

Best Practices Case Study: *Meeting Critical Needs at the Elementary Level*

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Forest Road Elementary School Valley Stream 30 Union Free School District



There is an inherent expectation of achievement here – it's not contrived.
– district administrator

School Context

Forest Road is one of the three elementary schools that comprise the Valley Stream 30 district. The community served by the district is just east of Queens and JFK Airport and is home to one of the largest and oldest malls on Long Island. The multi-lane Sunrise Highway runs through the district, creating a barrier that students, who walk to school, cannot safely cross. Only the area south of the highway can be served by Forest Road. This creates an enclave – a protected pocket of approximately 800 homes surrounded by an urban landscape – for a now very diverse community that entrusts its children to Forest Road School, a K-6 school with two classrooms per grade. The only students bused are special education students from other schools, including the other two elementary schools in the district, who attend the four self-contained special education classrooms that the district houses in Forest Road.

When Forest Road Elementary opened in 1953, it served a newly developed suburb. Children walked to school and went home for lunch, sometimes bringing the teacher with them. It was a community that valued education and held high expectations for their children and the schools that served them. While the population today is very different – including recent immigrants from the Indian subcontinent, the western Caribbean, and Africa – neither the families nor the educators have changed their high expectations. What has changed is the way school and district officials approach curriculum, instruction, and assessment so that they can meet the needs of their diverse students and their families.

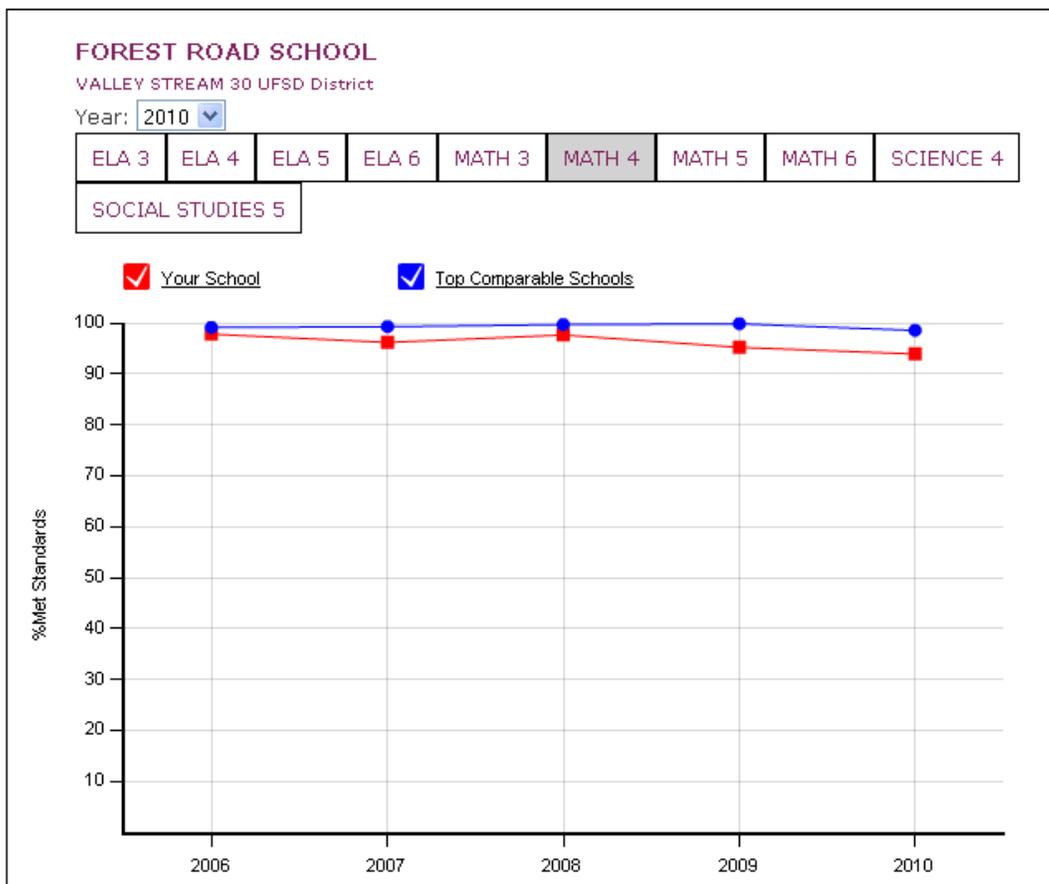
Student Demographics 2009-10 Forest Road Elementary, Valley Stream 30 Union Free School Districtⁱ

