

School Improvement Plan  
Narrative Overview

**Birney Elementary School**

Mission:

At Birney Elementary School quality teaching and high standards equal academic success! We recognize and value not just our students, but also their families, the community and our business partners. We believe that it takes all of us, working together, to provide a healthy environment for our students. We invite you to become a partner in this endeavor. Finally, we believe in school pride, respect and responsibility. These values are imbedded in all that we do with our students and each other. We open our doors to you. Come visit!

Birney was built in 1962 and named after Alice M. Birney, the first president of the National Congress of Mothers in 1897. This organization later became the Parent Teacher Association (PTA). Birney currently has classrooms that serve around 370 students from pre-kindergarten to fifth grade, including those involved in our deaf/hard-of-hearing program. The students in the deaf/hard-of-hearing program are immersed in language during the day and use primarily American Sign Language to communicate with each other and the rest of the student body. We also invite community organizations to use our building; currently we are home to Girl Scout and Boy Scout troops and youth and adult basketball teams. The school is located in the south end of Tacoma in the neighborhood surrounding Wapato Lake. Families enjoy living in this quiet, multicultural area of South Tacoma. There are many single-family homes and apartments surrounding our school and adjacent to the South End Neighborhood Center located next to the school. Children are drawn to the wide variety of programs offered by the center throughout the year, and citizens of all ages enjoy its many entertainment opportunities. Finally, the Greater Tacoma Kiwanis Club has a close relationship with Birney through our monthly Terrific Kids Assemblies and our end-of-the-year Terrific Kids drawing for bicycles donated to Birney students.

PROGRESS TOWARD PREVIOUS YEAR'S GOALS  
2011-2012

- Students in grade three performed with nearly 59% of students meeting standard in reading. Almost 43% of Birney's fourth grade students met standard in reading, a decrease from last year (58.3%). 5<sup>th</sup> grade students scored 47.8% in reading.
- Progress in reading was not consistent across grade levels. As we focus on the specific strategies and targets for growth described below, we look to higher reading achievement in 2011-2012.
- In the area of Mathematics, Birney students did not make adequate yearly progress as measured by the 2010 MSP.
- In third grade, 47.9 met standards, a small decrease from 49% in 2010. In fourth grade, 26.5% of students met standard in math and in fifth grade, almost 45% of students met standard in math.
- This growth is not adequate. As outlined below, a significant emphasis on mathematics instruction and data-based intervention, along with collaborative professional development for teachers, is planned as a means to improve the percentage of Birney students who meet mathematics standards.

OVERVIEW OF SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT  
2011-2012

**Continuous Improvement Process and Stakeholder Participation**

Birney's SIP plan represents the ongoing work and goals established for the 2011-2012 school year. The goals and strategies in this plan are determined by ongoing work of our staff members in collaborative teams both in grade levels and as a whole staff.

- Our attached Action Plan sets forth our school-wide change efforts. The Action Plan is the result of our staff's review of student assessment and BERCC report data, the prioritization of staff and team goals, and the articulation of specific next steps to improve student achievement.
- The establishment of goals and focus areas for our school's work is established in partnership with our SCDM, which is also our SIP team.
- We plan to focus intensively in these areas; use of math and reading assessment data to target instruction and intervention, intentional use of instructional strategies that increase student engagement and increase meta-cognition, clearly defined and expressed learning targets. We believe that intentional targeting of these areas will have a positive impact on our students reaching standard in math and reading.
- Our PTA supports learning at the classroom level, specifically with the funding of mini-grants to classrooms for enrichment activities.
- Title I discretionary money provides opportunities for us to both share and seek input from our families at planned evening events. LAP funds are used to fund an instructional coach and this ongoing process influences our work and the establishment of our goals.

