

# **Downing Elementary School**

## Narrative Overview

### PROGRESS TOWARD PREVIOUS YEAR'S GOALS 2011-2012

Welcome to Downing Elementary School, we are the Downing Eagles. Downing Elementary School is a neighborhood school situated within short distances to other neighborhood schools local businesses, parks and the Boys and Girls Club. Our student learning environments range from half day special education preschool classrooms and two Head Start classrooms, a third – fifth grade Highly Capable class and all day school for kindergarten through fifth grade.

Downing Elementary, as a school community is to educate all students to meet or exceed standards. We do this by providing multiple and varied learning opportunities based on current, best instructional practices. The school-wide data from the 2011 MSP indicates marginal strength in Reading performance. This data matches the progress as measured in our primary classrooms using district and classroom-based assessments. Our students' performance on the Reading portion of the 2011 MSP indicates that our students made adequate yearly progress in grades 3-5. Our work in this area is a collaboration of teachers coming together to review student work and reviewing ongoing formative assessments to make instructional decisions that support student learning in the classrooms and layers of intervention that are provided through our LAP program. (See action plan for specific intervention strategies.)

In the area of Mathematics, our students' performance at all grade levels met the state standard. Our instructional focus in this area will be continuation of the math program as we work to increase the level of academic success in mathematics. The District's support of this work with the infusion of math coaches, ongoing professional development for teachers, coaches and principals increases improved instructional strategies. This is combined with our school's grade level collaboration sessions and the development of intervention and enrichment plans to respond to student achievement which will all contribute to the work designed to significantly and positively influence our students' achievement.

## OVERVIEW OF SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT 2011-12

### **Continuous Improvement Process and Stakeholder Participation**

The content of this plan represents the ongoing work and goals established within our school for the 2011-2012 year. The goals and strategies in this plan represent and are influenced by the ongoing work of our staff members within grade level teams and as a part of whole-staff work sessions. The specifics of our attached Action Plan set forth our school-wide reform efforts and are a result of our staff's review of student assessment data, the prioritization of staff and team goals, and the articulation of specific next steps in our work toward student achievement.

The establishment of goals and focus areas for our school's work is also established in partnership with our SCDM and/or SIP team of which includes parent representation. Downing staff members have participated in the school improvement process (SIP) using assessment data and results of surveys, from staff, parents, and students. We continue using the district adopted math curriculum and teaching it strategically and intentionally so that students have a better understanding of math. In addition, a school newsletter brings parents into the learning process by sharing the topics we are learning in school. We continue our efforts to create more educational time on task by creating extended and early learning days for LAP qualified students and also preparation for state testing. This ongoing process influences our work and the establishment of our goals.

## Review of Data to Establish Improvement

### **Achievement**

Spring Data (expressed as a percentage of students meeting standard)

<b>Grade 3</b>	<b>2006</b>	<b>2007</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2011</b>
<b>Reading</b>	83.1	83.9	52.6	68.4	60.9	80.0
<b>Mathematics</b>	78.0	74.2	66.7	75.4	54.3	74.5

<b>Grade 4</b>	<b>2006</b>	<b>2007</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2011</b>
<b>Reading</b>	79.6	81.1	76.2	68.4	63.0	73.2
<b>Mathematics</b>	46.3	69.8	76.2	40.4	50.9	56.1
<b>Writing</b>	66.7	71.7	73.8	42.1	58.5	56.1

<b>Grade 5</b>	<b>2006</b>	<b>2007</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2011</b>
<b>Reading</b>	78.6	67.9	76.4	66.7	64.9	63.6
<b>Mathematics</b>	51.8	67.9	69.1	62.2	49.1	70.9
<b>Science</b>	25.0	28.6	38.2	40.0	35.1	50.9

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In the area of Mathematics, our student's performance met the state standard. Our instructional focus in this area will be continuation of the math program as we work to increase the level of academic success in mathematics. The District's support of this work with the infusion of math coaches, ongoing professional development for teachers, coaches and principals, this combined with our school's grade level collaboration sessions and the development of intervention and enrichment plans to respond to student achievement will all contribute to the work designed to significantly and positively influence our students' achievement. Downing staff continues to review student work and assessments to make their instructional decisions that support student learning in the classrooms and infuses interventions provided by our Learning Assistance Program (LAP) and the Learning Resource Center (LRC).

