

John Wash Elementary School

6350 East Lane Avenue

Fresno, CA 93727

Principal: Wesley Sever, Ed.D.

Five years ago, John Wash Elementary School was a school in need of improvement, struggling to cope with a rapidly growing, diverse population of students and their families. Today, John Wash Elementary is a 2008 California Distinguished School and a 2009 U.S. Department of Education Blue Ribbon School driven by high expectations, focused data, and rigorous academic standards.

- ◆ Elementary (K-6)
- ◆ 41% Hispanic
- ◆ 37% Asian
- ◆ 18% White
- ◆ 2% Black
- ◆ 1% Other
- ◆ 53% Free or Reduced-Price Lunch
- ◆ 22% English Language Learners
- ◆ 4% Special Education

In recalling his school's transformation, Principal Wesley Sever says, "We realized that *hoping* to do better was not a strategy. To be successful with the students we now had, we had to change." School leaders, faculty, parents, and students rose to share responsibility for learning. Teachers work in grade-level professional learning communities (PLCs) to analyze student achievement data and monitor the progress of classes and individual students. Resource personnel, including the principal and curriculum support specialist, help teams collect, manage, and interpret data. Together, they develop SMART (**S**trategic, **M**easurable, **A**ttainable, **R**ealistic, and **T**ime-bound) Goals to meet academic performance standards. SMART Goals provide teachers with a goal for student proficiency on standards-based formative and summative assessments. PLCs also collaborate on plans for explicit instruction and create differentiated strategies for students performing below or above grade-level expectations and students who are English language learners.

The success of John Wash Elementary is attributed to teachers using assessment results to guide instruction and intervention. Essential standards are assessed using summative, districtwide, grade-level assessments administered three times per year and weekly formative, grade-level assessments. Data from these assessments and goals are recorded and analyzed during PLC work sessions to identify non-proficient students. Grade-level Student Growth and Curriculum Conferences are held three times per year with the principal and support staff to review data for individual students and schoolwide subgroups. These conferences allow teachers to disaggregate and analyze assessment data to determine if all schoolwide student subgroups are progressing. These data are broken down into specific standards or learning skills and used to guide instruction for individual students to move them to proficiency.

John Wash Elementary uses a three-tiered Pyramid of Intervention system to identify student needs early and respond with appropriate strategies. Intervention is a part of the daily structure in every classroom, and students are routinely assessed and reassessed.

Classroom teachers provide differentiated strategies during whole-group Tier 1 instruction in core academic standards. They then test for understanding and mastery

in guided and in independent practice. At least 80% of students must attain mastery before the teacher moves on to the next standard. The process of small-group instruction for reteaching or frontloading English language arts or math lessons occurs daily.

Students identified for Tier 1 intervention are gathered from one or more classrooms and placed into small, flexible groups for additional instruction and practice with a standard. Students are then reassessed on that standard to determine proficiency. Each week, the PLC team analyzes formative assessments to identify students who have not demonstrated mastery after Tier 1. The team then forms learning groups across the grade level and selects appropriate intervention approaches.

Tier 2 students, those identified as below grade level, receive additional research-based interventions daily. Students not responding to Tier 2 who are more than two years below grade level receive Tier 3 intensive support. Students in Tiers 2 and 3 are monitored biweekly to assess progress and determine when students can move up or down the pyramid based on student need.

John Wash Elementary schedules daily “deployment” for all students. Deployment time provides an instructional block to accommodate the small-group instructional needs of students performing below grade level, English learners needing focused language instruction, and above-grade-level students ready for academic enrichments. During deployment, classroom teachers and resource personnel all provide instruction to student groups drawn from different classrooms and grade levels, with frequent monitoring and movement between levels.

All teachers at John Wash Elementary use common instructional language and practices that provide specific lesson design and delivery for planning instruction, monitoring student learning, and improving academic achievement. These components include: the learning objective, activating prior knowledge, importance of the skill, guided practice, step-by-step skill development, closure, and independent practice. Each element strategically scaffolds the lesson to ensure learning for all student ability levels. To support the lesson design, teachers employ delivery strategies such as think-pair-share, graphic organizers, and check for understanding to gain immediate feedback of student learning to guide the teachers’ instruction.

At John Wash Elementary, all students are challenged by a rigorous curriculum. English learners are paired with native speakers as peer partners, and teachers motivate students by switching from teacher talk to partner talk throughout the lesson. Students talk about what they are learning, ask each other questions, test out responses, and practice new vocabulary. Small-group instruction, frontloading, pre-teaching, peer support, and cooperative learning strategies are used to provide access to the core curriculum for English learners and low-performing students. As a complement to these strategies, teachers TAPPLE: **T**each first, **A**sk a specific question, **P**ause to give students think time, **P**ick a student for response, **L**isten for understanding, and provide **E**ffective feedback.

John Wash Elementary incorporates a systemic professional development plan based on student performance. Staff believe student performance increases when teachers and administrators grow and learn together. As the instructional leader of the school, the principal is an active participant in all teacher training sessions. All professional development is based on data results from the California Standards Test, district summative assessments, and common grade-level assessments. The principal and

curriculum support provider provide daily assistance to teachers in classroom instruction and in intervention, and grade-level professional development occurs weekly during PLC meetings.

The school's leadership team has a strong role in implementing rigorous academic standards and meets each month to analyze the implementation and effectiveness of school programs. Agendas include discussion of SMART Goals, intervention effectiveness, professional development, and progress towards school goals.

Sanger Unified School District Superintendent Marc Johnson sums up the John Wash experience — and that of all the schools in his district — by saying, “We are getting the job done by getting better at getting better. The big picture for us ties back to every child being successful. That’s at the core of everything we do.”