### **Review of Data to Establish Improvement**

#### **Achievement**

Spring, 2011 MSP Data (expressed as percentage of students meeting standard):

<b>Grade 3</b>	<b>2007</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2011</b>
<b>Reading</b>	53.8	70.1	57.1	60.8	58.3
<b>Mathematics</b>	61.5	60.8	48.6	49.0	47.9

<b>Grade 4</b>	<b>2007</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2011</b>
<b>Reading</b>	86.5	52.7	65.6	58.3	42.9
<b>Mathematics</b>	60.8	35.1	29.5	45.8	26.9
<b>Writing</b>	59.5	45.3	41.0	30.6	28.6

<b>Grade 5</b>	<b>2007</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2011</b>
<b>Reading</b>	68.2	61.4	54.5	61.8	47.8
<b>Mathematics</b>	59.1	50.0	42.3	47.3	44.9
<b>Science</b>	16.7	24.3	16.7	12.7	30.4

The school-wide data from the 2011 MSP indicates slight strength in Reading performance. However, our Reading scores show little consistency across grade level or across time. Our work in this area focuses on structured, ongoing review of student work, formative and summative assessments to make instructional decisions that support student learning in the classrooms and during intervention.

In the area of Mathematics, our student's performance at all grade levels is also inconsistent. Our instructional focus in this area is the implementation of the newly adopted math program to increase the level of academic success in mathematics. For the 2011-2012 school year, the instructional focus is to increase student voice through our work with increasing math talk. Using our LAP funds to hire a full time instructional coach to provide ongoing professional development for teachers, coaches and principals combined with our school's weekly grade level collaboration sessions will all contribute to significant and positive influence growth in student achievement. (See action plan for specific intervention strategies.)

The themes of our Comprehensive needs assessment, which was conducted on the day before school, led us to creating opportunities to increase student voice, higher level questioning strategies and focusing on developing the meta-cognitive strategies that will allow students to explain how they solve problems. In addition to this we found a need for improvement in analysis and informational text. Based on this data, we responded by creating an afterschool learning opportunity around science and

writing. The focus is on inquiry based teaching at the intermediate level, higher level questioning strategies, reading to understand, and writing with the purpose of explaining. Another area of focus for Birney is the significant achievement gap between white, black and hispanic students at each level. As a system we are responding by focusing on student voice and increasing student centered instructional strategies. We have a team that is being trained on culturally competent teaching strategies and training others in the use of these strategies. We are also ensuring that we focus on ethnicity in all of our investigations of school data.

**Attendance  
(Average Daily Attendance)**

2008-09	2009-10	2011-2012
96.01%	95.02%	98%

Regular attendance is a key element of high student achievement.

- At Birney, letters are sent to remind parents when tardiness or absences become too frequent. If tardiness or absences continue, a meeting occurs between the principal and parent. Depending upon the situation, an attendance contract may be the result of this meeting.
- Our attendance goal for 2011-2012 is 99%. Good attendance is encouraged with positive recognition; each month, the primary and intermediate classrooms with the highest percentage of students present are recognized at the Terrific Kids assembly. They receive a Birney All Star banner for the classroom, and their choice of extra computer lab time or extra recess.
- A bulletin board in Birney’s main hall displays the names of all the students with perfect attendance each month.
- At the end of the school year, awards are given for perfect attendance. This year, parents of these students will also be recognized with a gift card.

**Planning for Transitions** (between grade levels and grades)

Research tells us that students who struggle with school are most likely to “fall through the cracks” when transitioning from one grade level to the next.

- Knowing this, our whole staff meets for an afternoon in the springtime to plan students’ class placements for the following year. Grade level teachers share information about students’ strengths and challenges so that academic, behavior and special needs are positively supported. For the 2011-2012 school year, we will investigate ways to share information across grade levels about students in the fall of the next school year, including systems to use transition cards for multiple years.
- Head Start and pre-school teachers also meet with the principal and/or kindergarten teachers to share information about students who will transition into Birney kindergarten. We will work to set aside a specific date for Head Start students to visit Kindergarten.
- Special Education pre-school has a late start in the fall so the teachers can support the transition of former Special education pre-school students into kindergarten. Deaf and Hard of Hearing Preschool takes students to their kindergarten classrooms in the spring with the assistance of the District DHH liaison.
- Head Start has a Kindergarten Readiness meeting and each year we hold a Kindergarten Round Up.
- As part of our counselor’s guidance activities, 5<sup>th</sup> grade classroom visits are held to talk to students about middle school expectations. This occurs after winter vacation. In the fall, Baker Middle School counselors meet with 5<sup>th</sup> grade students to begin transition planning for 5<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> grade.
- Many Birney students attend Baker MS, so at the end of the school year 5<sup>th</sup> graders spend a day at Baker where they will meet their “buddy” for the next year and in general get a feel for their new school.