Grades served: K- 6	Forest Road	Valley Stream UFSD	New York State
Eligible for Free/Reduced-Price Lunch	17%	27%	48%
Limited English Proficient	8%	12%	8%
Student Ethnic/Racial Distribution			
African-American	39%	43%	19%
Hispanic/Latino	17%	29%	22%
White	6%	6%	50%
Other	40%	23%	8%
Total Enrollment	272	1,423	2,692,649

Demographic data are from the 2009-10 state report cards (<https://www.nystart.gov/publicweb/Home.do?year=2010>).

Although both the building principal and the district superintendent are new to their positions (completing their second and third years, respectively), the programs they are putting into place build on and represent a progression from prior years' work. Both teachers and an experienced district administrator new to the district and serving in an interim capacity credit the previous superintendent with doing "a fine job of moving a conservative district into the 21st century" in terms of maintaining high expectations, introducing and integrating technology, and implementing new programs to meet new needs. Teachers and administrators recognize that their two major challenges are the performance of the special education and ELL populations. "They are a continual focus" as educators work to set expectations and clarify the difference between modifications and accommodations. "We have to accommodate," say administrators, "but the child has to achieve at the same level. We are really shoring up our special education program in that way. We try to make the learning day as continuous as possible for the kids – the best balance of push in and pull out."

As a result, the students at Forest Road consistently perform as well as or better than their peers in schools with similar or greater challenges. For example, the graph below shows performance of grade 4 students on the State Mathematics Assessment from 2006-2010, compared with the most successful schools serving similar populations of students (top comparable schools).



Data are based on publically available NYS Assessment data as displayed at <http://knowyourschoolsny.org>. For an explanation of top comparable schools and results for additional grades, years, and assessments, click on "Find Your School" on the website.

Best Practice Highlights

To meet what they see as their greatest challenges, educators enact several practices that stand out. These include a focus on preventing rather than remediating difficulties, pooling and deploying resources to target identified needs, using a variety of data to continuously monitor performance, and involving a broad base of participation.

Prevention Rather Than Remediation

They are not afraid – including the board of education – to allocate dollars . . . for students at risk – summer, afternoon, or morning. – district administrator

From classroom teacher to superintendent, a shared attitude in this school is to prevent problems rather than remediate them, and this applies to academics as well as behavior. Academically, the focus is on literacy and intervening early to try to ensure that every child develops literacy skills. By April of each year, district officials seek to know which incoming kindergarteners are “at real risk, especially for phonemic awareness. They should be able to hear those sounds,” say district administrators. If they cannot, the district offers a five-week summer program “so they get support right away.” Then they “follow those kids all year all long.”

Once students reach Forest Road, those having difficulty are served by reading and other specialists, coordinating with the classroom teacher. A variety of diagnostic tools and screening tests are used to help identify what interventions to try, and schedules support the work of specialists to work with students, while protecting the ongoing work of the classroom. These services are provided before a student is referred for potential special education classification.

Across the school a positive behavior intervention system -- described in more detail below -- is in place. Teachers also describe less formal arrangements that enable students to avoid trouble. For example, an upper-grade student might stop in to eat lunch with a former teacher, removing him- or herself from a potentially sticky situation in the cafeteria. In a small school, say some teachers, it can sometimes be difficult for students to avoid each other.

Blurring the Special Ed-General Ed Boundaries

*It's really all ed rather than gen ed and special ed. That time has gone.
- district administrator*

With a shared goal of preventing difficulties, individuals work across “boundaries.” This applies to reading specialists, special education teachers, and ESL teachers focusing on ensuring that instructional support is directed to where it is needed. As one teacher who came from another district explains,

There's a lot of collaboration between the ESL teacher, reading teacher, classroom teacher, and administrator. We do that very well – there's a lot of flexibility – if I see a need for something with one of my readers, the reading teacher is very supportive of that – even if a child is not mandated for reading support services, she still will work with that student. Same with the ESL teacher.

