

East Richland Elementary School

East Richland Community Unit School District Number One

School Context

East Richland Community Unit School District Number One is located in southeastern Illinois, serving the majority of Richland County as well as portions of Wayne and Jasper counties. The district serves 2,144 students in one elementary, one middle, and one high school. Although the district opened East Richland Elementary School in Olney, Illinois in January 2000, the district has experienced slight but steady declines in its student population over the past five years. While district and school administrators discussed poverty issues at length, the district's percentage of low-income students (40%) is similar with the state average (38%). More than half of students at East Richland Elementary, however, are classified as low income.

Curriculum and Academic Goals

East Richland CUSD and its schools are in the midst of a three-year curriculum alignment process. According to one administrator, district educators are currently working to tie the Illinois Learning Standards (ILS) into the district curriculum through a horizontal and vertical curriculum alignment process. District administrators, however, view the state standards as the foundation, and they expect staff to extend their curriculum beyond the basics. At each level (i.e., district, building, grade level), someone is responsible for the district curriculum and the applicable state standards. At the school level, East Richland Elementary is using its school improvement days to work on curriculum alignment and articulation. During these days, teachers collaborate in grade levels and specialized teams to focus

on the inclusion of the state standards. Additionally, grade-level team meetings provide opportunities for curriculum alignment activities. Administrators at the school describe the ILS and alignment to the curriculum as a requirement for a quality curriculum particularly at the elementary level, although one principal reiterated the district stance, stating that the ILS are the foundation. Teachers state that the curriculum is constantly modified and revised according to needs and expectations. District administrators agree, characterizing the curriculum as a living document that changes as the district develops alternative assessments to demonstrate attainment of standards. As one district administrator explains, teachers review the curriculum continually and have internalized the process of aligning and articulating the curriculum to state standards.

Educators at East Richland Elementary have access to a variety of curriculum documents. District administrators report that East Richland CUSD has developed pacing guides that serve as extended outlines of the curriculum. Teachers also cite the availability of curriculum guides, and one teacher explains that teachers are expected to be aware of the curriculum at various levels. One teacher notes, however, that most of the curriculum is drawn from textbooks with emphasis on best practices. Other curriculum documents provided by school administrators include grade-level expectations by quarter and content area, general writing guidelines and goals, skills checklists, and grading scales.

Student Demographics*:

	<i>E. Richland EI</i>	<i>E. Richland CUSD</i>	<i>Illinois</i>
% Low Income	51.1	39.9	37.9
% Limited English-Proficient	0.2	0.1	6.3
% Mobility	14.1	14.5	16.4
Student Ethnic/Racial Distribution			
% White	97.1	97.6	58.6
% African-American	1.1	0.9	20.7
% Hispanic	1.0	0.8	17.0
% Asian/Pacific Islander	0.7	0.6	3.6
% Native American	0.0	0.0	0.2

Staff Selection and Capacity Building

East Richland CUSD relies on a more informal recruitment and selection process. For principal recruitment, the district advertises and recruits qualified candidates. Candidates from within are strong considerations. Often internal candidates have had the opportunity to be a part of the Eastern Illinois University cohort program. This program graduates quality candidates and has collaborated with the district.

District administrators report hiring outstanding young people; the principal of East Richland asserts that recruitment is not a problem in the district because of the district's academic excellence. The superintendent and assistant superintendent are responsible for selecting principals. During interviews, candidates are asked a series of questions related to instructional leadership and curriculum instruction, and principal applicants also meet with department heads. According to an East Richland Elementary administrator, district office and involved administrators determine the top candidates for interviews, and final selection is based on the best person matching the expectations and needs of East Richland CUSD #1.

For teacher positions, the district relies on advertising and word of mouth to recruit applicants. In selecting teachers, the principals review applications, and interview the top candidates. Then the top two candidates are taken to the superintendent. The superintendent conducts a final interview with the top candidates. The superintendent and principals confer on a final recommendation. Teachers at the elementary school indicate that they are not involved in the teacher selection process.

District and school administrators indicate that NCLB has not impacted the selection process because the district has always hired highly qualified teachers despite the district's financial problems. According to the district strategic plan, replacing retiring teachers may be "increasingly difficult," and sustaining the district's highly qualified teaching staff "will continue to be a top priority."

