



Hispanic Students in Nebraska Post Impressive Gains with NIFDI Support

Students at Schuyler Elementary, a school in Eastern Nebraska with a large Hispanic population, have demonstrated incredible improvements in academic achievement over the past few years. In 2009-10, less than half (44%) of Schuyler’s third graders met the state standards as measured by the Nebraska State Assessment (NeSA), and only three students exceeded the state standards. Last year, 2010-11, 67% of Schuyler’s third graders achieved passing scores, with eight percent of the students exceeding the state standards.

How does Schuyler compare to the rest of the state?

Students at Schuyler Elementary have made significant progress in closing the achievement gap between their performance and the average performance of schools around the state. In 2010, Schuyler’s third graders scored 21 points below the state average in reading. The next year, however, third graders at Schuyler Elementary posted scores 23 points higher, coming within two points of the statewide average score of 71. Similar results took place in fourth grade where Schuyler’s students narrowed the gap between the school and the state from 26 points to 15 (see Figure 1).

Average Scores on Nebraska State Accountability (NeSA) Test in Reading - All Students

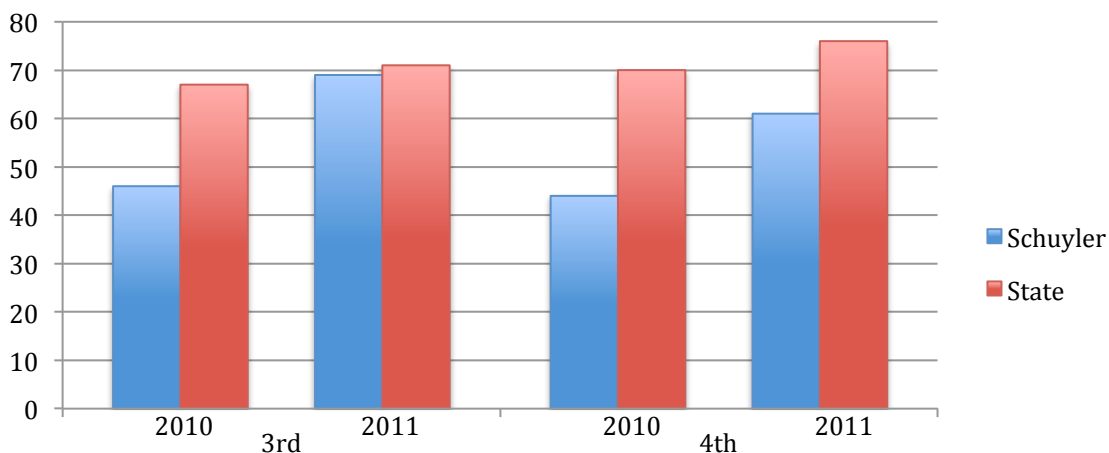


Figure 1



How well did Hispanic students score?

Driving these gains is the progress made by Schuyler's Hispanic students, who *comprise nearly ninety percent of the school's population* (see Figure 2). In 2009-10, a mere 39% of Schuyler's Hispanic students in 3rd grade passed the NeSA. Not a single one exceeded. Last year, in 2010-11, 57% of 3rd grade Hispanic students met and eight percent exceeded the standards, totaling 65% of the school's Hispanic population in 3rd grade meeting or exceeding the rigorous state assessment goals (see Figure 3).

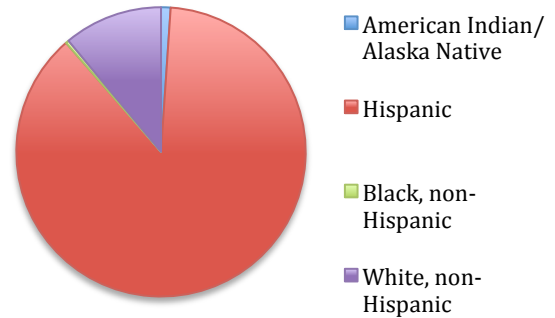


Figure 2

Performance of Hispanic Students at Schuyler Elementary on Nebraska State Assessment (NeSA) 3rd Grade Reading

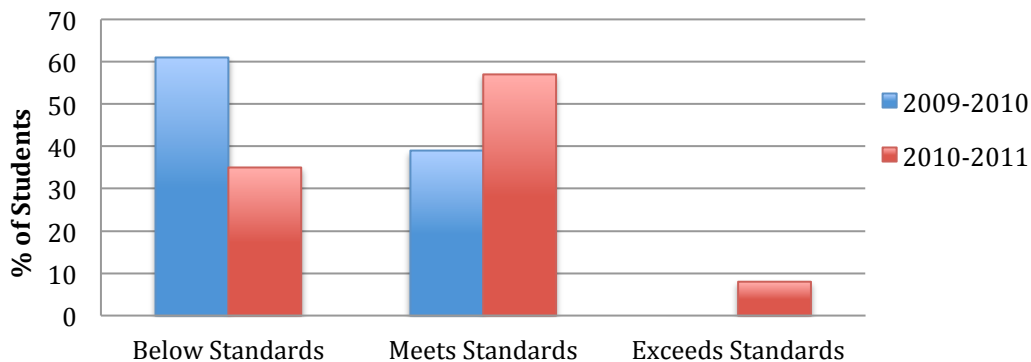


Figure 3

How has Schuyler achieved such positive results?

In 2008-09, Schuyler Elementary began implementing Direct Instruction (DI) with support from the National Institute for Direct Instruction (NIFDI). Bill Comley, co-principal at Schuyler Elementary, attributes the school's success primarily to the professional development and coaching support provided by NIFDI. "The professional development and on-site support NIFDI provides is critical in preparing teachers to teach our students effectively and implement the program with fidelity," Comley says. "Their staff knows the ins and outs of the program and ensures we learn them, too, so that our students can experience the greatest success possible."



SCHUYLER ELEMENTARY

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Darli Jo Vrba, Comley's co-principal, also noted one particularly relevant element of the program itself – the language component. Principal Vrba explained that providing the students with an introduction and practice in essential language skills was vital to students' success in school. “It helps students to hear and understand what language should actually sound like versus the language they hear on the street,” she says. “It gives children the tools to learn, not just the ability to speak. They were already able to speak independently quite well.”

Principal Comley also attributed students' impressive improvement to the weekly data analysis and problem-solving sessions with NIFDI. Each week, student performance data in the Reading Mastery curriculum is reviewed by NIFDI consultants. Based on the data, the consultants, along with school staff, make changes in the students' instructional programming including advancing students in the curriculum and/or providing additional support to students who need assistance in mastering the skills. This unique feature of NIFDI support is vital to a successful implementation of DI.

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Ms. Vrba shared her co-administrator's sentiments and added that the Coaches' Training and conference calls provided by NIFDI has built highly skilled literacy coaches in their school. She says, “NIFDI spends a lot of time ensuring coaches are strong in the programs so they can continue the implementation when NIFDI isn't here. This implementation wouldn't have happened without the support of NIFDI and our teacher's buy-in, which only came after NIFDI showed such care and enthusiasm for Direct Instruction and how it could help our students.”

The results at Schuyler are consistent with other schools with large Hispanic populations that have implemented the NIFDI model. Schools in both Crete and Gering, Nebraska have enjoyed similar results after implementing Direct Instruction with support from NIFDI. To learn more about Gering's story of how they implemented DI successfully to improve student outcomes, view the video, *Closing the Performance Gap*, online at <http://www.nifdi.org/15/videos/91>.