



CASE STUDY: LEADERS MATTER – EARLY LEARNING

WEST VALLEY SCHOOL DISTRICT #208 YAKIMA, WASHINGTON



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WEST VALLEY SCHOOL DISTRICT #208

DISTRICT WEBSITE

<https://www.wvsd208.org/>

DISTRICT DEMOGRAPHICS

<http://reportcard.ospi.k12.wa.us>

NCES DATA

<https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/districtsearch/>



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EARLY LEARNING IN WEST VALLEY SCHOOL DISTRICT

Background Information

West Valley (Yakima, WA) contains both suburban and rural areas with approximately 5,000 students in grades Pre K - 12. Approximately 40% of students qualify for free/reduced meal and 7% of students qualify as English Language Learners. Demographics are approximately 60% White, 30% Hispanic, and 10% other.



Role of Leaders

The West Valley Pre K Initiative

(https://www.wvsd208.org/apps/pages/PreK_Initiative_Contents) began in the fall of 2011 when Dr. Mike Brophy joined the District as superintendent. The District has used the framework by Sullivan-Dudzic, Gearns, and Leavall (2011) to organize the work.

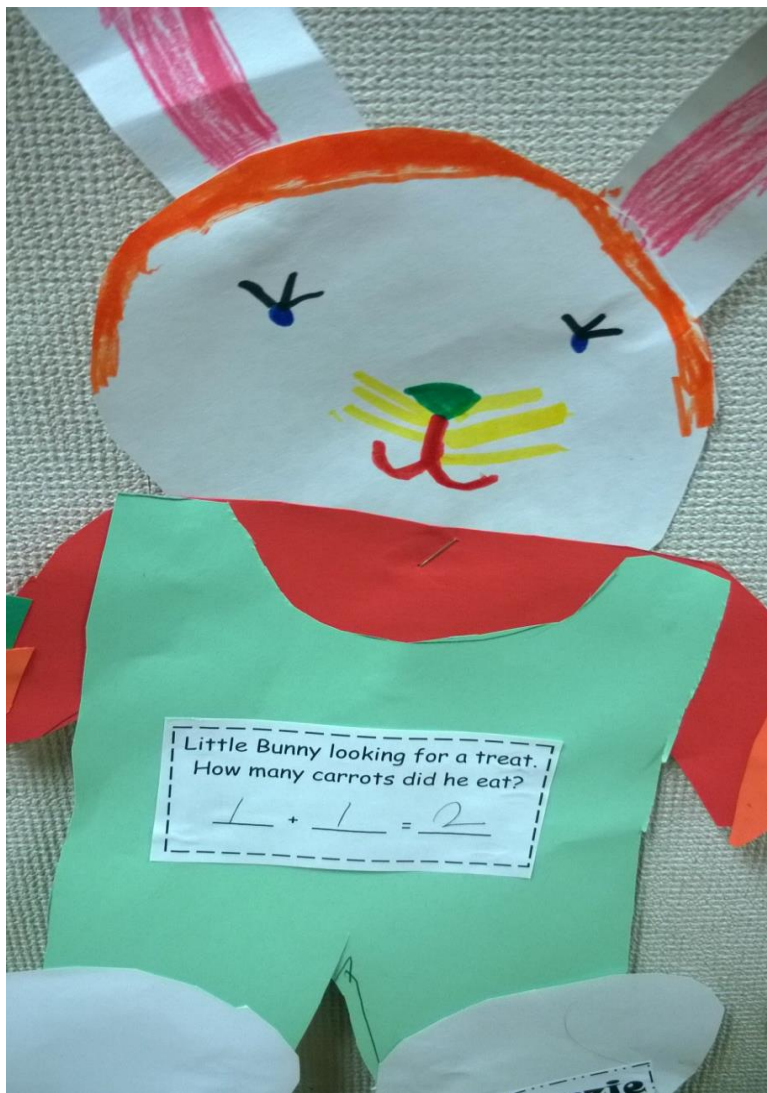
- Step One: Establish Need and Common Interests
- Step Two: Locate and Connect with Early Childhood Learning Environments
- Step Three: Develop a Leadership Team
- Step Four: Provide High-Quality Professional Development
- Step Five: Connect and Align Quality Pre K to Kindergarten
- Step Six: Maximize the Benefits of Full-Day Kindergarten

- Step Seven: Align and Connect a Strong Full-Day Kindergarten with grades 1-3
Step Eight: Conquer the Fade Out
Step Nine: Create a Sustainable System of Support
Step Ten: Review, Revise, and Extend

