

California Comprehensive Center (CA CC) High-Performing, High-Need School Profile

Prepared by CA CC partner, the American Institutes for Research

La Primaria Elementary School Mountain View Elementary School District

Overview

La Primaria is a small elementary school serving kindergarten through grade 3 in the Mountain View Elementary School District (see Exhibit 3). Since 1999, La Primaria's API score has risen 241 points (see Exhibit 4 for more information on La Primaria's achievement over time). La Primaria's staff traces this surge in scores to a new cohort of passionate teachers who joined the school's staff at about this time. Due to low turnover, many in this cohort still teach at La Primaria. Additionally, two teachers on staff were once students at La Primaria and six staff members are parents of students who currently attend or have attended the school.



The Mountain View Elementary School District, which consists of 12 schools, including 10 elementary schools and 2 middle schools, has one of the highest poverty rates (95 percent) in Los Angeles County. La Primaria has a total enrollment of less than 300, composed primarily of Hispanic students (84 percent) and English learners (52 percent), with 84 percent qualifying for free or reduced-price lunch (see Exhibit 2).

Exhibit 1. School API Rankings* 2004-05 Through 2007-08

	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08
Statewide ranking	7	7	7	8
Similar Schools ranking	**	10	10	10

*Statewide rankings range from 1 to 10, with 1 being the lowest and 10 being the highest. Similar Schools rankings compare an individual school's API to 100 schools in its comparison group. Schools are divided into 10 equal groups from the lowest (1) to the highest (10).

**The school did not receive a Similar Schools ranking this year given that the total enrollment of the school was below the minimum required to calculate this ranking.

Source: Academic Performance Index, 2004-05 through 2007-08

Exhibit 2. Student Characteristics, 2007-08

	School	District	Statewide ES Average
African American	0%	0%	7%
American Indian	0%	0%	2%
Asian	13%	7%	9%
Filipino	1%	0%	3%
Hispanic	84%	91%	47%
Pacific Islander	0%	0%	1%
White	0%	1%	31%
Other race/ethnicity	1%	0%	5%
Eligible for free or reduced-price lunch	84%	92%	55%
English learners (ELs)	52%	48%	29%
Special education	6%	10%	11%

Sources: California Basic Educational Data Systems (CBEDS); Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) Program; and Free/Reduced Meals Program & CalWORKS Data Files, 2007-08.

Overview (continued)

La Primaria has the same student-teacher ratio (20:1) as the state elementary school average. However, all of the teachers at La Primaria have a graduate degree and are fully credentialed, which is higher than the state average (see Exhibit 5).

Based on interviews with the principal and teachers during a visit to La Primaria, this profile details the following three strategies identified as key to the school's success:

- Shared vision and philosophy
- Focus on continuous monitoring and improvement of student performance
- Shared leadership and teacher collaboration

Why La Primaria Was Selected

To identify high-performing schools across the state, we examined student and school performance data from 2004-05 through 2007-08. An overview of our methodology is posted on the SchoolsMovingUp website: http://www.schoolsmovingup.net/pdf/CA_CC_High_Perf_Schools_Criteria2009.pdf. Additionally, we selected schools to highlight based on the following criteria:

- **Substantially higher performance than predicted**
As indicated by a Similar Schools rank of 10 in 2007-08 (see Exhibit 1), La Primaria students are performing at the very highest level among their peers in similar schools.
- **Meeting or exceeding subgroup performance standards**
La Primaria students in all numerically significant subgroups¹ are meeting or exceeding Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) goals in both English language arts and mathematics (see Exhibits 6 and 7).
- **Sustained performance over time**
La Primaria met all AYP requirements and was not identified for program improvement in 2004-05 through 2007-08. La Primaria also met all Academic Performance Index (API) targets in 2004-05 through 2007-08 (see Exhibit 4).
- **High need student population**
At 84 percent, students at La Primaria exceed the state's elementary school-level average for eligibility to receive free or reduced price lunch (see Exhibit 2).
- **No selectivity in admissions**
La Primaria is a regular public school and has no policy of selectivity in admissions. It serves neighborhood students within its attendance zone.

