

BELL PUBLIC SCHOOL
This is Our Story

THE CHALLENGE

Bell Public School is a rural, isolated school located in Adair County, Oklahoma. Bell serves 101 Pre-K through 8th grade students with 13 certified teachers. Demographically, the student population consists of more than 90% Native American with the percentage of students qualifying for free/reduced lunch fluctuating from 86% to 100%. The district poverty rate is 46% with the average household income of \$23,522 and 59% have less than a 12th grade education.

In the early years of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), Bell achieved Adequately Yearly Progress (AYP). However, poor attendance identified Bell as a “low performing” school. The following term, Bell qualified for “Safe Harbor” in academic scores, but not in attendance. The next evaluation of student performance revealed a drop in academic scores. Bell was now in “School Improvement.”

THE APPROACH

The Oklahoma State Department of Education (OSDE) assigned our school a School Support Team led by a retired educator. The team consisted of an OSDE employee, a special education specialist, and an elementary principal. The team visited Bell three times each year. During the team visits, the members observed classrooms, and interviewed stakeholders (teachers, parents, students, and staff). In addition, the team also reviewed documents and evaluated classroom materials and assessments. The team never dictated specific methods or programs; they made suggestions and brought ideas from other schools. The team became our strong supporters. The words, “We just want to share this with you” became a signal that here was something worth our efforts. As outside observers, the team recognized many things that we had not even noticed. The valuable, worthwhile suggestions offered by the OSDE School Support Team facilitated Bell School in meeting both academic and attendance challenges by changing the culture and expectations of the stakeholders.

The OSDE School Support Team heavily influenced administrators and teachers. Prior to the team’s visits, our classrooms were isolated entities. Teachers were teaching, but the curriculum was not aligned to the *Priority Academic Student Skills (PASS)*. The team’s initial assessment was daunting. During this time, the administration changed, and there was a turnover of the faculty. We recognized our deficiencies, and we depended upon the School Support Team to help us overcome our challenges. Every team visit brought us new concepts, which were based on research-driven data, and the staff

Key Actions Taken at Bell:

- Hired a new superintendent to lead turnaround efforts
- Provided targeted teacher professional development
- Implemented Building Academic Vocabulary initiative
- Built relationships with expert educators through the School Support Teams and What Works in Schools
- Implemented benchmark assessments and developed strong leadership team focused on data-driven interventions
- Focused on parent and

diligently worked to implement these new strategies and interventions.

Benchmark testing and the work of Dr. Robert Marzano were frequent topics. We attended every OSDE conference designed to help struggling schools. Contact with other schools that had conquered their challenges and had succeeded in “getting off the list” gave us a goal. The teachers said, “That will be Bell. Other schools and organizations will be asking Bell how we did it!”

Professional development during this time was intensive. All staff members were required to attend our professional development activities. Evaluation teams observed classrooms in order to document the use of strategies and interventions. The teachers played a vital role in Bell’s success. The teachers set goals and worked together to achieve the goals.

Prior to the OSDE School Support Team visits and assistance, parents did not take an active role in their children’s education. There was not any positive parental support. In fact, there was a feeling of the parents versus the school. During our parent-teacher conferences, as few as five parents would attend. Now we have as many as forty-five parents as well as some very interested and involved grandparents at our parent-teacher conferences.

THE RESULTS

Our student achievement has been most rewarding. We set our goal to make “Safe Harbor” in academics and to reach 92% in attendance. It was thrilling to learn that Bell achieved the greatest academic growth for schools of our size in the entire state of Oklahoma! Now, good classroom grades throughout the year are the norm and not a rarity. Students actually discuss what is going on in their classrooms with other students!

Every activity, intervention, strategy, or program was based on research-driven data. Administrators and teachers may search for methods or programs, but when the OSDE School Support Team said, “We have seen this work,” their endorsement helped us believe that it could work for us. The team’s observations helped us discover our ineffective practices that we might have ignored. Bell School would recommend the OSDE School Support Team to any school suffering difficulties or facing challenges. Where else could anyone find the combined experience of this team of professionals?

Bell's Academic Performance Index (API) Results

Attendance, mathematics, and reading are scored on a scale of 0-1500 for each school site and district. The graphs below show Bell's API for each year in comparison to the state targets.

