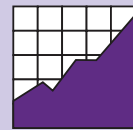


MOVING YOUR NUMBERS

Val Verde Unified School District: Achievement Profile

*Using Assessment and Accountability
to Increase Performance for
Students With Disabilities
as Part of District-wide
Improvement*



**NATIONAL
CENTER ON
EDUCATIONAL
OUTCOMES**

In collaboration with:

Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO)
National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE)

Supported by:

U.S. Office of Special Education Programs



ABOUT MOVING YOUR NUMBERS

Moving Your Numbers: Improving Learning for Students with Disabilities as Part of District-wide Reform, examines how school districts with vastly different demographics increase the performance of students with disabilities and other at-risk learners as part of whole-district reform efforts. Case studies of featured districts, as described in the full report, provide evidence that students with disabilities, like all other students, can learn at higher levels when adults focus their collective efforts on improving instructional practice, consistently implement core work across the district, and use assessment and accountability as a lever for ongoing system and student learning and improvement.

Moving Your Numbers identifies six essential practices that must be in place to improve the performance of students with disabilities. Evidence suggests that these six practices, when used in an aligned and coherent manner, are associated with higher student achievement. These practices are *use data well*, *focus your goals*, *select and implement shared instructional practices (individually and collectively)*, *implement deeply*, *monitor and provide feedback and support*, and *inquire and learn*.

Moving Your Numbers was initiated and is supported through the National Center on Educational Outcomes (NCEO) under the leadership of Dr. Martha Thurlow, NCEO Director; Rachel Quenemoen, NCEO Senior Research Fellow; and Dr. Laurene Christensen, NCEO Research Associate. Dr. Deborah Telfer, Director, School of Education and Allied Professions Grant Center, University of Dayton, coordinates the development and review of *Moving Your Numbers* on behalf of NCEO. NCEO was established in 1990 to provide national leadership in designing and building educational assessments and accountability systems that appropriately monitor educational results for all students, including students with disabilities and English Language Learners (ELLs).

Photographs used in this publication have been provided courtesy of the districts featured and the Ohio Department of Education.

Additional case studies of featured districts will be added to the *Moving Your Numbers* website as they are developed. Go to www.MovingYourNumbers.org for the complete report and additional tools and resources, and to submit success stories.

NCEO is supported primarily through Cooperative Agreements (#H326G050007, #H326G11002) with the Research to Practice Division, Office of Special Education Programs, U.S. Department of Education. Additional support for targeted projects, including those on ELL students, is provided by other federal and state agencies. The Center is affiliated with the Institute on Community Integration in the College of Education and Human Development, University of Minnesota. Opinions expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect those of the U.S. Department of Education or Offices within it.

Val Verde Unified School District: Achievement Profile

Perris, California

“It has been said that the Val Verde Unified School District should be in program improvement and facing state and federal sanctions based on our demographics, but nothing could be further from the truth,” said Assistant Superintendent for Educational Services Michael McCormick. In fact, 20 of the district’s 21 schools “continue to demonstrate strong academic growth across all grade levels and for all groups of students,” he added. Approximately 72 percent of the district’s student population is comprised of Hispanic students, and close to a fourth of all students is classified as English Language Learners (ELL). According to staff, the district has the highest rate in southern California of children living in foster care, group homes, or multiple family homes, and over three quarters of the district’s students live in poverty. But the teachers, principals, central office staff members, and classified staff who constitute the Val Verde Unified School District (VVUSD) community look beyond the numbers and believe, as a group, that their job is to cherish and prepare each student. “For every single child, regardless of race, creed, or disability, our job is to give them the skills to be able to work, to be a productive member of society, and to make a difference in the world, no matter where they start,” said Dr. Michelle Richardson, Assistant Superintendent for Business Services.

