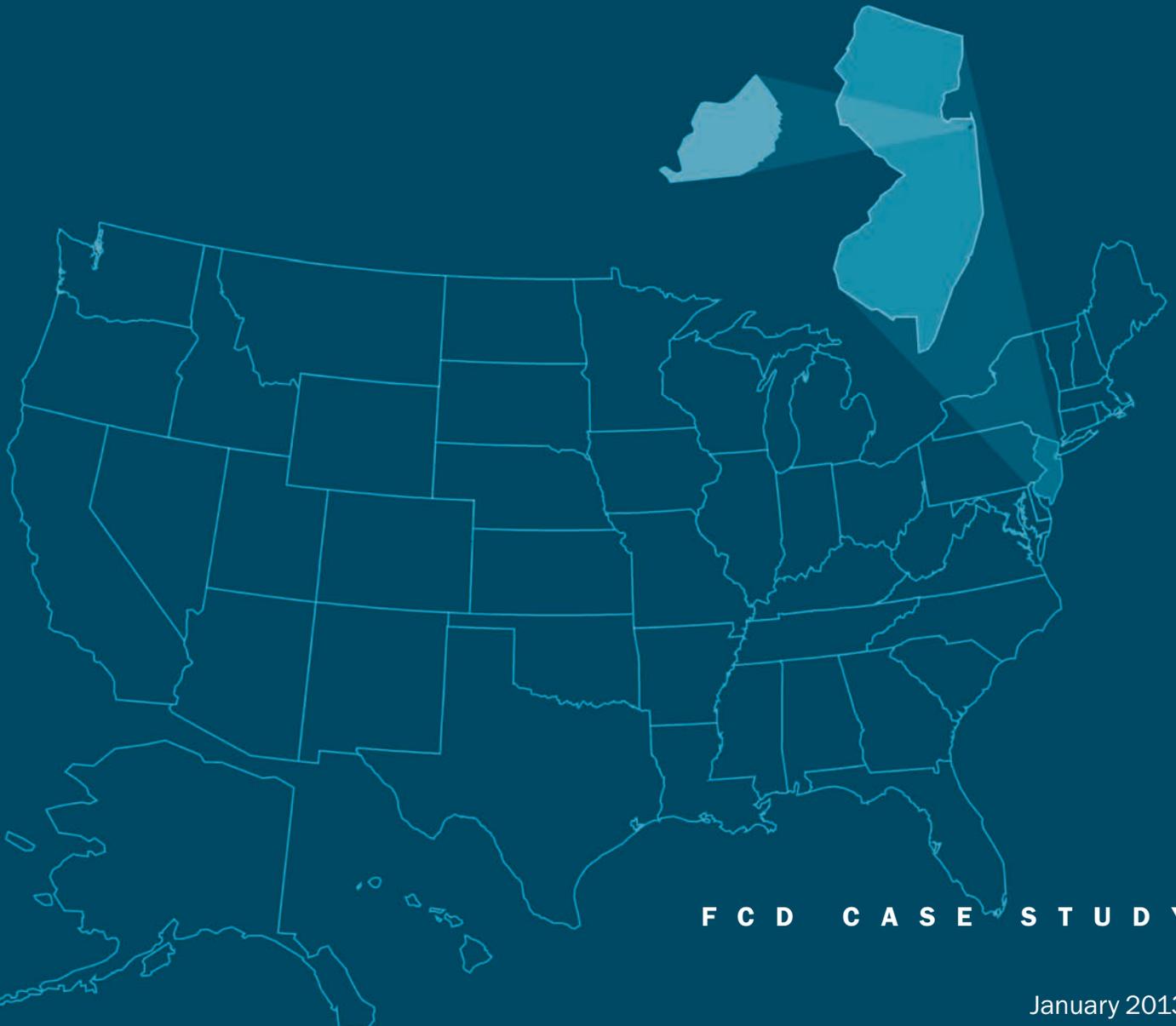


The Promise of PreK-3rd:

Promoting Academic Excellence for Dual Language Learners
in Red Bank Public Schools