Exhibit 3. School and District Facts, 2007-08

	School	District
Location	El Monte, Los Angeles County, CA	
Grade span	K-3	K-8
Number of schools	N/A	12
Enrollment	273	8,905

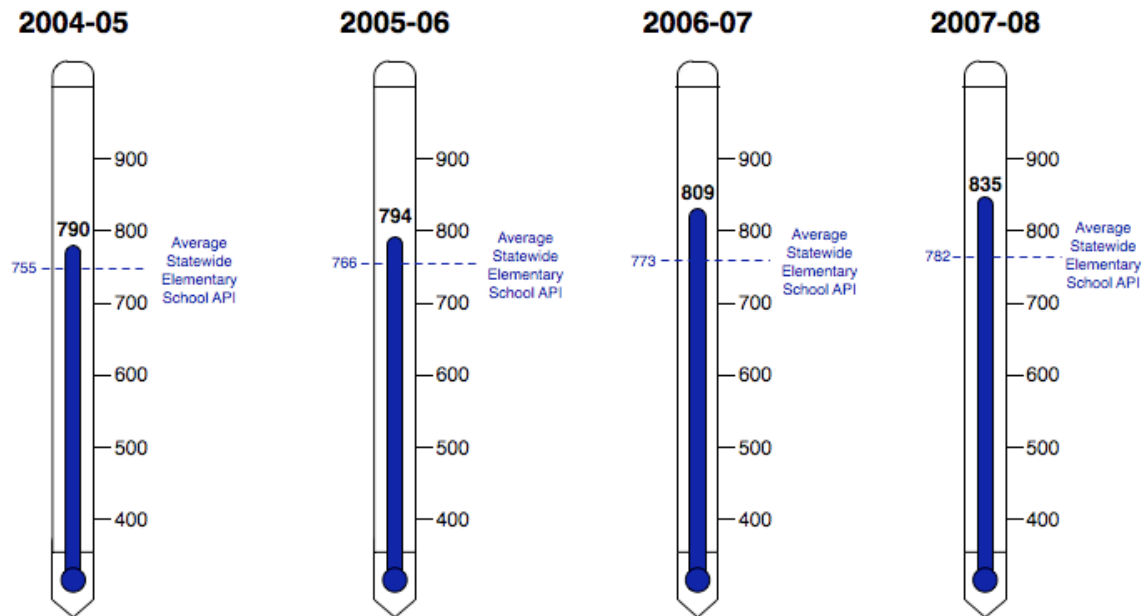
Source: California Basic Educational Data Systems (CBEDS), 2007-08

Recent School Awards

- California Distinguished School Award, 2005 and 2009
- Title I Academic Achievement Award, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009
- National Best Practice Site Winner, Waterford Early Reading Program, 2005
- MIND Research Institute, Outstanding Principal, 2007
- Bravo Award Honorable Mention, The Music Center: Performing Arts Center of Los Angeles County, 2009

¹ A subgroup is defined as numerically significant for percent proficient if it has 100 or more students with valid scores or 50 or more students with valid scores who make up at least 15 percent of the total valid scores.

Exhibit 4. Schoolwide API Scores for La Primaria Elementary School Compared to the Average Statewide Elementary School API, 2004-05 through 2007-08



Source: Academic Performance Index, 2004-05 through 2007-08

Factor 1: Shared Vision and Philosophy

Shared dedication to student success

The staff at La Primaria are dedicated to a shared three-pronged vision. The first element of the school's vision is based on holding all students to a high standard, no matter their background. Teachers at La Primaria emphasize that they do not allow factors such as a student's home situation to become an excuse for either students or teachers. By expecting students to perform at a high level, teachers cultivate confidence in children and create an opportunity for them to excel.

The second element of La Primaria's vision is that effort is valued more than raw intelligence. Teachers report that students absorb this message, and that over their time at the school students gravitate away from statements complimenting other students' intelligence ("he's so smart") to focus on the effort put in ("he works really hard"). Teachers noted that they continuously push students not to give up, frequently reminding students to "persevere," encouraging them to keep trying and working.

The third element of the school's vision is that no child is allowed to fall through the cracks. Principal La Corte, who began as principal at La Primaria in 2007-08, stressed that every child who comes to La Primaria is embraced as a member of the school's community. All teachers share responsibility for, and get to know, *all* students at the school. Many on the staff argued that this is more effective than each teacher merely looking after one group of students.

One of the things [other high risk schools] really need to learn is that the [socioeconomic status] of the kids doesn't matter. Our kids are just as able academically to perform as well as someone from Beverly Hills, even if they have home problems that other kids don't have to deal with. Don't lower your expectations because of the kids' home environment.

That's key.

