

Laveen Elementary School District

Q&A with Barbara Marshall

Assistant Superintendent of Academic Services

With state testing (Arizona Instrument to Measure Standards) scores improving in every subject for every grade, by as much as 16 percent, from 2008 to 2009, Laveen Elementary School District in Laveen, Arizona is doing something right. Barbara Marshall, Laveen's Assistant Superintendent of Academic Services attributes this rise in student achievement to strong administrator support and guidance, a systematic approach for both educator and student development, and the ability to manage and monitor the effects of these approaches through Galileo K-12 Online.

What were the main things that the District implemented that you believe were responsible for your success?

"We aligned the curriculum to the state standards, which sounds obvious but it does need to be done. Teacher committees took the state standards and mapped them out for the school year based on the grade levels, and on the order they would teach concepts and objectives. Having that available for our teachers has been a big help, especially in a district like Laveen. We experienced a lot of hyper growth from 2006 to 2009, about 42 percent average growth rate each year. We have a lot of new teachers starting their careers or even new to Laveen, so having the map really made a difference. Galileo helps hold teachers accountable for teaching to the map, by having a quarterly testing. And having a management system where we were able to go in and do the reporting as soon as tests are scanned in, we can start getting the results and start using the results.

I think one of the things that really struck me when I came to Laveen is that Dr. Ron Dickson (Laveen's Superintendent) has been really systematic with his staff development and it all builds on itself. It's not like we're trying new things and you've got a hundred different things, which one do you do? Everything we're doing builds on itself.

We did Galileo professional development with our administrators and that made a big difference in getting the principals and the academic services staff to really see the benefits of the reports. We started using the *Aggregate Multi-Test Report* with the principals and gathering data district-wide for district comparisons and at the school level to show principals and site administrators who in turn work with their teachers, who in turn work with their students.

The more the staff learns and sees how to use Galileo, the more beneficial it's becoming, which has really been key. Galileo is not just a program where we can have a test bank aligned to the state standards, and that we can scan in, but it's how we are using the system and using the reports to differentiate instruction, for example, using the reports to set up our after-school tutoring or to set up our tutoring clubs during the day."

Your district utilizes a team of instructional coaches called “Collaborative Peer Teachers.” Tell us more about what they do.

“The head of the Collaborative Peer Teachers is Mr. Dale Parcell, the Director of Curriculum and Instruction, and he meets with the Collaborative Peer Teachers on a weekly basis. There is one Collaborative Peer Teacher per campus, with one Technology Collaborative Peer Teacher district-wide whose main role is to teach teachers how to integrate technology into the curriculum.

Mr. Parcell provides training and support, current research, how things are going, what the norms are, and so forth. Through the weekly meetings, and especially in the summer when we have a little bit more time, we gave the Collaborative Peer Teachers extensive training in the use of the Galileo reporting system so that they are in turn training their grade level team leaders and the teachers on their campus.”

There is another piece of implementation unique to the District called “Test Talks.” Tell us more about that.

“A Test Talk is the teachers teaching the students how to take a test, mostly multiple-choice, but even how to take an essay test or how to take a true/false test. For example, making sure students are real careful with the directions. During a Test Talk the teacher and students would read the directions together, highlight the key words, make sure every student understands what the directions are asking. So really being systematic even with the kids on how to take the test, understanding the directions, then within each question highlighting the key words and the information within, and teaching the students how to eliminate, especially on a multiple-choice, the distracter answers. If you have four choices to choose from, if you can throw one, or sometimes two away, now you’re really only looking at two answers.

It’s been encouraging to go around and watch students take tests and see them use these techniques when taking tests throughout the year and we think that Test Talks have been really beneficial in helping our test scores improve.”

How did you identify students needing additional instructional assistance?

“It’s kind of a combination of things: The formal assessments with Galileo, and the informal assessment by the classroom teacher. Teachers develop mini-quizzes based on one or two objectives, which they go into Galileo to do, and we’re promoting that more and more.

From there, you can use the reporting in Galileo, like the *Risk Assessment Report* [within the *Aggregate Multi-Test Report*], to see where the students are. Principals set up tutoring plans at the school level, and they vary from campus to campus – some do their tutoring before school, some do their tutoring after school – and we even have it structured during the school day, there is time where students go to a particular teacher based on the skills they’re needing the extra assistance in.”

How did you plan what to teach students needing additional assistance?

"Decisions are driven by the results of the formal and informal assessments. When I use the *Aggregate Multi-Test Report* for the schools, it's just an overview: In reading, here is where your grade levels are, or your teachers are. But the principal and teacher can even break it down to the student level where they go in to see where the individual students are. The *Item Analysis Report* has been great for that because the teachers can go in to see, 'Oh my gosh, 80 percent of my class answered D. What was in that distracter that made them pick that?' This helps teachers build their Test Talks."

What advice would you give to other districts who might want to implement an approach like yours?

"I think everything just ties into itself, especially like the staff development, we're not just saying, 'Here's something new to try.' It's all systematic. Just keeping it at the forefront, not just saying, 'Here's what you need to do,' but providing the support and the monitoring to make sure it's happening.

District level administrators go out to each campus, on a rotating schedule for a different campus each week to visit with the principal to see how things are going, but most importantly, to go in and conduct informal observations to give feedback to the teachers on what they're implementing. We have a standard district form that includes Laveen expectations for general items, such as posting achievement data, and for student encouragement indicators, especially in the use of cooperative learning. This gives us trend data from grade level to grade level, school to school, across the district.

Teachers are required to post their Galileo report results in their classroom for their quarterly tests. And they've brought it down to the student level where the students are doing individual graphing and reporting. It's amazing to see students have goals for themselves, and they are tracking their progress.

Schools have implemented 'Data Assemblies,' they don't just celebrate the kids meeting the standards, but they go in, because Galileo makes it so easy, and find the kids who have made the most growth. So it might be a student who is really a struggling student, but they made tremendous gains and those students get to be celebrated at the Data Assemblies.

Overall, be systematic in your planning and implementation, involve all stakeholders, and continually monitor the progress to identify strengths and areas to target energies."