

## Literacy Initiative Helps ARI Scores Leap Ahead at Eubank, Other Elementary Schools

District-wide, the number of students reading at or above grade level on the Analytical Reading Inventory (ARI) jumped from 47 percent in 1999 to 72 percent in 2001, according to a report recently released by the district's Research, Development and Accountability (RDA) department. The ARI assessment is taken by second grade students.

District scores on the SRI (Spanish Reading Inventory) have also made impressive gains, rising to 67 percent in the spring of 2001 from 47 percent of students reading at or above grade level in 2000. SRI scores were at the 42<sup>nd</sup> percentile in 1999.

**Eubank ES**, located near the intersection of Indian School and Eubank in the northeast heights, is one of the APS schools posting remarkable improvements in student literacy.

### **Focus on Eubank Elementary**

Eubank ES scores on the ARI leapt from the 34<sup>th</sup> percentile in 1999-2000 to the 68<sup>st</sup> percentile this year, reports Principal **Karin Butchart**, thanks to the school's intense focus on literacy. Eubank employs the New Zealand balanced literacy approach and the six-trait writing process as part of a comprehensive literacy plan.

"The structure includes a daily, two-hour literacy block, and all certified staff teach students grouped according to their reading level, so we have a 12:1 PTR during those two hours," says Karin.

"Before we started this model, all of our teachers were trained. Our professional development is focused and deep. It's really paying off in improved student performance," Butchart reports.

"We had a professional development semester course that met every other week, plus our in-service day, with staff acquiring some 18-20 hours. We have a number of literacy leaders who meet with new teachers on Saturday to make sure they have the training, and all our professional development is based on reading and writing," Karin says.

Butchart says school staff have noticed how students' attitudes toward reading have improved. "I have a number of students come to me and say they love to read -- before they hated it. Some of these comments come from special education students who never felt entirely successful," she says.

Writing resource teacher **Jane McIntyre** says the smaller class sizes in the literacy block allows for closer relationships with students and that's important because three-fourths of the students are bused to Eubank from another part of town.

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“Since the school isn’t in their community; it’s harder to have the community feel connected. To help that, our school events are geared toward student achievement and that has brought about a big increase in parent involvement in terms of families coming to events,” McIntyre says. “We have parents who are amazed at the progress their student has made.”

Eubank includes six-trait writing in its literacy model, with each teacher receiving quite extensive training for direct instruction for students.

“Using the six-trait model, the staff has developed a hierarchy of the traits to identify what kindergartners should be introduced to and that adds more at each grade,” says principal Butchart. “Their writing goals follow that hierarchy.”

In addition to specific literacy goals for each grade level, teachers develop a portfolio for each student. Assessment information, demographic information, and information about the student’s family is included so teachers may get to know the student individually to make the best decisions about appropriate instruction.

### **Consistency throughout the school**

“We use the New Zealand model consistently throughout the school,” says Butchart. “We are consistent from class to class with a common language, common understanding and common components in literacy instruction. All teachers have been trained to deliver that instruction and have the appropriate materials to do that.

Teachers like the fact that all students take the DRA (Developmental Reading Assessment) because it provides them with a consistent testing tool across all grade levels.

“Our major emphasis is on reading and writing. We use math investigations, which includes a reading and writing component too, so it’s mutually supportive. Students and parents,” Karin says, “are amazed at how quickly they can move ahead.”

**Debbie Kenner** who teaches kindergarten, is also the school’s literacy leader for kindergarten through second grade. She feels that placing children in literacy blocks so they can be in smaller groups is helpful, with all students showing good gains in the Development Reading Assessment (DRA) and the ARI.

“I have seen a significant change in the achievement of students through this concentrated reading block,” Kenner states. “As teachers learn the assessments, we know our students better. We can meet them at their own level and extend their learning. Plus, the smaller group is much easier to work with. You can give daily attention to each student.”

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### **Leveled book room**

The school's leveled book room enables teachers to put learning strategies in action, school staff say. (A leveled book room is one which provides, for example, 16 or 17 reading levels in a single grade through a greater variety of books.)

"It's magic," says teacher **Debbie Kenner**. "Having a leveled book room really comes together for kids, by ensuring that materials used for instruction are at each student's specific reading level. Using these materials, the teacher supports students in developing strategies to help themselves when no adult is present to help. Plus, phonemic awareness is important. We focus on getting those students reading through phonemic awareness. It is perhaps the most critical skill to reading success."

The importance of literacy is underscored at Eubank special events, such as Writing Night, which was so popular last year it is moving to a larger venue this year. And teachers provide each student with nightly reading logs that require parents to read to children and children to parents. Two grants, one from Pepsi and another from Sandia Labs, fund the purchase of books for the nightly reading program.

Because she feels parent involvement and nightly reading makes a big difference, Principal Butchart makes visits to the Singing Arrow community center, meeting with families in their home neighborhood. There, she talks to parents about the importance of the nightly readings and literacy in the home.

More books will be purchased this year for the leveled book room through two other grants; a \$3,000 grant from the Albuquerque Business Education Compact (ABEC) and a \$3,000 grant from Philips Semiconductors. The grants supplement the selection of books in the school library, and some funds are used to replace the nightly reading selections that aren't returned.

The school year is off to a good start, Butchart reports. "We made many successful gains last year, with many students reading beyond their grade level. Our expectations are that we will continue making significant progress in student achievement."