Maria Estevez-Salgado,
2nd grade teacher

Teach to the top and scaffold to lower levels

The teaching philosophy voiced by teachers at the school is that in order to ensure that high-performing students do not get bored and that low-performing students do not struggle, teachers must teach to the top of the class and create differentiated supports for lower-performing students. In this way, all students are continuously challenged. The school utilizes a Response to Intervention (RtI) approach and implements a large array of interventions to help its students. Although La Primaria does not have a special program specifically for struggling students, differentiated interventions are available to every student, including multiple computer programs (e.g., Ticket to Read, Waterford, Lexia, Accelerated Reader), leveled reading groups, pull-outs with aides, and research-based curricula (e.g., Math Facts, Zoophonics, and Systematic Instruction in Phoneme Awareness, Phonics, and Sight Words (SIPPS)). The district recently adopted the Macmillan/McGraw Hill mathematics series, which La Primaria staff are working to accelerate by teaching students materials intended for the next grade level and creating supplemental materials to reinforce the lessons.

Exhibit 5. Staff Characteristics, 2007-08

	School	Statewide Elementary School Average
Teacher Characteristics:		
Number of students per full time teacher	20 : 1	20 : 1
Average years in education	14 years	13 years
Percentage with greater than BA degree	100%	86%
Percentage with full credential	100%	97%
Full Time Staff per 250 Students:		
Administrators	1 : 250	1 : 250
Pupil services	0 : 250	0 : 250
Paraprofessionals	3 : 250	3 : 250
Clerical	1 : 250	1 : 250

Source: California Basic Educational Data Systems (CBEDS), 2007-08

Factor 2: Focus on Continuous Monitoring and Improvement of Student Performance

Continuous use of assessments

La Primaria's focus on continuous assessments was influenced by Mike Schmoker's work—explained in his *“Results”* series of books—which describes teamwork, continuous quality improvement, and a focus on measurable results as key factors for successfully improving student achievement in a given school. La Primaria utilizes a variety of assessments that students take periodically, including mathematics benchmarks created by staff, SIPPS testing, the Sacramento County Office of Education (SCOE) assessment, the Beginning Phonic Skills Test (BPST), and an English Language Development (ELD) test. For example, there are three different SIPPS reading levels into which students are divided by phonemic awareness or phonics levels, depending on their grade. First grade teachers administer a SIPPS test every Friday, and first graders are then continuously regrouped into different classes based on their performance on the assessment. Students often move from one level to another every few weeks, with some students moving from the lowest to the highest group within a couple of months.

By continuously assessing students, teachers are able to monitor student growth and to determine which students need extra attention or support. Teachers also use assessment data to pace their curriculum and adjust teaching methods. Additionally, regular testing enables teachers to track the effectiveness of new programs and judge objectively which programs are worth continuing. Finally, the administration looks at data to ensure that La Primaria continues to improve student achievement overall.

We do continuously monitor and give assessments to make sure that they're really getting all those skills. I think that's one of the key factors in having the school do well.

