

Whiteside Elementary School

Whiteside School District 115

School Context

Whiteside School District 115, located in southwest Illinois about 17 miles from St. Louis, Missouri, consists of one elementary school and one middle school with a total enrollment of 1,146 students. The district serves Scott Air Force Base and has a predominantly white and African-American student population with a low-income rate of 44.7 percent. Whiteside Elementary serves few English Language Learners (0.9%) compared to the state average (6.3%). Although district staff reports being challenged by a high rate of student mobility, the district's mobility rate (17.1%) is not much higher than the state average (16.4%). Whiteside is a small school district, which makes it possible to operate successfully without having many formal processes and structures in place.

Curriculum and Academic Goals

The Illinois Learning Standards form the basis of the curriculum. Administrators define the curriculum as larger than the standards, but the emphasis is on teaching the basics. The superintendent explains that the district did not have a written curriculum until eight years ago, when a curriculum committee consisting of district and school administrators and teachers representing each grade level was formed. The committee took the state standards, laid out what the teachers were currently doing, and then looked at what was missing. The committee also studied the vertical alignment to identify curricular holes and repetition.

This process resulted in curriculum maps for each subject taught in grades K-8 that outline in which grades certain skills need to be introduced, mastered and expanded upon with the corresponding Illinois Learning Standards. Every teacher has a binder with this information in his/her classroom. Although the curriculum is based on the state-standards, teachers also rely heavily on the textbook series that the district adopts. Whiteside's focus is on the basics; the principal frequently talks about "hitting the three R's pretty hard." The curriculum committee continues to meet at the beginning of the school year to make sure everybody is on the same page and twice a semester during the school year to evaluate successes and identify curricular gaps. Multi-grade level meetings are held twice a year to ensure vertical alignment and consistency. Teachers also meet in horizontal teams every month to ensure appropriate scope and sequence of the curriculum.

Student mobility is a challenge for ensuring students move successfully through the district curriculum. The superintendent and several teachers point out that many students come into the district without the necessary skills for their grade level. Students who do stay at Whiteside for the whole year, are ready for the next grade level. Until last year, the entire district operated out of one building, which made for an easy transition from elementary to middle school.

Student Demographics*:

	<i>Whiteside EI</i>	<i>Whiteside SD</i>	<i>Illinois</i>
% Low Income	44.7	34.7	37.9
% Limited English-Proficient	0.9	0.6	6.3
% Mobility	18.5	17.1	16.4
Student Ethnic/Racial Distribution			
% White	50.6	51.3	58.6
% African-American	44.8	44.5	20.7
% Hispanic	1.5	1.5	17.0
% Asian/Pacific Islander	2.7	2.4	3.6
% Native American	0.4	0.3	0.2

Staff members at the district and school level criticize the number and the quality of the state standards for the sciences. The superintendent thinks that the standards for mathematics and reading are appropriate, but that there are too many standards per grade level for the sciences, allowing teachers to touch only briefly on what needs to get covered. According to the principal the standards sometimes “go a little overboard.” In his view, teachers should not teach to the test but “teach what children need to know.” The staff members who were interviewed all feel it is unrealistic to think that all students can have some kind of assessment tied to the Illinois Learning Standards. They feel that the assessments for special needs students should be tied to their Individualized Education Plans.

Staff Selection and Capacity Building

The size of the district allows for less formal staff recruitment and selection. The relationship Whiteside has as a Professional Development School with Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville is important for the recruitment and selection of teachers. In the past few years, several student teachers have been hired as faculty members in the year following their internship. The students are considered as another professional in the classroom and are already a part of the team, negating the need for a formal recruitment process. For the principal position, the superintendent and the principal of the middle school recommend candidates to the Board for interviews. Teachers are involved in the early stages of the selection process as well. The principal interview process includes a written component on the candidate’s vision of the ideal classroom as well as his/her previous experience to ensure the selection of a strong instructional leader.

