

Reflections from the Classroom

It Used To Be a Nightmare on Elm Street

By

Art Barragan, Principal

In 2004 I began my first assignment at Elm Street School in Oxnard, California. I had 17 years of administrative experience as an assistant principal at the high and middle school level and believed that I would be a successful elementary principal with ease. Elm Street Elementary was the lowest performing school in Ventura County with only 9.6% of the students scoring at a proficient level in Language Arts. After my first year at Elm, which was year round at the time, we only improved to 10.5% on the CST's. This was statistically insignificant. It's hard looking at oneself in the mirror every morning and thinking that I was "statistically insignificant." I knew we needed some kind of direction to improve our school.

In the spring of 2005, Superintendent, Richard Miller, introduced me to the concepts of Professional Learning Communities by R. DuFour. The implementation of this philosophy is directing us out of Program Improvement (PI) status. In addition, each member of the staff was given a copy of "Whatever it Takes," and "Learning by Doing," by R. DuFour. The staff has worked diligently to incorporate the PLC concepts at Elm.

During the summer of 2006, nine staff members and I attended a week-long training on the Sopris West Language Program. This is a Language Arts intervention program that was instrumental in our dramatic increase in the 2007 California

Standards Test. Along with demonstrating fidelity to the Houghton Mifflin program and the implementation of our technology programs, Success Maker and Waterford, we had a 24.8% improvement in language arts.

During the ACSA Leadership Academy at UCLA during the summer of 2007, the PLC concepts were reinforced throughout the week. In addition there were workshops covering curriculum development, data analysis, and school to home communication. Teambuilding activities were introduced throughout the seminars; they were easily duplicated at Elm.

It is fair to say that my personal leadership style has changed over the course of the last few years. In my first year I was quite autocratic and directive. I have learned to work collegially with my staff and increase communication. At Elm we are taking the opportunity to learn from our experiences/mistakes to make our school better; it's about developing positive relationships with all the stake holders at our school. Armed with the mantra that at ELM, Every Learner Matters, the dedicated staff is looking forward to this years CSTs and moving out of Program Improvement. Serving a population of over 97% Latinos, with the majority of them classified as socially economically disadvantaged, our staff takes great pride in the progress we have made and look forward to developing more success stories.

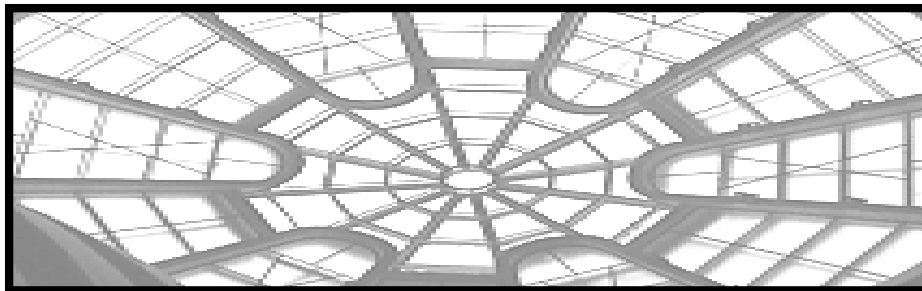


Photo by: Jairo Sanchez
Guggenheim Museum, New York