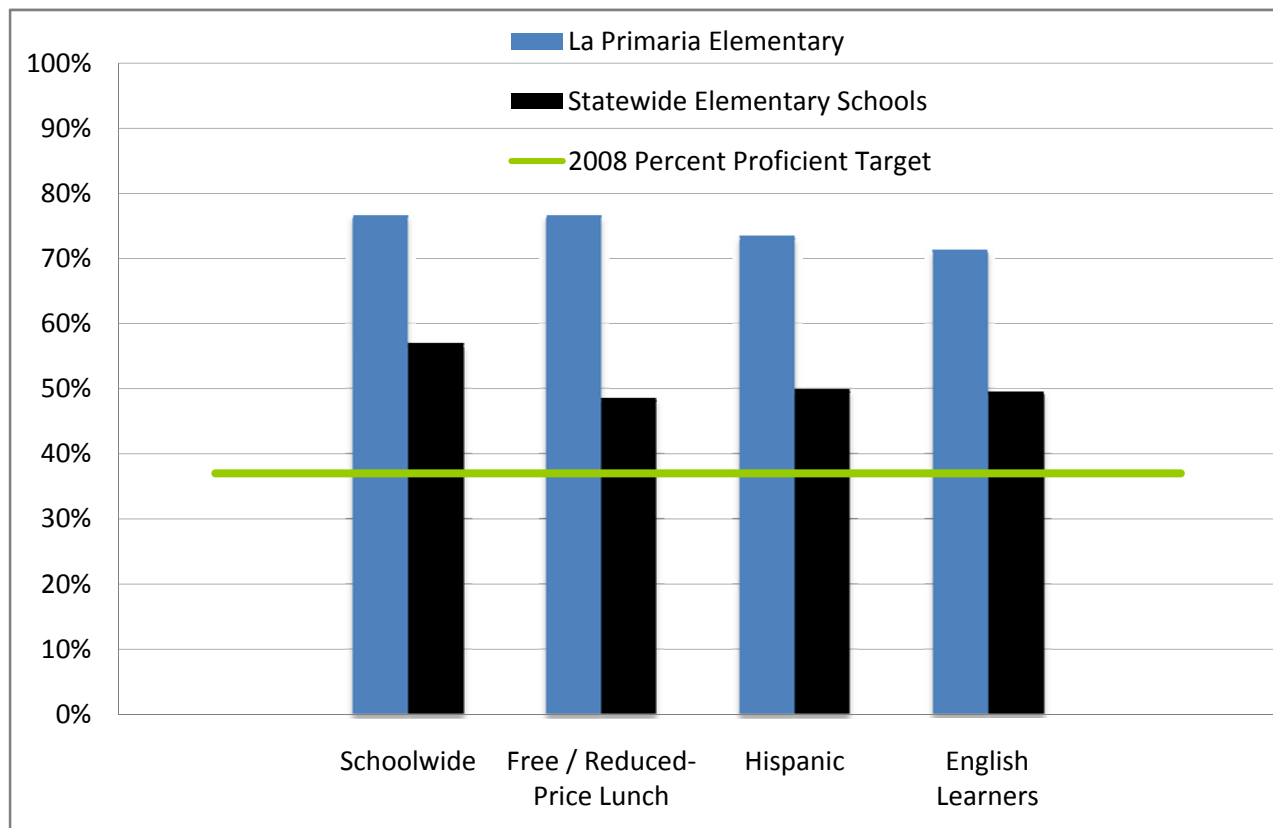
Maria Delgado,
3rd grade teacher

Use of research-based curriculum

La Primaria bases many of its programs and interventions on child brain development research, and then customizes the programs based on students' needs. School staff credit brain research for their understanding of reading, the reading process, and corresponding brain development.

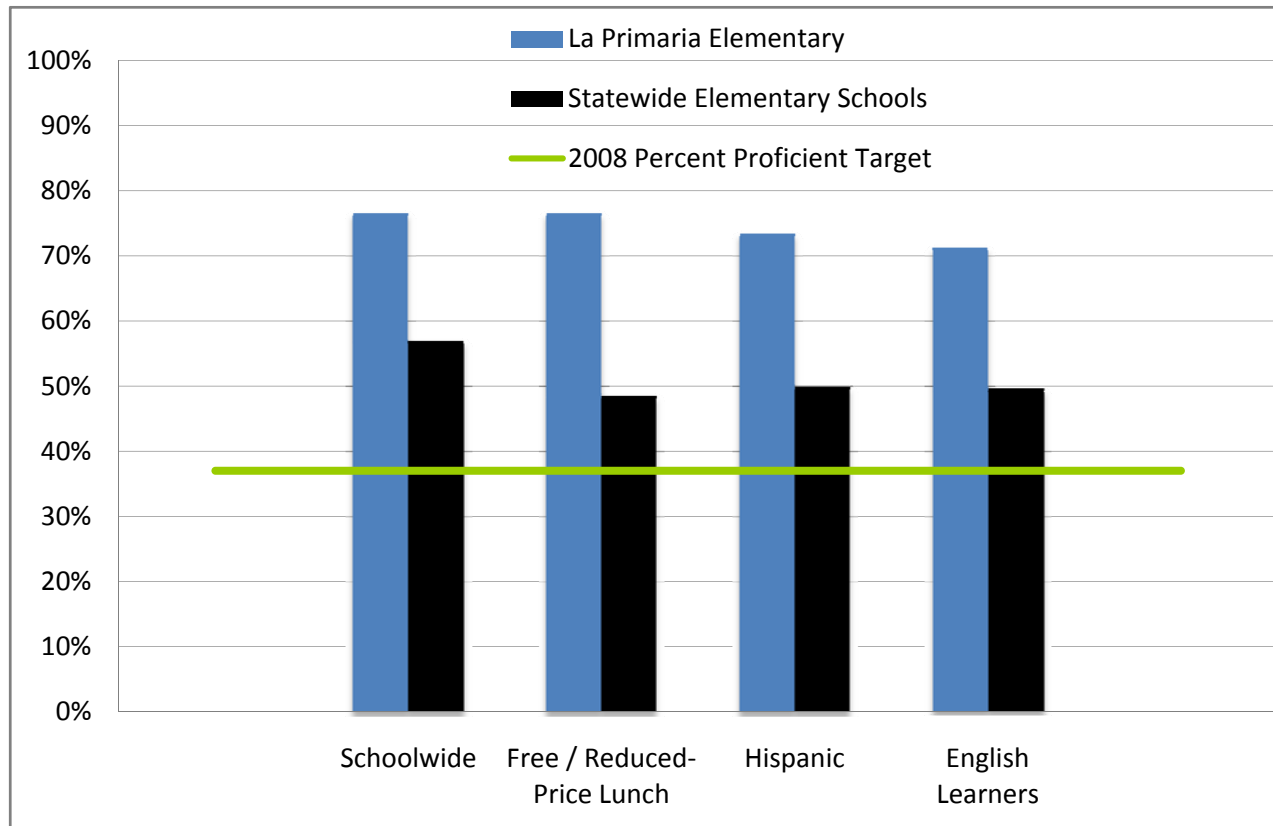
Second and third graders are also a part of the MIND Institute Program, which teaches mathematics through music while helping to develop the spatiotemporal part of children's brains. This program has been found to increase students' mathematics abilities and performance in other subjects. Kindergarteners and English learners use Zoophonics to scaffold learning the alphabet and corresponding sounds by incorporating hand motions to create automaticity and then slowly stripping away the hand motions.