East Richland Elementary has focused considerable efforts to improve collaboration among its teachers. Grade-level teachers at the elementary school share a common planning period. During grade-level meetings, teachers share ideas and lesson plans, discuss curriculum and teaching methods, and serve as resources to each other to implement best practices for student learning. Collaboration is increased when grade-level teams meet with principals on a weekly basis to communicate curriculum needs, discuss building operations, implement programs, and review school improvement activities for students. Email is used as a communication tool between administrators, teachers and staff members as well.

Teachers admit that team meetings were originally met with resistance because of their principal-driven nature; team meetings are currently more teacher-driven, and have enabled teachers to become more aware that their recommendations and experiences are valued. School administrators acknowledge the initial resistance to team collaboration, but note that teachers have been empowered with this process and are teaching a stronger, articulated curriculum. Most see the need for the common planning time and its benefits. School administrators identify team planning time as the single most important factor in curriculum implementation and curriculum consistency and characterize collaboration as one of the most powerful forces for school change and assistance to staff.

Teacher Demographics*:

	<i>E. Richland EI</i>	<i>E. Richland CUSD</i>	<i>Illinois</i>
Average Teaching Experience	--	15.4	13.9
% of Teachers with Bachelors Degrees	--	58.0	53.9
% of Teachers with Master's Degrees	--	42.0	46.0
% of Teachers with Emergency or Provisional Credentials	0.0	0.0	2.5
% of Classes Not Taught by Highly Qualified Teachers	0.0	0.0	2.1

To facilitate team building, the school hired a consultant to provide ongoing staff development on building leadership teams to strengthen collaboration and relationships. In addition to team training, grade-level team leaders attended training focused on improving their skills for leading their teams and working together as team leaders. Teams use quality tools to better function as a team and to be able to come to consensus in making decisions.

East Richland CUSD conducts teacher needs assessments to identify professional development needs. Needs assessment results are disaggregated by school and provided to building administrators. Administrators at East Richland CUSD emphasize the importance of ongoing professional development, and they characterize district training as excellent. The district favors bringing consultants on site to work with teachers. This way all teachers are hearing the same message and are able to work together with fellow teachers to implement the in-service training.

Both district and school administrators follow professional development up by sharing and discussing training content in team meetings or at school in-services. At East Richland Elementary, the principal uses teacher needs assessment results, student test scores, and input for the school improvement plan to determine professional development needs. The principal may ask teachers or grade level teams to attend specific workshops. Teachers at the school report they are encouraged to attend training sessions and grow professionally. Another focus for professional development training is technology integration and increasing technology skills. The elementary school has a mixture of inexperienced and

experienced teachers using technology and learning from each other. Other professional development targets data analysis, including sessions on NCLB, use of ISAT data, and using data analysis to identify critical priorities for school improvement planning.

Instructional Programs, Practices and Arrangements

Educators at the elementary school provide varying information about the selection of instructional programs and materials. According to a principal at the school, administrators request textbook samples and gather background research to share with teachers for the evaluation and selection of textbooks. A rubric for textbook selection is developed based on alignment to state standards, content, format, best practices, supplemental materials, teacher edition, and technology resources. When the textbook selection process does not have a clear cut number one choice, then the administrators work together with team leaders to select a textbook through consensus and priorities for a final choice that best addresses the needs of the students. Grade level teams establish priorities based on grade level needs as part of the process, too. One teacher, however, indicates that all textbooks and materials are provided by the central office. The elementary school works to integrate textbooks series with ISAT preparation materials to provide content in the core-content areas. Principals continue to encourage an ongoing integration of ISAT practice and preparation for students using the developed student friendly rubrics and practice tests.