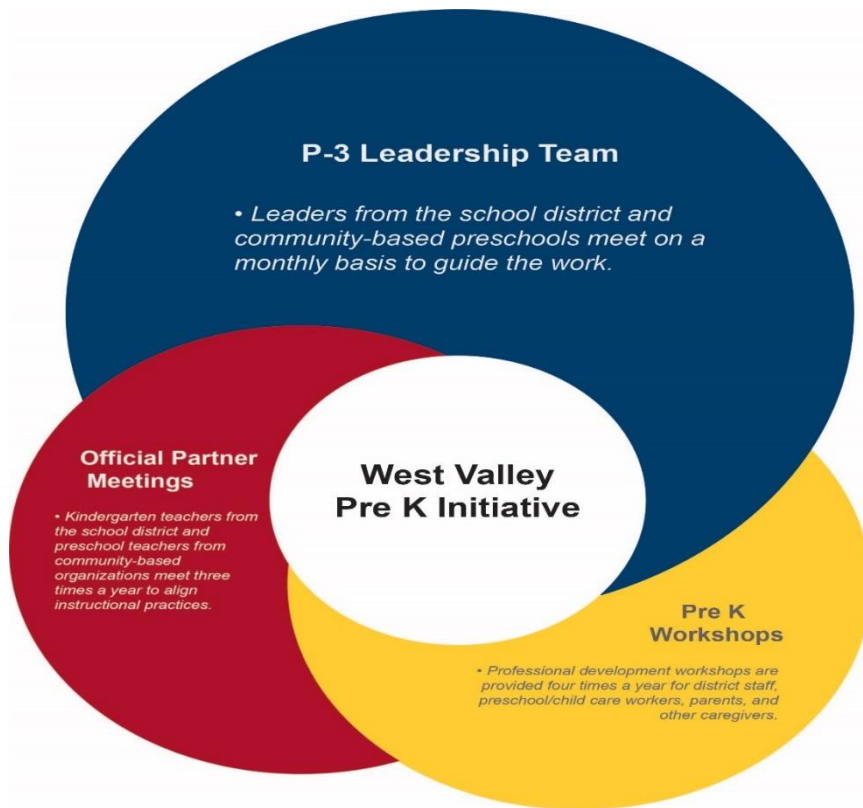
The Pre K Initiative started with six or seven people in a little shed behind the district office. But it was the right six or seven people! (Brophy)

As the initiative grew, Dr. Brophy asked Assistant Superintendent, Dr. Peter Finch, to lead the effort.

As the Pre K Initiative started to get traction, it was important to give it more attention, which Peter was able to do. Things really took off from there! (Brophy)



PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT



P-3 Leadership Team

The Pre K Initiative is led by the P-3 Leadership Team, which meets on a monthly basis. The P-3 Leadership Team is composed of staff members from the school district and from community organizations, such as child care centers, state and federally funded preschools, faith-based preschools, and the regional Educational Service District.

The P-3 Leadership Team guides the work by analyzing data and identifying topics for the Official Partner meetings and the Pre K workshops (https://www.wvds208.org/apps/pages/Official_Partners). In addition, a portion of each monthly meeting is reserved for the group to learn about recent developments in the field of early learning.

As of the fall of 2018, the *Pre K Initiative* had 17 organizations that were designated as Official Partners. During the 2017/18 school year, the District averaged over 100 participants at the quarterly Pre K workshops. West Valley has received national

recognition from the National P3 Center and “District of Distinction” recognition from *District Administration Magazine* for its focus on early learning.

Assistant Superintendent, Dr. Peter Finch, emphasized the collaborative approach that he has taken as the leader of the Leadership Team.

I always want to approach the work of the P-3 Leadership Team as a partnership. I don't want our early learning partners to think that the District is telling them what to do. We have a lot to learn from our early learning partners. (Finch)

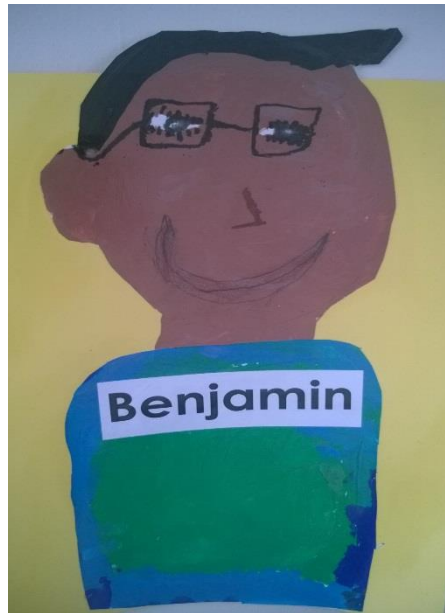
Official Partner Meetings

Official Partner meetings are held three times per year (November, February, and May). In these meetings, staff members from local child care facilities and preschool organizations meet in small groups with kindergarten teachers. One kindergarten teacher from each of the district's six elementary schools meets with staff members from the Official Partner organizations. Official Partners agree to collaborate on instruction, curriculum, assessment, family engagement, and professional development. Topics for official partner meetings have included math, phonemic awareness, oral language development, social/emotional learning, and family engagement.

