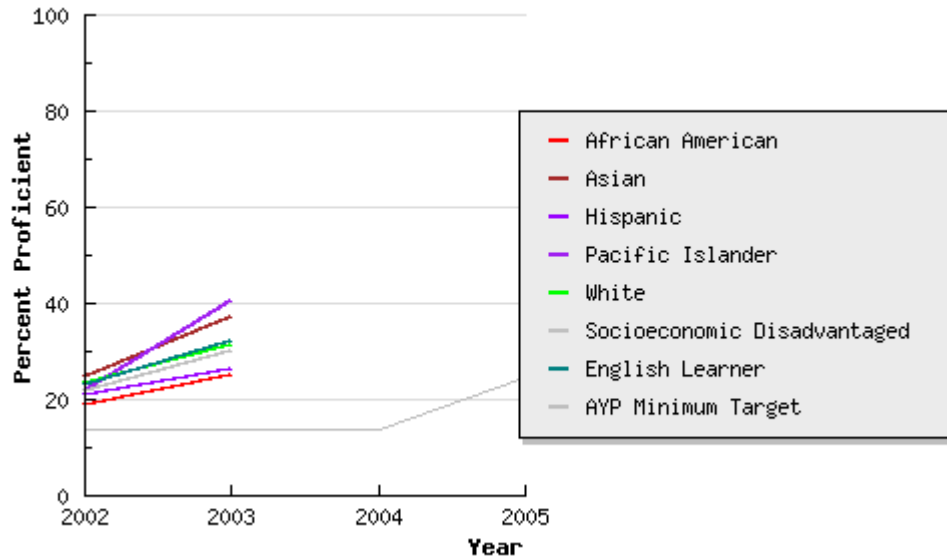


Grade 4 Mathematics 2003 Results



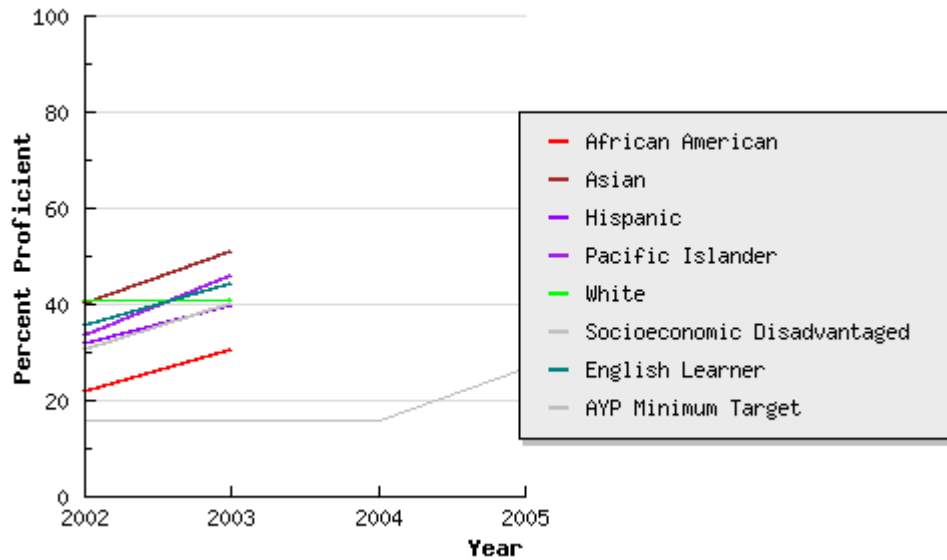
**These graphs track the rate of improvement in Language Arts and Math at Prairie disaggregated by subgroups.**

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



[www.jftk-ca.org](http://www.jftk-ca.org)

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



**DISTRICT CHARACTERISTICS**

The Elk Grove Unified School District (EGUSD) has served the Consumnes River, south Sacramento area, since 1959. The district is the second largest in northern California and one of the fastest growing in the nation. The 320 square miles of the district include the city of Elk Grove as well as the southern part of the City of Sacramento and large portions of Sacramento County. District enrollment is increasing by approximately 2,500 students each year. For the 2004-05 academic year, the district's K-12 enrollment is expected to be more than 54,000 students. The district's diversity is reflected in the more than seventy languages spoken within its schools.

