

# Effectiveness Study Series

## Case Study #5

### Clover Avenue Elementary Los Angeles, California

## Diverse Student Body Maintain High Standards with Help of The Literacy Center

Los Angeles, as the 2000 U.S. Census noted, is home to an increasing array of cultures. From south of the border, to Southeast Asia, the South Pacific and beyond, people come to the Golden State to build their dreams and ensure a better life for their children. Serving these students, mixed into an already large K-12 population, poses special challenges to public school teachers, especially at the early grade levels in literacy skills.

But Clover Avenue Elementary School, truly a “rainbow school” in terms of cultural diversity, proves that nearly all students can attain high levels of academic achievement.

Ranked at the top of California’s API (Academic Performance Index), this medium-sized K-5 school exudes vitality. More than 26 different languages might be overheard on campus. Some 35% to 40% of its students are eligible for free lunch; the remainders represent a wide range of economic backgrounds. Clover Avenue’s staff simply “expects *all* of our students to succeed,” says principal Maureen Melvold, “and then works hard to help them do so.”

Two Literacy Centers, heavily utilized within an after-school intervention program, are helping Clover Avenue retain its top-notch performance status.

### Keeping Its Top “10/10” Rank

California’s API, the state’s accountability tool, takes its data from SAT-9 test scores. Rankings, from 1 to 10, identify both low- and high-performing schools. Rewards flow to those at the top, while the lowest become eligible for special assistance now and other possible measures later.

For 2000, Clover Avenue Elementary received the top API rank (10) in comparison to both all elementary schools statewide, as well as to schools of “similar characteristics.” This 10/10 ranking makes it a High Achieving School, a designation the staff intends to maintain.

“We do have high standards and high achievement,” agrees principal Melvold. “But we also have a certain percentage of students who are not performing up to standards, and that’s why we have the Intervention program.”

Under intervention, educators target students’ weaknesses with additional instruction and skills practice, generally outside of class, as they continue to mainstream these students with their peers. The strategy appears to be working well at Clover Avenue Elementary so far.

### **“Fun” Environment Deemed Critical**

Roughly 10% to 12% of Clover’s kindergarten and first-grade students, about 35 to 40 kids, utilize The Literacy Centers during the after-hours intervention program. A few come in the mornings for an hour before school starts, but most stay after school for one hour a day, two days a week. Identified by teachers’ observations, many young participants number among the school’s 25% LEP population, while others just need more time and practice in reading and writing skills.

“We bought two complete sets of the Center, plus additional LeapPads® and a lot of the books for them,” says Melvold. This ensures that every student can make the most of those one or two hours by having access to LeapFrog SchoolHouse’s guided exercises.

In fact, Melvold explains that much of the appeal lies in how the Center physically delivers its instruction and skills practice. These are five-, six- and seven-year-olds, with short attention spans by nature. It’s tough to keep them on track with repetitive tasks, and especially asking a lot to have them come in early or stay late.

“We decided that if we were going to ask kids to stay after school,” says Melvold, “we had better provide a fun environment.” The Literacy Center really delivers on that vital fun factor, she says, due to its highly interactive LeapMats™, LeapDesks™ and LeapPads.

“Fun is especially important for the at-risk children,” she explains, “who find it hard to remain focused on the task at hand.”

Students find the Center’s three platforms “very motivating,” Clover Avenue’s principal says. They are “just plain eager” to use the materials, teachers report, and stay readily engaged doing its activities.

“Because it’s so fun, students stay very focused,” Melvold elaborates. “They feel it’s just a big game.” In reality, the LeapFrog SchoolHouse curriculum is highly targeted as well as individualized, so when students “play,” they’re actually practicing those early literacy skills in which they are weakest.

### **Virtually “Assures” Student Success**

“It is very skill specific at each level,” agrees Melvold about LeapFrog’s curriculum and activities. Each student’s study is both narrowly targeted as well as grounded in national literacy standards.

That combination appeals greatly to Clover Avenue Elementary’s three kindergarten and first-grade teachers, who have used The Literacy Centers since September 2000. They also like how the system first builds, then reinforces, the skills of students. Encouraged by positive messages, children receive immediate feedback on their practice, reducing wrong turns and wasted time, while boosting their self-confidence.

Indeed, many characteristics of The Literacy Center receive high mention from the teachers. Foremost is how its “multi-modality” approach – combining visual, auditory, kinetic and tactile learning styles – seems to create a uniquely effective instructional environment.

Both teachers and students find the system very “user friendly,” principal Melvold continues, as well as “pretty impressive” in how well it helps each student individually in mastering pre-literacy skills.

“The guidance is very thorough, very careful, and, of course, infinitely patient,” says Melvold about The Literacy Center. “It almost literally assures students of success.”