### **Attendance**

(Average daily attendance K-5)

<b>2007-08</b>	<b>2008-09</b>	<b>2009-10</b>	<b>2011</b>
95.7%	95.6%	95.8%	98%

### **Strategies to enhance school attendance**

Downing staff uses several strategies to help create a sense of urgency around good student attendance. Research shows that students who do not regularly attend school don't do as well academically. Here are a few strategies Downing uses to ensure students attend school regularly. Our Attendance Secretary does a daily safety call to all students' homes that are absent to ensure parents know that they are absent, to ask for a phone call if a note has not been sent in explaining the reason for an absence and to alert parents who did not know they needed to send a note or give the school a call. Classroom teachers at Downing also emphasize the importance of being at school and how much academic information is lost when they are not in attendance. If absences become chronic then the Becca Bill is put into action. We have monthly student of the month assemblies and each student who earned perfect attendance for the previous month is recognized by announcing their names at the assembly and they receive a perfect attendance certificate. At the end of each school year students with perfect attendance and almost perfect attendance are recognized at our end of the year awards assembly. Classes with the highest record of perfect attendance are given popcorn by our PTA for their efforts. Downing students, staff and parents all know the importance of good school attendance.

### **Planning for Transitions**

Research tells us that students who struggle with school are most likely to "fall through the cracks" when transitioning from one grade span to the next. Knowing this, as part of our counselor's guidance activities, 5<sup>th</sup> grade classroom visits to talk to students about middle school expectations occur after winter vacation and later in the spring middle school counselors come to our school to develop their 6<sup>th</sup> grade schedules. This year, we have worked with both Truman and Mason middle schools to better improve transitions for students leaving for 6<sup>th</sup> grade. We have implemented AVID (Advancement via individual determination) our fifth grade teachers have implemented goals of organization through the use of planners and binders. We plan to meet regularly, have teachers and counselors visit our school, help with those fears such as opening lockers, and peer pressures, and finding their ways to multiple classes. PTA will provided combination locks for our fifth graders to use in the spring this spring. We also plan to build in Kindergarten readiness activities/meetings for new families enrolling in kindergarten.

### **Characteristics of High Performing Schools**

In the Nine Characteristics of High Performing Schools, Downing continues to have focus in each of the categories. However three characteristics receive special attention this year. A **Clear and Shared Focus** is promoted through the strong alignment by all staff about our beliefs and values about working with children, about learning, and about our climate. Weekly common, collaborative time for staff planning and student data review is included weekly for teachers and support staff. Differentiating instruction around math so that our teachers are identifying and supporting the learning needs of our diverse student population will be what we will continue to focus on this year. **High Levels of Collaboration and Communication**, is addressed through dialogue between teachers, staff, and families. Downing achieves high levels of collaboration and communication through: weekly collaboration time that's built into the school day, regularly scheduled bi-monthly staff meetings, small team meetings in our LAP and Special Education programs. We work in conjunction with our more informal strategies for regularly communicating and working interdependently with all staff about school-wide initiatives, teaching and learning goals, daily routines and procedures, and connecting with our school community. **Effective School Leadership** is demonstrated by a range of staff members at Downing Elementary. Small teams gather to set goals and one or more team member take the lead for moving tasks forward and sharing with the whole group. Various staff members participate in district and state level leadership opportunities in order to bring the work back to our entire staff and lead particular ventures. In these larger, and in daily small situations, staff members are empowered and take the initiative to make decisions and move our professional work forward for the benefit of students and their learning.

## **Professional Development Opportunities**

A great deal of the staffs' learning at Downing is a result of our teachers coming together around student work and learning from each other as they constantly seek to improve their practice. Downing teachers are involved in professional development around the area of creating purposeful classrooms with increased student engagement. More formal professional development from the district will inform our school-based training around our focus area of math. Our academic coach and principal will continue to focus efforts toward walkthroughs for on the appropriate use of learning targets and student engagement in all classrooms.