<b>EGUSD Student Demographics</b>	
American Indian:	1%
Asian:	17%
African American:	19%
White:	35%
Filipino:	5%
Latino:	19%
Pacific Islander:	2%

Enough new families moved into the district in 2001 that four to five students entered the district's schools daily, enough to fill a classroom every three to five days. By 2003-2004, that figure had doubled: between seven and eight students entered daily, enough to fill almost two classrooms every five days. To keep up with this growth, the district will need to build an average of more than three new schools a year - about 27 new schools - by 2010 even after opening four new schools for the 2004-05 school year.

**SCHOOL CHARACTERISTICS**

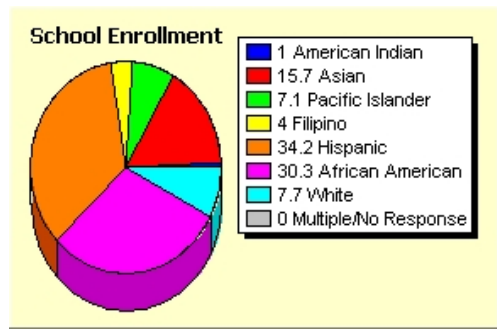
Prairie is one of the thirty-six elementary schools in the EGUSD. With 1,064 K-6 students (along with 260 preschoolers) it is

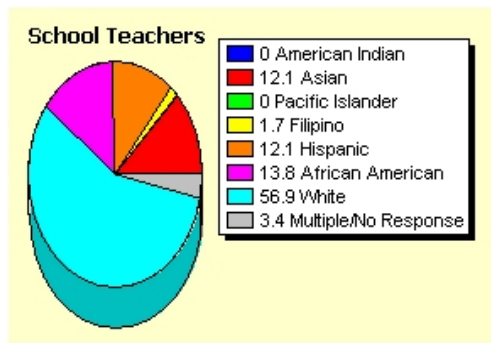
among the largest elementary schools in the district. The majority of the students is of color and socio-economically disadvantaged. Approximately 41 percent of its students are English Language Learners compared with the state average of 26 percent. Yet, while the percent of English learners is disproportionately high, so is the rate of redesignation. The percent of English Language Learners who achieved proficiency in 2002-2003 (measured against the percent of English Language Learners of previous year) was 21 percent, compared to the state average proficiency rate of 8 percent.

In part certainly due to the rapid pace of development in the area, the mobility rate at Prairie is high. In 2002-2003, just under a quarter (23 percent) of the students were new to the school (as opposed to the state average of an 18 percent mobility rate).

While the teacher demographics are not representative of those of the students, with 60 percent white teachers the school is far more diverse than the average school in the state, where white teachers make up 74 percent of the average faculty.

Following is the breakdown of student demographic groups at Prairie:





California Department of Education:  
<http://www.ed-data.k12.ca.u>

## FINDINGS

### District:

1. The district (and school) sets explicit, measurable goals for improvement in student performance that include goals for grade, subject and student population subgroups.
2. District leaders and staff are part of a learning community that provides multiple ways for teachers and administrators to develop the skills to ensure that all students receive high quality instruction.
3. District staff provides the resources and supports for sites to make data-based decisions to supplement core texts when they are not serving the needs of all students.
4. 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.
5. The district (and school) refers to principals, teachers and parents as clients to be served rather than individuals to be managed.

### School:

1. School leaders (and teachers) embrace state and district-adopted standards.
2. School leaders use data to make decisions about resource allocation.

3. School leaders provide teachers and staff professional development opportunities that enable them to learn new teaching strategies apply those new approaches and then collaboratively refine them.
4. School leaders provide a menu of intervention programs equipping teachers to adjust to meet student needs.
5. Interventions are used and benchmarks are set with redesignation as the goal.