One example of the alignment of instructional practices has been the focus on math. Official Partners organizations have agreed to use “10 frames” with students to increase student understanding of one-to-one correspondence. Kindergarten teachers use “20 frames” to extend student learning.

Pre K Workshops

The district hosts Pre K Workshops on a quarterly basis (August, October, January, and April). The structure for the workshops varies but a common structure has been for the district to organize a keynote speaker on a topic with follow-up break-out sessions where participants can complete a variety of “make-it, take-it” activities. The break-out sessions often have co-presenters with presenters from the school district and partner organizations teaming together to provide professional development. By having the co-presenters team together, the Pre K Initiative models the true sense of partnership with the community organizations. Topics for Official Partner meetings have included First Steps in Math (<http://det.wa.edu.au/stepsresources/detcms/navigation/first-steps-mathematics/>), Project GLAD: Guided Language Acquisition Design, and Social-Emotional Learning. (<http://ntcprojectglad.com/>).



Family Engagement/Home Visit Program

Since 2001, the District has supported a home visiting program for early learning. The district uses the *Parent Child Home Program* model (<http://www.parent-child.org/>). Home visitors visit families twice a week over a two-year period. The home visitors provide families with a book or educational game. The home visitors help families use the materials effectively with their children to support kindergarten readiness.

Through the partnership of the Pre K Initiative, district leaders learned about many effective family engagement strategies. The District's Family Engagement Coordinator, Minerva Pardo, organizes parent education classes, English as a Second Language classes, and a weekly "Play and Learn" group. Ms. Pardo has become a national trainer for the Strengthening Families Framework (<https://www.cssp.org/young-children-their-families/strengtheningfamilies>), which includes the following Five Protective Factors: 1) Parental Resilience; 2) Social Connections; 3) Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development; 4) Concrete Support in Times of Need; and 5) Social-Emotional Competence of Children. Ms. Pardo worked with the National Alliance for Children's Trust and Prevention Funds (<https://www.ctfalliance.org/>) to translate all training materials into Spanish. In April 2018, through a grant from the Yakima Valley Community Foundation, Ms. Pardo trained the first Spanish/English bilingual cadre of trainers to provide training to families and staff in the region.



Play and Learn

Pre K classrooms are used for classes Mondays through Thursdays. On Friday, the District hosts a Play and Learn (<https://childcare.org/family-services/find-care-kaleidoscope.aspx>) group for families with young children who participate in learning stations together. In addition, families are provided with information about community resources. During the Play and Learn sessions, families are also encouraged to build social connections.

At the first Play and Learn session, which was held on a Friday, a family was provided information about state-funded preschool that was available at the school. By the following Wednesday, the child was attending preschool at no cost to the family.



Washington Kindergarten Inventory of Developing Skills (WaKIDS)

The District has implemented WaKIDS beyond what the state required. The state required all districts to implement the WaKIDS assessment in the fall to determine a student's kindergarten readiness in six domains of the Teaching Strategies Gold assessment. The six domains are: Social-Emotional, Language, Literacy, Physical, Cognitive, and Math.

(<http://www.k12.wa.us/WaKIDS/pubdocs/WhatIsWaKIDS.pdf>)

