

Student Achievement Skyrockets in Vallivue District

By Marilou Blair

Vallivue School District (VSD) has achieved what many districts only dream of. In the bleak background of a grim economy, they have quietly been improving programs and seeing student learning skyrocket. Judging from the numbers, they have good reason to be proud.

AYP (Adequate Yearly Progress) is how school success is measured with the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation. It is tracked yearly in every school. VSD went from one school passing AYP in 2007 to eight schools out of ten passing in 2009 (one school missed by .4% of a point). In the same time period, the increases in reading based on the Idaho State Achievement Tests (ISAT) went from 70% to 86.3%. In math, from 69% to 81.8 % (See table below). Vallivue was the only large school district (enrollment over 5000) in Idaho to make AYP last year, according to VSD Asst. Superintendant Pat Charlton.

Superintendent George Grant commented “In times of great challenge such as schools are now experiencing, organizations must develop cultures that allow all students to find success. We are so proud of the accomplishments that have been made in all of our Vallivue schools. Student achievement has increased as a result of students, teachers, parents, and administrators working together toward a common goal”.

At Vallivue High School (VHS), one of the eight out of ten schools that reached AYP, the teamwork and success Dr. Grant refers to was dramatic.

The tenth grade ISAT math score** went from 65.77% in 2007 to 78.26% in 2009. The ISAT scores in Reading went from 66.66% 91.09% in the same time frame.

After the dismal ISAT scores in 2006, the school made some dramatic changes. They implemented the following programs:

1. Institute a Science Research Associates(SRA) reading program for those substantially below compliance in General Education and Special Education.(SRA is an educational research organization)
2. Institute an SRA writing program for those substantially below proficiency in General Education and Special Education.
3. Designate and staff an ISAT Prep PLATO lab for reading, writing, and math for those slightly below performance.(PLATO is a software program that allows the students to interact one on one with the software to learn the subject starting at the place they went ‘off track’.
4. Institute an ISAT Math class and hire a teacher to teach it. This is a ‘double dose’ course; students are enrolled in Algebra 1 and Algebra 2 simultaneously.
5. Institute Falcon Focus-a tutoring and study help held twice a week after school for an hour and on Saturdays for three hours.

These were the major changes. Additional changes included adding ‘trackers’-people to stay with high needs students throughout the school day. This helped in two ways. It increased the attention the individual student was getting, and added an adult to the classroom. Students surrounding the ‘tracked’ student got the benefit of added attention and learning assistance.

The English Language Learner program was changed also. Two additional ESL teachers were added to work with ELL students until they were ready for ‘mainstream’ classes. This allowed the general Ed teacher to teach their curriculum and the ESL student to work on language proficiency in the subject until they could understand the classes. It paid off. Dropout rates went down and student scores in Limited English Proficiency (LEP) increased by a whopping 30% in reading and 17% in math between 2008 and 2009. Assistant Principal Mark Layne watches these students closely. “All students benefit from increased adult attention” says Mr. Layne. “I track each of the students who need improvement and try to insure there is at least one adult encouraging them to succeed.”

What was given up? Some of the opportunities for electives. “If a student is failing in English, Reading, Writing, or language proficiency they are required to take a class that will help them rather than an elective, according to Ms. Yamamoto.

No one can point to Vallivue and say that the school is a ‘privileged’ urban school. It has a high percentage of economically disadvantaged students and English Language Learners. They do have a large tax base. However that cannot always be counted on. Some funding was required for the ISAT programs and trackers while some of the elective class sizes were reduced.

What is Vallivue High School up to now? In the last year, the High School has gone from offering four dual credit college courses to fourteen. Student taking the Advanced Placement (AP) exams went from 35 in 2008 to 192 in 2009 according to Counselor Connie Benke.

VHS is continually looking at ways to improve learning for their students. Last year they added night school for students who needed to pass English, Biology, History, and Physical Science. They have instituted a reading comprehension and fluency pull out program where tutors work one on one with students that are struggling with reading.

Last year, three new administrators were brought in. Charles McPherson as the Dean of Students, Mark Layne as Vice Principal, and Dick Brulotte as Principal. Julie Yamamoto was the continuing Vice Principal who provided the consistency to keep Vallivue High School on course through the administrative changes. The new team hit the ground running with Mr. Brulotte at the helm. With ‘Respect’ as the credo that he preaches at the welcome assembly every year and ‘visibility and support’ as his daily practice with students and staff, this principal is flying his Vallivue Falcons to the heights of student success.

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**Add sidebars that include test scores
(Sidebar)

Vallivue District Improvement Data

Year	Group	Reading	Math	Graduation
2006-2007	Grades 3-8, 10	70%	69.77%	68.86%
2007-2008	Grades 3-8, 10	79%	76.38%	73.08
2008-2009	Grades 3-8, 10	86.32%	81.82%	73.11%*

Vallivue High School Improvement Data

Year	Group	Reading	Math	Graduation
2006-2007	10	67.66%	65.77%	68.86%
2007-2008	10	84.25	73.41%	73.08
2008-2009	10	91.09%	78.26%	73.11%*

State School Improvement Data

Year	Group	Reading	Math	Graduation
2006-2007	Grades 3-8, 10	80.86%	77.02	NA
2007-2008	Grades 3-8, 10	84.57	80.85	NA
2008-2009	Grades 3-8, 10	88.15	81.57	NA

*Graduation expected to improve with expansion of Alternative High School.

**Current ISAT scores are evaluated on a SCALE SCORE (Rausch Vertical Scale)

Scale scores are equal interval scores that are used to denote student achievement and student growth, similar to the way feet and inches are used to describe distance. Scale scores range from 150 to 300 and are divided into four proficiency levels by grade and content area. Achievement Standards, often referred to as cut scores, are set using a Bookmark Method by groups of professional Idaho educators during the test development process. Achievement Standards will be reset every few years as required when significant changes are made to the ISAT.

Please go to http://www.sde.idaho.gov/site/assessment/docs/TC%20Guide%202009-10_02_09_10_version.pdf to find more information on scale scoring.