. . . I've never taught like this [before] – finding common ground so my practices would meet the needs of my students.

It also holds true at the district level. At a weekly cabinet meeting, says a district administrator, “We . . . put our heads together and ask ‘How can we pull our resources together to make this work?’” Cabinet members, who include the directors of technology and special education, assistant to the superintendent, superintendent, and business manager, look at all of the resources -- district resources, title monies, special education funds – and determine how each can contribute to addressing district priorities. These conversations and the resulting decisions for resource allocation are guided by their shared goals.

Ongoing Use of a Variety of Data

I couldn't go solely by any [one] of the programs to place a child, but combined they give some sort of picture that informs . . . instruction. – teacher

In addition to intervening early, educators at Forest Road speak of the need to measure how effective interventions are and change them if warranted. Careful monitoring of these and other data have recently been formalized in a “Red Zone” initiative that focuses squarely on academic progress and holds teachers and administrators accountable. On a four-six week cycle, the principal and reading specialist meet with every teacher and go through “every child in the class. Some get a cursory look, some a more in-depth look, and the children who get an extra look are in the ‘Red Zone’ and need additional instruction,” according to the principal. The data they examine can include ongoing running records, reading benchmark assessments, progress monitoring (done by reading specialists with all students in their case load). “We come to the table with a lot of information,” adds the principal, and ask questions such as, “Should a child remain in remedial 4 days? Can they be moved from a guided reading group? Sometimes a reading specialist will see a student functioning at a different level than the classroom teacher. So the specialist will go in and see what’s going on; is the student doing something different with the specialist than the teacher? Is the teacher questioning in a different way?” A teacher says of these meetings, “We . . . make a game plan for the next 6 weeks and the next time we meet.”

District administrators, in turn, report meeting with the principals once a month to discuss the Red Zone students and “ask them to tag the ESL and special education population students” so that they can monitor progress of those two critical needs groups.

Teachers are also provided a variety of tools to help them tailor curriculum and instruction in general. They receive results not only of how their last class did on items of the state assessments but also information about the strengths and weaknesses of their incoming class. These data help them identify gaps in their own teaching and plan how to address the particular needs of the class coming to them next.

Broad Involvement

All community members are partners who share the responsibility of educating our children. - district mission statement

From goal setting to parent involvement, structures and processes are in place to ensure that a broad constituency of people (teachers, parents, administrators) are involved with goal setting and program selection. At the district level, a Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment Council (called the Curriculum Council) meets regularly with a top administrator to work on goals that are aligned with overall goals set by the board (discussed in more detail below). The Council includes about 20 people who serve two years each. Members are committee chairs for the subjects, teachers, special area teachers, primary and upper grade teachers, school administrators, and ESL and special education teachers.

According to the superintendent, “The Teachers’ Association chooses who is on the council. We talk with them about the criteria for representation (for example from across all schools, grade levels, etc.) but we leave it to the union to give the representation. The principals rotate membership. . . . I think a lot of the success of the district is that we truly try to have collaborative responsibility and shared leadership. . . . The union gives us a good range of the people we need. You have some of the people who are the naysayers, too. We really do have everyone involved. If you’re going to make change, having those people on the committee means you really have to make your case. You get to hear all the voices.”

The principal and teachers describe an active PTA, with two teachers attending every meeting and an effort to include substantive information about curriculum and instruction at each meeting. For example, the principal reports, “At the beginning of the year we did [a workshop] that was literacy based. [We’ve done] study skills, accountable talk. Many of our parents will come in and say, ‘I don’t really read in English as well as I could.’” For those parents she stresses how important it is to simply talk with children, since conversational skills help build skills useful for reading. Many teachers mention parents’ active involvement in fund raising, whether for the school or for other worthy causes such as earthquake survivors in Haiti. And the school website asks parents to “take the 2 in 10 Pledge” -- a promise to “give 2 hours of your time over the next ten months to improve your child’s school experience.”