Instructional Information*:			
	<i>E. Richland EI</i>	<i>E. Richland CUSD</i>	<i>Illinois</i>
Pupil/Teacher Ratio	—	17.5	18.4
Average class size			
- Grade K	19.4	19.1	20.6
- Grade 1	21.4	21.4	21.3
- Grade 3	22.3	22.3	22.5
Time devoted to teaching core subjects (minutes/day in grade 3):			
- Mathematics	50	50	56
- Science	25	25	30
- English/ Language Arts	185	185	146
- Social Science	25	25	31

To address weak test performance in mathematics, East Richland Elementary School reorganized its math curriculum and adopted the ClassWorks computer software program. According to the school improvement plan, the school created a Math Design Team composed of teachers to oversee changes in the school's math program. With the assistance of a middle school math teacher and the superintendent, the team reviewed the math curriculum and identified gaps in instruction. In response, Math Design Team members and grade-level teams reorganized math instruction for students. After reviewing ISAT and ITBS test results, the elementary school began integrating ClassWorks math software into the instructional day. The software program includes computational skill drills and practice, and teachers align students' class activities with the ClassWorks lab activities that occur at least once per week.

Students at East Richland Elementary may participate in extended day activities through the school's Kids Kollege program. Kids Kollege seeks to "expand the typical grade school curriculum with fast-paced, unique, and fun-filled projects and lessons" through a safe and fun learning environment. This is an opportunity for all students to have enrichment classes. The school offers two four-week Kids Kollege sessions for primary (grades K-2) and intermediate (grades 3-5) students each spring. Students pay \$20 or request a waiver to attend a session, and parents provide transportation. Session facilitators are a mixture of teachers, retired educators, community members, business owners, high school students and community college instructors. Examples of sessions for primary students are hands on science, Spanish, board games, and story hour. Intermediate students can select sessions on various science activities, French, creative writing, making healthy snacks, computer skills, performing arts, critical thinking, and various art and physical education activities.

East Richland CUSD has adopted the Five Component Reading and Writing Plan program. Through the program, teachers integrate research-based best practices in reading and writing instruction based on findings from the National Reading Panel. The Five Component program modeled after Patricia Cunningham's Four Block requires that students receive daily instruction in four major components: word study, guided/directed reading, fluency, and writing. Students also participate in ongoing assessment (the fifth component in the program). Incorporated into the plan are Accelerated Reader and a modified Reading Recovery approach in the primary grades. Guided reading is a

critical part of the plan as the classroom teacher, Title I teacher, and Title I teacher assistant are in the classroom teaching during a 30-35 minute reading and writing session.

The district hired a national reading consultant who visits East Richland Elementary multiple times each year to provide training and individual assistance to teachers and grade level teams. One teacher explains that the reading consultant introduced new reading strategies to teachers and pushed teachers to change their teaching styles and their instructional approach in the classroom. The principals indicate that, although the reading consultant is not "the most popular" with educators, her assistance has "greatly impacted" the reading and writing instructional practices in the school.

In addition to support from the reading consultant, teachers continually evaluate the progress of students in reading and look for ways to adjust the reading program to better meet the needs of the students. Older students act as "buddies" and listen to the young students read as they practice reading their leveled books. Volunteers are trained to listen to students read and assist students to improve their reading skills. Retired teachers work with students and even work with higher performing students to implement a "Book Club" for above average first grade readers. After school tutoring is a very structured program for grades 1-2. Grades 4-5 focus on homework completion and reteaching. Teachers receive articles on reading and writing instruction. Principals stress the reading strategies during classroom observations and teachers are expected to be implementing the reading strategies from the National Reading Panel. Teachers share reading activities with each other. Title I teachers and teacher assistants provide reading instruction and assistance both inside and outside the classroom.

To address discipline issues at the school, East Richland Elementary is implementing two discipline programs—Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) and Hello, Update, and Goodbye (HUG). The PBIS team consists of teachers and staff members working together to decrease the incidents of misbehavior in the school. With PBIS all teachers and staff members are responsible for improving student behavior and discipline. It is a team approach. Inservice is provided for better discipline and classroom management. The school compiles a monthly discipline report that disaggregates student infractions, tracks the types of infractions, the time and location of the infractions that occur, the number of referrals to principal, and the

grade level of the offender. It is the team’s job to make recommendations as to why the behavior is happening and provide interventions to decrease the behavior as well as target repeat offenders.

