

**National Center for
Educational
Accountability**

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Just for the Kids – Colorado Elementary School Study, 2004-05

Ignacio Elementary School, Ignacio School District

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NCEA and Just for the Kids

NCEA is a collaboration of The University of Texas at Austin, Education Commission of the States and Just for the Kids. NCEA's mission is to inform, inspire and improve learning through the effective use of school and student data and the identification and replication of best practices found in high-performing districts, schools and classrooms. NCEA is the national sponsor of Just for the Kids School Improvement Tools and Services which present complex data in a way that is fair, actionable and available for all members of our public school communities. NCEA works in partnership with a growing number of Just for the Kids state affiliate partners, currently in more than twenty states.

Funding for this project

2004-2005 NCEA state best practice studies have been made possible in part by a matching grant from The Broad Foundation, much acclaimed for their work in urban education as sponsors of the Broad Prize for Urban Education. Studies include elementary, middle and high school best practices in twenty states, and often involve teaming with state research partners to conduct site-based interviews and observations.

NCEA State Studies Overview

Schools and Districts across the country are participating in an initiative led by the National Center for Educational Accountability (NCEA) to help teachers and administrators learn from successful schools and school systems and inspire school communities to promote best practices in their local schools. In partnership with a network of Just for the Kids state affiliates, NCEA has been conducting Best Practice State Studies focused on finding and sharing excellence in educational practices since 2001. Schools and systems selected to participate in these studies are identified through an in-depth analysis of academic achievement developed by NCEA using data publicly available from the state.

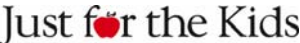
At Ignacio Elementary School, data were collected during a two-day site visit at the school and district administrative offices. Structured interviews were conducted with educators at three different levels of the school system: district administrators, school administrators, and classroom teachers. Additionally, evidence and artifacts were collected to illustrate and support the interviewees' responses. Participants answered interview questions from the NCEA State Best Practice Research Protocols. Interview and artifact data were analyzed using standard qualitative data reduction techniques and summarized in this case study.

School Selection

According to the regression analysis conducted by NCEA, Ignacio Elementary School was selected to participate in the Colorado Elementary School Study because it consistently ranked among the top of demographically similar elementary schools as measured by achievement on the Colorado Student Assessment Program (CSAP) in 2002, 2003, and 2004. Students were tested in reading and writing in grades three through six, and in mathematics in grades five and six. Ignacio Elementary School was one of 7 elementary schools to participate in the 2004-2005 Colorado Elementary School Study.

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IGNACIO ELEMENTARY SCHOOL, IGNACIO SCHOOL DISTRICT

School Context

The Ignacio School District is located in the Southwest corner of Colorado. It is a small rural community that is home to the Southern Ute Native American tribe. The Ignacio District has a tri-ethnic population consisting of Native American, Hispanic, and Anglo students. Approximately 60% of the students qualify for free and reduced lunch.

One of the main challenges facing the district is declining student enrollment. There are numerous factors contributing to declining enrollment including: limited property to buy, a small young population, previous reports of disciplinary issues and low test scores, and students leaving to attend a Montessori school on the reservation. The incoming principal of Ignacio Elementary School stressed parents' concerns about student bullying at the higher grades. She saw declining enrollment as being directly linked to decreased revenue. The principal explained, "We no longer have teacher's aids in every classroom. Next year we'll have two kindergarten teachers instead of three."

The incoming superintendent, who is leaving his position as the Elementary School principal, stated, "We are doing our best to meet the community needs. We do need to get some more money put into the district. I think complaints can be tied back to declining enrollment." The declining enrollment often affects how the future of the district is examined. It takes on particular importance with the listing of test scores in local newspapers and divergent perceptions about the district in the community.

The need to understand the unique characteristic of this community has led to a system of "growing their own" administrative staff. As the outgoing superintendent said, "This is my thirty-second year as an educator. I've been within twenty-eight miles of Ignacio my whole life. Until you come to the district and work with it, you can't really get a feeling for it." The district and teaching staff at Ignacio continually work to understand the local community. This has involved initiatives which include, creating a tri-ethnic advisory committee and the district's role in People for a Better Ignacio, PBI. PBI is an initiative by the district and the Southern Ute Tribal Council to deal with issues in the community. PBI is a tri-ethnic committee which promotes positive community interaction and improvement plans. The school district and PBI work together to address the cultural issues and educational needs of the Southern Ute population in Ignacio.