Val Verde Unified School District Demographics

Total Enrollment: 19,700
% Students Identified as Students with Disabilities: 9
% Students Identified as Economically Disadvantaged: 80
% Students Identified as Minority: 94
% Students Identified as English Language Learners: 24
% Students Identified as Talented/Gifted: 13



Located in the heart of what is known as the Inland Empire, VVUSD encompasses a 67 square mile area in a predominantly rural, but increasingly suburban, region of Riverside County. The district serves children in 21 schools (12 elementary schools, 4 middle schools, 4 high schools, and one alternative high school). Riverside County is home to more than one million residents, is the fourth largest county in the state, and is situated directly east of the Los Angeles metropolitan area, extending from within 14 miles of the Pacific Ocean to the Colorado River.¹

KEEPING THE FIRST THINGS FIRST

In 2007, VVUSD’s special education scores failed to meet academic growth targets, scoring low on the state’s Academic Performance Index (API). However, by 2010, the API score reflected tremendous growth for students with disabilities as evidenced by a 69 percent increase, from 488 to 706. In 2011, all elementary schools scored about 800 on the API with two of them scoring well above 850 (*The Special Edge*, Spring 2012). McCormick visits each of the district’s 850 classrooms annually and observed that “going into the classrooms across the district reminds us what the real work is about, and forces us to reflect back on the decisions we make and keep the first things first, which is what’s happening in our classrooms across the district,” said McCormick.

Focus Your Goals. Ensuring that all staff members across the district are prepared to implement the district’s agreed on strategies, and holding all adults and students to high expectations, are fundamental to keeping the first things first. To that end, VVUSD organizes its work to achieve five district goals, which they characterize as their commitment to achieve specific, measurable or observable results that exceed the present capacity of the district through a broad district-wide focus.

¹ Riverside County California at www.countyofriverside.us

These goals include the following:

- (1) Students in our District shall achieve Proficient or Advanced in core subjects as measured by State and/or Benchmark assessments;
- (2) We will work with ALL stakeholders to achieve and maintain fiscal solvency;
- (3) We will build and maintain schools that are clean, safe, and designed for learning;
- (4) We will attract, hire, and retain highly qualified and motivated employees; and
- (5) We will maintain legal and programmatic compliance in all areas: Education Services, Student Services, Human Resources and Business Services.



Val Verde Unified School District

OUR BELIEFS

Our Fundamental Core Values

WE believe that:

- Students are our first priority
- All students can learn
- Students benefit from family and community support
- High expectations improve performance
- Every individual has the power to make a profound difference in the life of another

“We don’t develop programs in isolation,” explained Special Education Coordinator Troy Knudsvig. In fact, the district has been intentional in identifying several key areas of work, such as establishing a rigorous curriculum, and using assessment to drive instruction, all designed to assist them in focusing their collective work to support higher levels of student learning and performance. One such area involved training every teacher in an approach to designing and delivering instruction called *understanding by design*,² which teaches educators to identify desired results, determine acceptable evidence, and plan learning experiences and instruction. “From a reform perspective, we used understanding by design and heavy teacher involvement to create a tighter curriculum for the district that increased rigor and set expectations for all kids,” added McCormick.

Prior to this work, which occurred in 2005, VVUSD began focusing on literacy and adopted the Houghton Mifflin core curriculum in 2001. The commitment of district leadership to ensure that the newly adopted curriculum applied to all children was reinforced by the district’s 2007 state-funded Reading First *Special Education Teacher Professional Development* (SETPD) grant, which resulted in a mandate to replace all previously used textbooks and “special education” curricular materials and, at the same time, required each principal to sign a statement saying that all teachers would use only the core curriculum. “We wanted all of our students to have access to the same standards. This way, however they advanced, they could step right into the general education stream, because essentially they never left it...” explained Sarah Nesvold, Special Education Instructional Coach.³



“The first question we ask is, ‘do we have good instruction going on for all kids?’”