F C D C A S E S T U D Y

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FCD Case Studies

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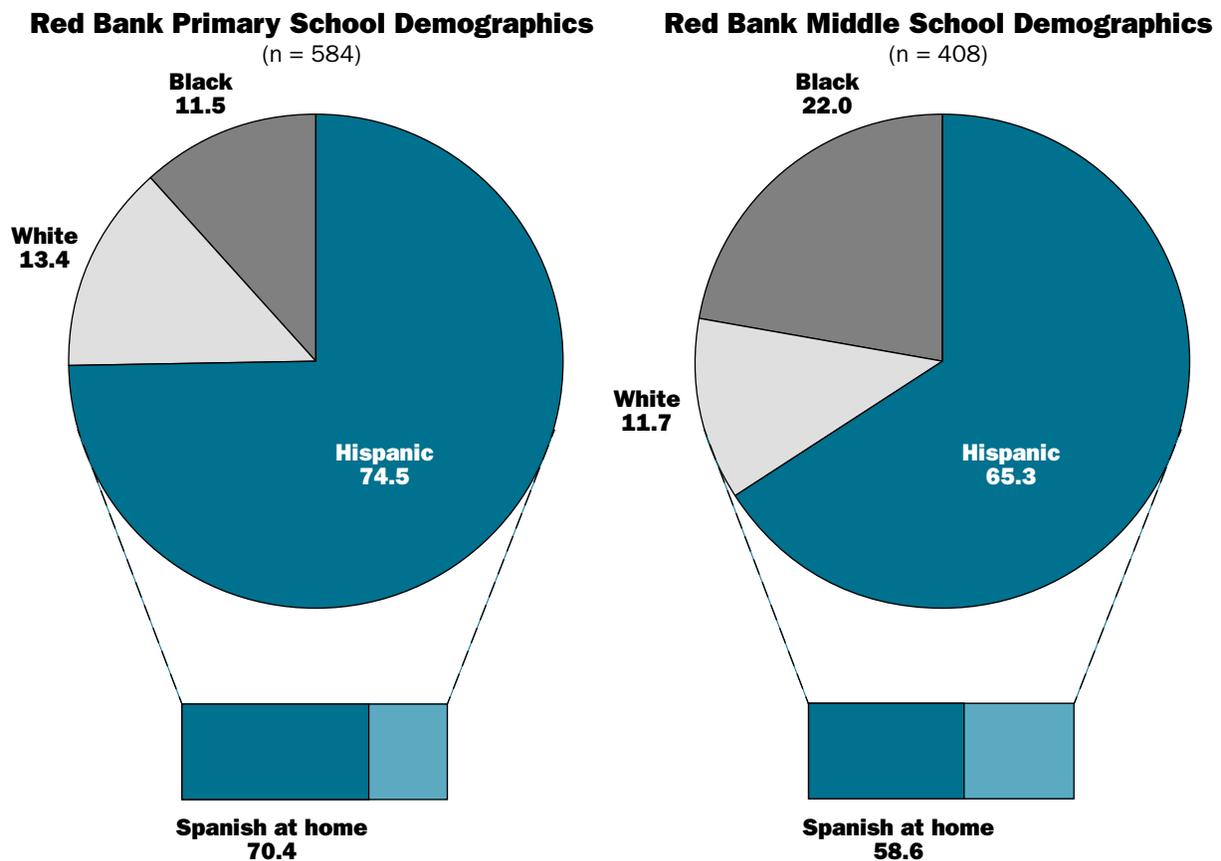
295 Madison Avenue, 40th Floor
New York, NY 10017
(212) 867-5777 phone
(212) 867-5844 fax
www.fcd-us.org

Introduction

In a town an hour outside of Newark, New Jersey, a small school district has gained national attention for its coherent PreK-3rd approach to educating Dual Language Learners (DLLs). Led by Superintendent Laura Morana, Red Bank Borough Public Schools have expanded college and career opportunities for its largely Hispanic, low-income student population through a unique whole-child PreK-3rd approach that emphasizes make-believe play, self-regulation, community partnerships to support arts programming,

and holistic assessment. In Red Bank, the young sons and daughters of day laborers take Suzuki violin lessons, put on theatrical performances, and perform ballet; teachers follow their social development as closely as they do their recognition of letters and letter-sounds. To ensure their unique approach reaches all young children within the community, district leaders share curricula, professional development opportunities, and funding with community-based early education providers.

