

## Snapshot #28

### Restructuring in a Multiethnic Environment

#### Linda Vista Elementary School San Diego, California

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#### RESEARCH FINDINGS

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Researchers have conducted extensive examinations of effective practices for urban schools serving minority student populations. In addition to the practices from the effective schooling research in general, they also have identified practices that have special relevance to minority racial and ethnic groups.

Having a principal who "brings in the research" may help explain the strong connection between what is happening at Linda Vista, a large urban elementary school in San Diego, California, and what the effective schooling research recommends. The following practices, drawn from NWREL's EFFECTIVE SCHOOLING PRACTICES: A RESEARCH SYNTHESIS/1990 UPDATE, are among those that have generally guided Linda Vista's fiveyear restructuring effort:

#### **2.2.L STUDENTS ARE GROUPED TO PROMOTE EFFECTIVE INSTRUCTION**

#### **2.3.1 STRONG LEADERSHIP GUIDES THE INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAM**

#### **2.3.2 ADMINISTRATORS AND TEACHERS CONTINUALLY STRIVE TO IMPROVE INSTRUCTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS**

#### **2.7.1 PARENTS AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS ARE INVITED TO BECOME INVOLVED.**

In addition, in her paper, EDUCATING URBAN MINORITY YOUTH: RESEARCH ON EFFECTIVE PRACTICES (Topical Synthesis #4, NWREL 1991), Kathleen Cotton identifies effective practices with "particular relevance to members of minority racial and ethnic groups." Those influencing Linda Vista's program include:

1. Teacher responsibility and sense of efficacy that acknowledges that learning problems are not caused by students' backgrounds but indicate a need to adapt one's instructional approach
2. Degree of native language instruction provided based on skill levels of students
3. Division of large schools into smaller learning units to foster ongoing relationships between students and school personnel
4. Assessment that is nonbiased and genuinely reflects students' abilities
5. Early childhood programming to increase student achievement, improve attitudes toward schooling, and increase graduation rates
6. Multicultural programming integrated into the core curriculum to promote cross-cultural understanding and respect
7. Strong parent involvement in classroom and extracurricular activities
8. Coordination of community resources to meet personal or family needs of students.

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## SITUATION

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Linda Vista Elementary School is a large urban school within the City of San Diego School District. Its students come from low socioeconomic backgrounds and neighborhoods where gang activity is common. Nevertheless, the school is virtually free of gang activity and gang graffiti. The school and surrounding grounds are clean and well kept. Students make orderly exchanges between classes and engage in friendly interactions on the playground.

Comprising two campuses, Linda Vista Elementary School has a student enrollment of nearly 1,000 students (in late 1992 enrollment stood at 995) and a staff of 120. There are 42 certificated staff, and every teacher has an aide supported by federal funds.

The neighborhood has always been multi-ethnic; however, about a decade ago, it became even more so. The surrounding naval housing became low-rent housing for Southeast Asian families. Three Southeast Asian refugee groups-Hmong, Laotians and Vietnamese-account for 55 percent of the school's student enrollment. Hispanics and blacks constitute 33 percent, and whites, 12 percent. Five major languages are spoken at Linda Vista: Hmong, Laotian, Vietnamese, Spanish, and English. Seventy-five percent of the student body is limited English proficient (LEP). This is up from 50 percent in the late 1980s.

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\*\*\* Context \*\*\*

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Dr. Adel Nadeau was appointed principal at Linda Vista in July 1987. She came to the school with a background in English as a Second Language, bilingual education, teaching, and administration. She found a school with, as she says, "immense needs." Students received inequitable services; staff suffered from lack of communication and low morale; instruction lacked continuity and focus. Dr. Nadeau did her homework. For six months she gathered evidence. She documented discouraging student achievement data. She also found that excessive pull-out practices for non-Englishspeaking or limited-English-speaking students resulted in:

- Students missing entire blocks of instruction in art, music, or computers
- Teachers never having full classrooms
- Teachers receiving unequal preparation periods.

These inequities contributed to the low staff morale she witnessed daily.