Troy Knudsvig
Special Education Coordinator

In 2007-2008, the Department of Special Education moved from Student Services to Education Services, underscoring the district’s belief that all students can learn and that high expectations improve performance. Knudsvig explains: “Unlike most other districts, the department of special education is attached to Education Services because the first question we ask is, ‘do we have good instruction going on for all kids?’”

² See Wiggins, G., & McTighe, J. (2000). *Understanding by design*. New York: Prentice Hall.

³ Source: Val Verde adapts system to serve all students. *The Special EDge*, Spring 2012, page 2.

Val Verde Unified School District
DISTRICT OPERATIONAL IMPERATIVES
(Must Do's)
The Rules We Play By

WE will:

- Make all decisions and take all actions based strictly on the best interest of the student
- Honor the dignity of each person
- Make optimal use of technology throughout the system
- Make policy and expenditure decisions that support district beliefs and goals
- Expect and support appropriate student behavior
- Expect highly effective performance from all stakeholders
- Only change or implement programs after the following:
 - A thorough cost benefit analysis
 - Participation and development by representative of all affected
 - Provisions for staff training
 - An evaluation plan

“Giving all teachers, including special education teachers, access to the same high quality instructional materials and training was a catalyst for promoting general education-special education connections and setting common expectations,” said Richardson. “We’re very prescriptive and directive across the district in making sure core work is implemented and all staff, including new people, are given training and get the same information,” she added.

The belief in high expectations applies to all staff, as well as all children. “We value all of our students and this comes from the top down and translates into expectations for all teachers and departments,” remarked Carla de la Torre, English Language Learner Coordinator and former special education teacher for the district. “Special education never does its own thing; we are all responsible to know how to teach at higher levels of rigor and understand we teach all students,” she said.

The Education Services department identified three strategies to guide its work in meeting district objectives, all of which a focus on building the capacity of the district to provide strong core instruction to every student. Data analysis protocols, an

articulated instruction model (AIM), and Response to Instruction and Intervention (RtI2) are used to help develop the collective capacity of the staff to deliver high-quality instruction to all children. Ensuring that all teachers received training in using research-based instructional strategies and early intervention was supported, in part, through the SETPD grant. “The special education staff felt valued and never felt left out,” said Jeff Mossa, the district’s first Special Education Instructional Coach.

The district’s work to increase rigor, while closing the achievement gap for subgroups of students, is paying off. In 2011, VVUSD was recognized by the College Board as the **Advanced Placement District of the Year** for medium-sized districts for its work to expand access to Advanced Placement Program® (AP®) courses while maintaining/improving performance on AP exams.⁴ From 2009 to 2011, VVUSD increased student participation in AP by nine percent annually, increased the percentage of

students earning a score of 3 or higher on at least one AP Exam by 11 percent annually, and increased the percentage of traditionally underserved minority students earning a score of 3 or higher on at least one AP Exam by 13 percent annually (*California’s Val Verde Unified honored as an AP District of the Year*, College Board Connection, October 2012).

Five of the district’s elementary schools received the highly sought after California Distinguished School award and, along with another seven elementary schools in the district, also received a Title I Academic Achievement Award. Additionally, Vista

Val Verde Unified School District
EDUCATIONAL SERVICES
STRATEGIES & SPECIFIC RESULTS

How We Will Achieve Our Objectives and Reach Our Mission

STRATEGY #1:

We will develop, communicate, implement and evaluate an Education Master Plan that incorporates the use of comprehensive curriculum guides, Best First Instruction (AIM), effective assessments, and Response to Instruction and Intervention.

STRATEGY #2:

We will develop collaborative K-12 learning communities to implement and improve research-based instructional responses guided by data analysis.

STRATEGY #3:

We will implement school and community programs that promote student connectivity.

⁴ Go to <http://www.connection-collegeboard.com/home/western/1081-californias-val-verde-unified-honored-as-ap-district-of-the-year> for additional information.



