

## K-12 Case Study 2: Richardson Elementary School, Washington, DC.

Excerpt adapted from Squires, D.A. (2005) *Aligning and balancing the standards-based curriculum*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

In 1994, Ms. Marlene Guy, then principal of Richardson Elementary School in Washington, DC, wanted to implement the Balanced Curriculum process at her school. Richardson Elementary had successfully used the School Development Program (SDP), based out of the Child Study Center at Yale University, to improve the climate and parent involvement. Student achievement improved during initial implementation of SDP, and, despite serving a majority of students who were welfare eligible, the school had accomplished near grade-level scores on standardized tests given by the district. A series of half-day workshops conducted on a monthly basis provided the training for Richardson teaching staff. Two teachers were released on a part-time basis to assist other teachers at the school with implementation. Dr. Squires discussed implementation between workshops with Marlene to ensure that progress was being made and questions answered.

As implementation happened, positive results accrued. Figure A compares 1993, which was before implementation, with 1994, when the results of the first year of implementation were available. The results on the Metropolitan Achievement Tests are presented in two ways, by year and by class. The figure indicates that results were better or the same in 1994 at 1st, 2nd, 5th, and 6th grade, or four of the six grades listed. Of course, the kids attending those classes were different.

**Figure A: By Grade Test Score Results  
Richardson Elementary School  
Washington, DC.**

Grade	1993	1994
1 Reading	1.9	1.9
2 Reading	2.3	2.7
3 Reading	4.0	3.5
4 Reading	3.8	3.2
5 Reading	4.4	5.0
6 Reading	5.2	5.5

Figure B shows improvements by the same class. For example, Grade 1 scored at 1.9 during 1993; in 1994, the same class in 1994 in 2nd grade scored 2.7, for an improvement of .8. Because the scores are reported in grade equivalents, we would expect a year's (1.0) growth for a year's instruction. Three class cohorts exceeded expectations.

**Figure B: Reading Scores Grade to Grade for Richardson Elementary School Washington, DC.**

Reading Grade to Grade	Improvement
1 – 2	.8
2 – 3	1.2
3 – 4	-.6
4 – 5	1.2
5 – 6	1.1

*What about the class that did not show improvement?*

Fourth grade in 1994 was a problem. Ask any teacher at any level of education and they will attest that every year, students are different and have different abilities and issues. With a challenging class, even the best schools and programs may not have the same level of achievement.

Ms. Guy also indicated that the two teachers at that grade level were both novices who had difficulty controlling student behavior during the year, which may have partially accounted for the poor results. Teacher experience is an important factor in student achievement.

What this case shows is that the process behind curriculum development, implementation, and evaluation is important because there are a number of well-established factors in student achievement that will affect student performance. Without using the Balanced Curriculum approach, student achievement at Richardson could have been much worse.

The Richardson Elementary case also highlights an important issue for 21<sup>st</sup> century education at all levels. In a data driven era where every sector seems to have its performance measured, this case study reinforces the importance of looking holistically at the factors affecting student performance on standardized tests. When student performance on standardized tests varies, there are lots of potential explanations for why it happened. Good schools and educational institutions make it part of their practice as educators to look at the big picture. Bad ones assign blame, often publicly, and that does not create an environment where problems can be solved.

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