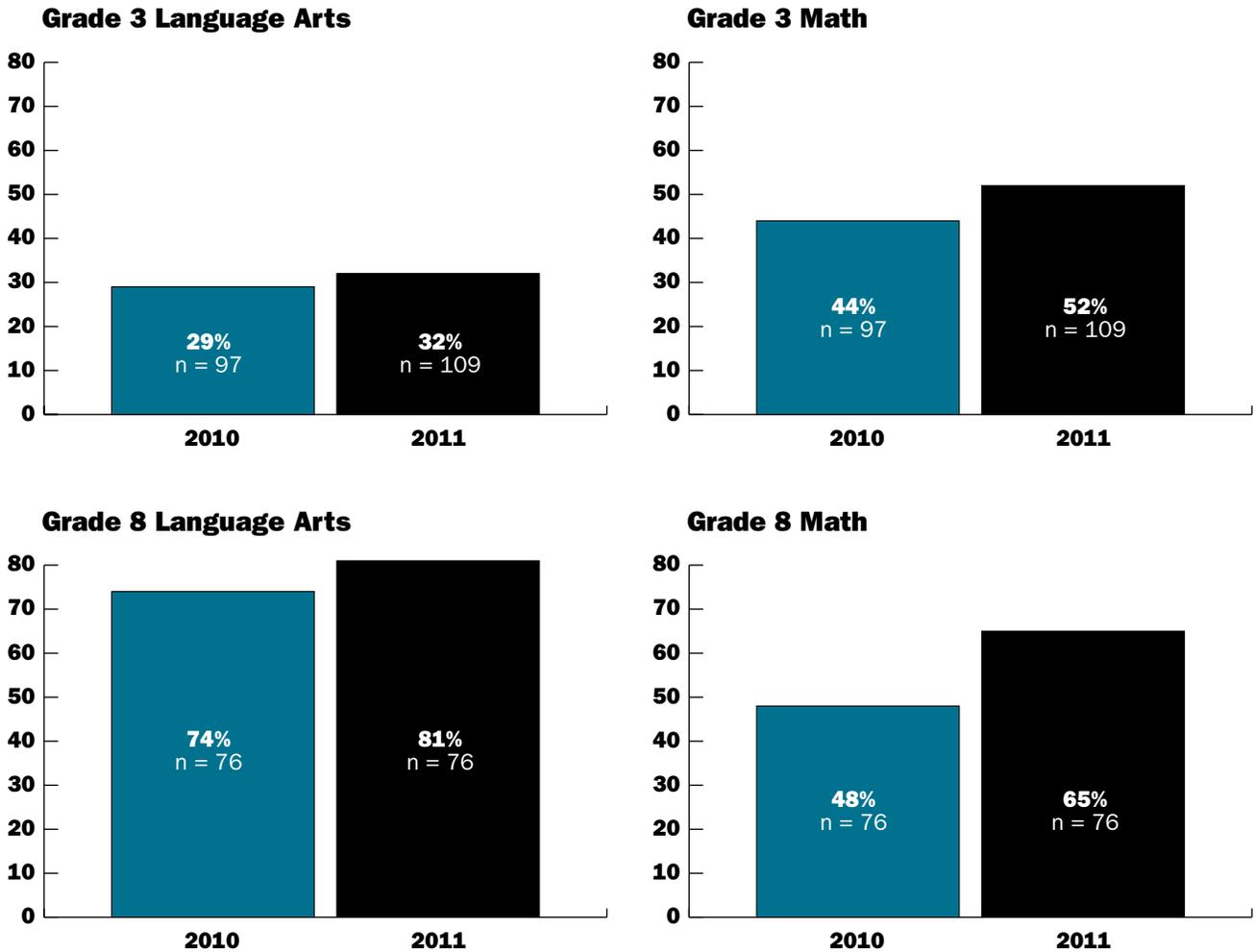
Figure 1. Demographics of Red Bank Primary and Middle Schools¹



Morana and Red Bank’s efforts are beginning to show results. Though the district still has a long way to go in terms of math and language arts proficiency on the state test, it has shown improvement over the last two years (see **Figure 2**). Also, Red Bank students appear to be doing better than their peers on average, considering the percentage of Hispanic Fourth Graders nationally who were proficient in reading was only 18 percent in 2011.² Red Bank has leveraged a unique policy context to its own

advantage in crafting a model of early childhood education that meets the needs of its community, and particularly DLL students. Despite limited resources, the district has transformed its offerings for young children toward a holistic and enriched educational experience that ultimately promotes the advanced language skills necessary for DLLs to access academic and career opportunities in a globalized, knowledge-based economy.

Figure 2. Percentage of Students at Red Bank Borough Public Schools Testing Proficient or Above in Math and Language Arts³



PreK-3rd Context in New Jersey

More than any other state in the nation, PreK-12 public education in New Jersey has been shaped by the court system. In the early 1980s, the Newark-based Education Law Center filed a lawsuit on the behalf of 20 children attending school in poorer, more urban districts. The plaintiffs claimed that New Jersey had failed to provide a “thorough and efficient system of public schools” as specified in its constitution.⁴ The famous *Abbott v. Burke* case eventually made its way to the New Jersey Supreme Court in 1985. The Supreme Court ordered that the case be heard first by an administrative law judge, who after extensive hearings, ruled that “inequality of educational opportunity... constituted a denial of a thorough and efficient education; that the failure was systemic; and that the statute and its funding were unconstitutional.”⁶

Over the next 25 years, 20 “Abbott” decisions followed that identified a group of “poorer urban” school districts that were targeted for sweeping reforms. Along with demanding the districts receive equivalent per-pupil funding as their wealthy suburban counterparts, the court mandated high-quality early education and Full-Day Kindergarten for all Abbott districts.⁷ The emphasis on PreK was an important component in a larger strategy focused on Third Grade reading proficiency. The Abbott approach intentionally integrated PreK with K-3rd through an “Intensive Early Literacy” strategy.⁸

As part of this strategy, the Abbott decisions established comprehensive requirements for early education programs across the state. The rulings required that every PreK classroom was led by a certified teacher with a college degree and stipulated that the PreK teacher earn equal pay as her K-12 public school

colleagues. The teacher was also equipped with an assistant teacher and a proven and developmentally appropriate curriculum.⁹ The courts also demanded that the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) develop clear early childhood standards and determine curricula that were aligned with these standards.