Verde Middle School was one of only six middle schools in the state of California and one of 50 nationwide designated as a *Schools to Watch* school.

The district’s focused strategies guide decision making about resource use at the district level, and schools must document the ways in which spending at the site (i.e., school) level is aligned with district goals. “I’m a unique CBO because I come from the curriculum side,” said Richardson. “It’s a collaborative process in terms of making decisions about the use of funds,” she said. Richardson, who explained that three years ago VVUSD experienced a fiscal crisis and was close to being taken over by the state, credits the recent passage of a \$178 million bond to

prioritizing and focusing the work. “We looked at our data and prioritized where to put the dollars to drive the right work.” She reflected. Then, and now, the district team asks three questions when making decisions about resource use” (1) is it right for kids? (2) is it fiscally responsible? and (3) will it get us where we need to be in the long run?

Use Data Well. “I’m sad to say that it was standardized and national assessment that drove our attention to students with disabilities, but it was,” offered McCormick. Former VVUSD Director of Special Education Vicki Butler agrees that positive change resulted from the *No Child Left Behind Act*, even though it was what she called an imperfect law. “Suddenly students in special education and their scores counted. So it was easier to sell the idea of inclusion to principals and regular ed teachers and the importance of giving these students a rich curriculum,” said Butler.⁵

2012 CST RESULTS: ENGLISH-LANGUAGE ARTS										
Result Type	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
% Advanced	25	15	37	26	22	21	27	21	15	13
% Proficient	33	36	33	36	30	38	30	30	27	26
% Basic	24	33	24	28	33	28	30	32	38	35
% Below Basic	11	11	5	8	12	9	10	12	15	16
% Far Below Basic	7	5	1	2	3	4	4	5	6	10

California’s state assessment program – the *Standardized Testing and Reporting* (STAR) program –measures student progress toward meeting academic standards at each grade level, and district performance on these tests is used to calculate the Academic Performance Index (API) score. The STAR system includes the California Standards Tests (CSTs)

administered to students in grades two through 11; the *California Modified Assessment* (CMA) administered to eligible students with disabilities in grades three through 11 for the purpose of allowing them to demonstrate their knowledge of skills in the California academic content standards; and the *California Alternate Performance Assessment* (CAPA), which is individually administered to a small group of eligible students with significant cognitive disabilities who are unable to take the CSTs even with modifications.

The CAPA is aligned with the California ELA, mathematics, and science content standards, and is organized into five grade-span levels. Beginning with the class of 2006, all students were required to pass the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE) to receive a diploma.

API INDEX: VVUSD AND RIVERSIDE COUNTY		
Year	Val Verde USD	Riverside County
2012	801	781
2011	789	766
2010	781	754
2009	763	736
2008	740	722
2007	712	700

VVUSD’s development and use of a standards-based accountability system, and its focus on improving the performance and achievement of all students, has resulted in steady progress and improvement, as reflected by the district’s API score over the past six years. VVUSD was identified and studied by the California Comprehensive Center at WestEd as part of its 2011 study on *Academically Strong California Districts for Special Education*.⁶ A rigorous selection process was used to identify four districts, including VVUSD,

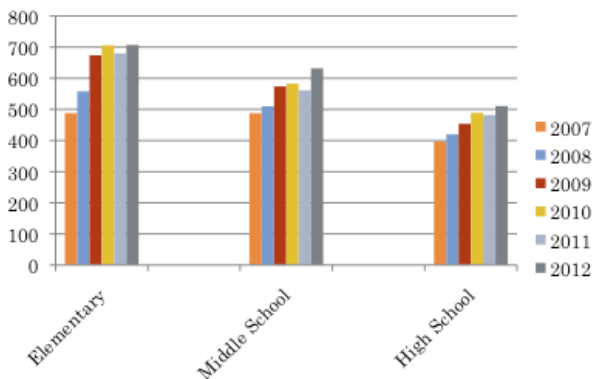
⁵ Source: Val Verde adapts system to serve all students. *The Special EDge*, Spring 2012, page 5.