### Classroom:

1. Teachers regularly use state and district standards to plan curriculum and ensure that students understand the goal of each lesson and where they need to improve.
2. Teachers regularly differentiate and adapt instruction based on data analysis to ensure all students reach grade level standards.
3. Teachers provide necessary support to students (often in collaboration with colleagues, school and district expert staff and parents) to ensure they meet standards.

## A SNAPSHOT OF PRAIRIE

Prairie Elementary is working in close partnership with the district to adjust to its rapidly increasing student enrollment.

The school's recent academic success has been achieved despite many challenges. One of the most recent and unique came the fall of 2003, when sections of the school were closed and more than 200 students were relocated because of an epidemic of mild upper respiratory illness.

One factor that contributes enormously toward Prairie's academic success by teacher

and leadership report is the school's and the district's intense focus on instruction. To enable administrators to concentrate on instruction rather than on administration, the district and school jointly have devised a plan to free the principal from extraneous activities so she can focus on the classrooms and work closely with students and teachers. Prairie has one full-time academic coordinator who tends to class schedules and grades among other items. In addition, Prairie has two intervention teachers along with two reading coaches who support the principal in her work so she is freer to focus on instruction.

Yet one more key factor at Prairie is the focus on high expectations for the learning of students *and* adults. A poster-size poem by the school's "announcement board" is telling. Titled *The Power to Teach* (by Frank Trujillo), it reads...

*...Mine is a present power and a future power...Mine is a giving power. All that I know about the world and about how one learns about the world I must give...*

### CURRICULUM AND ACADEMIC GOALS

Prairie Elementary articulates its academic goals within the school's Annual Academic Improvement Plan. The Plan, once formulated, is submitted to the district office where it is assessed for alignment with the district's own goals and policies. In the school's 2004 Academic Improvement Plan, the following targets were set to improve student achievement:

- 50 percent of all student subgroups scoring in the Far-Below Basic and Below Basic levels on the CST will increase scores sufficiently to exit those categories in both Math and Language Arts
- 100 percent of English Language Learners will progress at least one English Language Development (ELD) level as

measured by the California English Language Development Test (CELDT)

- All schools will meet annual API/AYP targets for each subgroup
- CST scores will increase from 390 to 410 in Language Arts
- The number of African American and Hispanic/Latino students scoring proficient or advanced in ELA will increase by 10 percent.

Once these goals were determined, the school spelled out the following specific actions:

- **Language Arts:** Grade-level teams will follow the long-term instructional plan by focusing on a new target for improvement each month. Full Open Court implementation will be supported through ongoing staff development to be provided by instructional coaches
- **Math:** Grade-level teams will follow the long-term instructional plan by focusing on a new target for improvement each month
- Teachers will implement an additional 20 minutes of oral language development in all ELD classes and all teachers will receive staff development in implementation of the ELD strategies used
- Teachers will use ongoing student assessment and monitoring to identify students' specific needs for differentiated instruction.

This coordinated process of goal-setting, assessing and planning leads the school to set goals both for improved results and for implementation of particular strategies to achieve these goals.

### STAFF SELECTION AND CAPACITY BUILDING

The district sees its prime task to be to "better serve its clients," in the words of the director

of elementary education. When asked who those clients might be, she pointed out that those would be the districts principals, teachers and students.

The district has processes in place that support good communication with principals. One such process is the yearly “Elementary Principals Retreat” which is presided over by the associate superintendent. A typical agenda for this retreat includes:

- Academic Targets for Elementary Education
- Academic Goal Setting
- “Cohort Time” and Individual School Site Meetings

The “Cohort Time” deserves some elaboration here. To maintain a venue for support among administrators who share common concerns, and manage its large and growing size, the district developed a leadership team consisting of representatives from the individual cohorts of elementary schools in the district. Cohorts are divided by Title 1/Non-Title 1 schools, by geographic area and by whether you are year-round or traditional school. (To manage the size, the majority of the elementary schools are year round.) Elk Grove has six such cohorts: two Title 1 East cohorts—due to the size of that region—and one Title 1 West cohort; two Non-Title 1 East cohorts; and one Non-Title 1 West cohort and one Traditional Cohort. A principal is elected each year on a rotating basis from each cohort to serve as cohort leader. Two weeks of the month the associate superintendent meets with all the elementary school principals. Cohort leaders subsequently meet twice a month to discuss all non-academic issues they share.