Importantly, there were also guidelines for meeting the needs of DLLs.¹⁰ The guidelines urged the support of developing the home language of the child, as well as English language, in order to promote an additive model of bilingualism. In addition, the recommended approach was to integrate language supports into the context of regular social and instructional interactions in the classroom, not as a stand-alone or pull-out program. Succinct one-paragraph boxes in guidance documents suggested core components of “recommended models” for staff roles and core components of high-quality early education programs for DLLs.¹¹

By the mid-2000s, the NJDOE published a set of comprehensive early learning standards, a detailed set of implementation guidelines,¹² and an assessment system to measure the quality and improvement of PreK providers.¹³ Around the same time the state had rolled out the early childhood standards, recommended curricula, and implementation supports, it also introduced the Early Launch to Learning Initiative (ELLI) to support high-quality PreK for non-Abbott districts. Districts could apply for ELLI funds to serve more children in PreK, extend hours, and improve quality. This funding support has been especially helpful in expanding and strengthening high-quality PreK across the state.

Red Bank

Red Bank Borough has capitalized on the new statutes and funding sources; while it was not designated an Abbott district, Red Bank entered the ELLI program in 2004. Combined with local funds and support from New Jersey's Early Childhood Program Aid, Red Bank was able to offer full-day PreK starting in 2004. Four years later, New Jersey overhauled its public education financing system with the 2008 School Finance Reform Act. The new statute gave a select number of districts additional funding to expand PreK offerings. Red Bank was one of the first districts in the state to take advantage of the additional funds, not only to improve quality of early childhood education generally, but especially for DLLs who were less likely to enter school settings at a young age.¹⁴

It was within this policy context that Superintendent Morana was able to build a coherent PreK-3rd approach in Red Bank. At its core, the model of early childhood programming in Red Bank expands college and career readiness by increasing opportunities to learn in a variety of settings within the community; for the DLLs of Red Bank, this provides a rich suite of language-building activities that promote the academic skills essential to high school and college success.

In order to capture the Red Bank approach, the authors used a qualitative inquiry strategy that incorporated interviews, field notes, and document review into a case study design.¹⁵ Sources of data included newspaper articles, newsletters, research reports, district memos and presentations, videos, and websites. In addition, 18 district and community members were interviewed including teachers, board members, parents, specialists, administrators, community providers, and the superintendent.



Morana's Strategic Approach to PreK-3rd

Morana arrived as superintendent of Red Bank in 2006. Her first steps were to understand what was in place in the school district, particularly at the PreK-3rd levels. Morana then engaged key stakeholders in a change process that focused on promoting early childhood education. For example, Morana saw that there were few opportunities for teachers to give their input on district-level policy in Red Bank. She formed a committee of teachers to analyze assessment data and interventions in place for PreK-3rd. Following the values and goals of the community and staff, she worked with the committee to develop a strategic plan for the district that emphasized the whole child—math, literacy, language, arts, socio-emotional, and science—rather than focusing narrowly on testing outcomes.

The strategic plan was anchored by a common vision for Red Bank students' success in life and responded to a major problem identified by Morana: students leaving Red Bank Middle School were not able to access advanced tracks at their local public high school, Red Bank Regional High. In particular, students were

not being accepted into the high school's more competitive programs and academies such as its International Baccalaureate (IB) or Visual and Performing Arts programs, and this stood in sharp contrast to other public elementary and middle schools that also sent students to the same regional high school.

The discrepancy in high schools outcomes mirrors achievement gaps across the United States for cultural and linguistic minorities. While the Red Bank elementary and middle schools served a predominantly low-income, Hispanic, and DLL population, neighboring elementary and middle schools enrolled students, the majority of whom were majority white and from higher-income families (see **Figure 3**). Succeeding in IB and Advanced Placement courses required mastery of complex English language concepts and vocabulary that can take years of exposure and practice to acquire; such mastery was already difficult without the additional challenge of learning English.

Figure 3. Demographics of Red Bank and Neighboring PreK-8th Grade Public School Districts¹⁶

District	Total Students	White	Latino	Free and/or Reduced Priced Lunch	Limited English Proficiency	English Is First Language
Shrewsbury	489	92.0%	3.5%	0.8%	0%	99.4%
Little Silver	804	93.2%	3.0%	0%	0%	99.7%
Red Bank	992	12.4%	72.0%	80.0%	27.8%	29.6%

However, Morana and her team recognized that academic skills were only part of the problem. Red Bank students were not exposed to the same opportunities as their wealthier peers in Shrewsbury and Little Silver, as their families often could not afford the necessary music and dance lessons to prepare them for advanced arts classes. A narrow focus on pre-literacy skills would not solve the broader issues of educational access across a variety of potential academic programs and careers. Moreover, young children developed the range and depth of language skills that support advanced literacy through involvement in far-reaching experiences.¹⁷ If the DLLs who graduated from Red Bank were to succeed in the same high school as children from Shrewsbury and Little Silver, they would need their own chance to participate in enrichment programs that broadened the language and experiences of their day-to-day lives.

