

## **Year One Performance Counts results: progress!**

A recently released report prepared by Research, Development and Accountability (RDA) details the district's progress on Performance Counts! benchmarks, with many APS schools reporting good progress in meeting Year One goals.

A Performance Counts revised report was provided to schools in August 1999. This revision provided schools with benchmarks that incorporate student performance on both of the state mandated achievement tests as well as providing benchmarks that are more reflective of the history of each school's performance.

In relation to the originally established baselines, **74.5 percent of elementary schools have increased the percent of students reading at grade level, with 25 percent of schools at or below their baseline.** Of the 59 schools improving their baseline status, 41 percent have already attained the third year benchmark, their future target.

**Beverly Moya**, principal at **Alameda ES**, one of the schools to attain its Language Arts third year benchmark scores during the 1999-2000 school year, reports, "Professional development really pays off. **Bonnie Leiting**, our Title I teacher, led the way with our Four Block literacy program assisted by **Kay Fulton**, who is the district's Four Block resource teacher. Both teachers modeled the program in the classroom and that helped teachers to fully understand and implement our literacy model."

Principal Moya notes Alameda had the greatest parent volunteer effort ever, with parents helping teach reading and writing skills, in addition to school special events which focused on literacy.

Specific yearly goals that highlight where and how much each school needs to improve has helped **Chelwood ES** teacher **Michelle Trigg**, who says, "Performance Counts has most definitely helped teachers to improve student achievement. We know exactly what's expected and where we're heading. We also focused on practice testing during the year and, in my personal view, that was really helpful in getting students familiar with the testing format and improving results."

**Navajo**, another elementary school which met its Year Three reading benchmark scores this year, also focused heavily on professional development and its balanced literacy program based on the New Zealand model.

"We have a lot of consistency in the materials teachers are using within the school and we have raised expectations for every student, which is a big part of it," principal **Tracy Herrera** says.

" We hired a literacy consultant who goes into the classroom and models the balanced literacy program, models the guided reading, so that teachers can see and then implement the program themselves. Staff meetings focused on grade level and across grade level meetings, so that you could learn and build upon what others are doing.

"Everyone is focused on improving reading and writing and everyone is moving in the same direction----that's critical to success," Herrera says.

RDA director **Rose-Ann McKernan**, responsible for assessing and reporting the district's achievement on the TerraNova, the state-mandated achievement test covering reading, math, science, social studies and language, notes that the increase in the percent of students reading at grade level is the outcome of collaborative efforts across the district.

"Efforts have been made to ensure that teachers have the tools and skills needed to teach reading, and teachers, principals and parents have the necessary information to gauge student progress," McKernan notes.

"Schools which haven't met their benchmarks this year shouldn't become discouraged," Rose-Ann says. "Fluctuations in these sorts of performance data are typical. Generally, it is accepted that three to five years of stable programming will impact trend data, and since different groups of students are being tested, the test score performance from these different groups of students may be best analyzed as a multi-year trend.

"Don't drop your expectations because it only appears you have lost ground. Look at how students developed from the first year to the second," McKernan says.

'Are there elements that differentiate schools which are experiencing early success?'

"The schools that are being successful have a comprehensive program in place where teachers are talking to each other," Rose-Ann reports, and these schools are asking, 'what are you teaching in the second grade---does it complement what I'm teaching in the third?' That kind of discussion about whether their instruction will align is important. It's broader than reading scores or test scores. Teachers talk together about student work—they talk about their professional development and help each other decide what's best and what's going to work for everyone."

**Reneé Rivera**, who teaches science at **Polk MS**, which met its Year Three science benchmark scores last year, says her school staff seem to embrace the concept of Performance Counts benchmarks. She says she also likes the benchmarks, "because it permits the community to see how hard we have been

working and it also documents our progress very specifically. It helps us to track our progress."

**Mary Ann Anderson**, who heads the district's principals' association, notes that, "principals have asked for some measure that compares their school against itself rather than against other schools in the district. Since each school attendance area is different, this is the only logical way to set growth standards for schools. We support and will continue to support Performance Counts, and will work with cluster principal leaders to continue this plan."

Performance Counts also measures the district's dropout rate using a cohort status study, which follows ninth graders for five years to determine their status at the end of the fifth year. Cohort rates will be available in early fall after student status has been verified.

Over the past three years, 6 of 11 high schools have shown a decrease in annual dropout rates. This year, principals will get a reorganized, easier-to-read list of students who need help, so they'll know which students aren't meeting standards.

"Performance Counts has become a piece of our communication with schools, like standards are becoming," McKernan concludes. "Our next step is to implement a standards system to accompany Performance Counts benchmarks. We'll be working hard to help schools integrate the two."