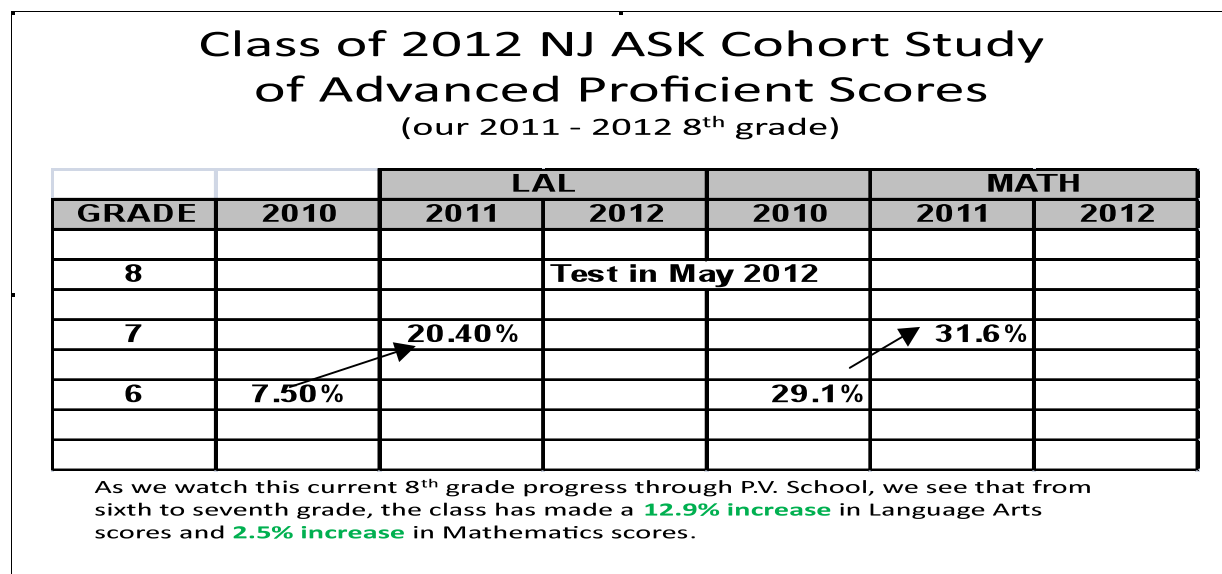


Demystifying Test Information and S.I.N.I. designation

This month, I'd like to take some time to help you understand all of this talk about test scores. During my career as a principal, I have had significant success raising test scores. However, it has never been my goal to join a school community with the express desire to "raise test scores." Test scores rise with good, common sense practices. Period.

As we look at test scores, we need to be able to compare "apples to apples." The practice of comparing one year's 8th grade to the next year's 8th grade is as impractical as comparing your children to each other. The good news is that our policy-makers in Washington have recognized this and the new version of NCLB will be based on individual student improvement. In other words, the Federal "powers that be" now recognize that we need to look at the SAME children over time. Let's take a look at our students over time:



The title of the chart above refers to a cohort study. The term, cohort, is a fancy name for "group." As your principal, I work with teachers to help them improve instruction so that the groups of students make strides in learning each year. As you can see with our current 8th grade, they continue to make good strides, according to this one indicator.

One of the best ways to increase student learning is through targeted instruction. Targeted instruction is the process of finding out what students DON'T know and directing instruction toward those areas. We have been working on developing an understanding of what targeted instruction looks like in our classrooms. Last year we implemented targeted instruction in our Language Arts Resource Centers, PROPEL, and Title 1. In order to really help children learn (and isn't that what this is all about?) we need to differentiate our instruction so that the various levels of student understanding are being addressed.

Teaching all students in a classroom the same material, at the same level of intensity, is a practice that is not always effective. Of course there are times that whole class instruction is the best practice, but it is used along with targeted instruction.

This year, our mathematics teachers are implementing targeted instruction. At the beginning of each chapter, the students receive a pre-test (fancy word: formative assessment). Teachers look at the pretest and determine the strengths and weaknesses of each class. They then plan based on those skills that really require the most attention. They don't skip things. They just use their instructional time more wisely. THIS is what will raise test scores.

I'm not sure if you know this, but the gains in cohort group scores at P.V. are growing faster than in the past. With each year, we teach more groups of staff how to implement the methodologies. And as the colleagues see the gains that students are making, the implementation begins to move more quickly. You might ask, "Why don't they all just start teaching this way?" The reason is simple: they are retooling. They are rethinking what they have always known. It is a change to the very philosophy of teaching. I am so very proud of the P.V. teachers. They are outstanding educators that continue to strive for your children's success.

I wish the test score conversations were that easy. It is clear that we are making strides. However, you will be receiving a letter soon that tells you that P.V. has been deemed a S.I.N.I. school. This is a heartbreaking formality. I'd like to give you the information that you need to know in order to understand this:

Because we receive Title 1 funds from the Federal Government, it is a requirement that I inform you that we have been designated as a S.I.N.I. school. Even though we have made huge improvements, if all 40 subgroups in the school do not make specific progress, the school does not achieve AYP. We have only been recipients of Title 1 funds for 2 years and have only been obligated to this extraneous reporting due to the funding. Please keep that in mind as I continue this explanation.

Under the NCLB (No Child Left Behind) laws, which are established by each president during their terms of office, 100% of ALL children must be proficient by 2014. With each year, the percentage of students achieving proficiency in each of the 40 subgroups increases exponentially. The closer we get to 2014, the more and more groups fail to meet the requirements – nationwide. The current administration in Washington is now revising NCLB based on this reality.

Here at P.V. School, out of the 40 subgroups, one group comprised of a small minority of students, did not make AYP for the second year. According to the formula (which is now being discarded under the revisions to NCLB) 86% of this subgroup needed to be proficient. This is a preposterous concept as the subgroup is our Special Education Math students. If 86% of this group could be proficient, THEY WOULD NOT BE IN SPECIAL EDUCATION Mathematics! The good news is that this group continues to make good progress. Many outstanding districts are finding themselves in the same boat. And this is why the law-makers are beginning to understand what we have been telling them: One-size-fits-all measurements are not particularly useful or informative.

So now there are some hard choices to be made. We can let this NCLB requirement create divisiveness or we can really look at what is happening and continue to make progress. I ask you to join me in sharing this information. Should you have questions, please come in or call. I'd love to talk with you about any of your concerns.

I hope this *Principally Speaking* was informative and I look forward to your thoughts and feedback.

Warm regards,

Sue