Exhibit 6. Schoolwide and Subgroup* English Language Arts AYP Proficiency Targets and Scores for La Primaria Elementary School Compared to Average Statewide Elementary School Scores, 2007-08



*Subgroups are ordered proportional to size.
Source: California Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), 2007-08

Exhibit 7. Schoolwide and Subgroup* Mathematics AYP Proficiency Targets and Scores for La Primaria Elementary School Compared to Average Statewide Elementary School Scores, 2007-08



*Subgroups are ordered proportional to size.
Source: California Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), 2007-08

In addition, they use other evidence-based work, including a school-wide reading program that focuses on systematic instruction and research-based practices, and which assesses students' reading and phonemic awareness three times a year. The program also emphasizes using songs and games to teach concepts in a form that young students can easily access. The SIPPS program also ties into a similar instructional philosophy, emphasizing that teaching methods for phonics and phonemic awareness must be systematic and predictable so that students only have to learn new content.

We would read things about brain research... and develop activities based on what we we're learning. I think that's why our kids do so well, because we focus on scientifically proven strategies.

Lydia Gaytan,
Kindergarten teacher

Factor 3: Shared Leadership and Teacher Collaboration

Shared leadership among all staff

The administration and staff at La Primaria are forthcoming with each other, share information, and continuously work together. Every teacher participates in decision making and is involved in the school leadership. Two Tuesdays a month are dedicated to staff meetings, in which information is shared between teachers and the administration and decisions are made collaboratively. For example, when the principal returns from district budget meetings where cutbacks are announced, she shares all of the information with the staff who then work together to determine where they must scale back interventions and programs.

Teacher collaboration within and across grade levels

Every grade level holds a formal one-hour meeting every Tuesday during students' physical education (PE) period to meet, plan, review the data discussed above, and share new research-based strategies. Grade-level staff also meet informally during lunch time, after school, and on weekends. Teachers reported constantly talking to each other about their students and sharing strategies and advice. Additionally, teachers across the school meet regularly and openly share various data with each other, enabling them to track each student's progress, share ideas for supporting individually struggling students, and avoid letting any students fall through the cracks. By communicating across grade levels and sharing data, teachers are able to discuss how their strategies may affect other grades and then talk about the actual results of the changes.

There is a shared love and passion for what we all do at [La Primaria]. We are educators that work hard, share constantly, and have fun in educating our kids.

Dr. La Corte,
Principal

More information:

- For more information about this school please go to the district's website: <http://www.mtviewschools.com> or contact Dr. Aileen La Corte, Principal, La Primaria Elementary School, El Monte, California: alacorte@mtview.k12.ca.us or (626) 652-4150.
- For more information about other high-performing, high-need schools, please see other school profiles on the SchoolsMovingUp website: <http://www.schoolsmovingup.net/cs/smu/print/htdocs/smu/ideas/schools.htm>.
- For more information about this study, please contact Mette Huberman, Senior Research Analyst, American Institutes for Research, Palo Alto, California: mhuberman@air.org or (650) 843-8174.