Knowing change was desperately needed, she called a meeting in January 1988 of all staff, both certificated and classified. She presented the facts and said, "The decision to change is not yours. But HOW we change IS your decision." Thus began a site-managed restructuring effort which has spanned five years at the time of this writing and still continues.

From January 1988 until the following June, staff met and considered how they wanted to change Linda Vista. Dr. Nadeau had asked them, "If you had a magic wand, what would you do to improve Linda Vista?" They waved their magic wands and came up with seven goals to guide their work:

1. More appropriate instructional/language proficiency groupings for each student
2. Less pull-out instruction during morning hours
3. More integrated learning experiences
4. Greater equity of services to all students
5. Less labeling of special needs students
6. A more unified staff
7. Better use of space.

Staff formulated a total school restructuring effort, simply called THE PLAN, based on these seven goals. They initiated and have continued a site-based management system organized around a committee structure and full-staff consensus decision-making. "Committee membership is rotated continually to encourage participation and leadership from the entire staff," says Dr. Nadeau. "This structure increases staff ownership in the process and its results."

Staff may sit on one or more of 19 standing committees. A sample of these includes: Assessment, Budget, Calendar, Curriculum, Discipline, Early Childhood, Parent Outreach, and Race/Human Relations.

The major components of the Plan are:

- An upgraded curriculum
- Development of an early childhood education program for pre-kindergarten, kindergarten and special education students at the annex site
- Reduction of class sizes
- Provision of weekly preparation time for all teachers
- Reallocation of resources to implement the Plan.

Resource teacher Cindy Whitmore describes the process in this way:

We are more involved in decision making now, and we really work together. There's a lot more sharing among staff. But we needed our administrator to give us a "jump start." Without her, none of this would have happened.

In addition to providing the impetus for change, Dr. Nadeau has served as a link with district staff when questions have arisen about district rules or legal issues related to implementation.

Sally Greenfeld, also a resource teacher, adds:

"Jump" is a good word to use. We had to jump in and do a complete revamping of the system. One small change each year wouldn't have been enough. You can't wait until the time is perfect

or conditions just right. We did the big things first and refined later.

Whitmore adds, "It's like a spider web. But it all works. It wouldn't work at all if we didn't have very dedicated classified employees. They are an important part of our success."

A supportive leader and empowered staff have changed the quality of education at Linda Vista.

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## PRACTICES

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"We did the big things first and refined later." Because Linda Vista is involved in a comprehensive school restructuring effort, it is most helpful to look at several practices to see how the overall plan is being implemented.

### Adapting Instructional Approach and Groupings to Serve All Students Equitably

Linda Vista has gone from excessive reliance on pullout programs and age and ability groupings to ungraded classrooms within approximately four multi-age groupings—early childhood, primary, middle, and upper. The Annex, Linda Vista's auxiliary campus, houses its early childhood education program, including prekindergarten, kindergarten, first grade developmentally young, and young-age special needs students. Previously, special education students were segregated at the annex. At the main campus, students are grouped by primary (previously first and second grades); middle (previously third and fourth grades); and upper (previously fifth and sixth grades). Students are no longer referred to by grade levels, except for testing purposes.

Students are assigned to morning homeroom classes by their language proficiency levels to eliminate the need for pull-out programs. Proficiency levels include: entry-level, sheltered A and B (requiring a specialized English instruction program); transition A and B, nonsheltered classes, and bilingual classes. Each level has entry and exit criteria, and students advance when they meet the exit criteria, not at predetermined times during the school year. This morning schedule provides students with ample opportunity to foster close relationships with their homeroom teachers.

There is no "watered down" curriculum at Linda Vista. Students receive the same curriculum, whether it is presented in their native language or in English. Social studies and mathematics are presented in a student's native language for Southeast Asian students. Spanish-speaking students are taught reading and math in their native language.

