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**Reward Schools Case Study Project
Glenwood Elementary
Amarillo ISD**

May 2015

Introduction and Context

A SNAPSHOT OF GLENWOOD ELEMENTARY

2013-2014 demographics:

- 370 students
- Grade Span – PK-05
- 96.5% of the students economically disadvantaged (i.e., eligible to receive free or reduced price lunch),
- 45.4% English language learners,
- 8.9% in special education, and
- 13.4% student mobility rate
- 91.4% Hispanic
- 4.9% White
- 1.9% African-American

In 2013-2014, the state accountability ratings were:

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

The students smile as teachers in the warm and welcoming hallways of Glenwood Elementary greet them at their classroom doors every morning. Administrators and teachers know the individual needs of each student and make instructional decisions based on that knowledge. As new needs arise, the staff with specialized knowledge of the need meet to study the data and determine what should be changed or if the campus needs to go in a new direction. It is evident from all of the interviews conducted during the course of this case study that this positive approach to student achievement is one of the many things that makes Glenwood Elementary special.

The Texas Education Agency's Critical Success Factors (CSFs) are the underlying theory of action guiding the Reward Schools case studies. 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 Glenwood Elementary:

- **Critical Success Factor 1 - Academic Performance**
- **Critical Success Factor 6 - Improve School Climate**
- **Critical Success Factor 7 - Increase Teacher Quality**

Critical Success Factor 1: Academic Performance

All of the case study participants discussed the following school-wide strategies to support the continuous improvement of academic performance:

- Data-driven and willing to do what it takes
- Targeted mid-course corrections

Data-driven and willing to do what it takes. The staff expects for all students to be successful. They spend whatever time it takes to know their students and their families in order to determine individual needs. Glenwood uses multiple data sources to determine their priority instructional needs and strategies. For example, the campus knew there might be a drop in writing scores in 2013 but did not expect only 65% of students to meet the standard. The overall district scores were low and the district was promoting a district-developed approach to improve writing. The staff at Glenwood studied the data and discussed the needs of

individual students and did not think the new approach was best for their students. The administrators and staff began to research other writing methodologies and determined that the Lucy Calkins units of writing instruction were the best fit for the needs of the students. The teachers decided to drop the district writing plan and attended staff development on the Lucy Calkins method and implemented it school wide. The district supported this decision because of the thorough research presented by the staff. The writing scores improved to 95% of the students meeting the standard in 2014.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

“The staff is not one to jump on all the new bandwagons to fix problems. They will question new ideas and study any new instructional methods to determine if it is what their students really need.”

– Principal Self

Targeted mid-course corrections. When the Glenwood team has not achieved their goals, teachers and staff conduct a root cause analysis to determine the problem. As one teacher stated, “The staff is not afraid of asking, ‘Was the problem that we did not know how to teach the objective or did the kids just not get it?’” The campus uses the district’s Common Collaborative Process (CCP) and has added an extra step to the process by writing a specific action plan to fix the problem. The district describes the staff as professionals who try to figure things out and they do not add a lot to their plates. They make sure they do a few things extremely well.

The summative data the Leadership Team uses to set annual goals is the STAAR data and cluster developed common assessments. They use the data to see where they need to be for the next year and develop instructional goals. Every grade level gathers formative review data throughout the year to monitor progress toward the goals. The teachers formally track students’ progress with assessments at the beginning, middle and end of year for math and reading levels. If the data indicates that strategies are not being met, the staff will regroup and determine what needs to be changed. The staff freely shares ideas with each other through horizontal and vertical discussions. They pride themselves on listening and learning from each other and approaching the work with flexibility and creativity.

Critical Success Factor 6 - School Climate

Many of the participants discussed the following strategies the school implements in order to sustain a positive learning climate:

- Sweat the small stuff
- High expectations for all

Sweat the small stuff. Discipline management is not a problem at Glenwood. The routines and procedures that are in place serve to minimize the opportunities for misbehavior. The campus repeatedly practices all procedures, even small ones, because they believe this helps reduce the need for discipline. According to the administrators, the teachers “sweat the small stuff” so major discipline issues never occur. Several members of the Glenwood team reported that teaching the *7 Habits of Highly Effective People* through the *Leader in Me* program has greatly improved school climate. “This staff really holds the kids accountable for following the habits and it makes a difference for our students,” one teacher said. When dealing with discipline issues administrators always refer back to one of the *7 Habits of Highly Effective People*.

