Highlights for September 18-24, 2012

Principals Share What’s Working

The percent of SFUSD students proficient or above on standardized tests continues to rise. Here are some examples of what school principals are saying has contributed to their students’ success.

At John Yehall Chin Elementary, they’ve turned the lunch routine around. Instead of rushing through their meals in order to get time on the playground, kids now head straight for the yard to get some exercise and then settle in for a nutritious meal afterward. According to Principal Allen Lee reversing the order of recess to before lunch, plus focused extra support for struggling students during the after school program and staff home visits to learn more from families, is contributing to making Chin the highest-scoring elementary school in the district.

At James Lick Middle, Principal Bita Nazarian says the single greatest factor for improved student achievement over the last seven years has been the collaboration of the staff while making sure that students understand the language of academics. Teachers meet weekly to discuss student progress and to maintain consistent instruction throughout the school. The school has been focusing on teaching academic language – words and phrases used in textbooks and on tests that are different from everyday spoken English and are vital to doing well in school and on tests. At James Lick, the school’s achievement gap (the disparity in academic performance between groups of students) is narrowing for Latino students.

Improved scores at Philip & Sala Burton High can be traced back to a lot of programs and efforts over the past few years, but Principal Bill Kappenhagen points to the focus on its 9th graders as the key. Students who start with a history of truancy or low grades get focused attention all year long, and those who might be struggling socially get help acclimating to the new school. This year Burton had higher gains in English Language Arts proficiency rates than any other SFUSD high school. Kappenhagen says if you build students’ skills in the first year, it pays off for them every year afterward.

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