

**National Center for  
Educational  
Accountability**

national sponsor of Just r the Kids

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

**Ignacio Intermediate School, Ignacio School District**

*For more information: Contact Janet Spence, Director of Communications: National Center for Educational Accountability - 4030-2 W. Braker Lane; Austin, Texas 78759; phone: 800.762.4645 or 512.232.0770; fax: 512.232.0777; [jspence@mail.utexas.edu](mailto:jspence@mail.utexas.edu) or [jspence@just4kids.org](mailto:jspence@just4kids.org).*

## **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.

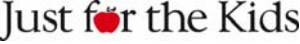
At Ignacio Intermediate School, data were collected during a two-day site visit at the school and district administrative offices. Structured interviews were conducted with educators at three different levels of the school system: district administrators, school administrators, and classroom teachers. 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 Intermediate 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 Intermediate School was one of 7 elementary schools to participate in the 2004-2005 Colorado Elementary School Study.

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## IGNACIO INTERMEDIATE SCHOOL, IGNACIO SCHOOL DISTRICT

### School Context

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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 superintendent 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. It 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 one Ignacio Intermediate teacher commented, "I'm from here, so I know who everybody is related to. I went to school with a lot of the students' parents." 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.

The progress of Ignacio Intermediate can be traced back to when the school was first identified for school improvement in 2001. After low student achievement on the CSAP, numerous developments occurred: the setting of improvement goals, instructional restructuring, school wide Title 1 programs for math and reading, and administrative changes. These changes which involved the hiring of the new principal "sparked" a transition with a new focus on academics, behavior, and technology. Teachers described this change as a major shift. As one teacher said, "Years ago the papers and the other schools thought we were horrible, the superintendent didn't like us, and we were like the black sheep. It's been

a 180 degree turn.” Staff members cited the new principal as a central factor in the school’s change; bringing a new attention to behavior issues and an increased usage of student data.

While discussing her background in gang-training, the principal told me, “There’s no sixth grader tougher than me.” She identified not only her background with dealing with behavioral issues but also the district’s behavioral programs as affecting the discipline situation. 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. The PAWS program has reduced conduct referrals by 36% and led to a safer environment for learning.

<b>Student Demographics</b>	<b>Ignacio Intermediate</b>	<b>Ignacio School District</b>	<b>Colorado</b>
Enrollment of Racial/Ethnic Groups	2004	2004	2004
White (%)	32.6	34.8	64.5
Black (%)	1.1	0.8	5.8
Hispanic (%)	22.1	24.5	25.3
Asian/Pacific Islander (%)	0.0	0.3	3.1
American Indian/Alaska Native (%)	44.2	39.7	1.2
Enrollment of Students with Special Needs			
Economically Disadvantaged (%)	59.7	52.0	30.2
Enrollment Distribution by Gender			
Female (%)	45.9	45.7	48.6
Male (%)	54.1	54.3	51.3

## **Curriculum and Academic Goals**

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In the Ignacio school district the current focus is to gear all activities to meeting the standards. The principal, while discussing the change in the use of the curriculum, explained, “In the past, the curriculum was the standards, now the curriculum is the road map to meeting the standards.” This “roadmap” includes utilizing lessons, assessments, objectives, and prerequisites to meet the standards. The school is working to identify sixteen to twenty essential outcomes with an emphasis on reading, writing, and mathematics. Teachers are given a matrix of standards and they look at how each grade satisfies those standards.

School initiatives have been started to involve all teachers in curriculum development and revision: Thursdays after school, grade levels work on curriculum development in groups; half days are set aside for teachers to meet with the curriculum director, grade by grade, to identify needs. The revision of the curriculum occurs on an annual basis and is informed by test score data and teacher observations of students. Additional curriculum alignment occurs due to students being homogenously grouped. The teachers working with the various student groups frequently work and plan together. As new programs are introduced into the school, all teachers are trained in those areas. This year Ignacio Intermediate introduced a new math program called Connected Math and teachers were trained to use it. The Title 1 math teacher observes teachers’ usage of the new program and is available to help teachers implement it.

