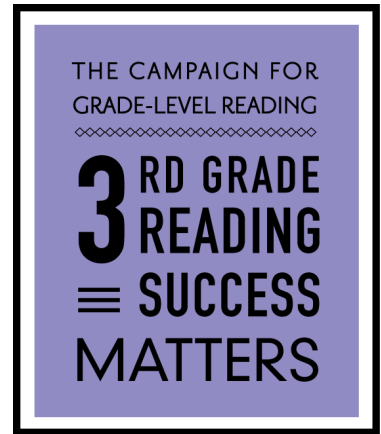


BRIGHT SPOTS

Quality Teaching



PS7, Sacramento, CA

At orientation in 2011, a sign greeted kindergarten parents: “Welcome families of the Class of 2028.” That is the year the new kindergartners will graduate from college, and the class designation signals clear expectations for the children, their parents — and their teachers. The tag will stay with these students throughout their PS7 careers.

The designation “is part of instilling a college-going culture with students and families starting Day One,” said Jim Scheible, superintendent of St. HOPE Public Schools and previously a principal, team leader and sixth-grade teacher at PS7. Field lessons (trips) to area colleges, starting in kindergarten and continuing through the early grades, reinforce this goal. Before each trip, teachers work with students to complete an “application,” modified appropriately for the age of the class.

Providing a rigorous college preparatory education to students of low-income and minority backgrounds is the mission of the entire district of St. HOPE Public Schools. To help students reach these high expectations, PS7 employs an extended school day, a modified year-round academic calendar, and a weekly data reporting system that supports continually improving instruction and student success.

“We’re being very strategic about our time, and it’s really paid off,” says Scheible. From 2008 to 2011, the number of PS7 third graders who were proficient or advanced in reading in the California Standards Test (CST) rose from 34% to 90%. The school’s total Academic Performance Index (API) went from 804 to 911 (out of 1,000) — the fourth highest in the local Sacramento school district and in the top 10% statewide.

WHO THEY ARE

PS7:

- 500 students, K–8
- 80% African-American, 10% Latino, 5% Asian & white, and 5% mixed race
- 70-75% Free and Reduced-Price Meals.

WHAT THEY ACHIEVE

- California Standards Test (CST), 2010-2011:
 - 3rd grade reading, 90% proficient or advanced
 - 2nd grade reading, 95% proficient or advanced
- Academic Performance Index (API), 2010-2011: 911, the 4th highest API among Sacramento City schools for second year Title I Academic Achievement Award School, 2010 and 201¹
- California Distinguished School, 2009
- 2010 Blue Ribbon award nominee
- 8th highest performing charter school in California (USC School Performance Dashboard, spring 2011)

Prepping the College-Bound

PS7 benefits from a unified focus across the St. HOPE district. In 2011, about 25 of PS7 kindergarteners had first attended St. HOPE's Triumph Center for Early Childhood Education. The continuity is a real boon, according to Scheible, because the children "are far more prepared academically than those coming from traditional preschools or no preschool at all." After the elementary grades, many students will attend PS7's middle school campus for grades 6-8 and Sacramento Charter High School. In 2012, the district's new Oak Park Preparatory Academy will create yet another option for middle school in grades 7 and 8.

PS7's school day starts at 7:45 am for all students. Dismissals vary by grade — 2:45 pm for kindergarten and 4 pm for third grade, for example. The extended day and school year mean that students receive more instructional minutes per year than the minimum California requirements: 56 percent more in kindergarten, 31 percent more in first and second grades, and 36 percent more in third grade. With that time, Scheible says, PS7 teachers teach "every single state standard," plus provide reviews and remedial learning in advance of testing, *and* include art, physical education, science and history in the curriculum.

In addition, PS7's trimester school calendar system includes three-week intersessions in the fall and spring. During these intersessions, 33 to 50 percent of the students attend two weeks of half-day classes to boost their skills. Three-hour sessions on Saturdays are "mostly optional," but "sometimes mandatory" for certain students, classes, or grade levels, says Scheible. A free afterschool program, with limited enrollment to keep the ratio of adults to students low, provides some children with additional support.

"Long term, we want 100% of our kids advanced on the CSTs," Scheible says. So every Saturday, teachers report data on each student to PS7's elementary (grades K-5) and middle school (grades 6-8) principals, who provide feedback by the end of day Sunday. Teachers can more quickly respond to "red flags," and parents can access student data online. Parents also receive invitations to meet with teachers at least three times a year to discuss how their child can improve during a student-led conference.

"We used to look at end of the year data, but then it was too late," says Scheible. "Now, we're making the data actionable."

HIGHLIGHTS:

PS7 provides:

- **Increased instructional time (compared to CA state minimum requirements):**
 - Kindergarten, 56% more
 - 1st & 2nd grades, 31% more
 - 3rd grade, 36% more
- **An extended day:**
 - Trimester school year, with 3-week fall and spring intersessions
 - 2 weeks of half-day remedial instruction held each intersession for students performing below grade level
 - 3-hour Saturday sessions for students wanting or needing additional help
 - Free afterschool program with limited enrollment
- **Expanded curricula: Harcourt Excursions and other standards-based materials for ELA, math, science, and social studies; plus art, physical education, science and history**

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