- Birney 5<sup>th</sup> grade students attend a district supported transition summer school prior to 6<sup>th</sup> grade.

### **Characteristics of High Performing Schools**

It is difficult to isolate just a few of the characteristics of high performing schools as they are each interrelated and foundational to the work. We know that we need to advance in each of the nine areas of school improvement as outlined by the state however the following emerge as areas of particular attention in this year's work;

- **Frequent Monitoring of Teaching and Learning:** Each teacher and every grade level will have a plan for using their students' math and reading assessment data to guide their core instruction and to plan targeted interventions. Team planning time will be available for teachers to work together to regularly monitor students' progress and adjust support strategies accordingly. Teachers meet 3 times a year one on one with the principal to review student's classroom assessments and discuss students targeted for intervention. Our schoolwide plan and our SIP plan are monitored regularly and evaluated annually with support from district representatives. We provide extended learning opportunities for students who did not meet standard on the MSP, coordinate with ELL to provide services to support struggling second language acquisition, and have a Teacher Support Team to provide resources and support to teachers for struggling students.
- **A Clear and Shared Focus** is promoted through the strong commitment by all staff to our beliefs and values about our work. Engaging students with higher level questions, giving them many opportunities to share their voice and developing meta-cognition is our strong focus, especially in mathematics.
- We work continually on promoting **High Levels of Collaboration and Communication**. We will address this characteristic through formal structures such as staff meetings that include a professional development component, weekly grade level team meetings, periodic after school data sessions, and half-day release for team collaboration funded through Title I.
- **Effective School Leadership** is demonstrated by the growth of individual teacher leaders throughout Birney. Small teams gather and set goals, with one or more team members taking the lead to move tasks forward and share with the whole group. Various staff members participate in district and state level leadership opportunities, such as the Marilyn Simpson cohort, in order to bring the work back to our entire staff and lead particular ventures. Our lead LAP teacher has taken on a strong role to support teachers with organization of data, as well as with informal coaching in the area of reading. On a daily basis, staff members are empowered to take the initiative to make decisions and move our professional work forward for the benefit of students and their learning.

### **Professional Development Opportunities**

Professional development is connected directly to Birney's SIP goals, as well as to feedback from Birney staff about their needs.

- With the principal, a cohort of teachers receives training on developing learning targets and increasing student voice. This is a "Trainer of Trainers" model in which the cohort group will develop an action plan to provide ongoing professional development in-house for Birney staff.
- Grade level teams meet weekly to examine their students' math and reading assessment data to determine the success of core instruction and intervention. Teachers also participate in regional PLCs to look at student assessments and share insights. The schoolwide plan is monitored periodically throughout the year.
- Staff meetings include "mini-sessions" of professional development tips on developing learning targets, higher level questions and math talk.
- Our academic coach and principal continue to lead in implementing the elements of the 5 Dimensions of Teaching and Learning ensuring the appropriate use of Learning Targets and Student Engagement.
- Birney's principal regularly conducts informal classroom visits, giving teachers feedback on how their instruction aligns with grade level standards and curriculum maps.

- Substitutes are brought in three times a year to release grade level teams of teachers and support staff for collaborative work on math and reading planning, pacing, assessment and intervention.
- This year we are also investigating alternative reading instructional practices through book studies and collegial conversations. Upper grade teachers have been involved in Inquiry by Design training. We believe it is important to include para-educators in our training opportunities.
- Our work with Cultural Competency training also supports our areas of focus which include increasing student voice, learning targets, and frequent use of data.
- 2011-2012 Professional Development Calendar