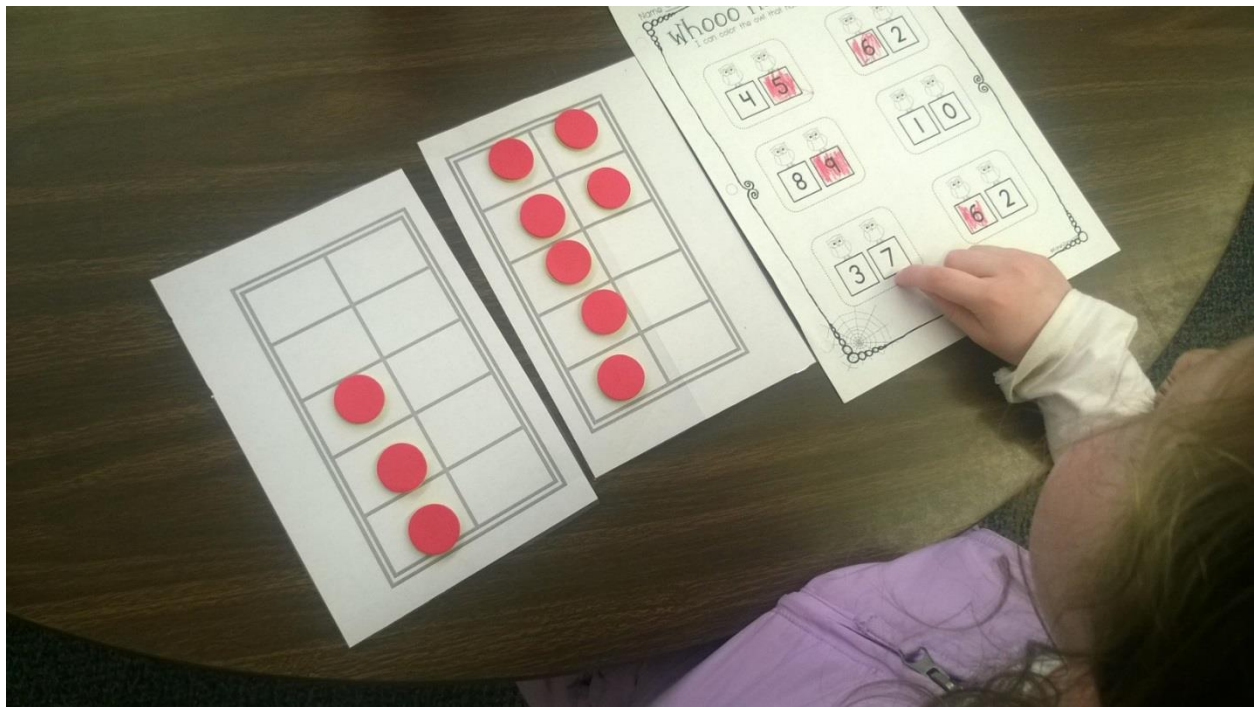
In addition, the state encouraged schools to hold parent/teacher conferences for all kindergarten students prior to the first day of school. In West Valley, kindergarten teachers use the WaKIDS assessment for their report cards in the fall, winter, and spring. The District is considering parent/teacher conferences prior to the first day of school for all elementary students.

Preschool Classrooms

The District has three classrooms that are used for preschool students with special needs. In addition, the District provides classroom space to community partners if there is space available at the school. In the past, four of the six elementary schools in the District were able to provide space to community partners. Due to enrollment growth in the District, only two schools are currently able to provide space for community preschools.

Transition Kindergarten

Through the District's participation in state-level early learning work, district leaders learned about a program in another district where students who turn five-years-old during the school year are able to enroll in kindergarten. In January 2017, the District began a Transition Kindergarten classroom so that students who were not receiving educational services could attend school for the second half of the school year. Most of the students continued with kindergarten in the following school year. The program was replicated in January 2018.



High School Dual Credit

Chris Nesmith, Director of Innovations and Futures, oversees the District's Career and Technical Education Program. Mr. Nesmith worked with Dr. Melissa Matczak from Yakima Valley College to provide high school students from West Valley the opportunity to earn high school credit and college credit for classes taken at West Valley High School. High school students are able to complete the three course sequence needed to obtain the Initial Certificate in Early Childhood Education. The courses are:

ECED&105, Introduction to Early Childhood Education (5 credits)
ECED&107, Health, Safety, and Nutrition (5 credits)
ECED&120, Practicum-Nurturing Relationships (2 credits)

Creative scheduling allows for the high school teacher to oversee the Intro students and the Practicum students during the same class period. Students in the Introduction class attend class on the high school campus four days per week. On the fifth day, the students are in early learning classrooms for observation time. Students in the Practicum are in the field four days a week and they attend class at the high school for one day a week. In this way, the high school teacher can supervise both sets of students during the same class period.

SUCSESSES AND CHALLENGES

Results

The District maintains a focus on systems improvement. Early learning, alone, will not ensure student success. The District has an extensive professional development program that includes two years of mentoring for new teachers, an additional two years of teacher induction for new teachers as well as for any teacher who is new to the school district. And once teachers have completed the mentor program and teacher induction program, they are offered a two-year cohort to complete their National Board Certification. Once teachers have completed National Board Certification, they are ready to serve as mentors in the District's new teacher mentor program.