## **Highly Qualified Teachers**

- Provisions for staff training in Tacoma include opportunities, incentives and compensation. The district provides a broad spectrum of classes on assessment, standards-based instruction and best practices in the content areas. Staff members receive extra pay to attend these classes and clock hours/university credits are frequently offered. The district also supports and encourages school-based training that support the school's SIP goals with building-based optional day pay for certificated staff. In addition to classes, instructional facilitators at each LAP school provide ongoing, job embedded staff development. Para educators and other staff receive workshop pay to attend both district and school workshops. Para educators and other staff are encouraged to participate in all Reading and Math curriculum and assessment professional development.
- Parents are informed in the Parent Handbook of their right to know their teachers and Para-educators qualifications
- HQ Para-educators meet a rigorous standard of quality and can demonstrate knowledge and ability in instructing reading, mathematics and writing.
- Tacoma actively recruits highly-qualified staff with our job fair, letters of intent, recommendations to hire and applicant searches. We seek to attract and keep highly-qualified staff at our school by providing opportunities for quality staff development and professional growth.
- All teachers in Tacoma are required to meet the NCLB highly qualified teacher requirement. Human Resources send each school a list of the teachers with their teaching qualifications. THE SCHOOL principal signs an attestation form to confirm all staff are highly qualified. In the event that a staff member does not meet the highly qualified requirements, a NCLB HOUSSE Plan of Assistance is developed for the teacher. To support teachers working to achieve highly qualified status, along with all staff striving to provide excellent instruction, our school's professional development/training is focused on best practices in reading and math.

## **Recognition of Non-Academic Learning**

At Downing Elementary, we believe in educating the whole child! This belief is demonstrated by a strong emphasis on creating a focused, structured, and nurturing environment. We look for opportunities to recognize and promote non-academic learning with a particular focus of integrating the arts throughout the curriculum. Students are provided opportunities to explore the arts through drama, visual arts, music and movement. Children are offered alternative and enrichment experiences before school band and after-school chess and foreign language classes. We partner with St.Luke's church and the neighborhood food bank by holding tow food drives during the school year. Overall, we work to promote the values of helping others, giving back to community, and the building of a collaborative work culture. Area businesses support our Peer mediation program and Accelerated Reading program with gift certificates for student achievement. Wilson High and Bellarmine Preparatory schools will provide tutoring during the school day for Downing Students. We use School Messenger calls to keep families informed of our educational programs and special events.

## **Safe and Supportive Learning Environment**

The Downing Elementary School staff is purposeful and intentional in its work to create a safe and supportive environment. This year we have a school wide classroom management system, Clip-Up allows students to move beyond the ready to learn stage of their day and students are given the opportunity to move to the outstanding level. Our staff believes in the direct instruction, modeling, and ongoing practice of expected behaviors and attitudes for learning within our school. Having adopted a school- wide discipline format the consistency exists across all classrooms and grade levels in this area and there is a pervasive attitude that all Downing students belong to all Downing adults. A no-tolerance approach to behaviors that violate safety and respect is combined with a supportive safety net through our counseling program for whole groups, small groups, and individual students. This year we have a school wide jungle theme that also includes “get spotted tickets” for students making good choices.

## **Equity Issues**

The District’s focus on cultural competency and the Action Plan for closing the achievement gap will drive our school’s efforts this year. Our performance data trends on the WASL and now MSP show that our greatest gap is between our white student population and African American and Latino males in both math and reading. Our professional development in math will address culturally competent teaching strategies that can be applied to all subject areas. We will include cultural competent strategies during professional development segments in our bi- monthly staff meeting. Intervention activities that include additional time for struggling students will be built into the day and provided after school as well. Because many of our students are on free or reduced lunch we acknowledge that their learning needs cannot be met if their basic needs at home go unmet. We strive to reach the needs of all students.

## **Technology**

Downing Elementary continues to build upon the use of technology in a variety of ways to enhance student learning. Technology within the classroom includes regular access to computers in every classroom, the daily use of document camera/LCD projector bundles, opportunities for word processing, internet research for project-based learning, and the use of a technology-supported student publishing center.

## **Parent, Family and Community Involvement**

We believe strongly in the power of parent and family involvement in our school and have worked hard over the years to have developed a strong parent involvement component into our school program. We are fortunate to enjoy a rich and intentional support from our PTA as they funnel their energies and resources directly back to students and learning. Additionally, we have used our LAP money to provide for family curriculum nights where we have taught parents how to help students with homework

We know that communication builds strong partnerships so Downing elementary sends home to parents Monday Envelopes, monthly newsletters with upcoming events, items of concern and opportunities for involvement. Teachers send home progress reports and provide information on their classroom websites. The district also has in place a communication system (School Messenger) that allows our school to send personalized voice messages to parents to encourage parents and families to be actively involved in their children’s education.

## **Coordination of Fiscal Services**

Much of what we are able to do to support student learning comes from our LAP funds generated through the state and based on our free and reduced lunch count of 47%. We use these funds to hire .5 LAP teacher who focus efforts on math 3-5 and reading in first grade. In addition, we use our building funds, ASB support and in collaboration with PTA are able to provide assemblies for our students.