In the afternoon, students are rotated through a series of classes based on multi-age groupings only, not on language proficiency levels. Integrated by cultural and linguistic group and gender, students spend approximately ten days in two subjects. For example, a student will receive science and music for ten days and then rotate to physical education and art. In addition to science, physical education, and fine arts, all primary students take reading lab, oral language lab, literature, and computer lab. Upper students take literature, library research skills, math lab, counseling groups, and computer/writing. These classes are presented as subjects, not as supplemental or remedial programs.

This integrated afternoon schedule enables students to receive instruction from many staff in a variety of subjects that one teacher could not even begin to present adequately. They also are exposed to a variety of teaching styles. The afternoon schedule reduces boredom both for

students and teachers and discourages alienation or isolation by making it possible for students to interact meaningfully with nearly all staff members.

Staff have spent several years developing their LANGUAGE ARTS STANDARDS AND RUBRICS. This document clearly defines oral language, reading and writing competencies, instructional materials to use, and appropriate portfolio contents for each language proficiency level at each age grouping.

Dr. Nadeau says, "Acceptance of portfolios as a major portion of assessment at Linda Vista reflects a major change in teachers' thinking not only about assessment of student progress but also about learning." A radical change in the manner of grouping students to increase their learning inevitably led to a nontraditional approach to assessing their learning.

Assessment was a key concern from the beginning of the restructuring effort. Staff wanted to establish an assessment system that reflected both the state framework for assessment and Linda Vista's six levels of language proficiency. They envisioned a system that didn't unduly categorize students at the same time that it embraced schoolwide standards.

After much study, staff concluded that portfolio assessment would be used to assess the actual work of students-the process and thinking skills used-in the context of the standardized expectations set by instructional staff. In deciding to use portfolio assessment for language arts, staff had to design rubrics for oral language, reading and writing, and then decide appropriate types of student work to include in a portfolio.

Initial efforts at portfolio assessment were fragmented. Some teachers began building portfolios for their students while others stayed with old familiar ways. Then, in April 1992, Linda Vista received a large grant from RJR Nabisco under the Next Century Schools project. Funds from this grant enabled staff to incorporate technology into the portfolio assessment system and elevate it to a school-wide effort. Special rooms housing teacher computer stations and electronic scanners are located at both campuses. Ongoing staff training ensures the effective use of the system, which can store all types of student work-oral, graphic, and written. Original work can be scanned directly from a photograph or lifted from a videotape or audiotape.

Designing and implementing the program has taken three years. Portfolios will be presented to parents for the first time during the 1992-93 school year.

- Multicultural Programming \*\*\*

At Linda Vista, multicultural programming is used to promote cross-cultural understanding and respect. Curriculum units as well as special events are used to present information about culture in general and about particular cultures. Two major activities of the multi-cultural program are described below.

## **THEMATIC PRESENTATIONS**

Every four to six weeks begins a new multi-cultural theme at Linda Vista. Students from early childhood to upper groups study different cultural groups, both within and outside the United States. Units present different aspects of the cultural group in both a historical and contemporary context and rely on classroom visitors to serve as role models.

Culminating activities occur throughout the year. For example, American Indian Day occurs in November at the early childhood annex. This year students rotated through stations on the

playground as the temperature reached a warm 75 degrees. One group learned a circle dance, listening intently to the beat of the drums. Another group planted corn, not in a garden but in dampened cotton balls placed in ziploc bags. The next group crushed corn kernels with small rocks on the asphalt to make corn flour, then moved to the next station where the corn flour was made into tortillas and fried. The last group rinsed cranberries in large wash tubs, then sat down to enjoy some cooked cranberries with biscuits.

Some students wore costumes made in class-vests from brown paper bags, decorated with brightly colored paints and beads, and paper headbands, also beaded and adorned with paper feathers. A visiting kindergarten class from a suburban school dressed as pilgrims and joined in the celebration. Teachers, aides and older students guided the children through the different stations. Several helped disabled students participate in the activities.

Teachers and paraprofessionals brought American Indian artifacts from their personal collections and transformed an ordinary classroom into a small museum, featuring pottery, basketry, and clothing. A special addition is a headdress made from golden eagle feathers. Because it is now illegal to obtain or own such feathers, the headdress is registered with the United States government. Children may also participate in hands-on activities in the little museum, including a shell game and clay making.