Instructional coaches at each school provide support for data analysis and "response to intervention" systems. The instructional coaches meet on a weekly basis to ensure that best practices are used at every school.

Erica Peppers, a teacher in the District, completed her Master's degree project with an analysis of a cohort of students who completed preschool with a partner organization. The partner organization served students based on high economic need. She analyzed the third grade Smarter Balanced scores for these students in comparison to the state average for students who qualified for free/reduced meals. Her analysis showed that a greater percentage of students from West Valley met the state standard for both reading and math (Peppers, 2017).

Smarter Balanced Assessment, Percent Meeting Standard, Spring 2017

West Valley students who completed preschool with partner organization vs
WA State students who qualify for free/reduced meals

Assessment	West Valley	WA State
Grade 3, English Language Arts	59%	36%
Grade 3, Math	67%	42%

West Valley, N = 22 students

WA State, N = Approximately 40,000 students

When analyzing the results for all students, students from West Valley have sustained achievement that is greater than the state average for both reading and math (OSPI, 2018).

Smarter Balanced Assessment, Percent Meeting Standard, Spring 2015-2017

All Students, Grade 3

Assessment	West Valley	WA State
Spring 2015, Math	70%	57%
Spring 2016, Math	78%	59%
Spring 2017, Math	71%	58%
Spring 2015, English Language Arts	61%	52%
Spring 2016, English Language Arts	62%	54%
Spring 2017, English Language Arts	61%	53%

West Valley, N = 430 students

WA State, N = Approximately 90,000 students

In the first year of the Pre K Initiative, the P-3 Leadership Team analyzed kindergarten readiness scores and made math a focus. The results from fall 2015-2017 demonstrate an increase in math scores for students as measured by the Washington Kindergarten Inventory of Kindergarten Skills (WaKIDS) (OSPI, 2018).

WaKIDS, Percent “Kindergarten Ready”, Fall 2015-2017

All Students, Kindergarten

Assessment	West Valley	WA State
Fall 2015, WaKIDS Math	63%	61%
Fall 2016, WaKIDS Math	69%	66%
Fall 2017, WaKIDS Math	75%	66%

West Valley, N = 385 students

WA State, N = Approximately 79,000 students

REVIEW, REVISE, AND EXTEND

District leaders continue to explore ways to expand the work of the West Valley Pre K Initiative to close opportunity gaps, increase equity, and ensure that all students enter school “Kindergarten Ready.” The District has partnered with Yakima Valley College to host student teachers for a new Residency model for teacher preparation. Candidates will earn a PreK-8 Certificate with an endorsement in Early Childhood Education and/or an endorsement in English Language Learners. The first cohort will be placed in West Valley schools in fall 2018.

District leaders would like to expand the Dual Credit offerings for high school students to include a Registered Apprenticeship for Early Childhood Education. High School students would be able to complete additional college credits through a three-hour block class where they would be paid an apprenticeship salary for their work in early learning classrooms.

The P-3 Leadership Team recognizes that the work of the Pre K Initiative has “moved the needle” on kindergarten readiness for math. Based on data analysis and input from staff members, the team has made Social-Emotional Learning a focus for the upcoming school year. A series of workshop topics have been organized for the Pre K Workshops including Self-Regulation, Positive Relationships, and Collaborative/Proactive Solutions. In addition, the P-3 Leadership Team has established the goal of increasing

parent attendance at the Pre K Workshops and to extend the scope of the workshops to include Birth to Age 3 (Infants and Toddlers).

District leaders continue to seek ways to expand their learning about “best practices” for Early Learning. This includes their participation in regional organizations, such as the Investing in Children Coalition, their participation in state organizations, such as the Early Learning Advisory Council for the Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families, and their participation in national organizations, such as the AASA National Cohort for Early Learning (<http://www.aasa.org/early-learn-cohort.aspx>).

Finally, media coverage of best practices was seen as an essential element for sustaining community understanding and support (<http://kimatv.com/news/local/nearly-70-of-yakima-county-kids-not-ready-for-kindergarten>).

References

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Peppers, E.K. (2017). Impact of preschool on Kindergarten readiness and longitudinal academic achievement in a P-3 system. (Unpublished Master’s Degree Project). Heritage University. Toppenish, WA.

Sullivan-Dudzic, L.T., Gearns, D.K., Leavell, K.J. 2010). Making a difference: 10 essential steps to building a Pre K-3 system. Corwin Press.
