

A Quest for Excellence

By Gail Malay

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Lake Havasu Unified School District is building a culture of excellence. Culture means the way we do business. The majority of our employees are working in their area of passion. They truly care about our students and realize they will be entering a world that is changing at a very rapid pace.

Our quest for excellence begins with an assessment of current reality. We are in the process of looking at data both for behavior and for academic achievement. Several of our schools are using a school-wide behavior support system called: PBIS. PBIS stands for positive behavioral interventions and supports.

We are finding more and more students are entering school without the skills necessary to behave appropriately. We now must teach these skills. The best way to accomplish this is to implement a school-wide system. School-wide systems provide consistency for students and really demonstrate what the appropriate behavior looks like and the consequences for not behaving appropriately.

At the schools using PBIS, discipline data is analyzed frequently so staff realizes where the trouble spots are and can put more time and attention in those areas. We are finding discipline referrals decreasing with the use of PBIS.

School-wide behavior support leads to improved academic achievement. How are we monitoring our academic achievement? We have several different measures.

At the elementary level we use DIBELS . . . dynamic indicators of basic early literacy skills. We closely monitor our students' progress in reading and then differentiate instruction. For our advanced students

we offer more challenging activities and for our struggling students we give small group and sometimes individual interventions. Teaching reading is rocket science and we want to make sure our students read well. This is a basic skill for the 21st Century.

K-8 grade level we also use Galileo. This assessment lets us know how our students are doing on Arizona's academic standards . . . what our students are to know and be able to demonstrate at the end of a class or course.

At the high school level frequent quizzes and tests are given to make sure our students are learning the required material.

The district is committed to continuous learning for our employees. In January, the high school had a late start so that training could be given to teachers on instructional scaffolding. Instructional scaffolding includes: reviewing the importance of teachers explicitly explaining and modeling the learning, teacher-led practice on the learning, small group instruction for those needing intervention or more challenging work. In college, high school teachers are trained in the content they will teach, not enough time is given to the pedagogy . . . how to teach. We help our teachers become even better facilitators of instruction.

Your school district is constantly improving. So when you think about schools today . . . know it is different than when you were in school. We appreciate the community's involvement and support of the schools. Together WE Can . . . provide the best education possible for the young people of Lake Havasu.

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