The importance of the district's relationship with the community was continually stressed, being a small community where many people know each other. As the former principal of Ignacio Elementary commented, "I taught more than half of the students' parents in this building." The community is often closely linked to the district's schedule. Upcoming district events are posted on the billboard of a local restaurant, the Patio, which is situated along the main road through town.

The push in the district for academic consistency and continual examination of data involves a regular investigation of how different groups are having their academic needs met. The incoming superintendent, while expressing his pride in the tri-ethnic community, said, "We focus on academic achievement to keep moving forward and to look at the uniqueness of this community." The uniqueness of the community was a recurring theme among staff in

Ignacio. With community feedback and an investigation of student data, the district focuses on three areas: academic achievement, discipline, and technology.

Within the low socio-economic district of Ignacio, Ignacio Elementary School is striving to provide high quality education. The Elementary School teachers said they were motivated by beating the state test percentages. The teachers face the challenges of students frequently moving, the lack of involvement of parents of at risk children, and helping students with limited academic skills. One teacher summarized the situation, "The primary challenges are low socio-economic students, attendance, and getting parents to come." With the pressures of declining enrollment, the school has lost both programs and staff and continues to persist in a state education climate that stresses, "Do more with less." Despite these challenges, the school works to do what is best for its students by sticking to the school wide improvement plan and addressing the needs of individual students. As one teacher explained, "We see success as trying to bring up each kid's level." Focusing on raising each student's level allows staff to work with children from Special Education students to Gifted and Talented, with the same goal in mind. Student success and unity of the diverse student body were characterized as priorities for Ignacio Elementary School. The Ignacio School District is part of the Colorado Positive Behavior Initiative. A team of Intermediate teachers helped develop the school's PAWS program. The PAWS program, based on the district mascot, the bobcat, stands for Positive Attitudes Will Succeed and its motto is CATS, confidence, accepting, thoughtful, and safe.

Student Demographics	Ignacio Elementary	Ignacio School District	Colorado
Enrollment of Racial/Ethnic Groups	2004	2004	2004
White (%)	36.9	34.8	64.5
Black (%)	0.5	0.8	5.8
Hispanic (%)	24.1	24.5	25.3
Asian/Pacific Islander (%)	1.0	0.3	3.1
American Indian/Alaska Native (%)	37.4	39.7	1.2
Enrollment of Students with Special Needs			
Economically Disadvantaged (%)	67.7	52.0	30.2
Enrollment Distribution by Gender			
Female (%)	44.1	45.7	48.6
Male (%)	55.9	54.3	51.3

Curriculum and Academic Goals

In the Ignacio School District the current focus is to gear all activities to meeting the standards. Ignacio Elementary School has not had any major curricular changes in the past year but there has been an increased focus on student data. The District Technology team has made predictions of student learning needs based on data. This use of student data is beginning to impact the curriculum. The incoming principal stated, "We are still in the infant stages of the data focus. We decided, for example, that we wanted to work on word choice and we are going to meet again to see if it has made a change."

Ignacio Elementary School has a school wide plan through Title 1 which governs how things move in the building. Through meetings and in-services, the school works to get curriculum documents in place. Critical Friends groups are also used to explore curricular issues. In reading, the school has been using the Silver Berdet Literature series. The Elementary

School has been working with Mathland, getting ready to adopt Math Investigation, and training all teachers in Step Up to Writing.

District goals are monitored through the district accreditation plan, the curriculum process, and the meeting of AYP every year in reading and mathematics. The school and district goals are aligned around the three focus areas: achievement, behavior, and technology. These areas provide common goals that each school can work towards. The first annual goal set out in the district accreditation plan is as follows:

- I. Alignment with Consolidated Grant Goals
 - 100% or AYP proficiency in reading and math by 2013-2014.
 - All staff highly qualified per Leave No Child Behind.
 - English Language Proficiency (a) identify percent of English Language Learners and (b) percent of ELL that are making progress.
 - Safe, drug-free, civil learning environment.
 - Improve student academic achievement through use of technology K-12. Implement Instructional Technology Literacy program.
 - Budget according to guideline.

Staff Selection, Leadership, and Capacity Building

The district has created a system for developing their own administrative staff. This process was put into place after high administrative turnover rates occurred with personnel from outside the community. The Intermediate School principal expressed the challenges of coming into the district as an outside person, "The administration turnover is greater than the teachers because it is tough. You take all the heat. In some cases the community can drive people away." The former principal of Ignacio Elementary School also stressed the importance of being able to work well with the community and parents. He saw some of his success as an administrator as being related to the fact that he taught many of the students' parents and was known within the community from his days as the high school football coach.