⁶ Huberman, M., Navo, M., & Parrish, T. (September 2011). *Academically strong California districts for students in special education*. California Comprehensive Center at WestEd.

that evidenced higher-than-predicted academic success over four years (from 2005-06 to 2008-09) for students receiving special education services. The authors of the study noted that VVUSD and two of the other districts profiled “cited continuous use of student assessment data and RtI strategies as a way to respond to student needs and limit the number of students referred to special education.” (p. 13).

VVUSD’s API Summary scores for special education from 2007 to 2012 reflect the improvements made across all levels – elementary, middle, and high school. These data include results from children participating in the CST, as well as the CMA assessment, which Knudsvig describes as an assessment that modifies the delivery mode, but not the standards. Additionally, a very small percentage (i.e., .58 percent) of children tested participate in the CAPA, which is designed for children with significant cognitive disabilities who are unable to take the regular assessment even with modifications.

SE LONGITUDINAL DATA ACROSS GRADE CLUSTERS – ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE INDICATOR (API)



While state assessment data are used by the district to identify trends and critical needs, staff recognized that they are insufficient for making ongoing decisions about what is/is not working instructionally. “About three years ago, instructional coaches, principals and others began to analyze state test scores and look at trends across the district and what we needed to do to address our big problems,” explained McCormick. “We involved staff in analyzing wrong answers and understanding what was behind the state assessment,” he added. For example, the district identified writing as an area of need district-wide and took steps to implement several district-wide actions to address it. These included using district writing prompts in first through fourth grade, and the use of “step up to writing” across the district.

Passionately obstinate. VVUSD’s commitment to making sure every child counts influences the ways in which data are used at all levels across the district. “Our focus on looking at data is to develop our plan of attack for getting to 100 percent proficiency,” said Deborah Bryant, Director of Assessment and Accountability. “We look at horizontal and vertical skill breakdowns, provide samples to instructional coaches and principals, decide on our strategies, and take them to all teachers and classified staff. We also conduct parent trainings so parents can support their kids at home,” she said. “Teachers are passionate and obstinate about getting kids what they need,” said Marie-Antoinette McPhee, Assistant Principal of Rancho Verde High School. Knudsvig agrees, saying that “percentages don’t dictate what we do; kids’ needs drive our actions.”

VVUSD uses the *Educator’s Assessment Data Management System* (EADMS), a commercially developed web-based assessment system first developed by a California-based company in 2000. EADMS houses demographic and enrollment data, and multiple sources of academic data including district results on state assessment, district benchmark data aligned with state assessment, and assessment results from other measures (e.g., writing prompts, teacher created tests, student grades), while facilitating data collection and analysis. Instructional coaches, teachers, related services providers, and other staff can use the system to analyze results by school, classroom, and student; customize reports by standard or strand; and easily identify strengths and weaknesses. Support for the effective use of data, including the EADMS, is provided to California districts through the Electronic Learning Assessment Resource (ELAR), a service of the state supported California Learning Resource Network.



WE'VE GOT YOU COVERED: SHARED WORK, SHARED ACCOUNTABILITY

The fact that students with disabilities, like all other students, take the same assessment facilitates shared work and shared accountability among staff for the success of all students. “Everyone talking the same language is huge,” exclaimed Knudsvig.



Select and Implement Shared Instructional Practices.

“Having a common language also helps with transiency and mobility so we’re better able to meet the needs of children who move in and out of the district, or between schools in the district,” explained Jim Owen, Principal of March Middle School. The comprehensive professional development (PD) plan developed through the district’s Department of Educational Services is used to ensure that all staff members are supported in implementing agreed on priority actions. Among the “short list” of priorities is “ensuring that the district focus is maintained to reduce fragmentation within the district.” PD is provided to all staff in the effective (1) analysis of student achievement data using district developed protocols; (2) use of the articulated instruction

model for direct instruction; (3) use of research-based strategies for student engagement and English learners; and (4) use of specific interventions for behavior and academics within an RtI framework.