In addition to these regular meetings among all principals, the district offers specific forms of support to new principals. For example,

the associate superintendent meets with new principals for breakfast once a month.

Each year, the district also holds a vice-principals’ retreat meeting, again presided over by the director of elementary education. The agenda for this retreat revolves around setting academic targets, discussing test scores and data, and targeting academic improvement. This retreat helps prepare these administrators for the principalship. Principals and vice-principals alike serve in both Title 1 and non-Title 1 schools, to build a broad base of experience and collegial community. Principals typically rotate every two years and vice principals can rotate as frequently as yearly. So Prairie’s principal previously served in a non-Title 1 school and her vice-principal, come end of year 2003-2004, will move to one of the district’s non-Title 1 schools.

Elementary school administrators receive specialized training to develop increased skill in supervision, evaluation and intervention with under-performing teachers.

Teachers are also provided with ample opportunities for professional development at Prairie. District-mandated Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment (BTSA) training is provided which helps new teachers build their skills and begin to put into practice the California Standards for the Teaching Profession.

Alignment of the curriculum and instructional programs to state standards is a high priority in Elk Grove, which became an early adopter of Open Court and which also invested heavily in professional development for teachers. Prairie is no exception. One of the most innovative and well-regarded professional development strategies at the site is a teacher-based training that was the brainchild of the Associate Superintendent of

Elementary and Middle Schools at EGUSD. This seminar, conducted and attended only by the teachers as an annual event, is highly popular among the teachers. There are no administrators or outside coaches presiding over these meetings. Teachers from the same grade level gather together informally and exchange ideas and methods about lesson planning and effective teaching strategies. “We have found that peer support is some of the most powerful. There is a deeper level of trust and openness when you’re learning from peers rather than from outside consultants or superiors,” notes the principal.

#### INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAMS, STRATEGIES AND PRACTICES

Prairie operates on a four-track, year-round schedule. Students attend school for 60 days and then break for 20 days. The school day runs from 8:00 a.m. until 2:30 p.m.

The school uses the district- mandated Open Court text as its Language Arts core curriculum and Scott Foresman as its Math curriculum.

The district hand picks the text books from a list provided by the state and subsequently conducts pilot programs at different schools. The teachers piloting instructional materials meet with the district officials and provide their feedback based on their own evaluations. Community members and parents are strongly encouraged to review the curriculum and provide their input. The most important criterion when it comes to adoption of a new curriculum or textbook is alignment with the standards. However, “we also look at easy readability for the teachers and easy access to additional and supplementary materials” says the district associate superintendent.

Accountability is one key to successful implementation of a common curriculum by

school and district leadership report. The district, for example, publishes the API scores for each school in the local newspaper. “I do think that it is practices like these that make us more accountable,” says the district director of elementary education.

Teachers at Prairie are deeply conversant in the standards, talk about them freely and easily with students – in child-appropriate language -- and make them easy to recognize as soon as someone enters their classroom. The district has identified differentiated instruction as a key element of effective instructional practice at Prairie and throughout the sites. As the district director of elementary education elaborates, “The biggest or the most important thing we look for during a classroom visit is the workshop time in Open Court and Math.” In walk throughs they use a tool all teachers and site administrators know well to look for the number of children engaged in purposeful work towards the standards. “It’s a major focus for us,” she adds.

In addition to the differentiation of instruction for all students that happens within Open Court and Math workshop time, teachers also use specific supplementary materials and targeted instructional strategies for English Language Learners and children identified as at-risk. Some examples of these materials and strategies are:

For English Language Acquisition:

- Rosetta Stone<sup>4</sup>
- Language for Learning<sup>5</sup>
- Accelerated Reader – Computer based

For Core Subject Support:

- Open Court ELD Guide

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<sup>4</sup> A computer program to build literary skills among ELL students. It is used for 20 minutes/day.