A final challenge for the strategic plan was beginning early with *all* of the young children in Red Bank. Immigrant families faced a variety of challenges when considering PreKindergarten, from language barriers to rigid work schedules. In order for Red Bank to transform opportunities, they had to find a way to engage the children who were not enrolling in PreK programs. Very often, these are some of the most educationally vulnerable students. Early exposure to learning environments would be crucial to their success at school, and the school needed to find the right approach to engage these children.

The challenges of economic disadvantages and learning English as a second language meant Red Bank students not only needed a solid foundation in English language and literacy by Third Grade, but also meaningful experiences in music and the arts. In her approach to college and career readiness, then, Morana sought to improve academic outcomes while equipping children with a wide array of skills. She sought to expand the reach of the district, both in terms of children receiving high-quality early learning environments and the programming they offered.

Along the way, Morana and Red Bank found that the success of their program rested on four key principles:

- 1) Expand opportunities to learn for young DLL children**
- 2) Integrate PreK-3rd curricula and instructional practices that develop mastery and self-regulation**
- 3) Build intentional partnerships that support a common goal of educating the whole child**
- 4) Implement multiple-source assessments that drive curricula and instructional alignment and teacher quality**

With these four components in place, Red Bank was able to offer an inclusive and multidisciplinary program for its young children, sustained through local and state funds, that provided a strong foundation in the advanced skills necessary for broader social access.

Principle 1: Expand Opportunities to Learn For Young DLL Children

For Morana, starting early meant free and high-quality PreK for all children in the Red Bank community. However, the district was constrained by its physical structure and could not create more PreK classrooms. In fact, the primary school was built directly adjacent to a large marsh and could not extend out or up. With funding support from the state's ELLI program and School Finance Reform Act, Morana went to the local providers—Community YMCA, Monmouth Daycare Center, and Tower Hill—about expanding the community's PreK offerings through their centers.

At first, some providers saw the move as a threat, worrying that the district would compete for families needing early care. After a series of meetings, the community providers began to see a partnership with the district as a win-win. Additional funds meant providers such as Head Start and private centers could increase available slots, hire more teachers, and ultimately serve more families.

In addition, all certified PreK teachers at the various centers would receive the same pay as district teachers, allowing centers to find highly qualified teachers who were less likely to leave their role.

Fortunately, as a result of the Abbott remedies there was a precedent for partnering with private and nonprofit providers to provide early education in New Jersey.¹⁸ The rapid expansion of PreK offerings, demanding programmatic requirements, and state regulatory code compelled Abbott districts to partner with community providers, Head Starts, and private centers.¹⁹ Morana worked hard to build a culture of partnering in her district—as part of her plan

of including community leaders in the future of Red Bank, Morana called the Red Bank mayor the morning of the day after he was elected to discuss the district's plans. The coordinated engagement of the many early learning settings was a key focus for the school. As Morana said: "When we got the expansion money, we knew we did not have the space/capacity to serve all of the children through the school system so we worked with private providers... We told them that we would be building a relationship to partner in expanding quality PreK

and thus sent the message that we were all in it together and would all work to increase quality through training, professional development, data collection, and analysis."²⁰

Strengthening Full-Day Kindergarten. Even as the district sought to expand PreK offerings in the community, Kindergarteners in Red Bank were not receiving instruction based on a developmentally appropriate and aligned curriculum or assessment

system. Morana recognized the impact that rigorous and responsive curricula and instruction could have on student learning, especially those students learning English, but she needed to get teachers and district leaders onboard to enact such a large-scale change. She arranged a site visit to another school district with a research-based Kindergarten curriculum aligned with state standards for a group of Red Bank teachers and administrators. After the visit and several follow-up meetings, most in the group were convinced that the approach was a good move for Red Bank. But, some teachers were concerned that the district did not have the funds to

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equip classrooms, provide training, and pay teachers. Morana responded by saying, “That is not your problem, we will be sure you have everything you need.”

For the 2007-2008 school year, Morana and her team reallocated Title I and some local funding to support implementation of the new Kindergarten curriculum for all students in Red Bank. About two months into the school year teachers began to notice the impact on learning in their students. As Morana said, “We could see how it was working for kids.” Kindergarten became a crucial piece in supporting academic English-language skills. In

PreK, DLL children participated in a bilingual model that included instruction in English one week followed by instruction in Spanish the next; the Kindergarten program transitioned students to educational settings with English as the primary language of instruction. In Kindergarten, students were grouped by ability and receive focused English instruction from a certified English as Second Language (ESL) teacher. Intensive language supports across the school day helped DLL students enter First Grade with a wider repertoire of English-language skills.



Principle 2: Integrate PreK-3rd Curricula and Instructional Practices That Develop Mastery and Self-Regulation

Once the partnerships and opportunities were in place, Morana turned her attention to programming quality. Morana asked teachers, administrators, and community leaders important initial questions: “What can you say about your PreK-3rd system? Where do you see variation? Where do you see alignment?” Attaining consistent high-quality learning experiences across a multitude of providers was a challenging component of the partnership process. An integrated PreK-3rd curriculum supported by shared professional development helped address that concern, and the Tools of the Mind curriculum became the starting point for alignment across classrooms in Red Bank and community-based early care centers.