The teachers acknowledged the change in attention paid to curriculum. “When I first came I helped make it on my own,” said one teacher. “I went to my co-workers and then I spoke to teachers in other districts about what they did.” When the school was put on School Improvement, teachers had to select

research based practices aligned with Colorado state standards. The focus on standards has helped the staff collectively identify priorities but it has also at times limited creativity. The school used to do a program called Living Museum where students would dress up as historical characters and answer questions as their characters to visitors and parents. Although the students enjoyed the project, the school created program was canceled because it wasn't research based. The school continues to strive to find ways to incorporate standards into creative hands on projects such as local field trips.

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.

In addition to district and school goals, the instructional programs themselves involve goal setting with the students. Programs such as Reading Renaissance have a student goal setting component built into the program.

### **Staff Selection, Leadership, and Capacity Building**

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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 the 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.

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 the 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 and teacher fairs. The principal interviews candidates with a team that involves parents, grade level teachers, and, sometimes, the curriculum director. The team looks at the applicant's skills and grade level certification before making a recommendation to the school board.

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. The principal selects mentors for the new teachers and they are compensated through BOCS. The mentoring program gives new teachers someone to go to. As one teacher stated, "The purpose is to make sure that the teacher knows the processes in the school and the district. When you're first a teacher, you are overwhelmed."

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. There is constant overlap between the district initiatives and individual teacher interests. As one teacher explained, "We get stipends to do different trainings and receive graduate credit. And we are using our own teachers in the district to provide classes on the subject. For example if someone goes to training in a particular area they will come back and share what they learned. Or they will bring people in."

Training and collaboration are closely linked at Ignacio Intermediate School. There are forty-five minutes of study team time every week, common planning time among grade levels, weekly staff meetings, and reports from teachers who have attended workshops. Collaboration is mandated on a weekly basis but frequently occurs daily. Currently, the teachers are meeting horizontally but they are working on developing more vertical collaboration.

At the end of the year all teaching staff attend a data retreat. At data retreats the teachers go outside of Ignacio and stay at a hotel to examine test scores. Built into the teachers' contract time, the data retreat is an opportunity to outline changes that may need to be made to address student needs.

### **Instructional Programs, Practices, and Arrangements**

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Ignacio School district uses an adoption cycle that allows for piloting of programs. The Title 1 math teacher piloted two math programs and made a recommendation. The teachers, principal, and curriculum director then decided on a program that would meet both student and teacher needs.

Regular monitoring is used to determine the progress of the program. Students take Northwest Evaluation Association, NWEA- MAP, testing three times a year. The NWEA 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 the principal explained, "You don't have to wait five years to see if something is not working; you can tell immediately if it's working. Just by quick assessment you can tell and by paying attention to whether the kids are getting it."

The state accountability system has had a significant impact on the instructional practices within the district. In discussing the frustrations of her staff, the principal stated, "'Accountability' is like a four letter word. In other ways it has brought to life the idea that you cannot work in isolation...Before, you could just teach fourth grade, and now you have to teach fourth grade standards." The state accountability system has helped prompt school study team time and a sense of responsibility for the data. At this time there are no mandated instructional practices but the Intermediate school subscribes to Marzano's Nine Essential Elements of good instruction which has a "what works" component that includes practices such as note taking and summarizing.

Students at Ignacio Intermediate School are ability grouped. The Special Education students are pulled out but the Special Education teacher uses the same curriculum as students at that grade level, by breaking the curriculum down into smaller pieces. English Language Learners are identified prior to coming to the school by a language specialist. The district has a policy that all teachers will be ELL certified but it is a slow process of actualization. Currently, the teachers who are certified work most closely with those students. The Gifted and Talented program is in the process of being developed. Gifted and Talented students receive additional projects and work from their classrooms as needed.

A key instructional arrangement is the use of the Opportunity Room. The Opportunity Room is a separate classroom run by a master teacher who is ELL certified and capable of working with a diverse group of students. The principal described the Opportunity Room teacher as the catch all who can be as positive or as punitive as needed. "The Opportunity Room is everything I ever wanted as a principal. The Opportunity Room is your chance to be successful; they do all the behavior contracting, all the in-school suspension, all the lunch detention, and when kids are absent for a long period of time they go to her first." The Opportunity Room is set up with separate areas so that students can be working on different projects and the teacher can attend to both academic and behavioral issues. 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.

