
Students are Making Gains in Taholah



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Taholah School, a Quinault Nation school in rural Taholah, Washington, never used to get much outside notice. Now, in the last few years they have been highlighted in several local and state-wide newspaper articles. The reason behind the notice is important: students are making gains. The average national percentile rank in reading of sixth-graders at Taholah on the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills (ITBS) rose from 37% in the 2001-2002 school year to 58% for 2002-2003. Between 2001 and 2004, the percent of Taholah middle school students passing the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL), increased by 95.5%, compared to the state average of 20.7%. Additionally, administrators report an improved school climate and increased attendance.

These gains have come with a close collaboration between the Taholah School staff and the Success for All Foundation, which provides training, professional development, ongoing support, and curriculum materials to the school from kindergarten through tenth grade. As part of the program, Taholah's middle school now has 60 minutes a day dedicated to targeted reading instruction, and teachers incorporate the same reading strategies throughout their content area classes. The middle school staff is also using SFA's research-based curriculum materials in academic content areas such as: language arts, social studies, math, and science.

A key feature of the program is a series of regular, school-wide reading assessments. Facilitator Patty Marz, a former Taholah School teacher, has been trained by the Success for All Middle School to use baseline data on each student to place students into leveled reading classes at the start of the year. Students are then reassessed every eight weeks, giving them the opportunity to move to the next reading level as soon as they are ready for an increased challenge. This ensures that all students move as rapidly as possible toward (and beyond) grade-level reading achievement.

When Ms. Marz is not tracking students' progress, she is coaching teachers, modeling classes, and leading feedback sessions with small groups of teachers. She also works with content specialists to infuse academic literacy skills into all classes across the day. Ms. Marz explains, "I believe that our reading program started as the base. Adding math and humanities and science was the culminating grace that actually made a difference in our middle and high school. This is about more than just scores. Attendance is up. Kids are looking at four-year institutions and scholarships that never did before. Staff and community take great pride in the achievement of their students."