A Closer Look

These practices are evident throughout the five dimensions that frame the study of which this case is one part. The sections below expand on each of these practices within the context of the study’s framework.

Curriculum and Academic Goals

The Curriculum Council in the district deals with all curriculum items . . . an identical curriculum for special ed and general ed. . . . The curriculum is the same, assessments are the same, expectations are the same.

– district administrator

The curriculum across the district is aligned through a goal-setting process tied closely to data monitoring and a curriculum framework and maps. Goals are expected to be aligned from teacher to school to district. The Curriculum Council plays a major role in goal setting, meeting monthly and then at the end of the year to review and reset measurable goals that are intended to “stretch us a bit,” according to district administrators.

Goals are specific and measurable. When analysis showed that the first level of instruction in a Response to Intervention Model was not meeting 80% of the students' needs in the classroom, as demonstrated by a weakness in word study and phonics, the Curriculum Council set a goal of establishing a systematic approach to phonics instruction in grades K and 1. This involved bringing in a program to meet that need. The next year the goal became to move that program into the second grade. Once goals are set, according to the superintendent, "They become the basis. Everything is tied to that -- professional development planning is tied to what those goals are; every goal is measured; teachers' goals and principals' goals are all tied to these goals. . . . my goals. We're all linked. All the professional development resources link into them."

An upper-grades teacher describes her goal and its origin:

My priority . . . is exposing [students] to a variety of genres and much more non-fiction because as they move . . . to middle school they need to have the tools to understand content area reading. . . . so my goal for this year and next year is to focus my attention on strategies for reading non-fiction, especially in the content areas. That goal came from . . . the state standards, especially with the Common Core coming up, which is calling for a lot more non-fiction reading.

The principal describes the goal-setting process as now being more formalized than it had been in the past, in part because of a district shift to using Charlotte Danielson's framework for teaching. Now, as she describes the process, a teacher "sits with an administrator saying, 'I want to address these domains.' . . . All of the teachers create 3-5 goals that are instructional in nature, looking at the Danielson domains." Since all teachers have been given both gap analyses and Wrong Response Analysis Process (WRAP) reports for their incoming and outgoing classes, they are asked to take a look at ELA and math and discuss how their class did and where they need to go with their instruction. The discussion with the principal revolves around questions like "When you get to know your learners a little better – would you like to add, amend, or delete those?" Both teachers and principal also have the annual analysis from the superintendent showing how the district did compared to the region as a whole.

Just as the Curriculum Council seeks to stretch itself with its goals, special educators want to be sure that IEP goals are "challenging, not be set because they're manageable. . . We make sure there is a sufficient level to permit growth of a student. We discuss the goals at the meetings – we permit the parents to participate in that – we don't want to put anything on there that will not challenge the student or put the child on another level," says a district administrator.

In the end, what makes it possible to meet their goals is "that kid watching," says the superintendent. "It's being able to know each kid, then working with the building principal and the teachers." She attributes the district's overall success to "curriculum alignment, which is district wide in terms of setting clear alignment maps in terms of what students should know and be able to do. These are consistently upheld school wide, district wide and classroom wide."

Through the Curriculum Council and other committees, there is broad participation in goal setting and monitoring. Across the board goals are aligned, specific, and measurable – and intended to be a stretch. Close monitoring of individual student progress is seen as the key to meeting goals.

Staff Selection, Leadership, and Capacity Building

We are looking for teachers with a sense of mission. – district administrator

Although the administration is relatively new, the school and district have experienced a relatively stable workforce; the prior superintendent served twenty some odd years, and veteran teachers report little turnover in the principalship at Forest Road. Both general and special education teaching staff are a mix of veteran and new. Teachers report a trickle in of new teachers so that the foundational culture is transmitted and carried forward. With the increasingly diverse student body, administrators actively seek a more diverse group of professionals at every level, supplementing typical job postings with reaching out to professional associations like the Long Island Black Educators Association and being sure to describe the district as a “diverse, multi cultural community.” Dual certification is seen as a plus.