### **Highly Qualified Teachers**

- Provisions for staff training in Tacoma include opportunities, incentives and compensation. The district provides a broad spectrum of classes on assessment, standards-based instruction and best practices in the content areas. Staff members receive extra pay to attend these classes and clock hours/university credits are frequently offered. The district also supports and encourages school-based training that support the school's SIP goals with building-based optional day pay for certificated staff. In addition to classes, instructional facilitators provide ongoing, job embedded staff development. Para educators and other staff receive workshop pay to attend both district and school workshops. Para educators and other staff are encouraged to participate in all Reading and Math curriculum and assessment professional development.
- Parents are informed in the Parent Handbook of their right to know their teachers and para-educators qualifications
- HQ Para-educators meet a rigorous standard of quality and can demonstrate knowledge and ability in instructing reading, mathematics and writing.
- Tacoma actively recruits highly-qualified staff with our job fair, letters of intent, recommendations to hire and applicant searches. We seek to attract and keep highly-qualified staff at our school by providing opportunities for quality staff development and professional growth.
- All teachers in Tacoma are required to meet the NCLB highly qualified teacher requirement. Human Resources sends each school a list of the teachers with their teaching qualifications. Birney's principal signs an attestation form to confirm all staff are highly qualified. In the event that a staff member does not meet the highly qualified requirements, a NCLB HOUSSE Plan of Assistance is developed for the teacher. To support teachers working to achieve highly qualified status, along with all staff striving to provide excellent instruction, our school's professional development/training is focused on best practices in reading and math.
- Teachers receive substantive feedback through formal observations, required by the district and informal observations. Staff also receives feedback as part of their Project Quality Professional Growth Plans. The Instructional coach provides ongoing support and feedback for teacher's instructional practices along with professional development.

### **Recognition of Additional Academic Learning**

At Birney Elementary, we believe in educating the whole child! This belief is demonstrated by a strong emphasis on creating a focused, structured, and nurturing environment. We look for opportunities to recognize and promote non-academic learning.

- Birney's ASB, comprised of 3<sup>rd</sup> through 5<sup>th</sup> graders, participate in service activities such as food drives, volunteer work at ST. Leo's Food Bank, and Adopt a Traffic Circle.
- Birney students are offered alternative and enrichment experiences such as an indoor gym as a recess alternative, before school band and orchestra explorations, Recorder Club and Runners Club.
- Birney's school counselor offers regular Friends Lunch Groups to encourage the growth of social skills.

Overall, we work to promote the values of helping others, giving back to community, and the building of a collaborative work culture.

### **Safe and Supportive Learning Environment**

At Birney Elementary, expectations for behavior and safety have been completely reviewed and updated to reflect the principles of Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (PBIS). We are guided by the principals of Pride, Respect and Responsibility. The direct instruction, modeling, and ongoing practice of expected behaviors and attitudes for learning is imbedded in our daily routine. Bullying, behaviors that violate safety or that cause a substantial disruption are addressed quickly and firmly- contact with parents is a primary component. Clear consequences for poor choices are combined with a supportive safety net of caring staff and a comprehensive counseling program for whole groups, small groups, and individual students. Students have opportunities to build an ethic of service by participation in the Birney Job Squad in which participants volunteer as cross age tutors, assistants in classrooms for deaf/hard-of-hearing students, recyclers and office helpers. The Bucket Fillers program encourages students to fill the buckets of others with positive words and actions. Monthly Terrific Kids assemblies, supported by the Greater Tacoma Kiwanis Clubs, are a time for recognizing students in a variety of ways. Students who regularly make good choices qualify to participate in monthly Fun Friday Enrichment Activities. Working together, we actively and explicitly promote a safe, supportive and positive learning environment for all students.

### **Equity Issues**

- Birney's MSP results show a large gap between the achievement of white students and students who are Hispanic or Black. This is especially true in the area of 5<sup>th</sup> grade math. Our SIP action plan addresses this with research-based strategies to increase student voice, present higher level questions and connect learning with real-life applications.
- Because parent involvement is the key to students' academic growth, the principal holds regular sessions of Café Con La Directora (Coffee with the Principal) beginning December 2010.
- Birney has a large population of students who are deaf or hard of hearing. The parents of these children rarely attend all-school family events, so the principal and DHH parent leaders have recently formed a DHH Parent Group to address concerns that are specific to this Birney community.

### **Technology**

Birney Elementary staff uses technology in a variety of ways to enhance student learning. We have benefitted from a Gates technology grant that provides training for two Birney teachers to become technology mentors for colleagues. Their expertise has contributed to the growth of staff's use of SMART boards as instructional tools. Document cameras, opportunities for word processing, internet research for project-based learning, and the web-based intervention activities for mathematics are in regular use.