Tools of the Mind, like the other state-approved early education curricula, was research-based, addressed the needs of DLLs, and aligned with New Jersey’s Preschool Teaching and Learning Standards and Core Curriculum Standards.²¹ However, Tools of the Mind offered some distinct advantages in a setting where stakeholders were concerned about whole-child development, and where materials needed to translate to early care centers. Tools of the Mind was focused on cognitive development through social-emotional self-regulation.²² Self-regulation is integral to learning as it includes the ability to stay on task, develop self-discipline, plan short-term and long-term actions, reflect, and cooperate with others, a host of skills termed executive functioning. These skills were best developed through peer-interactions while playing, an approach that often resonates with early care providers.

A central component of the curriculum was self-directed learning play in centers. Self-regulation was developed as students engaged in dramatic make-believe play that was scaffolded and guided by the teacher through explicit center-based and instructional activities. The center themes changed and developed throughout the year (see **Figure 4**).

Children played an active role in brainstorming ideas for the centers and making new materials. For example, children in a Red Bank PreK classroom thought a farm-themed center needed a chicken coop. With guidance from the teacher and assistant, the students constructed a chicken coop complete with an egg-laying chicken out of paper and cardboard. Nonetheless, the fundamental tools and academic focus in each center stayed the same (e.g., blocks for math reasoning and painting materials always stayed in same places in the room), promoting consistency across settings.

Tools of the Mind worked for DLL students because it builds language through high-quality children’s literature, scaffolded imaginary play, and ample visuals. In addition, the flexibility of the program invited cultural connections, allowing DLLs to build on their own background knowledge and feel like a valued member of the classroom community. The curriculum was easily integrated with a dual-language program where students alternated between one week of instruction in English and the next week in Spanish. The structure avoided complicated time calculations splitting English and Spanish instructional time during the day and did not interrupt the flow during the day.

Figure 4. Pictures of Child-developed Arctic and Farm Themes



These strengths of Tools of the Mind plus the support of shared training and professional development made it easier to convince leaders of private providers—Rose Mintz at Community YMCA, Susan DeBrigard at Tower Hill School, and Heidi Zaentz at Monmouth Day Care—to adopt Tools of the Mind for their PreK classrooms. Just to be sure, Morana invited all the program leaders to visit another school district that was using Tools of the Mind. There they saw three-year-olds having fun playing and learning how to write. As one leader said about the visit: “It was amazing, three-year-olds were writing, not because they were forced, but because they were engaged in a developmentally appropriate play activity.” Soon after the visit most of the providers were on board with the common curriculum. As Morana said: “Private providers understood that we’d all have to use the same curriculum...they would all need to participate in the professional development activities throughout the year that would be key to the effective implementation of the curriculum.”²³

It didn’t take long before partners were convinced of the power of the curricular approach. Using all the same curriculum meant that the district and providers could engage in common trainings, which helped create a professional community that cut across organizational boundaries by focusing on the teaching and learning needs of the youngest students. All first-year teachers, regardless of where they worked, attended the same trainings on Tools of the Mind together. Also, there were common trainings held offsite for all instructional staff—assistants, floater teachers, and teachers. As Rose Mintz, the leader of the Community YMCA said: “What we saw after implementing the curriculum was amazing, we could actually see the impact on learning.” Heidi Zaentz from Monmouth Day Care reiterated: “Red Bank makes it easy to collaborate. The trainings are collaborative and the master teachers are always accessible.”

Partnership with providers went beyond shared curriculum and professional development. Morana and her team, together with the leaders at the respective PreK programs developed a common PreK parent/student handbook, adopted similar school calendars, daily schedules, and parent-teacher conference dates, and created joint field trips. The group also sat down together for regular articulation meetings where they discussed curriculum updates, assessment results, and emerging challenges.

A final element of their partnership program was Master Teachers, experienced and well-regarded teachers who took on a coaching role across all of the early childhood settings. Master Teachers ran professional development sessions, provided individualized coaching and consultation, and promoted consistency of program implementation across classrooms and centers, often spreading best practices and sharing good ideas. Their hands-on role with teachers also promoted vertical alignment, particularly in terms of connecting Tools of the Mind curriculum into the primary grade classrooms at Red Bank. Morana explained the important role of Master Teachers: “The master teachers are wonderful and my right hand. They are regarded highly by the classroom teachers. They are right there in the classroom coaching, mentoring, and assessing.”²⁴

As a result of the deep collaboration and the coaching program, the providers did not see themselves as competing with one another to increase enrollment. Indeed, families now applied for early care in a centralized process coordinated by the district. Children were randomly assigned to a program, a process that worked because families view all the programs as being equally high-quality. Without competition, early education providers have developed a perspective of shared problem-solving. As one leader said: “If it’s a problem at one place, then it is all our problem.” Together they promoted high-quality learning experiences for the diverse children of Red Bank borough.