Hiring committees use rubrics to evaluate candidates. For administrators, the committee is the assistant to the superintendent, 3 parents and 3 teachers and a building clerical staff member. The superintendent explains that they have taught parents and teachers how to ask questions “designed to be open ended to let the candidates reveal themselves.” The committee provides the superintendent and cabinet their ratings “across the rubric.” After the cabinet interviews candidates, the superintendent sends two names to the board to interview. She further reports that all “administrators are instructionally sound. They come from instruction and understand instruction. To be hired, candidates “need to have a clear understanding of what good instruction is,” and she feels that the rubric enables them to assess that.

Hiring of teachers follows a similar process, with the addition of requiring candidates to teach a lesson. One recent hiree, when asked why she thought she had been hired, replies,

I think they valued that I'd worked with a diverse population. I also did a writers workshop demo lesson. She [administrator] was very impressed with the writing lesson I did. . . I had a majority of those students the next year in my . . . class, an inclusion class. I think they wanted to see how I would do with those students.

For those hired, the district requires tenure portfolios and has a “gate process” for tenured teachers. Before teachers get an increase on the salary scale at 5, 10, or 15 years, they have to go through this gate process. “We don’t want a scrapbook,” says a district administrator. It should be about “work that is important to you” and answer questions like “What are your goals?” It should take into account new standards and indicate where the teacher will target instruction in the next year given student performance this year. Overall, the process should be “What I saw from my data, steps I took, how I monitored it, what I learned, what I’ll do next year.”

Teachers work within a set of clear goals and frequent progress monitoring, with opportunities to make change when needed. For example, when the need for better benchmark assessments in literacy was identified, administrators asked teachers and reading specialists to select the program that would best accomplish that. Over the years, building staff capacity and providing a variety of interventions have been priorities in the district and at Forest Road. The intervention models they choose are not the ones that say “You have to do this, and if that doesn’t work, do this, and if that doesn’t work, do this. Instead,” a district administrator says, “we take a problem-

solving approach” that expects the teachers to be able to determine need and select a response – with adequate training. “When we do professional development, it’s never one shot,” she adds. “It’s embedded over time. We bite the bullet and devote the resources to it. And then report on it. We look at it and student data.”

Teachers report being supported by the principal to test new approaches with an attitude of “Experiment – try this. . . . If it works, it’s great.” This approach, says a teacher “is really instrumental . . . in terms of helping us reach our potential.” In turn, the principal describes the teachers at Forest Road as being instructionally “very, very strong.” She describes “a group of people that look to go to conferences.” In addition, 4-5 teachers have formed “a collegial circle -- people who want to talk about professional journals and what’s new. They choose one topic and discuss it for the entire year. . . . Next year one [teacher] wants to lead a Common Core discussion. It’s voluntary . . . they do it on their lunch time. Central administration will support it by purchasing the book they want to discuss.”

Leaders at both building and district levels focus on instruction, not by mandating particular approaches but by establishing goals and expectations and supporting teachers to acquire the knowledge and skills to be problem solvers.

Instructional Programs, Practices, and Arrangements

Kids are getting good reading instruction in the classroom and then getting more. . . . But my message to parents and teachers has to do with how do we help students grow as thinkers, not just learners. - principal

According to teachers, curriculum drives instruction. They have curriculum maps for each grade level, but how they accomplish teaching that curriculum to all their students is to a certain extent up to them and their same-grade partner as well as the specialists who push in or pull out to meet particular student needs.

Programs

With so many students needing interventions of some sort and such a focus on individual student progress, one of the struggles, according to district administrators, is “trying to tie these pieces together.” However, “We are making real progress,” they say. For example, in working with ESL teachers as a group and looking at individual ESL students they need to work with, they ask, “How do we make that [ESL] connect with the reading and classroom teachers?” And the bigger question, asked by a district administrator: “For every service that a kid gets, how can we as a district put things into place so that everyone is talking together?” The Red Zone meetings discussed earlier in this report “are about that,” says the superintendent.