Leadership is viewed as a shared responsibility among administrators, teachers, other staff, and parents. Structures for facilitating ongoing learning and improvement, and for **implementing deeply** agreed on priorities, are used to overcome longstanding barriers to collective practice. “Breaking down isolated practice and raising the capacity of the entire system of 850 teachers through collaborative teaming is a substantial cost to the district, but one that is necessary for improving learning for all students,” said McCormick. Several years ago, VVUSD instituted a modified version of the *Collaborative Coaching and Learning* (CCL) model developed by the Boston Public Schools. The CCL model is a type of professional learning community through which groups of teachers analyze data, identify instructional strategies, support collective implementation of those strategies, and inform each other’s instruction.



In VVUSD, a district-level CCL comprised of district leadership and all directors reviews data from schools and discusses any issues identified by the Elementary Curriculum Committee and the Secondary Curriculum Committee with a collective eye toward improving instruction and student learning. At the school site level, multiple CCLs are established to support collaborative instruction and learning, provide demonstrations of effective teaching, work with individual teachers who may need support in specific areas, and facilitate cross-team/cross-school visits to observe effective practice. Assistant Superintendent McCormick often videotapes examples of effective instructional practice occurring in one school and shares it with other schools.

In addition to CCLs, which meet approximately six times per year in each site, grade-level/content area teacher teams meet regularly. At the elementary level, grade-level teams meet weekly, and at the secondary level, whole faculty and departmental meetings occur twice per month. Across grades K through 8, teachers meet every Wednesday, which is a “minimum” or shorter school day to allow for professional collaboration. Personnel differentiate between CCL, which includes administrators, and CC, which typically does not to encourage teachers to share and seek support. “We want teachers to be able to say, ‘I don’t know how to teach X,’ explained Bryant.



Teacher teams use a structured process – facilitated by instructional coaches – to analyze benchmark assessment, which is administered every 12 weeks at the elementary level, and every 9 weeks at the middle and high school levels. The position of instructional coach (IC), which began at the elementary level through *Reading First* grant money, was extended to K-12 and sustained by VVUSD as a district-wide priority. Each school has an IC and the special education IC works with all other ICs and special education teachers. At the same time, the district eliminated virtually all resource specialist pull-out (RSP) classes and restructured its special day classes (SDC) to operate as learning centers for students with disabilities and other at-risk students with similar learning needs. “We moved away from SDCs to learning centers because we wanted kids to be educated in their home schools, and we wanted to increase access to general education instruction in general education classrooms,” said Knudsvig. This change was consistent with the district’s strong belief, articulated by District Psychologist Dawnielle DeLongchamp, who said “every child is a general education student first.”

VVUSD maintains three SDCs for fewer than 20 students, the majority of whom have severe emotional disturbances. “No matter what level of student you have as a teacher, we’re always asking how we can bump that student up to higher levels of learning and achievement, and we’re always telling them, ‘you can do it,’” said Amber Driscoll, SDC teacher at March Middle School. Program Specialist Chris Counts, who works at the secondary level, said “just because a child is considered to have more intense needs, does not mean that student is in a self-contained class 100 percent of the time; it is not a dumping ground.”

“When we went to the LC model, behavior issues decreased,” recalled Mossa. “SDC was associated with the label of ‘those kids,’” explained Nicole Satcher, Special Education Teacher at Citrus Hill High School. “Going to the LC removed that stigma and we were able to do it because special and general education teachers worked so closely together,” she said.



