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**TEXAS COMPREHENSIVE CENTER**

Advancing Research, Improving Education



**Reward Schools Case Study Project**  
**Glen Cove Elementary**  
**Ysleta ISD**

May 2015

## A SNAPSHOT OF GLEN COVE ELEMENTARY

### 2013-2014 demographics:

- 852 students
- Grade span: Early education - 5th
- 81% of the students Economically Disadvantaged (i.e., eligible to receive free or reduced price lunch)
- 24% English language learners
- 11% Special Education
- 11% Student mobility rate
- 92% Hispanic
- 5% White
- 3% African American

### 2013-2014, the state accountability ratings:

- Met Standard on all 3 Indices (Student Achievement, Student Progress, and Closing Performance Gaps)
- Distinction Designations in Reading, Math, Science, Top 25% Closing Performance Gaps, and Postsecondary Readiness

## Introduction and Context

Glen Cove Elementary School is located in a working-class neighborhood in Ysleta, Texas just outside of El Paso and only a few miles from the US-Mexico border. On entering the campus, one sees well-kept grounds, hallways decorated with student work and vibrant art, and hears the buzz of children engaged in lessons in their classrooms. Visitors are greeted by smiling campus staff members who direct each visitor where they need to go. What makes Glen Cove stand out, however, is the palpable passion of the teachers, administrators, and staff for their students. This passion is a major contributor to Glen Cove's remarkable success and is why the school has been recognized as a Reward School.

In the 2012-2013 school year, Glen Cove Elementary "Met Standard" on the TEA School Report Card, and earned "Distinction Designations" in reading/English language arts, mathematics, as well as a Top 25% rating for student progress. Glen Cove students exceeded state target scores for performance on the STAAR test by significant margins and the science scores are the highest in the district. These successes are the result of a shared sense of mission by the campus teachers, effective leadership and coordination by administrators, and regular parental support and involvement.

In order to learn more about what makes Glen Cove Elementary the Reward School it is today, the following report will focus on the Texas Education Agency's Critical Success Factors (CSFs), which provide the underlying theory of action guiding the Reward Schools case study project. The findings below are presented in terms of the CSFs. Based on principal and teacher leader interviews, and focus groups with teachers and staff, the following CSFs were particularly evident and strong at Glen Cove Elementary:

- **Critical Success Factor 1 – Improve Academic Performance**
- **Critical Success Factor 5 – Family & Community Engagement**
- **Critical Success Factor 6 – School Climate**

### Critical Success Factor 1 – Improve Academic Performance

All of the case study participants discussed the following schoolwide strategies that support improved academic performance:

- A team-based approach
- A living Campus Improvement Plan (CIP)
- Planning for every child

**A team-based approach.** The principal of Glen Cove employs an inclusive process to make school improvement decisions. This team-based approach begins with developing a CIP based on district and state guidance, teacher input, and parental feedback. A Campus Education Improvement Committee (including parent representation) develops the CIP and meets monthly to monitor implementation and progress. A comprehensive needs assessment process helps the team to identify specific areas in need of improvement. The approach is “not top down” and seeks to “anticipate challenges.”

The principal organizes and works through multiple committees to solicit input, feedback, and reflection to guide instructional and student placement decisions. The goal is to achieve consensus on these and other issues related to student achievement. The principal is also focused on ensuring that instruction is directly tied to the CIP. Administrators will on occasion model teaching in the classroom, work with students, and use their experience and findings to support teachers with guidance and professional development. Teachers notice and respect this practice, which contributes to a collaborative and mutually supportive climate and culture.

**A living CIP.** In some form, campus improvement planning happens on a weekly basis in administrative, grade-level, and content area meetings. Campus- and student-level data are continuously analyzed to tailor and customize academic plans for students. Special emphasis is placed on the K-2 grades to provide the early foundation for future success. The principal expects that all students will read by the 2<sup>nd</sup> grade. There is also a focus on improving number sense, problem solving, and critical thinking skills in these early years. Teachers engage in regular self-reflection on teaching practices and develop specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and timely (SMART) goals to provide focus and drive decisions about professional development needs and instructional strategies. Teachers analyze and “unpack” TEKS-based student expectations to ensure that instruction is aligned with state standards.

**Planning for every child.** The teachers’ data analysis ensures that teachers do not use a one-size-fits-all approach to student learning, but rather utilize a wide variety of strategies, programs, and individual approaches to instruction. Programs such as Sharon Wells Mathematics, Singapore Math, Super School, Accelerated Reader, and others are used to support instructional interventions. Additional methods such as foldables, notebooks, math journals, reader’s workshops, interactive word walls, cooperative learning and many others are used to provide differentiation to target specific needs.

Teachers, under the guidance of the principal, use a backwards design process to plan for instruction and utilize campus and district specialists for support. There is a strong emphasis on providing solid Tier I instruction for the whole class and campus. Data books, also known as “running records,” are kept to individualize instruction and to use as a diagnostic tool to plan for subsequent lessons, especially in the area of literacy. Regular progress monitoring, classroom walk-throughs, and data analysis are all employed to inform decisions about instruction. All teachers, including coaches and fine arts teachers, align their lessons and activities to instructional goals, especially in reading and mathematics. There is a

#### BEST PRACTICE

Administrators tutor students on a regular basis, demonstrating their personal commitment to student performance. Administrators and counselors schedule times to work with students based on identified areas of need, such as those indicated by test scores or the need for English language support, with a special emphasis on supporting reading and math. Administrators may work with individual students in class, or pull students out of class to work with them in the staff lounge.

particular emphasis on cooperative or group learning and hands-on activities. For example, science teachers are required to provide weekly hands-on lab experiences for students.