### **Parent, Family and Community Involvement**

Birney is a neighborhood school. All of our students live within Birney's attendance boundaries, with the exception of students who are bused from throughout the Puget Sound region to attend our Deaf-Hard of Hearing classes. Strong community support is shown in the high levels of participation in Partnership Conferences and evening events for families. Birney's School-Parent compact was created with input from parents in the fall of 2011. The compact was printed and discussed during the December conferences. Please see attached copy of Birney's Compact and Parent Involvement Policy.

- Parent communication regularly occurs in several ways; monthly Birney newsletter, classroom newsletters, and ConnectEd phone messages. The principal has an open door policy and a commitment to return all phone calls before the end of the day. We maintain classroom and school websites for parents to gain access to what is happening at our School. This year, we have a goal of meeting with 100% of our parents at conference time.

- We have a hard-working PTA. However, some constituencies are under-represented in PTA. To encourage the participation of these parent groups, Birney's principal plans periodic meetings with the DHH Parents Group, and will host Café Con la Directora (Coffee with the Principal). Birney has a long standing tradition of having an annual Grandparents Day.
- We offer evening events that bring families together at school for fun and learning. This year Family Math Night focuses on our new math curriculum and home support, as well as on how to play with math. We will also host a Literacy Night and a Dr. Seuss event. During our open house we include a number of social/health services that benefit our families.
- We have a number of volunteers who regularly work with children to support learning, who help monitor progress in reading and math, and who assist in the lunchroom and on the playground. We will hold a volunteer appreciation breakfast at the end of the year to honor our volunteers.
- Community service is an important value at Birney. Every year, Birney's ASB students volunteer at St. Leo's Food Bank the afternoon before Thanksgiving. In 2009, they adopted a nearby traffic circle for ongoing beautification. We also partner with a number of community groups such as Kiwanis, ADWAS, SERTOMA, local Veterans and local health/dental clinics.
- Students assist in planting and maintaining Jennifer's Garden, our school's memorial to teacher Jennifer Paulson.
- 2011-2012 Parent Involvement Calendar

### **Coordination of Services**

While categorical and basic education funds are tracked separately in Tacoma, the programs work together to meet the needs of all students and support the schoolwide program goals. Birney Elementary has a blended Title 1 /LAP model this year. Our school has 70.4% poverty and as a result we receive a Title 1 Allocation of \$150,606 and a LAP Allocation of \$42,500. Our Title 1 allocation is spent on 1.0 certificated teacher and a .875 classified staff member. This certificated Coach models, mentors and provides opportunities for staff to collaborate and provides them with feedback for improving instructional strategies. He also works with the Title 1 para designing lessons and planning. The LAP allocation pays for an instructional coach. Our LAP funded coach works to meet the needs of struggling learners by focusing on instructional strategies that will improve student learning.

Birney's School Improvement Plan has been aligned with the Tacoma School District's Improvement Plan. Our school improvement efforts coordinate our district Bilingual and Migrant services, Title I Schoolwide Plan, Special Education (IDEA) and McKinney Vento Act to meet the needs of all our students. Basic Ed staff work with Title I, LRC, Special Ed Deaf and Hard of Hearing classes, and ELL to provide differentiated instruction and timely assistance to our students at risk of not meeting state standards. Partnership Conferencing, Individual Student Assessment Portfolios, Student Learning Plans and 504 Plans involve parents and families in the work.

Through the work of schoolwide planning and SCDM, Title I, ELL, Special Ed. and the Homeless liaison team with Basic Ed. to improve academic achievement in Reading and Math, coordinating services for identified students and families. Title I Instructional Facilitators help teachers coordinate intervention instructional services for our students with high academic needs. Title I also works closely with homeless services within the district.

In addition to Title I providing technical assistance and NCLB support, the district provides the following support for schoolwide implementation: Curriculum & Instruction provides professional development, research and instructional support, purchasing supports expenditures, Human Resources facilitates staffing and monitors Highly Qualified information, Research & Evaluation provides data.

2011-2012 Title I/LAP Budget

Appendix A