Whiteside School District supports and expects teachers to collaborate; Whiteside Elementary teachers rely on collaboration to improve their teaching. Teachers from the same grade level meet daily at a common planning time and get together in a weekly meeting to share ideas and materials. Teachers interviewed say this is especially helpful when there are new people on the team. Faculty members work in cross-grade level and subject matter teams to improve curriculum and instructional delivery. Teachers also initiate opportunities to work together themselves. Every new teacher has an experienced tenured teacher as a mentor. The special education coordinator talks about the good working relationship between regular and special education in the district. Several regular teachers also have Masters degrees in special education and “there is no place with any negativity towards mainstreaming.”

Professional development at Whiteside School District consists primarily of the courses offered by the St. Clair County Regional Office of Education (ROE). Whiteside School District does not engage outside experts for professional development on its own. The district pays for the classes offered by the Regional Office of Education and gives up to three days a year for professional development. The district also pays for teachers to go back to school or to take Masters courses. First year teachers receive an extra fifty dollars to equip their classroom if they attend the workshop the ROE organizes for them at the beginning of the school year.

Teacher Demographics*:

	<i>Whiteside EI</i>	<i>Whiteside SD</i>	<i>Illinois</i>
Average Teaching Experience	--	13.7	13.9
% of Teachers with Bachelors Degrees	--	58.1	53.9
% of Teachers with Master’s Degrees	--	41.9	46.0
% of Teachers with Emergency or Provisional Credentials	1.0	0.7	2.5
% of Classes Not Taught by Highly Qualified Teachers	0.0	0.0	2.1

Instructional Programs, Practices and Arrangements

The curriculum is determined in large measure by the textbook series the district adopts; the Illinois Learning Standards are incorporated in the series. Single series are adopted for most subjects, but many many teacher created lessons are also used in all subject areas by all teachers. The K-6 writing program is the only place where a method developed by a writing specialist at the Regional Office of Education was adopted instead of a textbook.

Textbook Series*:

Subject	Series
Mathematics	Scott-Foresman Addison Wesley
Reading	SRA Open Court (recently adopted)
Science (K-3)	Holt Science
Science (4)	HBJ Science Anytime
Social Studies (K-3)	Silver Burdett
Social Studies (4)	MacMillan/McGraw-Hill

The state accountability system directs the instructional focus to subjects to be tested. While some teachers say that the state accountability system has not changed the instructional practices at Whiteside, others indicate that there is an increased emphasis on the subject matter that is to be tested as state standardized testing dates approach and that this is stressful for students. Whiteside Elementary does not have a set policy for the amount of instructional time that is spent in core content areas. There is a double block of English Language Arts each day, all other subjects are taught for a single period.

Students are grouped heterogeneously in grades K-5. Whiteside Elementary tries to mainstream students as much as possible and encourages inclusion. Teachers from the previous year help group students for the next year to ensure a balanced mix.

Whiteside has an extensive Character Education program. Character Cabinet is a program in which a group of older elementary students develop character education lessons for early childhood learners. The students plan and present lessons based on the character word of the month. At the beginning of the school year, teachers teach the lesson 'trace the traits'. In this lesson students trace the outline of the body of a student and write what they want to happen inside it and what they do not want to happen outside of it. The poster is hung up in the classroom for reference during the school year. The Value Tale Series and other books specifically address character traits such as responsibility, respect and honesty. The emphasis on character development is seen throughout the school. Hallways are named after certain characteristics, for example Respect Boulevard, Wisdom Way, Peace Parkway, Integrity Lane, etc.. Classes that exhibit good lunchroom manners are rewarded, as are individual students.

Instructional Information*:

	<i>Whiteside EI</i>	<i>Whiteside SD</i>	<i>Illinois</i>
Pupil/Teacher Ratio	—	20.4	18.4
Average class size			
- Grade K	23.6	23.6	20.6
- Grade 1	22.5	22.5	21.3
- Grade 3	24.8	24.8	22.5
Time devoted to teaching core subjects (minutes/day in grade 3):			
- Mathematics	60	60	56
- Science	20	20	30
- English/ Language Arts	174	174	146
- Social Science	20	20	31

Monitoring: Compilation, Analysis and Use of Data

The administration monitors student performance by analyzing achievement data overall and by subgroup. Students take the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) in the fall; the results are used to set priorities for the coming school year. Teacher developed assessments are administered quarterly to monitor the progress of students towards the state standards. Teachers also rely heavily on the assessment materials that accompany the new reading series, SRA Open Court Reading. Progress reports and report cards are sent home four times a year to keep parents informed of student progress and behavior. All subgroups made Adequate Yearly Progress during the 2002-03 school year. The superintendent points out that, while progress is being made, an achievement gap still exists between white and African-American students and between low-income and not low-income students.