Monitor and Provide Feedback and Support. VVUSD uses a variety of tactics to monitor the degree of implementation of agreed on strategies across the district, and to strengthen the skills of all staff in improving the achievement of all students. Teachers like Satcher appreciate the opportunity to collaborate with peers in other schools through monthly job-alike meetings



supported by the district as a way of providing teacher-to-teacher feedback and support. “Special education teachers teach multiple subjects and it’s good to talk with people who have taught something in another school, and to observe in other teachers’ classrooms,” said Satcher.

Feed the staff. District leadership also observes in classrooms across schools in the district, looking for trends and meeting with principals to identify ways in which central office can support instruction at the site level. Richardson explains: “There’s an umbrella here and we’ve got schools covered. If you don’t feed the teachers, they eat the students. People need feedback and they feel supported because they see us.”

Principals are expected to be instructional leaders, but so are other staff. “In my current position, I still see myself as an instructional leader,” said Richardson. Principal Jim Owen reflects: “my job hasn’t changed much in terms of being the instructional leader.

What's different here is that principals don't do their own thing. We're looking at district issues, helping each other through our own jobs-alike meetings, and there isn't the rivalry between schools that you see in other districts." "In VV, we put our money where our mouth is and we're good at developing, implementing, and monitoring what gets put into place," he added. "We have a good faith effort at the site level," said Ross Godfrey, Assistant Principal of Citrus Hill High School. "We give back to the district what's not used so it can be used in other schools in the district," he said.

Principals meet in regional clusters and assistant principals (AP) also meet monthly. Each AP has a mentor. New teachers complete an intensive orientation session upon employment and all teachers new to the district, even those who taught in other districts, are



supported through the *Beginning Teacher Support and Assistance (BTSA)* program, a state-required program for all new teachers. "In the other district I worked in, I was thrown in with another 180 teachers and had no support. I came here five years ago and the support was incredible; I'm given the opportunity to work with peers, given a buffer to go to, and given guidance when I need it," said Satcher. "I couldn't have done it without the support from the school psychologists, administrators, and other teachers," said Julie Sheline-Biarnat, who is a new SDC teacher at May Ranch Elementary School.

Ongoing support isn't limited to support for teachers. "I get support all the time from the district. Most of us don't come from a special education background, but we can always pick up the phone and call a friend in central office and they're here," said Godfrey. District Psychologist Antoinette Martinez Vallejos recalls the myriad ways that district leadership has provided support to schools. "Last year a student was killed in a car crash. The crisis response team came in, but so did the cabinet," she said. "There's a shared experience here; we all feel a part of the school community," added de la Torre.

"Relationship building is different here, from the district to the school sites, including teachers and classified staff. We're all a part of the team and that attitude carries into the classroom. Everyone knows their role in kids' lives and everyone wants to be here," said McPhee. Part of the role of principals includes frequent walk-thru observations using a common template, and weekly meetings with teachers. The purpose of the monitoring process is to gauge the degree of implementation and to give frequent feedback to teachers on the instruction being delivered. "We're also looking for evidence of certain practices such as effective differentiation to meet student needs," added Owens. The district uses iPads to facilitate the collection of data, which then get reported to the district. "We use every tool in our arsenal with adults so they can model it with kids; our kids are doing the best they can," said Richardson.

THE VAL VERDE WAY: WHERE EVERYBODY KNOWS YOUR NAME

"There's a way of doing things and then there's the Val Verde way and you get to know what that means. It's like Mayberry here and even though the population is much larger, it's the same kind of culture; everybody knows your name," observed Godfrey. The VV Way means that each member of the community is part of something important – the chance to affect the lives of children. "The culture rubs off on the kids; for many of them, the



classroom is the safest place,” said Owens. During the 2011-2012 school year, March Middle School initiated a new program to support children with autism spectrum disorders. “We wondered how the other kids would accept the children with autism and we were heartened by the degree of acceptance,” said Owens. “There wasn’t one negative word from any of the kids and we believe that was because of the expectations we set,” he added.