## **rites of Challenge Program**

Seeking answers to the problems plaguing African American men, Ron Mtume developed an in-school program called Rites of Challenge for young African-American students. This eight-week course began in January 1992 at Linda Vista and is part of the morning social studies program for seven- to twelve-year-olds. The basic assumption of the course is that children develop, mature, and accept increasingly more socially acceptable responsibilities as they are empowered by adults to do so. The curriculum takes students through a series of challenges, including communication with family members, withstanding negative peer pressures, and personal decision-making. It also teaches African and African-American history and cultures. Parent involvement is a major aspect of the program.

Plans are underway to provide a similar program for Hispanic girls, who constitute the largest number of dropouts at Linda Vista. Eventually, staff plan to include all children in such programs.

- Community Involvement \*\*\*

Community involvement is a strong focus at Linda Vista. A multi-faceted partnership program has grown from the school's commitment to involve its community in the educational process. According to Dr. Nadeau, "Partnerships are a major aspect of our restructuring effort." At present, Linda Vista enjoys partnerships with six agencies:

- Western Division of the San Diego Police Department
- County Office of Education
- Francis Parker Middle and Upper School (a nearby private school)
- Local YMCA
- Local McDonald's restaurants
- Price Club.

Partners provide many valuable services at Linda Vista. For example, the Price Club, a major

corporation in California, provided funds for Linda Vista's one-acre garden, including seed, fertilizer, equipment, and fencing. Students care for the garden as part of their science classwork. Parents, especially the Hmong and Laotian, also use the garden.

In 1991, the YMCA approached Linda Vista staff. The YMCA has a large facility virtually unused during the day. It proposed that Linda Vista use the facility and even offered the help of their instructors. One glitch was transportation. A local McDonald's heard of the plan and decided they could help with transportation. They wrote a grant to McDonald's Corporation to fund some buses. Bus drivers from Francis Parker School drive the buses. Four days a week, physical education classes from Linda Vista are bused to the YMCA, where they participate in gymnastics, swimming, and soccer classes. Those with limited-English proficiency catch on by example. During its first year, YMCA officials estimate that nearly 20,000 free lessons will be provided.

Each year Linda Vista holds a partnership kick-off event to highlight that year's agencies and businesses that sign partnership agreements. This year the kickoff was held at the Annex. Approximately 100 young children gathered on the school lawn to witness the signing of the agreements. From this group, several students emerged carrying baskets of fruit, a gift for their partners symbolizing the "good things we give each other."

- Parent Outreach \*\*\*

The Parent Outreach Committee is very busy at Linda Vista, because members know that parent involvement is key to the success of its restructuring effort. Parents must take pride in the school and support its efforts. Staff at Linda Vista are busy grant writers. This is how they obtained funds to hire a parent to serve as the parent volunteer coordinator. The coordinator prepares a newsletter for parents, recruits tutors and room parents, and carries out a myriad of other tasks.

One major responsibility is overseeing parent education workshops held five times during the school year. These workshops are based on needs assessments conducted with parents. Each workshop is conducted simultaneously in separate rooms in five languages. This involves writing a script for the workshop and translating it into five languages. Parents from each group then join together for refreshments after the session. Child care is provided.

Also supported by grant money, three community aides serve as liaisons to the parent community and as vital links to social service agencies. They also conduct monthly home visits to parents. Community aides do whatever is necessary to help families support their children in school. This may mean helping a family obtain a refrigerator for their home or shoes for one of their children. It may mean taking an ill child home.

As mentioned earlier, parents also are involved in the garden project at the school and the Rites of Challenge program.

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## OUTCOMES

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Reporting in April 1991 on the visible effects of the restructuring process, Dr. Nadeau presented the following observations and data.

- Site-Based Management Process \*\*\*

A system of staff committees has evolved from the initial restructuring effort. Both certificated and classified staff serve on committees which submit proposals in writing to the entire staff for their approval. A three-year committee effort has resulted in portfolio assessment being implemented at Linda Vista. The assessment committee worked directly with the Research and Evaluation district staff on an ongoing basis to make this possible.

