



A Union of Professionals

ABC Unified School District

Introduction: A Commitment to a Labor-Management Partnership

ABC UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT Overview

- SE corner of Los Angeles County
- 21,000 K-12 students; 30 schools
- 92% ethnic minority students
- 40% low income
- 25% English language learners

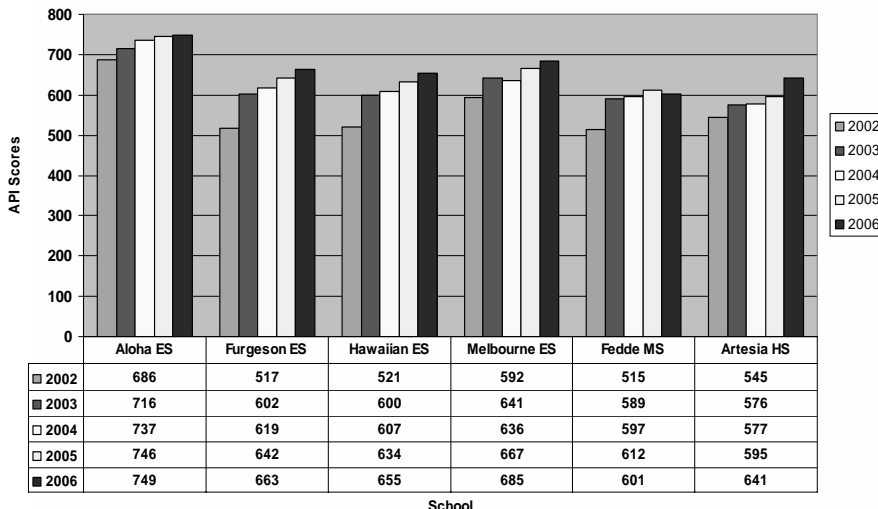
The ABC Unified School District is located in the southeastern corner of Los Angeles County. While home to one of the highest-performing high schools in the state and a district where average test scores compare favorably with other school districts in California, the six schools in the Southside section of the district—which serves diverse, less-affluent communities—were not meeting state standards on standardized reading tests. While the “Southside problem” could easily have been ignored, the ABC Federation of Teachers (ABCFT), an affiliate of the American Federation of Teachers, district, and elected officials have continued to unify and align their efforts to help all children reach high academic standards.

This was not always the case. In the early to mid-1990s, the district was overridden with budget problems, labor strife and transient leadership. However, in 1999, Ron Barnes was hired as superintendent, and he committed to creating a new partnership between labor and management. He and ABC Federation of Teachers President Laura Rico have been credited for developing principles to guide behaviors and create an environment of mutual trust and respect. Moreover, in 1999, Barnes and Rico, along with members of the school board and negotiators, attended a labor-management institute on school reform held at Harvard University. This session brought the groups together to talk about how to work together on problems, specifically low-performing schools.

Since then, labor and management have initiated several other efforts to continuously emphasize team building and communication, including the annual Partnership with Administration and Labor (P.A.L.). The program began in 1999 and serves as a full-day, collaborative-planning retreat for school administrators and site union representatives.

This newfound proactive collaboration to close the district’s achievement gap—and limit potentially damaging outside party intervention—has proven fruitful. Year upon year, Southside schools have registered significant academic gains across the board as reflected in state API scores below.

ABC UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT
Southside Schools
API Test Scores 2002-2006



UNDERSTANDING THE CALIFORNIA ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE INDEX (API)

- Numeric index ranges from 200 (low) to 1000 (high).
- Statewide API performance target for all schools is 800. Schools that fall short of 800 are required to meet annual growth targets until that goal is achieved. API targets vary for each school.
- In a reporting cycle, a Base API is compared to a corresponding Growth API to determine the degree of school improvement in a year.
- Schools are ranked and compared to like schools across the state.
- The school’s API score is a weighted average of student scores across content areas. Indicators include the CA Standards Tests in grades 2-11 (language arts, math, history and science), CA Alternate Performance Assessment in grades 2-11, and CA Achievement Test (norm-referenced) in grades 3 and 7. The CA High School Exit Examination in language arts and math is also calculated into the overall score. Content area weights may vary from school to school.

Source: California Dept. of Education, 2007



The Southside Schools Reading Collaborative

In 2000, the Southside Schools Reading Collaborative was created to address the literacy needs of at-risk students in the six Title I schools in the Southside of the district.

The project aims to close gaps by regularly calling together teachers and administrators from feeder elementary and middle schools and their respective high schools to develop action plans addressing (1) assessment, (2) instruction in reading, (3) instructional time, (4) instructional materials, (5) differentiated instruction, (6) professional development and (7) parent and community involvement.