### Critical Success Factor 5 - Family and Community Engagement

Staff mentioned the following strategies they were using to support family and community engagement:

- Counselor in the lead
- Parents supporting learning
- Having fun together

**Counselor in the lead.** The principal has designated her lead counselor as the informal liaison to parents. In this role, the counselor generates a monthly school calendar of events, responds to parent requests, helps coordinate the work of the parent teacher organization (PTO), and plans family and community outreach events. The PTO typically provides direct support to teachers by assisting with activities such as classroom decorating, participation in events, and helping with routine preparation activities. The school hosts events such as parent wellness (Wellness Wednesday), cooking, and Common Sense Parenting classes.

#### BEST PRACTICE

One example of how data is used to improve school climate is through attendance statistics. Since attendance is an important piece of how schools are evaluated by the state, and has a significant impact on student learning, there are campus-wide efforts to promote good attendance. Attendance statistics are displayed on an "Attendance Wall" for all to see, and competitions between classes and grade levels are used to incentivize students not to miss school. Rewards such as ice cream parties are provided to classes with the best attendance.

**Parents supporting learning.** The school also hosts parent math and reading "academies" in order to show parents the type of math and reading the teachers teach and how they are assessed on the STAAR. Math academies are divided into two groups: grades K-2 and 3-5. Reading academies are held for all grade levels independently. During these academies, teachers demonstrate lessons, share basic concepts and academic standards, and show parents the books and materials they use in class. They also share materials and test examples from middle and high school to show parents the kinds of things that students will encounter in the future, and how it connects with what students are doing in the early grades. Sessions include a mixture of whole-group presentation, as well as roundtables with small groups.

**Having fun together.** Fun activities such as Kite Day, Fishing Day, and a parent-teacher softball game are also a part of the Glen Cove parent outreach effort. Hundreds of parents and grandparents attend these events. While Glen Cove's CIP has a goal of 62% of parents having some kind of involvement with the school, the principal reports 90%+ participation in most conference nights, and high levels of parental participation in the events outlined above.

### Critical Success Factor 6 - School Climate

Many of the participants discussed the following strategies the school used to sustain a positive school climate:

- The choice is yours
- Keeping it positive
- The team of three

**The choice is yours.** The principal reports that, due to the school team's proactive approaches to reduce and avoid discipline problems, student misbehavior is not a prominent issue at Glen Cove. An important part of this success is the regular use of the slogan "The Choice is Yours!" The message is student-focused and encourages students to reflect on their behavioral choices and actions. This messaging is part of a school culture where students are taught to be self-advocates and ask questions. Teachers check for understanding of school rules and expectations and seek to address student frustrations and re-teach expectations.

**Keeping it positive.** The campus uses a program called Project Wisdom, which includes beginning the day with a positive message about behavior choices during campus announcements. Administrators and teachers reinforce these positive messages and arrange regular celebrations to acknowledge students' successes and provide morale boosts. Teacher participation in "fun" activities such as Kite Day and a book fair serve to further engage teachers with parents and provide fun activities to deepen teacher, parent, and student relationships.

**The team of three.** Glen Cove Elementary has been able to achieve significant success as a Title I school due to a combination of systems, practices, and key collaborations that support school improvement. As one teacher puts it, "It's collaboration, plus passion, and a love for our kids." At the core of this is a focus on what is called the "Team of Three" – a close collaboration among the teacher, student, and parent. Underlying this approach is an explicit attitude that "we want it." The entire faculty and staff is unified in their desire to not only do the very best for their students, but to be the very best in the district. There is a clear focus on achievement, and a culture of attainment for students, teachers, and administrators. This atmosphere is apparent from the physical environment, positive messaging, visible and engaged presence of administrators, and the collaborative efforts of highly qualified teachers who are consistently engaged in data analysis, fostering positive relationships, and crafting instruction that is laser-focused on meeting state standards while actively supporting the social-emotional well-being of all students.

### Summary

The principal and teachers report that they are most proud of their team and "village" approach to collaboration. As one teacher commented, "The first day I came to this campus, I felt the passion and I loved it, I won't let it go, and I share it with my students." The principal is particularly proud of the school's unified focus on literacy in the earliest grades through robust teacher learning and collaboration, which has generated the positive results that led to Glen Cove's designation as a Reward School.

While proud of what they have accomplished, a significant feature of Glen Cove's current state is being mindful of the future. "We can't become complacent and we have to understand change," one teacher stated. The principal echoed this sentiment and explained, "Your goal [as a principal] is to create people who can continue those things after you leave." While there may be no single silver bullet when it

comes to school improvement, Glen Cove exemplifies some of the critical factors that can lead to success – harnessing and channeling the passion of teachers, students, and staff into a deliberate use of data to inform instructional and support functions, and planning ahead to meet the challenges of the future.