To try to make services as seamless as possible, teachers take many steps. A reading specialist explains that they buy programs “that meet student needs” then use one program as their “basic” program for K-3. They modify the language of a different program to match the basic one so that children hear “the same language year after year. [Students] need a constant; they can’t be learning a different program every place they go.” It could be as simple a change as using the same sample word for a letter sound as children learn in their phonics program. Another way they have brought consistency is that the leveled readers are consistently color coded across

classrooms and grades. This is more important than it might at first appear because students may need to get books to read from a classroom other than their own.

Practices

One teacher describes what she observed when she first came to Forest Road from a very different setting: “Teachers would take the curriculum and teach it the way that best suited their children, not relying so much on the text as a way of doing things. I kind of took that in – if I’m looking at my kids [I ask myself], ‘What’s the best way for me to get to them?’ I find that if you’re OK with change and if you’re OK with taking on a different way of teaching, it’s gonna best help you and your students. . . . In my years working here I’ve been lucky to work with people who find the best ways to reach children, even if it means sharing the way you teach, even if it means taking in constructive criticism.”

Overall, language and literacy dominate the curriculum, and instruction follows a balanced literacy approach, which one teacher defines as “shared reading, guided reading, and word study.” For classified students, the focus is on coteaching and differentiation. As described above, the boundaries between general and special education, reading specialist and classroom teacher get blurred as teachers collaboratively seek to provide whatever instruction each student needs to succeed.

The principal describes instruction: “In our younger grades much of the guided reading work is done during center time. The teacher might present information that is then divvied up into different centers [where most of the children work] while she’s working with 4-7 children. . . . One of the areas [we’re working on is] teachers feeling more comfortable pushing kids to the next level – helping teachers come out of the safety zone . . . scaffolding to move kids up.”

Teachers describe readily moving students to be sure that every student has a group of peers with whom to read. When this occurs across the two classrooms in a grade they call it “cross guided reading.” The teachers group children from the two classes together by reading level. This works especially well for lower-level readers, who work with each teacher twice a week, increasing the amount of instructional time. A teacher reports that with this approach “Children who needed a lot of intervention have really progressed to a higher reading level.” Other options include moving some children who are very advanced to read with a higher grade. And, as discussed below, ESL and special education teachers frequently place students in additional groups, both to give them a more appropriate placement and to bolster the amount of reading instruction they receive.

Along with language and literacy, the principal’s emphasis is on higher levels of thinking and asking questions that push students to those higher levels. Thus, she encourages teachers to “think about the metacognitive process . . . to figure out what kinds of questions are of a higher order. . . . How much think aloud are you doing? How much opportunity is there for kids to be active participants?” In both lesson planning/review and observations, she looks for teachers to use questioning techniques that ask not just for rote or recall but require deep thinking by students – “on a daily basis.” Doing this well involves coming to know the population well enough “to activate or infuse some schema that maybe they don’t have,” turning to the ESL teacher for assistance if needed.

Given the school and district emphases and goals and the attitude that it's mostly up to the teachers to determine how to present the curriculum, teachers report doing a variety of cross-grade and cross-disciplinary work. These range from a self-contained classroom inviting other classes in to learn about recently hatched ducklings, where the host students answered questions and explained how to hold, care for, and feed the ducks, to a teacher-written play put on by third graders, complete with music, dance, and a guest appearance by the principal. Add to these a year-long podcast project jointly done each year by a fifth-grade teacher and a music teacher. As upper-grades teachers prepare their students for advancement to middle school, they consider carefully what skills they will need and teach them. For example, Forest Road uses few text books, but a teacher reports providing students with copies of text book chapters and modeling note-taking so that they learn that skill.

Arrangements

In addition to the four self-contained classrooms, Forest Road offers special education services through a Resource Room and, in the grades where students qualify, inclusion classrooms. The schedule provides time for teachers to meet – each teacher with his or her “grade-level teacher or reading teacher or specialist,” reports one of the teachers. To maximize instructional time, new this year is a six-day cycle that enables specialists who rotate among the three elementary schools to divide their time more evenly. Another change is trying “one pull-out time per grade per teacher” so that all the reading teachers pull out from grade 1 at 9:00, then at 9:45, they pull from second grade, and so on. The goal, according to a reading teacher, is “to help the teachers have more time with their classrooms.”

