



Raising Student Achievement: Practices that Work

A bi-monthly e-series dedicated to sharing success stories

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Improving Reading and Attendance at Indian Community School, Milwaukee, Wisconsin

“With Indian values and culture at the heart of our mission, the Indian Community School provides each child in our care with the best opportunities to develop spiritually, emotionally, physically, socially, artistically, and intellectually.” School Mission

“At first, people thought NCA was a binder that sat on the shelf,” shared Cheryl Weber, second grade teacher at Indian Community School. “Now people know it’s not a thing. It’s what we do every day to make the students better and teachers better. It’s just what we do around here.”

Located in urban Milwaukee, Indian Community School serves 333 Native American students in grades K-8. Approximately 65% of the students are eligible for free and reduced lunch. For the past several years, the faculty at Indian Community School has actively worked to embed a culture of continuous improvement and active learning. Focusing on improving reading performance and attendance, their efforts have paid off. In 2001, 62% of third graders received a proficient/advanced score on the Wisconsin Reading Comprehension Test. In 2004, 78% received a proficient/advance score. The percent of students scoring in the minimum/basic categories decreased from 38% in 2001 to 12% in 2004. Scores for eighth graders also increased. The school’s attendance rate which averaged 87% in 1998-99 is now at 94%. The school attributes their gains to the following.

Differentiated Instructional Practices

“We implemented a combination of approaches and theories recognizing that kids are different and that no single approach will meet all students’ needs,” shared Jo Lewis, Education Director. In reading, the teachers have received training on and tailor strategies from Guided Reading, Six Trait Writing, Early Reading Empowerment, **Engage Learning**, and other research-based interventions to meet the needs of their students. Teachers also use computer programs that reinforce reading skills, Word Walls (a component of the Cunningham Model), and other tools to build reading skills while making reading interactive and fun. Reading and vocabulary are incorporated in art, music, and technology lessons to reinforce students’ reading skills across the content areas.

Comprehensive, Convenient Staff Development

The school has a comprehensive staff development plan focused on providing teachers with the tools they need to help students improve. A minimum of ten days of focused staff development are provided each year. The staff development design exposes teachers to a variety of methods and approaches in an effort to strengthen and increase teachers’ repertoire of effective strategies. In addition to being comprehensive, the school makes professional development convenient. “The school has made it convenient to become knowledgeable,” stated Cheryl Weber. “Professors come on our campus; and we have a \$2,000 tuition reimbursement program.” Training and support is also offered in-class. Once a week, a reading specialist models practices in the classroom. The specialist teaches the teacher while instructing the students. Teacher assistants participate in these modeling sessions so that they too can reinforce the practices demonstrated. **A Coaching, Reflection, and Application (CRA) process through Engage Learning is used to provide teachers individual and small group support and instruction while implementing a student centered program.**

Resources

First grade teacher Jody Hirt noted the value of enhanced resources for teachers and students. “Within the past 4-5 years, we designated one big room as the book room that contains different leveled books for teachers to use during guided reading in their classroom. There are a wide range of reading manipulatives and activities. It’s a tremendous, easily accessible resource for us.” In a recent staff survey on practices that helped them achieve their reading goal, several staff members highlighted the book room along with funding for classroom resources, library resources, reading incentive programs, book fairs, and the support of a full-time Title I instructor.

Active Learning

When asked what an observer might notice when visiting their school, Joanne Kehrein, third grade teacher, shared, **“You would see kids actively engaged in learning, working in cooperative groups, working with partners. It’s not**

teacher oriented. It's student oriented." Her colleague, Beth Stawski, first grade teacher, added, "Kids are aware of themselves as learners. They understand the terminology we are using and take ownership for what they are doing. They are more responsible. We are guiding them." Techniques for teachers to encourage active learning are incorporated in professional development and modeled in the classroom.

Holding Students and Parents Accountable

To address attendance issues, the school establishes attendance contracts with parents and their children. The contracts set expectations and goals for better attendance. A social worker at the school makes contact with parents when children are not in school. Every month, perfect attendance certificates are awarded to students which they can take home and share with their parents. The certificate includes school coins that can be used to buy school supplies from the school store. Ice cream parties for classes that meet the NCA attendance goal and award ceremony recognition reinforce and reward students for meeting attendance expectations.

Teacher Driven/Administrator Supported

Principal Jeff Gordon shared, "Teachers have empowered themselves from their professional development. They help and train other teachers. This has broadened the scope of what our staff can do." This empowerment was evident in comments from staff. The improvement process is driven by teachers and supported by administration. The result is a strong buy-in for continuous improvement at the staff level and an understanding of NCA/ongoing improvement as "just what we do around here." Staff noted consistency and a sense of everyone being on the same page and using a shared language of improvement.

Advice

When asked to share advice with other schools, Elmer Baacke, sixth grade teacher, shared, "Get a wide variety of staff people involved in the process – from all different grade levels and areas." Beth Stawski added, "Keep your community and staff informed," noting the importance of sharing the school's work and successes with the community.

**Indian Community School
Student Performance and Attendance Data**

Wisconsin Reading Comprehension Test

Percent Receiving Advanced/Proficient Score

	2001	2002	2003	2004	Adapted Standard Unit*
3 rd grade	62%	55%	66%	78%	.46

Note: This is an example of one of the assessments the school uses to monitor reading performance. The school uses multiple assessments to gauge students' reading skills.

Attendance Rate

98-99	99-00	00-01	01-02	02-03	03-04	Adapted Standard Unit*
87%	90%	92%	93%	94%	94%	.43

*Adapted standard unit gains of .3 or greater represent substantial statistically verifiable improvement in performance.

North Central Association Commission on Accreditation and School Improvement
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