Community Consolidated School District 15

Community Consolidated School District 15 (D15) is a kindergarten through eighth-grade public school system serving 12,390 students in all or part of seven municipalities in Palatine, Ill., a northwestern Chicago suburb. Its student population includes 37.5 percent minority students and 32.5 percent at the low-income level. Approximately 32 percent of D15’s students come from non-English-speaking backgrounds; 72 different languages are spoken in the homes of its students. The school district has 14 kindergarten through sixth-grade schools, three junior high schools, and one alternative school. D15 operates the schools and its own transportation, maintenance, technology, and food services departments on a budget of $146.9 million, with a workforce of 1,898 faculty and staff led by Superintendent Robert A. McKanna.

World-Class Learning

For D15, “good enough” is not good enough. The district’s mission is to produce world-class learners who achieve exemplary levels of understanding in academics and who can compete with any student around the globe. D15 has laid out six key goals that must be accomplished to achieve its mission: providing their students with 21st-century skills, including accessing and understanding information, communication, comprehensive reading and understanding, problem-solving, and human relations skills; promoting world-class achievement; developing a connected learning community; ensuring a caring, safe, and orderly learning environment; maintaining a high-performing staff; and implementing an aligned and integrated management system.

To most effectively help all students in its diverse population achieve success, D15 has implemented a wide array of programs, including intensive reading intervention programs in kindergarten, first grade, and second grade; the Soar to Success program to accelerate reading growth for children in grades three through six; and Read 180, which combines technology with high-interest, age-appropriate print materials for children in junior high and targeted elementary schools. Programs for English Language Learners include bilingual or English-as-a-Second-Language classes and one-on-one or small group sessions.

As a result of these programs, many students are now meeting goals and improving at an increased rate. In the 2002-03 school year, results from a nationally normed test, the Iowa Test of Basic Skills, showed that 84 percent of D15’s second-grade students were reading at or above grade level, nearly 35 percentage points above the national average.

From 2001-02 to 2002-03, eighth-grade students’ “enthusiasm for learning,” a key performance target, increased from 42 percent to 82 percent for reading, from 50 percent to 80 percent for math, and from 42 percent to 82 percent for science.

Turnover rate for certified staff was 11.7 percent for 2002-03, compared to a national average of 20 percent.

At a cost per percentage point of student performance on state learning standards tests of $111.93, the district outperformed its three comparison districts, which ranged from $118.57 to $122.36.

Highlights

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Reaching for the Stars

D15 uses some unusual means to inspire its earthbound students to learn about science and technology, including a school bus converted into a “space shuttle”; mission control simulations; a Discovery Learning Center for earth science and geology; and involvement in actual space shuttle missions. Since 1996, junior high students with learning disabilities have participated in a week-long competition at the NASA Space Camp in Huntsville, Ala., against non-disabled and gifted students from throughout the nation. During these seven years, the D15 students have finished first in at least one of four competition areas.

In fact, the overall rate at which D15 special education students are meeting goals and exiting the special education program has shown steady improvement since 1998-99, reaching approximately 14 percent in 2002-03—significantly higher than both national and state comparisons of about 5 percent. For English Language Learners, the exit rate has increased from 8 percent in 1998-99 to approximately 15 percent in 2002-03 exceeding state and local comparisons. In one group of kindergarten students, 18 percent required intervention services when entering school in 2001, but this number was reduced to 1 percent by the 2003-04 school year.

Special education students are showing improved performance, a trend seen throughout the district. D15 students have met or exceeded state standards of learning as assessed through the Illinois Standards Achievement Test, given in grades three, five, and eight for reading and math, and in grades four and seven for science and social studies. The district equaled or outperformed its comparison district at all levels and in all subjects from 1998-99 through 2001-02. In addition, in 2002-03, performance in third-grade math exceeded the 90 percent target and approached the state’s top 3 percent benchmark. In addition, grade five math, grade seven science, and grade three reading near the 90 percent target.

D15 third- and eighth-grade gifted students participating in the 2001-02 World-Class Tests for math and problem solving had a higher pass percentage rate than those from the other countries participating: the United Kingdom, Australia, Hong Kong, and New Zealand.

Changing Their World

Critical to producing world-class learners is a dedicated, high-performing team of professionals, including teachers, administrators, and support staff. Highly qualified teachers, as defined in the Illinois criteria for meeting the federal “No Child Left Behind” legislation, teach 100 percent of the district’s classes, and the number of its teachers who have achieved National Board Certification has increased from two in 1994-95 to 48 in 2002-03, the second-highest number achieved National Board Certification has increased from 1994-95 to 48 in 2002-03, the second-highest number. The district has developed innovative means of assessing student performance, a trend seen throughout the district. D15 students have met or exceeded state standards of learning as assessed through the Illinois Standards Achievement Test, given in grades three, five, and eight for reading and math, and in grades four and seven for science and social studies. The district equaled or outperformed its comparison district at all levels and in all subjects from 1998-99 through 2001-02. In addition, in 2002-03, performance in third-grade math exceeded the 90 percent target and approached the state’s top 3 percent benchmark. In addition, grade five math, grade seven science, and grade three reading near the 90 percent target.

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