A reading teacher describes the annual rhythm of her work:

In the beginning of the year, I work with first grade more; they've had Kindergarten. Then as they start to get going, you're releasing them, pull in more Kindergarteners; they've come to school [and now] have an idea about the routine, they've learned some letters. That's sort of the things I do -- pull back in one grade and push more with another grade. In second grade there's more of a push in the beginning. . . . When the third grade test is over, pull in second grade.

A science specialist, who is shared with the other schools, teaches one lesson per cycle in the science laboratory, in a coteaching environment with the regular classroom teachers. The classroom teacher then builds off of that lesson to teach the other two science lessons in the six-day cycle.

Teachers describe a flexible arrangement of push-in and pull-out services to ensure that all children with an identified instructional need – no matter their classification – receive the instruction they need from a general classroom teacher or specialist.

Monitoring: Compilation, Analysis and Use of Data

Now people are starting to understand how to use the data to teach. That's become integral.
– district administrator

As indicated earlier, educators in both school and district emphasize using a variety of evidence to not only monitor progress of their classes as a whole and of individual students but also to

measure the effectiveness of interventions. Some teachers express appreciation for the new programs and assessment tools that enable them to do this much more effectively than in years past. Looking at performance data is where they start to think about and discuss in a systematic way student growth and then to measure the impact of interventions on academic achievement. The Red Zone meetings, described earlier, are a primary way to monitor progress. This overall approach has been the expectation for many years, but teachers used to receive the data individually and were expected to go through it and make an action plan on their own.

At the beginning of the school year, the central office presents district-wide data to all staff for all buildings, for all cohorts, including all the categories for accountability. This, according to district administrators, gives everyone a sense of “where we were better and where we could improve.” When teachers leave that presentation they find in their mailboxes a folder with data on their own students’ performance. It is with these data in hand that principals meet with teachers about their goals for the year. A month later, they meet again, looking only at the data for ESL and special education students, asking, “What/where can we push?” and setting action plans for ESL and special education.

An upper grades teacher describes how she uses the data:

Last year my students did terribly on a question on character development on the state test. I knew for myself I need to . . . teach more on character. I planned a unit on that. . . . I also knew what the strengths and weaknesses were for incoming [students. I planned] strategy lessons for small groups – for example, inferencing. I also knew their strengths, and I did not need to focus on things they were successful at the previous year. I find it to be very beneficial.

Using second grade as an example, students receive universal screening in fall, winter, and spring. This screening is done on the computer and does not take much time. Students also take a reading benchmark assessment in fall and winter, and they have a math assessment at the end of each chapter. “All teachers must give the unit tests,” say district administrators, and “any kid who scores below 80% gets a double dose,” that is, the teacher reteaches that material to those students. The phonics program also has a unit test, and, again, teachers double dose to make sure that students have learned. “Kids in the intervention are watched closely.”

All teachers hand in to their principal a list of the whole class, with an explanation of what they did for every child who didn’t do well on a unit test or benchmark assessment. District administrators see their role as “helping our principals in holding their teachers accountable.” If district administrators notice, for example, that only 60% of a particular class of students do well on more than one consecutive uniform math assessment, they will go to the building and meet with both principal and teacher to “take a look at this information [and ask], “What is it that you need or what we can do?”” And since both the superintendent and her assistant for curriculum and instruction spend time in each building, they are not strangers to the teacher on the rare occasion when they need to call such a meeting.

Data are not confined to formal assessments, as teachers also report using observation notes and running records. And a student with a particular challenge might be even more closely watched. District administrators give the example of a recent immigrant, a young girl who had come to the

school with little family support. Given her needs, interventions were put in place immediately. A district administrator put four key people in an email loop and frequently conversed about her and her progress. As this administrator explains, “This is a case of close inspection of the kids.” By providing the right programs in the beginning, the district has reduced the number of students needing intervention as they move from Kindergarten to first grade. Achieving this, they say, “goes back to knowing your kids.”