Currently all of the principals in the Ignacio School District were developed as in-house candidates. The leaders within individual buildings are often reorganized to meet the changing needs of the district. The Elementary School principal is becoming the new superintendent, the head teacher at the Elementary School is becoming the Elementary School principal, and the High School assistant principal will be the Junior High principal. The transition of administrators is eased by the frequent contact between the administrators that are relocating.

Administrator transitioning and training occurs through shadowing. The Elementary principal has been shadowing the superintendent and increasingly getting involved in district issues. The head teacher becoming the Elementary School principal will spend a couple of years working closely with the Intermediate School principal. The transitioning administration is tempered by the small size of the district where teachers within the buildings are already familiar with the incoming principals. Weekly principal meetings with the superintendent and informal contact allow principals to become acquainted with individual building and staff issues. In addition to shadowing, new principals get support from a Board of Cooperative Services, BOCS. BOCS provides services to small rural school districts that are not large enough to have various training and support programs. BOCS, in conjunction with the district, provides support to new principals.

Teachers are selected through newspaper advertisements, teacher fairs, and postings on the district website. The principal picks a selection committee to help with the teacher selection process. The selection committee usually involves teaching staff from the same grade level that the applicant is applying for. After a set group of questions the committee votes on which candidates they think should be hired.

Though much of the teacher training is case by case, teachers also meet during grade level meetings and common planning times. The curriculum director is visible within the school and helps teachers learn about curriculum programs. Teachers commented that there is a supportive environment amongst the staff. As one teacher stated, "We have an open door policy for whoever needs anything." The positive reinforcement of the principal and a recent raise across the board were identified as adding to teacher retention.

Extensive training is available to teachers. The BOCS provides a new teacher induction program with monthly meetings. Participants in the program look at instructional and behavioral issues and do a student case study. Other than the BOCS programs, additional teacher training occurs through district and teacher initiatives. Topics of district trainings are based on student data with input from the curriculum director.

Instructional Programs, Practices, and Arrangements

Curriculum adoption is done through a process of piloting. The district has set out a policy for piloting of programs:

A teacher or staff group wishing to initiate a pilot program shall obtain written approval for the project in advance. For each such project a letter explaining the purposes, setting forth a general outline for procedures, and a plan of assessment/evaluation shall be submitted for approval through the Building Principal of the school involved to the Superintendent of Schools.

At the end of the school year, the teacher who piloted the program submits an evaluation to the superintendent. This process allows staff to become intimately involved with the curricular materials used in the schools.

The Colorado Basic Literacy Act forced the Elementary School to figure out what sort of assessment they were going to use. This led the school to investigate what student outcomes they wanted. The incoming principal sees a value in language arts that involves actual writing and reading and not just worksheet time. In discussing the school's language arts program the principal mentioned, "High-quality classroom instruction can be seen in the fact that all of our teachers, building-wide, block off the morning for a literacy block. You will see some sort of language arts activity taking place. We have the same curriculum and instruction." Currently the school uses the following research based programs: Spalding Writing Road to Reading Language Arts Program, the Silver Burdett Ginn Literature Works, Reading Renaissance, and Mathland.

Regular monitoring is used to determine the progress of the program. Students take Northwest Evaluation Association, NWEA- MAP, testing three times a year. Benchmarks are set along the way to see if the programs are working and the District Technology Team closely monitors student test data. Teachers are able to determine the effectiveness of a program as they use it. As one teacher explained, "Basically we look at test scores and we meet as a group to see where there are gaps."

Student's learning needs are addressed in various ways. Special Education students have Individual Education Plans, IEP's and work closely with the Special Education teacher. Some of the Special Education students have one on one aides and others are pulled out of class. The incoming principal has done research on the tendency for Special Education programs to be a "dumping ground for male minority students." To ensure that students are not wrongly being assigned to Special Education, teachers go through a process that involves the Teacher Assistance Team, TAT, and a Child Study Team which evaluates the particular needs of the students.

The Elementary School has a lot of students who are limited language learners. Most of the teaching staff has ELL training so these students can stay within their assigned classrooms. Students that are struggling have different avenues of help including, Title 1 support, a part time counselor, and TAT. TAT is a team made up of grade level representatives and the principal to brainstorm ideas for addressing student problems. For Southern Ute students there is additional educational support from the Southern Ute Education Program such as a tutor who will come into the school to work with students.