Teacher evaluations are tightly aligned to the Illinois Learning Standards. The science curriculum includes a checklist with all the topics that need to be covered throughout the school year. Teachers need to list the dates on which these topics were addressed in their classroom and indicate the number of students who have exceeded, met or not met the standards in each category to demonstrate compliance with Whiteside and Illinois Learning Standards. The teacher evaluation process was developed with union groups. Teachers complete a pre-observation worksheet focused on addressing the state standards, aligning lessons to standards and assessing student achievement on the standards prior to a scheduled classroom observation. Teacher evaluations are not explicitly tied to student data. Tenured teachers are formally monitored every other year. The principal also drops in regularly for more informal evaluations. There is no formal principal evaluation process. The superintendent, not the Board, evaluates the principal in a narrative way.

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

<i>Whiteside EI</i>	2001-02	2002-03
Grade 3		
Reading	72.6	70.4
Mathematics	86.8	84.8
Writing	72.1	72.4
Grade 4		
Science	74.3	84.6
Social Science	77.2	78.6
Grade 5		
Reading	63.8	61.7
Mathematics	67.0	72.9
Writing	71.0	73.8

Recognition, Intervention and Adjustments

Recognition programs at Whiteside Elementary School focus on character rather than academic performance. Character Plus Kids is a program that recognizes children who have good work habits and who are good citizens. Each quarter a special event is planned (usually a video and snacks) that all Character Plus Kids may attend. Any classroom that does not have any checkmarks with regard to the lunchroom rules during one week can display a Silver Spoon outside the classroom for the following week. Student accomplishments are also highlighted in the Whiteside District Newsletter. The middle school started to participate in the National Junior Honor Society last year.

Intervention strategies for students who are not working at grade level are widely available. The administration noted that African-American students scored under state averages on 8th grade mathematics and quickly implemented PLATO for skills development. Many student intervention programs at Whiteside involve the use of additional staff and volunteers. Struggling students are pulled out for reading and math. The school has an after school tutoring program where volunteers work on reading improvement. Accelerated Reader is available in the library for students to work on language arts skills. A staff member works with English Language Learners separately.

Classroom aides provide additional classroom support in Kindergarten classes and special education resource rooms. A Student Assistance Program helps teachers deal with students with behavioral problems. The social worker works with individual students, pull out groups and classroom groups every day. A retired teacher comes in two days per week to work with pull out groups of accelerated students.

Other Factors Influencing Practices

Whiteside district enjoys a good relationship with their staff and the community. Both district and school staff comment on the positive school climate and the presence of a strong faculty that works diligently for students. Despite a lower expense rate, resources seem to be adequate to provide sound instruction to all children. According to the superintendent the district has not compromised what the teachers can do. The nature of activities has changed; there is more focus on what is going to be tested. The relationship with the School Board is very positive. The superintendent describes the Board as a highly educated, very knowledgeable group that understands their role and does not try to micromanage. They are interested in programs and appreciative of the teachers. Whiteside makes a serious effort to communicate with parents, but teachers say there is not a lot of parental involvement and only little support from parents in the classroom. A district newsletter is sent home monthly. Parents receive copies of the Iowa Test of Basic Skills and the Illinois Standards Achievement Test reports. Each week students take home a folder containing all their graded work for parents to sign. The school holds parent teacher conferences twice a year with 90% participation. Booster Clubs assist with extra-curricular activities and fundraising as needed.

Resource Allocation*:

	<i>Whiteside SD</i>	<i>Illinois</i>
Instructional Expenditure per Pupil	\$3,911	\$4,842
Operating Expenditure per Pupil	\$6,425	\$8,181
% Expenditure per Function		
Instruction	27.1	45.5
General Administration	1.9	2.5
Supporting Services	18.2	31.0
Other Expenditures	52.7	21.0

*Financial Indicators 2001-02