Teachers and administrators describe a constant process of using data to measure the effectiveness of their own performance, a particular program, or an intervention.

Recognition, Intervention and Adjustments

The philosophy district wide is positive support as often as possible.

- principal

The approach to student behavior is preventative, with a positive behavior intervention system (PBIS) called STAR behaviors: Safety first, Take time to care, Act responsibly, Respect self and others. A school-wide kickoff in September is reinforced by activities in individual classrooms such as posters and public service announcements taped by the students. All are designed to show students the behaviors that are expected. Good behaviors are rewarded through shout outs and a coupon system. A teacher explains: “Every staff member – lunch room lady, secretary, and teacher -- gets coupons, and we are allowed to give these to any child we catch doing good things. Every student has a basket. At the end of the month, the coupons come down [to the office] and two names are drawn and those students get prizes. We really live by that – it is a school wide set of rules, in addition to classroom rules. Another feature of the program is “shout outs.” “Any teacher, kitchen staff, secretary can write a shout out. If you catch a kid doing something right – any kind of positive community type behavior will get recognized.”

Negative behaviors also have consequences, so the school also has a “think about it” sheet for when a student is caught doing something he or she should not be doing. The sheet records what the action was and how that action was in conflict with STAR behavior – in the child’s words. The sheet goes home to the parents, and parents sign it. Sometimes it’s just a note home, but sometimes there are consequences. “We also have PBIS referral sheets for behavior an aide or teacher wants me to know about,” says the principal. “There is a menu on it for what the possible consequences are -- loss of privileges, detention, phone call home.”

In addition to an active PTA, mentioned earlier, educators at Forest Road, led by the principal, reach out to families in a variety of ways, some for fun and games – field day, end-of-year family picnic – some more overtly academic. A weekly Forest Forum communiqué to parents is posted on line. Each lively issue is one page and covers topics from what a particular grade or class is studying to suggestions for activities to promote language, vocabulary and thinking during a vacation – or any time. This written information is supplemented by parent workshops and programs during PTA meetings.

Overall, educators in Forest Road School as well as the district central office strive to intervene early so that they can “lay a stronger foundation.” Rather than putting a lot of resources into

remediation at higher grades, educators have shifted their focus to addressing core reading with the expectation that students will be able to “soar later on.”

Prevention of difficulties, whether academic or social, is the overriding approach at the school. From close monitoring and rewarding of positive contributions to the school community to intervening early to catch problems, educators at Forest Road strive to lay a strong foundation for success for every student.

In a Nutshell

Educators at Forest Road School strive to keep up with changing requirements by the state as well as changing demographics and needs of their students and families. Through goal-setting and progress monitoring, they assess their own performance and closely monitor the performance of individual students, particularly those classified for special education or ESL services. General education teachers and specialists work together to provide instruction suited to their students’ needs.

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Valley Stream, NY 11581
http://www.valleystream30.com/our_schools/forest_road_school

i This case study is one of a series of studies conducted by Know Your Schools—for NY Kids since 2005. For the study of critical needs elementary schools, conducted during the 2010-11 school year, research teams investigated ten consistently higher-performing and five consistently average-performing elementary schools. Schools were selected based on the performance of critical needs subgroups – African American, Hispanic, English language learners, and special education students, and students living in poverty as measured by eligibility for free or reduced-price lunch – on New York State Assessments of English Language Arts and Mathematics for grades 3 through 4, 5, or 6 (depending on the schools’ grade range) in 2007, 2008, and 2009.

Researchers used site-based interviews of teachers and administrators, as well as analyses of supportive documentation, to determine differences in practices between higher- and average-performing schools in the sample. Percentages of ethnic minority students, English language learners, and/or students living in poverty exceed the state averages in sixty to seventy percent of the higher-performing schools. Average-performing schools were matched as closely as possible to the higher performers in terms of student poverty levels, geographic location, size, and student ethnicity. Details regarding the project, its studies, and methods can be found on the project’s web sites: www.albany.edu/aire/kids and <http://knowyourschoolsnny.org>.