Student Achievement Data	Ignacio Elementary	Ignacio School District	Colorado
How Students Performed on State Reading Tests	2005	2005	2005
Grade 3 Reading - At or Above Partially Proficient (%)	96.0	96.0	90.0
How Students Performed on State Math Tests			
Grade 3 Math - At or Above Partially Proficient (%)	96.0	96.0	92.0
How Students Performed on State Science Tests			
How Students Performed on State Writing Tests			
Grade 3 Writing - At or Above Partially Proficient (%)	99.0	99.0	94.0

Monitoring: Compilation, Analysis, and Use of Data

The district uses state assessments to monitor its goals. Although the state assessment was developed by teachers, some district personnel were concerned that the math section was "too high" and that the test didn't reflect the unique cultural makeup of the community and its strengths. Colorado was described by the staff as having a triple accountability process with NCLB, AYP, and CSAP. The challenges on time and personnel with three separate standards were characterized as "frustrating." The district works to link student goals with district goals.

In addition to the state assessments, the district uses NWEA- MAPS. NWEA is aligned with state standards and through its Decart program, personnel can get in-depth information on students' academic ability levels. Colorado requires a performance committee that recommends an evaluation procedure for the district. Along with their formal evaluations, the district benefits from being able to have daily contact with other administrators to focus on student learning challenges. At the school level NWEA- MAPS testing occurs three times a year from 2nd through 10th grade.

There was concern amongst the staff of Ignacio Elementary School about how state assessment information is used. The grading of a school was seen as detrimental. The principal in discussing the state assessment said, "I think it is a pretty good assessment tool but we are in a diverse community. There are a certain amount of biases that are not appropriate but it has raised the bar." Other teachers were concerned that the test didn't reflect rural communities and took discovery inquiry learning out of the classroom.

Teachers chose to monitor their students through Alpine Achievement and data driven discussion groups. The incoming principal expressed the school's approach towards student evaluation, "When evaluating a student, we go to a Child Study Team. The push now is to talk about each child, compile information, and we have a whole list of intervention strategies." The staff works to use early interventions and interventions listed on the Alpine website.

Probationary teachers are evaluated two times a year and non-probationary teachers are evaluated every other year. The evaluation involves a preconference, observation, and post conference. Informal observations are used to evaluate staff's use of disciplinary referral, record keeping, and attendance at meetings. Student data are not officially part of the evaluation process but it is discussed with staff. Each staff member has a Professional Growth Plan and if staff members are not meeting district expectations they are put on a Professional Improvement Plan, which sets out specific areas of improvement.

Recognition, Intervention, and Adjustments

The greatest challenge facing student achievement is attendance. The district continues to work to raise student achievement and get students to attend school. Intervention and reward programs are all based on student data.

Ignacio Elementary School has the Bobcat awards and PAWS. The school has a system for student behavior called PAWS that reinforces positive behavior by giving students recognition points that can be exchanged for school supply items. As the PAWS handbook explains to parents, "The most important part of this program is your child will be rewarded more frequently for good behavior than disciplined for negative behavior. When your child is seen following one of the rules, they will be given a "PAWS" (POSITIVE ATTITUDES WILL SUCCEED!). 'PAWS' are the concrete reward that can be exchanged later." At Ignacio Elementary School students also get dog tags for reading in the library.

Influencing Factors

Both Southern Ute and non-native community members expressed the challenges of learning about cultures that are different from one's own. Part of meeting the academic needs of students is acknowledging and learning about the culture from which they have come. Issues of education and mistreatment run deep for Native American parents who had negative experiences with education as students in boarding schools. The involvement of parents in Ignacio was described as a "little bit tricky" by the incoming superintendent. He is working with the adult education association and PBI to address the specific issues of the community. The school board also is a significant support within the district and was unanimously described as "not micromanaging the district." Preparing to leave his post as a principal, the incoming superintendent said of parental support, "When I talk to other principals in different districts they have more involvement but less support." A teacher commented on the parental involvement, "They are small but very dedicated and they help with the store that students can get rewards at for positive behavior."

Several staff members raised issues with the Montessori school on the reservation. The Montessori School has been a factor in declining enrollment but staff seemed more concerned with issues of educational compatibility. With students going between the two schools the students are encountering very different educational philosophies. It was the wish of some staff members that a dialogue could be developed between the two schools to discuss what is being provided for Southern Ute students.

Expenditure per Student	Ignacio School District	Colorado
Spending Summary	2003	2003
Operating Expenditures (\$ Per Student)	9,473	7,233
Instructional Expenditures (\$ Per Student)	4,972	4,177