Inquire & Learn. School personnel, in turn, credit district leadership with setting the expectations and conditions that have supported staff members in being successful. The culture of ongoing inquiry and learning is built into every level of the system, from the district cabinet and CCL to school site teams, to interactions among instructional coaches, teachers, principals, and others. “I’ve been here 24 years and the district leadership would ask my opinion and say thank you; that doesn’t happen in other places,” said Bryant. According to Owens, the openness and clarity of vision of the top leadership of the district, and the conversation that has been allowed to occur have shaped the VVUSD culture and contributed to the district’s capacity to improve outcomes for all students. Richardson believes that the district has gone about implementation in ways that make teachers want to be a part of the system. “I get jazzed by the incredible things going on in our classrooms,” said Richardson.

“In my current position, I see myself as an instructional leader. I get jazzed by the incredible things going on in our classrooms.”

Dr. Michelle Richardson
Assistant Superintendent for Business Services

VVUSD serves as the administrative unit for the Riverside County Special Education Local Plan Area (SELPA)⁷ and is often called on by other districts interested in making improvements to their systems. While many districts send their students with disabilities to the county to receive services, VVUSD’s goal is to provide services for all students, with the possible exception of the program for Deaf and hard of hearing students, within the district. Starting in the 2012-2013 school year, VVUSD will implement its own district-developed Mental Health Services department for students with disabilities to better integrate educational and mental health services for students who need them. “We don’t develop programs in isolation,” said Knudsvig.

Advice from Val Verde Unified School District

1. Pick something feasible and do it consistently.
2. Create the vision from the district and apply it across all schools.
3. Build the capacity of every person in the district, including students, parents, family members, and staff.
4. Provide support for teachers to share with and support each other.
5. Foster conversation, communication, and collaboration at all levels.
6. Establish and use a common vocabulary to focus the work across the district.
7. Feed people – mentally, physically, emotionally – to build an exceptional system and stay true to it no matter what!
8. Don’t develop programs in isolation.
9. Follow through.

Supplementary information about VVUSD’s journey in meeting the learning needs of all students can be found by clicking on the *Additional Resources* tab. For additional information about VVUSD, contact Michael McCormick, Assistant Superintendent, Educational Services K-12, 975 West Morgan Street, Perris, CA 92571; Phone: (951) 940.6103; Fax: (951) 940.6120, or via email at: mmccormick@valverde.edu.

⁷ Mandated in 1977, California SELPAs are consortia of county agencies and school districts established to provide for all special education service needs of children residing within the regional boundaries. They facilitate high quality educational programs and services for special needs students and training for parents and educators. Source: California Department of Education.

Available *MOVING YOUR NUMBERS* Publications:

- Administrator Preparation Guide: Using Assessment and Accountability to Increase Performance for Students with Disabilities as Part of District-wide Improvement.
- District Self-Assessment Guide for Moving Our Numbers: Using Assessment and Accountability to Increase Performance for Students with Disabilities as Part of District-Wide Improvement.
- Moving Your Numbers: A Synthesis of Lessons Learned from Districts Using Assessment and Accountability to Increase Performance for Students with Disabilities as Part of District-Wide Improvement.
- **Moving Your Numbers: Five Districts Share How They Used Assessment and Accountability to Increase Performance for Students with Disabilities as Part of District-Wide Improvement.**
- Moving Your Numbers: The Critical Role of Regional Providers in Facilitating School District Capacity to Improve Achievement for Students with Disabilities.
- Moving Your Numbers: The Critical Role of SEAs in Facilitating School District Capacity to Improve Achievement for Students with Disabilities.
- Parent/Family Companion Guide: Using Assessment and Accountability to Increase Performance for Students with Disabilities as Part of District-Wide Improvement.
- Teacher Preparation Guide: Using Assessment and Accountability to Increase Performance for Students with Disabilities as Part of District-Wide Improvement.

**For More Information on
Moving Your Numbers, Contact NCEO or Visit:
movingyournumbers.org**

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