High expectations for all. Glenwood has also managed to keep class sizes are small and everyone agrees this made student management easier. The smaller numbers enable teachers to spend more of their time teaching and reinforcing high expectations for each student. The teacher group credits the high expectations to the low discipline incidents. However, the teachers are not the only ones with high expectations.

The teachers attribute the low discipline to the culture of the community. Parents are appreciative of what teachers do for their children. In fact, many of the parents were once students at Glenwood. The community values respect and has pride in the school and that is instilled in the students. Various sources reported that Glenwood parents do not tolerate their children misbehaving at school and that the students do not tolerate misbehavior from each other. New students learn the expectations from their peers quickly.

Critical Success Factor 7 – Teacher Quality

When asked how the campus supports its teachers and helps them improve their practice, the principal, teachers, and staff described the following strategies:

- Intentional Professional Development
- High standards and “old school” instruction

Intentional professional development. Glenwood is very selective when it comes to selecting and attending professional development. The staff is not quick to grab onto new instructional ideas or methods unless they can be sure that it meets the needs of the students. Glenwood is in what Amarillo ISD calls the “Caprock Cluster” of schools and all the campuses in the cluster are offered a variety of professional development opportunities. The district offers cadre meetings in the core subjects to look at district data and plan common lessons for the areas of concern. Cadre Meetings consist of picking a

BEST PRACTICE

Glenwood is a very selective campus when it comes to attending professional development. The staff at Glenwood is always hesitant to commit to the training without the campus data that indicates a need.

topic and teachers will bring ideas and materials to share. For example, differentiated instruction could be one topic. One person in each grade level and core subject attends the cadre meetings and brings the information back to the grade/subject level teams. The cadres meet every six weeks. The staff does not always participate in optional district-level professional development unless they believe there is an identified benefit to their students.

In addition to this assortment of professional development opportunities, the campus has a full-time Curriculum Assessment Specialist whose main job responsibility is to support teachers with instruction. She guides teachers in understanding difficult TEKS, models lessons, and provides a variety of resources. Professional development is offered each year and is based on the identified campus and individual teacher needs. Typically, three or four trainings are offered at the same time and teachers are allowed to select the one they feel is best for them. Some of the professional development offerings have been Amarillo Literacy Instruction (Balanced Literacy), a continuation of the Leader in Me, and Advantaged Math. All teachers attended the professional development sessions covering the first two chapters of Good Habits, Good Reading. According to the teachers, the focus on the first two chapters is just about “simple, good teaching.”

High standards and “old school” instruction. All three interview groups stated that one of the best practices at Glenwood is that teachers incorporate high expectations and good “old school” instruction. The teachers at Glenwood have a reputation for having high expectations in the classroom and implementing a culturally relevant approach to teaching students in poverty. One member of the teacher group stated that their success, “surprises people because other campuses with the same population of students do not do as well.” They believe that if, “they hold themselves to a high standard which trickles down to the students.”

Regarding “old school” instruction, one example would include the teachers’ insistence that students know their math facts, “because if the students do not have to think about that so much when they are working through a problem, they are able to focus on the higher level math they need to do.” The administrators all agree that they see great instruction going on from bell-to-bell in every classroom. The administrators stated, “Our teachers are very good at knowing where their students are and what they need to work on. We keep it simple and focus on good lessons and checking for understanding throughout so that we can stop and fix it if there is a misunderstanding about a concept.” They have not felt the need to push the teachers to jump on new bandwagons because of the success that the campus has experienced in the past and present.

Summary

The Glenwood community has a palpable depth of love for their students and believes that education is the only way out of poverty. Glenwood is proud of what they have accomplished. Glenwood students have been very successful in meeting the current phase in assessment standards. Looking forward, the Glenwood team is committed to holding on to what helped them be successful while figuring out what they need to do to have all students meet the final level standards on the state assessments. There is no doubt from the administrators or teachers that they will find the key to continued and future success for the students. Based on the interviews in this case study, it is clear that they never waiver from this worthy cause.