Principle 3: Build Intentional Partnerships That Support a Common Goal of Educating the Whole Child

When Morana arrived at Red Bank, family and community engagement was emphasized through literacy and math nights, cooking programs, and an active parent-teacher organization. Morana began to reimagine this relationship in the fall of 2007, as she was faced with responding to the effects emerging from the start of the Global Recession. She recognized that in order to continue to expand opportunities for DLLs, Red Bank would have to maximize its partnerships with local community groups, rather than see the school itself as the primary source of learning and enrichment activities.

One key example of community-school partnerships in Red Bank was the growing arts enrichment programs. Promoting art, music, dance and theater as an integral part of learning and teaching was difficult at a time when funding for the arts was being drastically reduced. Yet, Morana recognized the resources for the arts outside of school doors. In fact, the Red Bank community was home to the Count Basie Theater, a renowned theater. By building on a nascent partnership with the theater, Morana was able to provide weekly musical theater, dramatics, and keyboard instruction during the school day for PreK-3rd students. After school, students were able to participate in ballet, ballroom, and musical theater performance troupe programs. More recently, students in the performance troupe put on a rendition of the *Jungle Book* where they participated in every step of putting on a show from auditions to casting to costumes. The partnership with Count Basie has also led to being selected to participate in the prestigious Kennedy Center Partners in Education program, which provides teachers professional development in the arts.

Another arts initiative that was built from the community was Red Bank's Strings Suzuki-based program, an initiative supported by community and family enthusiasm and fund raising. The orchestral program was open to everyone—parents attend and learn with their children. Currently 54 students were enrolled, including six children from PreK. Band started in Third Grade, more than two years earlier than in most public schools. Once in band, children were exposed to different musical instruments and began to focus on playing one for the long term. The string and band programs complemented an after-school chorus for First, Second, and Third Graders. To build on music as a learning experience, students performed for the Red Bank community and at the celebrated statewide "Kids in Concert" event. All of these music-based offerings were supported, in part, by community-based fund raising.

The arts initiative was only one example of community-school partnerships in Red Bank. Always promoting the idea of "the earlier, the better," Morana has also used community resources to build opportunities for the youngest of children, infants and toddlers. This includes the "Great Start" program, a monthly get-together for parents and their children from newborns to four-year-olds. Guest speakers came and talked about health and safety, nutrition, and home learning activities. Each evening ended with a book giveaway, with options for Spanish or English picture books. This complemented a "Let's Get Cooking" program for families and children birth to five. In this program, families met together in the evenings and on weekends to engage in cooking activities that incorporated literacy and math skills. "Wherever there is an opportunity to build on what we can offer at the school, we will take it and incorporate it into our offerings," said Morana.

For teachers, these enrichment and supplementary programs went beyond stand-alone activities to improving learning and life outcomes. As one teacher said, “This is potentially another career opportunity for students. Performing in band, drama, or chorus early-on may lead students to pursue it in college or beyond.” Ultimately, the community partnerships were an essential component of preparing students to succeed in a whole-child educational approach. As one teacher said, “The students at Red Bank are going to be competing in a world where other people have had meaningful experiences with art, music, and dance. Why shouldn’t they have the same opportunities?”

Serendipitously, the community initiatives strengthened relationships between school staff and parents. Art, books, and food all became an entry point for family engagement, providing a universal language that transcended cultural barriers. In particular, since the community was a major asset in building the arts program, teachers came to see families as resources. Indeed, to parents, family engagement was more than just exceptional programs—the leaders, teachers, and staff at the school made parents feel welcome and valued. As one parent said, “Communication is not a one time, two time kind of thing. It is constant. When we come to conferences we know what is going on.” Another reiterated, “They [teachers and principal] don’t expect us to come to them; they come to us.”



Principle 4: Implement Multiple-Source Assessment Practices That Drive Curricula and Instructional Alignment and Teacher Quality

A different approach to learning required a different approach to assessment. The goal of Red Bank’s early childhood initiative was to give a better picture of student performance and progress based on individual developmental trajectory and state and national standards. This required the development and implementation of an ongoing assessment of PreK-3rd Grade student progress—data that could inform the school about the effectiveness of its program and also signal individual student needs across a variety of developmental domains. Moreover, a good data system would need to work in the variety of settings that engage young children, providing the same key information on children in community-based centers as those enrolled directly in Red Bank’s PreK program. The committee chose the Work Sampling System (WSS) for PreK-3rd as the architecture of their assessment system and unrolled the assessment in the 2009-2010 school year. WSS was a performance-based assessment with three elements: 1) a checklist aligned to national and state standards, 2) student portfolios reflecting authentic learning tasks, and 3) summary reports that provide an overall picture of strengths and weaknesses against benchmarks.