<sup>5</sup> State adopted supplemental program

- Scott Foresmann Math Strategies

At Prairie, strategies to support English Language Learners are seen as a key part of any lesson. Generally, as one teacher put it, good strategies for English Language Learners are just plain good for all students.

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

Monitoring of student data at Prairie is extensive and systematic. Across the board, teachers and administrators realize the importance of data. Teachers are expected to know not just the overall school data on state assessment tests, but also the individual student progress data. To acquire this fine grain knowledge of where students are in their learning, teachers are expected and supported to engage in frequent assessments on individual student progress together with their students. Teachers are constantly engaged in exchanges of new ways to better track student learning. In addition, they are constantly looking for new ways to engage the students themselves in goal setting and monitoring their progress. “The point is that the students themselves take ownership of the goals they set and the progress they make,” reports one teacher. In 2003-2004 the principal, vice principal and reading coach began to do individual goal setting meetings with each student. As the principal explains, Prairie leadership and faculty want each student to learn to think about how they’re doing and what they can do to improve, and want them to know that the adults around them will be working with them so they can learn and grow.

The district’s state-of-the-art software system – SISWEB – is maintained and managed by the research and evaluation department. At the beginning of each year, all new teachers are provided training by the research and

evaluation department staff in how to read and use data.

School-wide, students are assessed three times each year at Prairie. At the beginning of the year, STAR<sup>6</sup> data is analyzed; at mid-year, Open Court data is looked at; and at the end of the academic year, all major state assessment benchmarks are analyzed and discussed by the teachers and the principal. English Language Learners have an additional annual assessment of the CELDT. During the initial days of the academic year, additional assessments may be used school-wide with at-risk students.

The school’s academic coordinator tracks the academic growth of all students and places students performing below grade level in special programs both during and after school<sup>7</sup>. The school also has two intervention teachers who support the detailed intervention program at Prairie and work with the Twilight Coordinator and the Healthy Start office. In addition, the school enjoys two reading coaches, one funded by the district and one funded through the school’s Reading First grant.

#### RECOGNITION, INTERVENTION AND ADJUSTMENT

Prairie has numerous programs in place that ensure timely recognition of academic excellence and provide strategic intervention for struggling students. The Intervention Coordinator oversees these programs.

Students are recognized for a variety of successes, ranging from academic

<sup>6</sup> Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) Program included four components: 1. California Standards Tests (CST); 2. California Alternate Performance Assessment (CAPA); 3. California Achievement Test (CAT/6); 4. Spanish Assessment of Basic Education, 2nd Edition (SABE/2).

<sup>7</sup> More on this program under Recognition, Intervention.

improvement to good behavior. Students are rewarded for their exemplary behavior or achievement in a number of ways.

A Student Study Team (SST) that includes both parents and school staff oversees intervention programs at Prairie. Students who score far below basic on the CST or are failing to meet grade level standards for promotion are designated at-risk. These students receive intense and timely intervention tracked in the shape of a program called the “purple folder.”

The purple folder follows children throughout their time in the system and when they transfer to another school, so that new teachers have a record of the child’s academic progress. The classroom teacher is required to review and update the purple folders on regular basis.

The “Twilight” after school program may be the most notable intervention strategy at Prairie. This after-school program offers 45 minutes of reading instruction, 45 minutes of homework help, and 45 minutes of math instruction. All is provided in three hours of after school support and organized by the Twilight Coordinator. Preference is given to students at risk of retention.

Additionally, there is an in-class intervention called “push-in” to distinguish it from more traditional “pull-out” programs that have been designed especially for English Language Learners. The push-in lesson plan includes:

- 5-7 minutes of strategy practice with words from the intervention manual provided by the SST.
- 5-7 minutes of using the strategy to decode challenging words from the intervention guide.
- 5-7 minutes to review selection vocabulary.

- 20 minutes reading from the intervention guide.