The HUG program is such an intervention. The HUG program stands for **H**ello, **U**ppdate, and **G**oodbye. It pairs an at-risk student with a mentor (volunteer teacher or staff member) who interacts with the student on a daily basis. During the quick interactions, the mentor spends approximately five minutes or less with the student, providing positive interactions and daily communication. The program fosters better behavior by exposing at-risk students to role models who teach and reinforce positive behaviors and actions. The mentor talks with the classroom teacher to best know the areas to help the student especially if he/she is having behavior problems.

Monitoring: Compilation, Analysis and Use of Data

Educators at East Richland CUSD and East Richland Elementary express some concerns about the state’s assessments. A district administrator states that she has no problem with accountability from the state. “The state tests have forced us to examine teaching content and practices. Expectations for students have increased. It has made us to become better teachers and created change in schools. This is good. Unfortunately, the test creates a lot of stress for teachers as grade 3 has some not developmentally appropriate tasks. The majority of the ISAT is inappropriate for special education students. Expectations for special education must be

high, but reasonable.” Educators at the elementary school reiterate this stance—the principal asserts that some parts of the test are inappropriate for students, and a teacher states that the reading section is not appropriate because it uses words and names unfamiliar to students.

Monitoring student achievement is an evolving process at East Richland CUSD. East Richland CUSD encourages teachers to use GradeQuick, an electronic grade book and lesson planner. The district is also working with software companies to improve data monitoring. The principal at East Richland Elementary notes that educators need software to better monitor student achievement. While recognizing that the district is moving toward this, the principal adds that teachers also need more training in data-driven decisions. Assessments used at the elementary school include ongoing grade-level assessments (e.g., Accelerated Reader testing, writing samples), ISAT, ITBS, STAR reading assessments, Title I assessments, and Title I end-of-year tests. At first and second grades, teachers monitor through running records, ISEL tests, and fluency assessments. Teachers at the school explain that no formal monitoring system exists in the district. Teachers receive students’ results for the ITBS and ISAT, which allow them to identify weaknesses and areas to focus on during the next school year. They are also able to discuss test scores during school improvement in-service days. Currently, discussions of assessment in the district are focusing on the timing of assessments and areas of assessment that can be eliminated, as there is some concern about the amount of time district students must spend on testing and the need for both ISAT and ITBS.

The new superintendent in East Richland CUSD has provided the impetus for changes in both principal and teacher evaluations. Currently, East Richland CUSD is in the midst of revising the principal evaluation process to more closely align with revised principal job descriptions and the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) Standards. Using a best practices format to develop the principal evaluation, the district is establishing evaluation criteria based on job description standards. Evaluation will also include principal goal setting where principals must provide updates on progress toward goal achievement. The teacher evaluation process has also been revised, such that non-tenured teachers receive formal evaluations twice each year and tenured teachers have formal evaluations every two years. Teachers receive advanced notification of the official classroom observation, and evaluation forms are approved by the teachers’ union. In addition to formal evaluation, the principal conducts four to six informal

Student Achievement*: Percentage of students scores meeting or exceeding the Illinois Learning Standards for the grades and subjects tested on the ISAT.

<i>E. Richland El</i>	2001-02	2002-03
Grade 3		
Reading	74.6	68.0
Mathematics	85.2	81.3
Writing	71.4	68.0
Grade 4		
Science	79.4	78.0
Social Science	67.2	78.7
Grade 5		
Reading	71.4	70.8
Mathematics	80.0	78.2
Writing	83.6	81.4

observations of teachers on an annual basis. The principal provides feedback to teachers and believes this gives her an accurate picture of educational learning in the classroom. Teachers at the elementary school report that the previous teacher evaluation process was very intimidating, but the process has improved since the new superintendent was hired. While one teacher notes that evaluation effectiveness in improving instruction depends on the evaluator, teachers generally describe the evaluation process as smoothly running and indicate that teacher evaluations are both beneficial and improve classroom instruction.