As part of WSS, teachers used a set of developmental guidelines and asked themselves: “How does this child’s current level of performance compare to national expectations for children of this age or grade?”²⁵ Teachers filled out checklists five times a year across three domains: language and literacy, mathematical thinking, and personal and social development. Data sources included teacher

observations and, as students enter Kindergarten, multiple periodic assessments including the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA), running records, and writing assessments. These online checklists required minimal time from teachers and were aligned to national and state standards.

Portfolios of student work were crucial to documenting student progress as well as recording classroom-based learning tasks. Teachers selected “core” and “individual” items for the portfolio.²⁶ Core items represented a child’s typical application of skills and concepts in a particular area, while individual items reflected the child’s unique characteristics as a learner. Teachers chose two core items and one individual item for both math and literacy domains three times a year (fall, winter, spring). These items then received one of three ratings—as expected, needs development, other than expected—which helped communicate progress to parents.

Data sources were integrated into a “Summary Report,” which replaced the traditional report card for individual students and provided a rating of student progress. Teachers evaluated whether their students were making expected progress by asking the key question: “Compared to his or her earlier performance, has this child made expected progress?” The Summary Report was shared with parents at formal trimester conferences and informal periodic meetings throughout the school year. It was also mailed out to parents (see **Figure 5**).

Figure 5. Work Sampling Standards of Comparison²⁷

Work Sampling Component	What Do Teachers Look At to Make Their Rating?	What Do Teachers Compare Their Work To?
Performance Checklist	Daily Observations, Classroom Work, and Checklist Ratings	National Standards for Children of This Age and Grade
Performance Portfolio	Child's Work in Language Arts and Mathematics	New Jersey Core Content Curriculum Standards
Progress	Current Performance on Checklist and Portfolio	Child's Own Past Performance

The multiple source of information inherent to the WSS was particularly useful for DLLs, who were developing language skills at the same time they were developing connected skills in literacy and math. Observing students across realms allowed teachers to consider language development in conversational and academic settings. The child's progress was monitored, but not compared to external benchmarks normed on monolingual children. In particular, the progress component was especially helpful in targeting instruction to the language needs of students. This component was essential to DLLs who often learn basic literacy skills at the same rate as their English-only peers, but may not have the depth of language skills necessary to support comprehension.²⁸ Such subtle nuances in language differences often emerge through social interactions or portfolio work before they manifest as reading difficulties in later grades. Finally, language proficiency of DLLs was also assessed formally through home language survey

and MAC II Test of English Proficiency. These formal batteries provided a clear sense of proficiency in specific aspects of English when compared with external benchmarks, providing a crucial balance to the more local observations provided by WSS.

This integrated assessment system helped parents better understand how their children were doing in school, particularly as it challenges parents and teachers to think about many aspects of development. As one parent remarked: "It was great to see the work sampling because I can really see the progression over the year, how detailed the picture is, how complex it gets over the year." Another parent said, "I can see concrete examples of progress, I can see the narrative of my child's learning." The focus on growth over time in academic and interpersonal domains maintains a focus ? on whole-child development.

Moving Forward

Red Bank is at the beginning, not end, of its journey to promote academic excellence for all students, including those learning English along the way. However, Red Bank is a compelling example of a district embracing the whole-child instructional approach, providing comprehensive and immersive experiences to the very populations of children least likely to have access to such resources. Red Bank has been able to build its program by expanding learning opportunities beyond their own buildings, establishing an integrated curriculum that is aligned across early education settings, building strategic community partnerships to supplement their own programming, and understanding progress through a multiple-source assessment system.

As Morana and the Red Bank community move forward, they face the challenges of connecting student learning experiences with 21st Century Skills, particularly the advanced literacy skills raised by the new Common Core Standards. However, their coherent, multidisciplinary approach provided a firm foundation upon which to build. The promise of the PreK-3rd approach was grounded in providing enriching and immersive learning experiences to children in order to promote a positive development trajectory. Through their four principles, Red Bank has cast a wide net to include the most vulnerable of children, and put into action a deep commitment—not to remedying the deficiencies of the child or the community, but rather to build from the assets inherent in children, families, and neighborhoods in service of a long-range goal of preparing children for expanded life opportunities.

Geoff Marietta is a doctoral student at the Harvard Graduate School of Education and Research Associate with Harvard University's Public Education Leadership Project. His research focuses on how social interactions and managerial decisions influence collaboration and learning in education. He is a former special education teacher and school administrator. Geoff graduated with highest honors from the University of Montana and holds an M.B.A. from Harvard Business School.

*Sky Marietta is a postdoctoral fellow in education and lecturer on education at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. Her research examines how children are involved in talk in their homes and communities to better understand connections between language, culture, poverty, and reading achievement. Sky is a former elementary teacher and co-author of *Making Assessment Matter*, a book that details how literacy assessments can translate into differentiated instruction at the individual, classroom, and school levels. She graduated from Yale College with honors in Psychology and holds an MAT in Elementary Education, EdM in Language and Literacy, and EdD in Human Development and Education.*

Endnotes

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