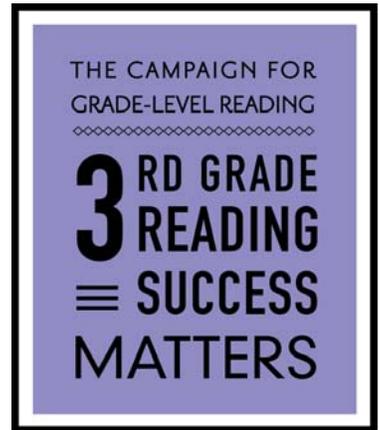


BRIGHT SPOTS

High Opportunity Schools



Morningside Elementary, Brownsville, TX

During exam time at Morningside Elementary, big posters appear with a simple message: 90%. “I expect everyone to get at least 90 percent on the test,” says Principal Dolores Cisneros Emerson. Ambitious? Yes, but consider that 100 percent of Morningside third graders — virtually all from low-income families — were reading at grade level on the state assessment test last year, and 55 percent were commended for having no more than three questions wrong. Emerson expects excellence from Morningside students, no matter where they come from. Benchmarking, regrouping, individualized instruction, tutorials, and relentless optimism get results.

No Excuses

High expectations were not the norm when Emerson came to Morningside five years ago. “Being poor is no excuse for poor performance,” said Emerson. “I said to the teachers, ‘How would you feel if these kids were your nieces and nephews? Would you expect them to fail? No. These are our children, and they can do just as well as or better than any other children.’”

Morningside focuses intensely on reading achievement, striving to individualize instruction for each child despite extreme ranges in reading ability. The Morningside solution is frequent benchmarking — the third grade benchmarks at least once a month — and disaggregation of data to reveal individual strengths and weaknesses. “We go over the test results with each child, to help them understand how they did and why.”

Benchmarking for everyone takes place at the end of the first semester, and the children are then grouped into appropriate — but not homogeneous — levels with 10 or 12 children per group. “I believe in heterogeneous groupings, mixing up English and Spanish speakers and children with different skills,” says Emerson. Teachers are responsible for all students in their grade. If a child will not perform for one teacher, a colleague takes over and works with that student.

WHO THEY ARE

811 Pre-K–5th

98% FARM

99% Hispanic

80% Spanish speaking

15 years average teaching experience

19 average class size

WHAT THEY ACHIEVE

2010 TAKS (Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills):

3rd grade reading 99%

4th grade reading 99%

2010 Winner, Dispelling the Myth Award

CONTACT

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Dolores Cisneros Emerson, Principal

Multiple Supports

Morningside combines the district-wide [CSCOPE](#) curriculum with a [Reading First](#) approach called Capacity Building and Study/Demonstration into a common process for content delivery with customizable instructional plans. While Emerson attributes most of the school's success to hard work and dedication, she also provides teachers with a host of supplements to reinforce learning and help students meet [Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills](#) standards:

- [Measuring Up](#) and [Building Stamina](#) from Peoples Education.
- [Step Up to the TAKS](#), [TAKS Coach](#), and [TAKS Master](#).
- [Curriculum Associates](#) intervention tools.
- [KAMICO](#) diagnostics.
- [Motivation Reading](#) from Mentoring Minds.

Third graders in need of extra help spend one hour a day with an interventionist, working on reading strategies and fluency for a minimum of six weeks. Tutorials, three to four days a week, begin within the first month of the school year. Teachers and students also stay after school to work on fluency and comprehension, as well as having ten four-hour Saturday sessions a year.

Absenteeism is very low, and the parents of children who aren't in school by 8:30 a.m. get a phone call from the parent liaison.

"Morningside has a wonderful staff — teachers, paraprofessionals, lunch ladies, custodians, everyone," says Emerson. "With them, we're as close to perfection as we can be without getting struck by lightning."

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

- **CSCOPE curriculum**
- **Monthly benchmarking**
- **Reading First data-based programs for reading mastery**
- **Measuring Up and Step Up to the TAKS for state assessment test prep**