Recognition, Intervention and Adjustments

At East Richland Elementary, recognition activities honor achievements at all levels. The school is recognized as 1 of 27 Spotlight Schools by the Illinois State Board of Education; these awards recognize high achieving schools that serve high percentages of low-income students. The school was also selected as the Illinois Exemplary Reading School by the International Reading Association. Teachers at the school receive praise through recognition in the school newspaper, positive notes and emails, individual praise, appreciation luncheons, and extra time during school improvement planning days. Recognition also occurs through the school teacher of the year award, teacher service awards (recognizing years of service), exchange studies awards (such as Fulbright awards), and nominations for the state’s Those Who Excel/Teacher of the Year awards program. The school recognizes its students through praise during morning announcements, positive notes and personal praise from building administrators, positive notes to parents, Accelerated Reader recognition, and restaurant gift certificates. Additionally, students can earn points through the Accelerated Reader program, and points can be redeemed for awards from the PTO store.

Primary intervention efforts occur through East Richland Elementary’s Title I after-school tutoring program. Eligible students are recommended by teachers based on their ITBS test results, grades, reading progress, and Title I identification. The after-school program focuses on reading, writing, and mathematics remediation. Students in grades (1-5) attend one-hour tutoring sessions two to four days each week. The after-school tutoring program occurs from mid-October to the end of March. Tutoring for grades 1-2 is a very structured program providing extra reading practice, working with words, spelling practice, and writing practice. Intermediate (grades 3-5) tutoring activities include

homework assistance, math fact practice, Accelerated Reader activities, and development of prescribed reading skills.

Teachers, teacher aides, college students, and high school students can serve as tutors in the program. Preference is given to elementary teachers. In addition to after-school programming, the school also provides additional support for students not meeting exit level criteria for basic competency (as measured by ITBS and ISAT test results). These students receive assistance through remediation classes and tutoring. District and campus administrators, however, emphasize that the remediation programming at the elementary level needs to be fine tuned. A variety of school staff - including Title I teachers and teacher assistants, counselors, a behavioral specialist, supervision aides, and teachers - are also available to provide additional assistance to students during the school day. Struggling students may also be assigned a buddy from a higher grade level who provides reading and math help before or after school. Teachers at the elementary school emphasize that they work to quickly identify students needing additional assistance; ensuring students receive intervention well before report card grades are finalized.

Resource Allocation*:

	<i>E. Richland CUSD</i>	<i>Illinois</i>
Instructional Expenditure per Pupil	\$3,880	\$4,842
Operating Expenditure per Pupil	\$6,804	\$8,181
% Expenditure per Function		
Instruction	42.4	45.5
General Administration	3.2	2.5
Supporting Services	44.1	31.0
Other Expenditures	10.3	21.0

*Financial Indicators 2001-02

Other Factors Influencing Practices

Educators at East Richland Elementary believe that all children can learn but stress that learning may look different for individual students. Principals at the elementary school endorse the statement “all children can learn,” although they also emphasize that not all students learn at the same level and rate. They cite time and social issues as particular hindrances to student learning, and they add that exceptional teachers can make a real difference in learning. Teachers at the school also agree with the statement but explain that students may not learn at the same rate or be at the same level. One teacher adds that students need support, and, if they enter the classroom with the right attitude and willing to practice and work hard, then they can be successful. In discussing classroom priorities, teachers cite the provision of an environment that supports learning for all students at their own levels.

The principals of East Richland Elementary appreciate the strong working relationship with the district’s school board. The school administrators describe the school board as caring, dedicated, and professional. They assert that the board wants to do what is best for students, and board members stress the importance of meeting low-income students’ needs to schools in the district. One of the school administrators feels fortunate to have the opportunity to be innovative, attend in-service and increase her own knowledge. She has been given excellent resources and trust from the Board to implement new programs and ideas. The Board has been willing to take risks and accept recommendations from administrators. Recently, the board president received the Thomas Lay Burroughs Award, which recognizes the state’s most outstanding school board president.

District and school educators attribute their success, in part, to a positive educational climate. According to district administrators, district success is attributable to good organization and high expectations. They note that the staff and community are proud of the district’s accomplishments. School principals emphasize the effective organization and the flexible, fun, and non-threatening environment as factors in the school’s success. Teachers at the elementary school describe the school as excellent and the staff as dedicated and conscientious. They note that teachers work hard on a daily basis to ensure the school is a fun, safe place for students that supports student learning and achievement. They describe the principal as awesome, supportive, and understanding, and they report that teachers are friends both inside and outside the school.