Collaborative components include the following:

- Monthly meetings with principals and teachers in the collaborative to visit members' school sites, problem solve, and collaborate;
- Monthly "progress and invention" sessions for the Southside Reading Collaborative leadership;
- Teacher attendance at special district training sessions;
- Site visits outside the district to observe research-based school reform models;
- Full-day reading conferences convened by the district, local union and the AFT; and
- Extended school day to allow for additional reading instruction.

Within the first three years of the Southside Collaborative, sixth-grade test scores rose from 39 percent to 53 percent, and three of the schools were granted the governor's Performance Award for demonstrated growth in reading. All six schools have met their schoolwide growth targets—several have made double-digit gains. Moreover, all schools in the collaborative have shown improvement on the California Standards Tests.

Based on the success of the union-management collaboration, the Southside Schools Reading Collaborative has earned the ABC Unified School District the California School Board Association's 2002 Golden Bell Award, which honors exemplary programs in 15 major categories targeting curriculum and instruction. And, in recognition of its commitment to meeting literacy needs in the community, the unique union-district partnership has been granted the "Daily Point of Light Award" by the Points of Light Foundation and Corporation for National Service.

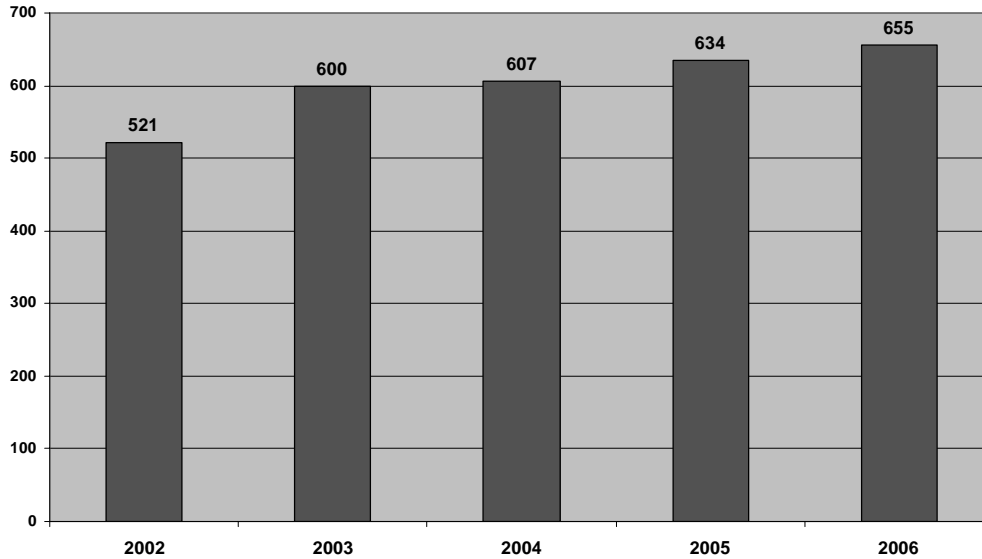
School Spotlight: Hawaiian Elementary

Hawaiian Elementary has experienced high poverty, low student test scores, and a history of unsuccessful reading programs. As part of its Redesigning Schools To Raise Achievement project, AFT staff arranged for staff within the Southside Reading Collaborative including Hawaiian Elementary to visit successful school models in Texas to observe their reading programs and develop insight into research-based reform. The visit focused on three areas:

- Conducting a school audit/assessment;
- Picking the program that is right for your school; and
- Setting up a plan of action for your school.

Subsequently, the school reviewed "What Works" materials from the AFT, and then conducted its own audit and needs assessment. In partnership with the AFT and ABCFT, the school weighed the costs and benefits of various research-based reform programs, and unanimously adopted the Success for All (SFA) reading model. Ultimately, the school has been successful in achieving 100 percent staff buy-in, implementing SFA, using data to drive instruction, and—most important—moving from a culture of isolation to one of collaboration, trust, and parent and community involvement. With participation in the Southside Reading Collaborative and implementation of SFA, tests scores have improved dramatically in both reading and math as reflected in the following graph.

ABC UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT
Hawaiian Elementary
Southside School
API Test Scores 2002 - 2006



School Spotlight: Artesia High School

The sole high school in the Southside Reading Collaborative, Artesia also serves a low-income community and has worked to overcome a history of chronically low test scores. In 2001, the principal and several teachers attended QuEST (Quality Educational Standards in Teaching), the AFT's biennial professional issues conference, taking with them a foundation on which to build relationships and align philosophies. Indicators of culture change included:

- Implementation of teacher support structures so that teachers can collaborate and share best practices on a regular basis (teachers now have common planning schedules four times a month);
- Implementation of an on-campus suspension policy to deter disruptive behavior and reduce suspensions, allowing students to spend more time in class;
- Outreach to parents via a parent liaison who has implemented home visits;
- Collaboration to create benchmarks and curriculum based on the standards;
- Creation of standards-based accountability: Teachers collaboratively developed benchmarks and curriculum based on standards. A copy of the standards is posted in each classroom, and its components are checked off accordingly when students master them. This system helps promote student accountability and ownership of learning, and teachers have the flexibility to adjust instruction to meet student needs.