- Instructional Program Observations \*\*\*

The morning basic skills program runs very smoothly. An indication of its success is that an average of 25 students advance through the different language proficiency levels within the first quarter of the school year, and several hundred students are reprogrammed by the end of the school year. In 1991, a preliminary analysis showed that nearly 95 percent of the language proficiency groups met the English-as-aSecond -Language and reading-level expectations set by staff.

An upgraded curriculum, reduced class size, and increased teacher preparation time have led to improvements in several areas, such as time-on-task, student attendance, and staff morale. Linda Vista has maintained its record of having one of the lowest, nonapportioned absence rates in its district.

Programs that have been especially successful include a bilingual program for non-English-speaking students and the special education/basic skills program. To improve its image, the latter was given the name "The Academic Enhancement Program." Staff have observed genuine academic improvement for several chronically underachieving students. Many students who have never received an award received the good citizen and academic improvement awards.

Two other new programs directly resulting from restructuring efforts are the gifted (GATE) program, which had not existed previously, and an innovative math program in which each classroom is a concept station and students rotate to each class every three weeks.

The afternoon program has retained student interest and enthusiasm. Visitors often remark how little dead time and off-task behavior they witness at the end of the day.

- Instructional Program Achievement Data \*\*\*

In comparing the ASAT scores for spring 1991 and 1992, staff have found some significant differences for reading, math and language arts at all grade levels. (Grade levels are used solely for the purpose of data reporting.) For example, first grade reading scores went from 18 (mean percentile ranking) in 1991 to 59 in 1992; math scores, from 36 in 1991 to 76 in 1992; language arts total scores from 36 in 1991 to 73 in 1992.

Other grades didn't see such dramatic changes but still improved their scores: second graders moved from 47 in math in 1991 to 50 in 1992; third graders moved from 55 in math in 1991 to 58 in 1992; fourth graders moved from 15 in reading in 1991 to 27 in 1992, and from 24 in language arts in 1991 to 32 in 1992; and fifth graders moved from 28 in reading in 1991 to 32 in 1992.

English language test results for students served by Chapter 1 or state compensatory education programs also showed significant gains in 1992. For example, second graders scored 21.8 (percentile equivalent) on the reading comprehension pretest, but 53.2 on the posttest; third graders, 24.2 on the pretest, but 33.7 on the posttest; and sixth graders, 33.0 on the pretest, but 35.8 on the posttest. Again, larger gains were seen at the primary level.

Although not all scores showed gains, students are achieving at a higher level overall than they were before restructuring began.

- Recognition/Awards \*\*\*

Certainly one indication of success is the recognition given one's efforts. At Linda Vista, recognition has been overwhelming. For example, Linda Vista received one of 15 Next Century Schools grants awarded nationwide by the RJR Nabisco Foundation. It has received state and national attention. One recent distinguished visitor was the Governor of California. Visitors are now a common sight at Linda Vista, and many have gained valuable information to help them with their restructuring efforts. The school was selected as one of nine exemplary sites to be included in a nationwide study of LEP programs. Finally, it was also featured in the April 1990 issue of TIME MAGAZINE.

A visitor once referred to Linda Vista as a "school made in heaven." Staff appreciate this praise, but they know their successes are the result of a lot of hard work and planning by everyone involved: principal, teachers, paraprofessionals, and classified staff. As physical educator Susana Occhi frankly admits:

We have a different kind of stress now, actually a good kind of stress, because we are more involved and responsible. Before, someone told us what to do. Now, we are part of the decision making. We have to justify and define our programs to the entire staff. Before, we would just say, "that doesn't concern me." Now, everything concerns everyone. We look at the benefit to the whole school, not just one person. And we know we can always change what we don't like or what doesn't work. Yes, there are more after-school meetings, and change causes some turmoil. But, it's definitely worth it.

For more information about restructuring at Linda Vista Elementary School, please contact Dr. Adel Nadeau, Principal, 2772 Ulric Street, San Diego, California, 92111, (619) 496-8196.

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