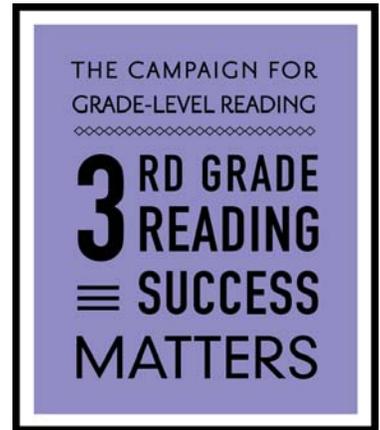


BRIGHT SPOTS

High Opportunity Schools



Natchez Elementary School, Wadsworth, NV

A small school in the heart of the Pyramid Lake Paiute Indian Reservation, Natchez Elementary is on the fringe of the massive Washoe County District and 30 miles from Reno, the nearest city. “We’re in the middle of the desert,” says Principal Rick Taylor. Picturesque Pyramid Lake is the iPad’s default screen image, but Natchez’ playing field is the only patch of mowed and watered grass on the reservation. It is there that Natchez students, generations removed from their proud Pauite Indian ancestors, come to play football and soccer at night.

No exceptions

Taylor describes his school’s path to success as “a really long process.” When he became principal in 2003, Natchez teachers felt such empathy for their students that “there was always a reason they couldn’t perform.” Then as now, students faced genuine problems — extreme poverty, crime, and drug and alcohol addiction in their families. Still, says Taylor, “Teachers were magnifying the impact of the problems by being so sympathetic.”

Today, Natchez has a no-exceptions policy, and staff members firmly believe that all of their students can learn. This requires high expectations, a commitment to rigor, and three meals a day for everyone. “We feed our kids; we clean them up; we get them ready to learn,” says Taylor.

Taylor gives substantial credit for the rise in student performance to the reading curriculum, [Success for All](#), which emphasizes prevention and early intervention around learning problems. Its leveled readers offer the same story, pitched to varying skill levels. Natchez teachers can also use the Houghton Mifflin [Journeys](#) curriculum, a district-wide adoption. A “sacred” 90-minute reading block takes place each day, during which nothing else is scheduled and no interruptions are permitted.

WHO THEY ARE

145 students Pre-K–6th

92% American Indian

5% Hispanic

100% FARM

10 years average teaching experience

16 average class size

WHAT THEY ACHIEVE

2010 Nevada Criterion Reference Test

(CRT), Reading:

3rd grade 69%

4th grade 68%

Distinguished Title I school

CONTACT

Natchez Elementary School

Wadsworth, NV

Phone: (775) 351-1902

Rick Taylor, Principal

Everyone takes part

Frequent testing and monitoring give Natchez staff abundant data on each child. The staff evaluates assessment scores from Nevada's [Criterion Referenced Tests](#) and [Measures of Academic Progress](#) three times a year, and administers the [Scholastic Reading Inventory](#) (SRI) every nine weeks. [Accelerated Reader and STAR Reading](#) programs provide additional computer-based diagnostic tools. The staff pinpoints specific skill deficits, and works in teams to identify the most effective supports.

"Speaking and talking in Paiute culture is very limited," says Taylor. "Men, especially, don't talk unless they have something very important to say. So some of our kids come to us with no language experience at all."

A \$68,000 Save the Children grant supplements Title 1 funding for intensive 45-minute interventions every day for the 16 children who currently qualify. The other 129 children do enrichment activities, such as Accelerated Reader. "We use every adult in the building," says Taylor. "Not just teachers, aides, and speech therapists, but also music teachers, lunch ladies, and custodians." A reading coach provides in-service training three times a year, and three Natchez teachers are trained in the Lindamood-Bell [Visualizing & Verbalizing](#) program, a "fantastic but time-consuming" approach to language comprehension.

Beyond the classroom

An after-school program provides additional academic supports:

- [Criterion Referenced Tests](#) for practice taking tests.
- [Soar to Success](#) from Houghton Mifflin, pairing fiction with non-fiction.
- [Fluent Reader](#) computer-based diagnostics.

Natchez has more private money than most Title 1 schools because a number of philanthropic groups target Native Americans. Three years ago, volunteers from the Burning Man art festival installed solar panels on the school roof, and now Natchez produces so much power that it receives \$20,000 in annual rebates from the local power company. The school shares its abundance with the entire community. Taylor invites parents to come to the school for various activities — often including Native American culture and always dinner — once or twice a month. Natchez provides books and clothing, access to computers, phones and fax machines, help with job applications, and even space for funerals. Says Taylor, "Natchez IS the community."

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

- **Success for All reading curriculum with leveled readers and early intervention**
- **Computer-based Accelerated Reader and STAR Reader programs**
- **Soar to Success, pairing fiction and non-fiction**
- **"Sacred" 90-minute daily reading blocks**
- **Intensive 45-minute reading interventions daily**
- **Frequent testing, monitoring, and skill-level assessments**