Schoolwide Literacy Activities

Artesia High School has been selected as a Secondary Literacy Demonstration Site for the Los Angeles County Office of Education to showcase how to integrate the Reading Across Curriculum (RAC) program. The RAC program now has expanded to include writing and is called the Writing and Reading Across the Curriculum program.

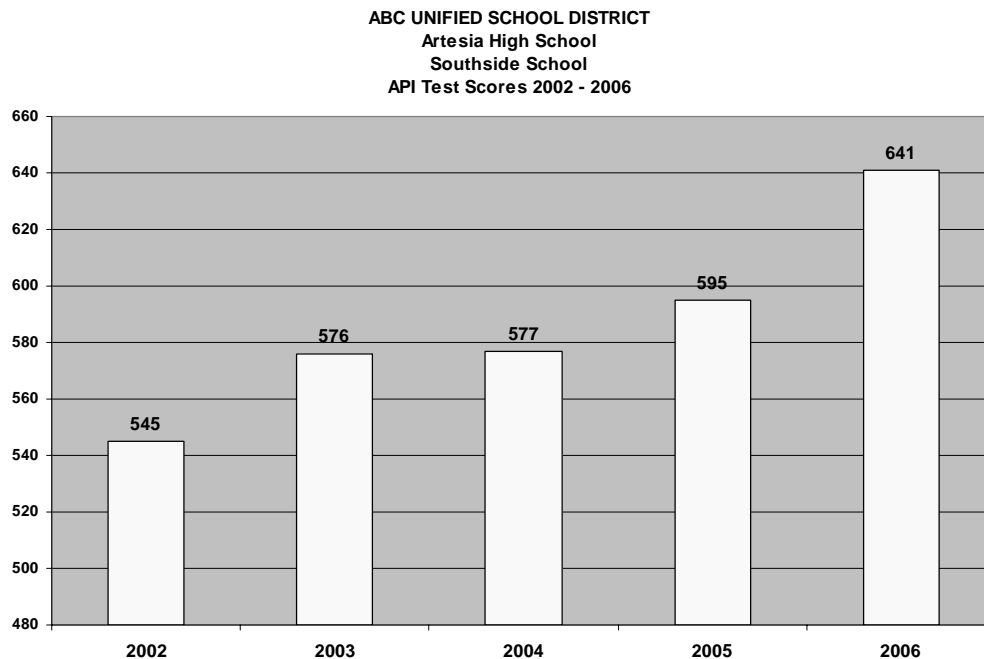
Components of the literacy program include:

- Six research-based reading strategies per semester;
- A cross-department reading team that works to make strategies useful for all teachers;
- Monthly professional development on strategies through RAC collegial time;
- Supportive materials, including an outline of the school's literacy plan, teacher responsibilities, and suggestions and sample lessons for each chosen strategy; and
- Software technology to support strategy implementation in the classroom.

Beyond the RAC program, staff and students participate in the following literacy initiatives:

- All staff and students participate during the twice-a-week Drop Everything and Read (DEAR) time.
- The Scholastic Reading Counts program promotes student-selected reading.
- A vocabulary-building program, Words of the Week (WOW), promotes five words per week to be infused across the curriculum whether in daily lesson plans or supplemental activities.

Consequently, Artesia has witnessed a significant growth in student achievement, as reflected by the school's API scores below:



Tapping Resources: A Model of Success

The ABC Federation of Teachers has received praise from both the state and national unions as a model of a medium-sized AFT local effectively tapping into resources at the national and state level to improve schools. As noted above, district teams of teachers, principals, administrators and union leaders have journeyed to schools in other states to examine successful models of school reform. With support from the AFT's educational issues department, the union-district team also has provided frontline educators with information on strategies proven to boost reading achievement, such as Open Court, Direct Instruction and Success for All.

In recent years, ABCFT and the AFT also have partnered for the following initiatives:

- Active participation from ABCFT at biennial AFT QuEST conferences, including leading presentations; approximately 80 ABC Unified School District teachers and administrators have participated.
- Participation in the Effective Leadership for Academic Achievement Institute—approximately 300 teachers and administrators have attended this training provided by the United Federation of Teachers (N.Y.).
- Co-sponsorship of local Effective Leadership for Academic Achievement Institute conference in 2002.
- Implementation of AFT Educational Research and Dissemination (ER&D) program, a research-based professional development program; approximately 435 teachers have attended the training since 2005.
- Collaboration in Peer Assistance and Support System (PASS) since 2000 to provide support and coaching to new and struggling veteran teachers in the district. PASS focus areas include: creating an effective teaching environment, organizing subject matter, planning instruction, assessing learning and continuing professional development.
- Sponsorship of the first annual Secondary Literacy Conference in 2006 to focus on literacy across the curriculum with more than 100 secondary teachers in attendance.