In addition to focus on academic progress, by principal report Prairie has consciously and deliberately invested resources in supporting students’ social and behavioral development. Indeed, when in response to a series of bullying incidents in the Elk Grove high schools in 2004 the district called together a task force (comprised of district staff, principals and teachers and parents) to focus on strategies to better support students’ social/behavioral development, this group identified a list of “Student Unity Programs” (see tool) that their research identified as valuable supports to address development in these areas. When the list was published, Prairie was pleased to see that it had already in place ten of the thirty programs the task force spotlighted.

Programs supporting the students’ social development now in place at Prairie range from “Conflict Management” and “Civic Values and Ethics Education” (which offers professional development to teachers in assisting students in building their civic skills ) to their work with “Tools for Tolerance”, where Prairie’s fifth grade students all participate in two days of intensive training that enables them to articulate and implement anti-bullying programs on their campus.

One distinctive feature of the Prairie is the presence of Healthy Start on the school grounds. All faculty, particularly when they have students in the Twilight Program, work in close alignment with supports made available through Healthy Start.

**FACTORS INFLUENCING EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES**

The principal enjoys a close relationship with the teachers and the students. She attributes the strength of the relationship to a district initiative that provides her more time to focus on instruction than on administration.

According to the director of elementary education, "We try to come up with ways to free up our administrators so they can get into the classrooms more frequently and make sure that good teaching and good strategies are going on."

To address administrative tasks such as building maintenance, hiring/firing of part-time personnel etc that the principal might otherwise be doing, Prairie receives the services of two state-mandated academic coordinators, referred to as "call prevention and academic specialists." These two coordinators are paid from Title I funds.

The district aims to support its school leadership in other ways as well, in addition to providing academic coordinators to principals. The district provides training to the administrators on how to effectively manage time. One district-organized training session was titled "How to Work Less, Play More, and Still Get the Job Done in a Normal School Week."

**"How to Work Less, Play More, and Still Get the Job Done in a Normal School Week"**  
  
Now in its third year, this program has been proven to double the amount of time administrators spend in classrooms coaching teachers, while simultaneously reducing work loads. In this program you will learn about:

- Education paradigms that keep school leaders overworked and underutilized
- Getting a principal and front office staff out the school door by 4 pm daily, without losing administrative effectiveness

- Best practices for utilizing the school secretary
- How to increase a principal's time in classrooms
- You will leave able to run your organization in significantly less time than it currently takes you
- Spend two full days a week in classrooms
- Empower your secretary to free up your leadership capacity and more!

Despite the school's size and complex year-round calendar, a strong sense of community is evident at Prairie. The principal and the staff take pride in getting to know students personally. One sixth grade teacher, his students and a yard duty supervisor in 2003-2004 drew public attention to this culture of community by setting an example that made headlines in the local newspapers and television station.

**Students Shave Heads to Support Fellow Classmate:**  
Nine sixth grade students at Prairie Elementary School joined a teacher and a yard duty supervisor in having their heads shaved to support their fellow classmate, Michael Soto, who has been diagnosed with Leukemia. His teacher, Daniel Di Mundo, challenged the students at Prairie to raise \$1,000 through the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society "Pennies for Patients" program. Di Mundo said he would have his head shaved if his students raised more than \$1,000, and the students had raised \$1,711.11 as of April 2. Four employees of the James Mark Salon and Spa in Elk Grove donated their time to cut the participants' hair.

**CONCLUSION**

Notable at Prairie are the following:

- A relationship with the district that centers on shared standards and that includes an emphasis on accountability
- The involvement of administrators in improving instruction

- Cohort Time – enables the administrators to share strategies for effective instruction with like-minded colleagues.
- Timely and extensive interventions and simple strategies to help teachers and administrators identify at-risk students and, track their progress, as well as the effectiveness of the intervention program
- High quality professional development for both administrators and the teachers are encouraged and provided.
- Data availability through the state-of-the-art software system, courtesy of the research department at the district, enables the school to disaggregate data in numerous ways.