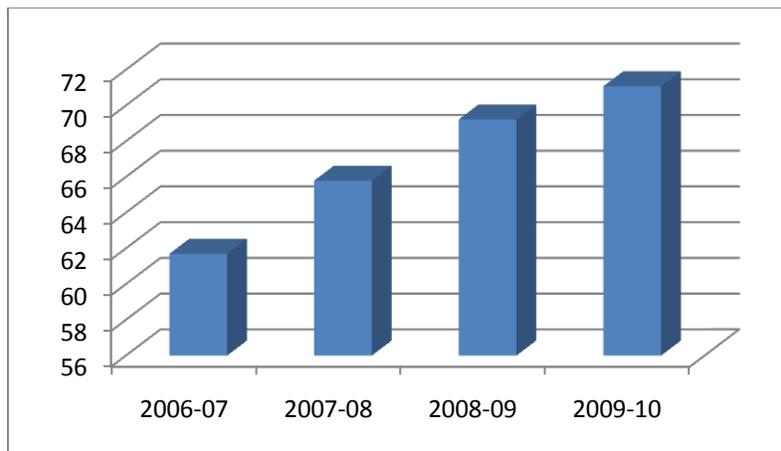


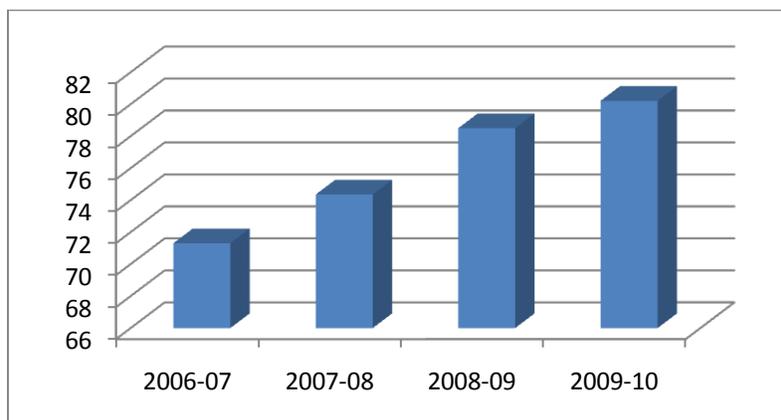
Increasing Student Achievement in Challenging Times: The Story of Klamath County School District

Klamath County School District's average district-wide free/reduced lunch eligibility is 71%. The district's 21 schools are spread out all over Klamath County, making this one of the geographically largest school districts in the state. High poverty, great distances between schools, a history of lean budgets and a host of other challenges. So how is it that this district also saw 19 of its 21 schools meet federal Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) benchmarks last year? Not only that, but the two schools not meeting AYP missed by the tiniest of margins. Take a look at the last four years of Klamath County School District elementary student reading and math performance (see charts below). How did they do this?

*Percentage of Klamath County School District Elementary Students Meeting or Exceeding State
Reading Benchmarks*



*Percentage of Klamath County School District Elementary Students Meeting or Exceeding State
Math Benchmarks*



To learn the “secrets” behind these remarkable student achievement gains, the ESD interviewed Klamath County School District Superintendent Greg Thede as well as district curriculum/instruction/assessment leaders Doug and Michelle Smith.



Beth Clark assisting student with Language!

ESD: What were three or four major factors that you believe have contributed to your district's success in seeing these gains in student academic achievement?

Doug and Michelle Smith: We have wonderful, dedicated teachers, administrators and school staff who have been focused in very specific ways on student achievement for the past 10 years. Beginning in 2000 with a Reading Excellence grant from ODE at Malin Elementary School and working with the CORE program out of Berkeley, California, our district has focused intensively on what we call the “three legged stool of academic excellence”:

1. Teacher knowledge. Providing teachers opportunity for research-based staff development in instructional best practices.
2. Research-based materials. Giving teachers and school staff the material tools they need to provide excellent instruction.
3. Using assessment tools that provide school staff specific information about how students are learning and using data from those assessments to shape and drive instruction.

Early on we took our district leadership team to five days of training with the CORE group in Oakland, California where we worked to tie all three elements together in a comprehensive district literacy plan. This 15 page plan spelled out the responsibilities at each level of our system; superintendent, principal, teacher, support staff – it delineated how often we would instruct, how often we would assess students, what we would do with the assessment data, etc. This training and planning was pivotal, a real game changer.

We then went to work implementing the plan, developing systems of accountability and providing follow-up coaching, training and support. We stayed with the plan – kept the focus on the “three-legged stool”, eventually applying the same framework to math.

Greg Thede: We really have kept a consistent focus on instructional excellence, emphasizing teacher support, evaluation and accountability and implementing observation and evaluation systems to tell us how we are doing in our implementation of best practices. This year we are moving to a system of frequent “mini-observations” of teachers, providing continual formative assessment and support around instructional excellence. We have also implemented a system of “Instructional Rounds” whereby three partner principals take turns observing each other’s schools as a group of three. They spend a half-day observing in multiple classrooms and throughout the building, learning from the strong practices they observe and identifying areas to strengthen.

We have also been very public about our progress. In our board room we have large posters showing year-to-year changes in student performance in reading and math at the individual school level. That continuous public display of performance has also helped all of us keep our focus.



Janell Preston provides additional small group instruction.

ESD: What other factors have contributed to your success as a district?

Doug and Michelle: Two other things have had key roles. Understanding the dynamics of poverty, and the implementation of Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS).

In 2003 some of us at the district level saw Ruby Paine present at a conference in Wilsonville on the topic of poverty and the impact of the culture and dynamics of poverty on student and family attitudes, and on student academic performance. We began infusing this information in our work with the “three legged stool”. Attitudes began to change throughout our schools and our efforts at improving student achievement were greatly enhanced by the infusion of this understanding into our work with kids and families.

PBIS also became a focus throughout our district and, as we implemented school-wide systems of positive behavior support we found a significant decline in student behavior incidents. As discipline issues decrease, more time is available for teachers to teach and administrators to lead. Students feel increasingly safe at school and the school atmosphere becomes more conducive to learning. PBIS implementation has had a major positive impact.

ESD: What advice do you have for other districts working to improve student achievement?

Doug and Michelle: We would advise several things:

1. Stay focused. Our superintendent has maintained a relentless focus on our “three legged stool” for improving academic achievement. Under his leadership we truly have become a data-driven system – identifying what works well and making the sometimes tough decisions necessary to keep doing what works well and do it system-wide.
2. Support staff. Provide the coaching support and staff development necessary to help people really learn and implement best practices and sustain those practices.
3. Support administrators. Mentoring, training, cross-building support – and keep them reading. Books like “Teach Like a Champion”, “Six Secrets of Change”, “Good to Great” and “Mindset” have been part of our leadership study.
4. Maintain strong systems of administrator and teacher accountability.
5. Maintain district sensitivity and responsiveness to issues of poverty.
6. Implement and maintain systems of positive behavior support.

For more information, please contact Greg Thede or Doug Smith at ...

<http://kcsd.k12.or.us/contactus.asp>



Doug and Michelle Smith