

Great Ideas for Great Public Schools

CALIFORNIA

Struggling school transformed by more resources, professional development, smaller classes

Teachers, school staff, and administrators have **used a collaborative approach and research-supported strategies to boost achievement** at John Muir Elementary School in Merced, California. In 2010, John Muir scored an 806 on the California Academic Performance Index (API) and made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for the first time in eight years. The school, where 86 percent of students qualify for free- or reduced-price lunch and 25 percent are English-language learners, was one of only four schools in the Merced City School District to exceed 800 on the API—a dramatic turnaround. In 2005, John Muir had scored 650 on the API and was considered one of the lowest performing schools in Merced.

Background

- The Quality Education Investment Act (QEIA) of 2006 helped John Muir succeed.
- QEIA is infusing nearly \$3 billion over seven years into 488 low-performing schools throughout California.
- John Muir has used QEIA funds for proven reforms such as increased collaboration, professional development, and smaller classes.
- QEIA exists thanks to advocacy by the California Teachers Association, a major sponsor and supporter of the law.

Creating a collaborative culture

- John Muir raised student achievement by focusing on helping teachers improve their skills and work together more effectively, not firing teachers and hiring replacements.
- Most of the instructional staff has stayed the same. “All across the district, we are talked about as a school where people come and stay,” said reading interventionist Lisa Van Elswyk.
- The school focused on helping teachers improve and work more effectively together.
- Collaboration is built into teachers’ schedules. QEIA pays for substitutes to cover classes during collaboration sessions where faculty meet, share data, and present summaries of effective lessons they’ve recently delivered.

- First- and second-grade teachers have a book club where they discuss texts on improving instruction. “We believe our students can learn, and we work to develop relationships with our students and families so that they believe as well,” said fifth-grade teacher Teresa Pitta. “We celebrate each and every bit of growth.”

Making professional development a priority

- Using QEIA funds, John Muir hosted a week of teacher training before the start of the school year. The focus was developing academic programs for English-language learners and aligning state standards with a new math textbook.
- Nine John Muir teachers are University of California, Merced Writing Project fellows who mentor other teachers in writing instruction.

Focusing on class size

- John Muir uses QEIA funds to keep class sizes small, even as budget cuts are causing class sizes to balloon throughout the state.
- K-3 classrooms have a maximum of 20 students, and fourth- and fifth-grade classrooms have a maximum of 25 students.

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NEA web site: *Reaping the Fruits of Collaboration at Muir Elementary*, <http://bit.ly/etI9S8/>



Great Public Schools for Every Student