Edgemont Elementary School

21790 Eucalyptus Ave.
Moreno Valley, CA 92553
Principal: Melissa Bazanos

Built in 1956, Edgemont Elementary School is one of the oldest schools in Southern California's Moreno Valley Unified School District. It used to be known in the community as "the school with limited means," with its deteriorating walls, outdated equipment, and low performance scores. Today, Edgemont Elementary is

- Elementary (K-5)
- 9% Black
- 95% Free or Reduced-Price Lunch
- 3% Special Education
- 68% English Language Learners

viewed as an exemplary school. Teachers from other school sites now visit and see it as a model for determining their own next steps toward improving student achievement at their schools. Staff members at Edgemont now ask to have their own children transferred there because of the tremendous growth the school has demonstrated. Edgemont students have a sense of ownership of their school, parents are proud to be involved, and the surrounding community has become a part of the success.

Getting Started

Melissa Bazanos stepped into her new role as principal at Edgemont Elementary in the fall of 2005 facing the challenge of raising student achievement. The principal did not make sweeping changes to the staff; rather, she worked with the existing staff to make dramatic changes to improve instruction based on a coherent system of assessments and guided by data analysis. To get started, Ms. Bazanos received support and training from the district's Elementary Education department, the Categorical Programs department, a retired principal mentor, and the previous Edgemont principal. She worked with Edgemont's leadership team to build and expand upon successful programs such as the Accelerated Reader program and schoolwide assessment portfolios.

The Accelerated Reader program at Edgemont is designed to encourage students to read more and improve their reading comprehension, as well as to enable students to choose books that are appropriate for their own reading level. In this program, students meet with teachers to set reading goals and then work toward these goals. They can earn rewards for receiving 80% or higher on a computer reading comprehension assessment, they receive certificates and prizes, and their names are announced during morning announcements. Ms. Bazanos expanded the program by transforming the whole library into an Accelerated Reader library, with every book labeled by reading level so each student can choose books that are appropriate to his or her level. The program was also extended to include lunch clubs for reading.

Another program Ms. Bazanos expanded was the system of schoolwide assessment portfolios. Assessment portfolios track the progress of each student from grade to grade, with all information neatly compiled in a single folder. This allowed teachers to have

an ongoing record of a student's development across years. Ms. Bazanos further developed the assessment portfolios by implementing a system of evolving assessments. As the curriculum changed or as students improved, students were given different types of assessments. Each year, every student's assessment portfolio was passed on to the student's next teacher, who could then use the information in the portfolio to determine how to help students who may need additional support.

Looking at the Data

In order to determine the areas of focus for turning Edgemont around, Ms. Bazanos decided that the most important starting point would be the data. To identify the priority growth areas, Ms. Bazanos and her staff examined California Standards Test (CST) data, curriculum-embedded assessment data, trends in student performance across grade levels, and the results of the Academic Program Survey, which is an assessment tool measuring the school's adherence to nine Essential Program Components. Using the knowledge gained by examining data, they were able to determine the areas of weakness at Edgemont. Then, with those areas in mind, they determined what would be the best course of action in terms of staff development, materials, and instruction.

According to the Academic Program Survey, professional development at Edgemont needed to change. Staff members needed to focus their professional development on using instructional minutes effectively and improving direct instruction as well as differentiation strategies. As part of the turnaround effort, professional development at Edgemont was aligned to the results of the Academic Program Survey and student achievement data. Ms. Bazanos hired outside agencies to provide training in direct instruction, reciprocal teaching, reading comprehension, and writing. She wanted to make sure that the professional development she provided was consistent for each grade level, each teacher, and each classroom, so that everyone was on board with the schoolwide plan and programs were consistently implemented as students progressed through the grade levels.

One academic area of need shown by the data was writing. However, Ms. Bazanos determined that it made more sense to hold off on implementing the writing component until students were able to improve their reading comprehension and vocabulary. Edgemont has made dramatic improvements in these two areas after extensive teacher training, so Ms. Bazanos recently initiated a schoolwide writing program. In 2007 she arranged for an outside consultant to come to Edgemont to provide training. Teachers received training in writing, received graphic organizers for writing, and developed a schoolwide writing ladder, with the rungs representing the writing component for which each grade level is responsible.

Positive Changes

Edgemont Elementary has made a dramatic turnaround. In 2003 and 2004, Edgemont did not make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), due to Hispanic students and English language learners (ELLs) falling short of meeting AYP criteria in language arts. Since 2003, Hispanic students have comprised between 71 and 83% of the student population at Edgemont, and ELLs have made up between 59 and 68% of the student body. In other words, these two subpopulations are a large and important part of the Edgemont community. The turnaround efforts at Edgemont have been successful, and the students, including these important subpopulations, have seen sufficient growth for Edgemont to make AYP in 2005, 2006, and 2007. Additionally, Edgemont's Academic

Performance Index (API) score has increased substantially, from a score of 581 in 2003 to a score of 718 in 2008.[1]

The culture at Edgemont has also undergone a remarkable turnaround. Teacher attitudes have improved because they can see the benefits of the changes that have been implemented. They can see the growth in their students, and they can see Edgemont's API score improve. Parents are more involved at the school with volunteer programs and parent education classes coordinated by a full-time community liaison. Student involvement and engagement have also improved dramatically, due to the increase in achievement. They have a sense of ownership and pride in the school. Furthermore, discipline issues have declined dramatically: there were 640 incidents in 2006-07, but there were only 322 incidents in 2007-08. This may be attributed to more consistency in the handling of student discipline issues, the implementation of a character education program focusing on the six pillars of character (trustworthiness, respect, responsibilty, fairness, caring, citizensihp), and counseling and citizenship programs implemented by a full-time school counselor.

Ms. Bazanos continues monitoring and analyzing student achievement data to see where she needs to lead Edgemont Elementary in the future. There are roadblocks and pitfalls, but she and her committed staff plan their actions according to the data, and they keep moving forward with one goal in mind: the kids have to be priority number one.

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[1] The API score summarizes a school's performance on California standardized tests and high school exit exams. It is measured on a scale of 200 to 1,000.

School profile prepared by Doing What Works project staff