The teachers at the Intermediate School saw high quality classroom instruction as involving student engagement in multi-level and multi-sensory learning. Instruction continues to be propelled by state standards and testing. A computer teacher mentioned that when she realized that her lessons on spread sheets and graphing corresponded with CSAP testing, she altered her curriculum to focus more on those areas. The teachers spend an hour on the core subjects and an hour and a half on reading a day. It has been challenging for teachers to explore an idea thoroughly with the loss of three weeks of the year for testing, not including test preparation time. Teachers felt that the Opportunity Room and the Title 1 teachers positively impacted their instructional practices. Struggling students also benefit from the Child Study Team that looks at the needs of struggling students.

Student Achievement Data	Ignacio	Ignacio School	
	Intermediate	District	Colorado
How Students Performed on State Reading Tests	2005	2005	2005
Grade 4 Reading - At or Above Partially Proficient (%)	85.0	85.0	86.0
Grade 5 Reading - At or Above Partially Proficient (%)	92.0	92.0	88.0
Grade 6 Reading - At or Above Partially Proficient (%)	89.0	89.0	87.0
How Students Performed on State Math Tests			
Grade 4 Math - At or Above Partially Proficient (%)	92.0	92.0	90.0
Grade 5 Math - At or Above Partially Proficient (%)	94.0	94.0	89.0
Grade 6 Math - At or Above Partially Proficient (%)	83.0	83.0	85.0
How Students Performed on State Science Tests			
How Students Performed on State Writing Tests			
Grade 4 Writing - At or Above Partially Proficient (%)	81.0	81.0	91.0
Grade 5 Writing - At or Above Partially Proficient (%)	92.0	92.0	95.0
Grade 6 Writing - At or Above Partially Proficient (%)	87.0	87.0	93.0

### **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 was 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 2<sup>nd</sup> through 10<sup>th</sup> grade. They also use Star testing for reading and math and Accelerated Reader and Math testing. School goals are monitored through the accreditation process and the Title 1 improvement plan. The teachers at the school expressed concern about the state assessment. Though they are glad it is in existence, they were concerned with how the test results are used in the community. As one teacher explained, “You can’t compare a school that is sixty-five free and reduced lunch with a rich school.” Teachers questioned if the test was culturally biased and if it was appropriate for students growing up in rural areas. One teacher expressed a strong preference for the MAPS testing because it was three times a year and normed over three million other students. The teachers also look closely at students’ daily work, tests, quizzes, and projects to monitor their development.

Probationary teachers at the Intermediate School are evaluated two times a year and non-probationary teachers are evaluated every other year. The evaluation involves a preconference, observation, and post conference. Every teacher has a growth development plan. Although student data are not formally part of the evaluation, the principal staples student test scores to each evaluation to indicate if students are moving in the right direction. The principal works to support the staff through a positive reward system for outstanding work called PAWS. When the teacher has repeated PAWS the teacher will get “goosed” and the principal will teach their class for one afternoon while the teacher leaves early.

### **Recognition, Intervention, and Adjustment**

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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. The primary intervention for students is the Opportunity Room.

Ignacio Intermediate School has the Bobcat Awards Assembly at the end of every trimester where they give out awards. The principal does everything she can to encourage student academic growth. One year she agreed to kiss a pig if the students doubled their academic goals from one trimester to the next. The school has a system for student behavior called PAWS that reinforces positive behavior by giving student 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.”

Teachers mentioned the importance of getting to know their students personally. One teacher who greets her students at the door with high-fives and hugs said, “I think we teach some very difficult to motivate students. Beginning in fifth and sixth grade, the kids have bumped into some unpleasant sides of life and the value of academics doesn’t always seem as important.” In order to facilitate learning with their students the teachers often have to form personal connections with their students and their parents.

### **Influencing Factors**

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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."

At Ignacio Intermediate School, parents make up the Accountability Committee and they meet monthly. The formal process to involve parents is the KPTO (Kids, Parent, and Teacher Organization). The principal explained, "We put the K, which stands for kids, first because we put our kids before everything else." The focus on the students has helped this diverse community work together for a common goal.

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