

One of 69 elementary schools in the Seattle Public School district, Maple Elementary School is located on the west side of Seattle's Beacon Hill, where noise from nearby Boeing Field, freeways, and railways reminds Maple students and visitors that they are part of a harbor city that is the gateway for goods and families from all over the world.

Maple Celebrates Diversity

Almost 40% Maple students begin school speaking little English and qualify for bilingual education. Their diverse backgrounds encompass more than 17 languages, including Cantonese, Chinese, Mandarin, Tagalog, Ilokano, Spanish, Samoan,

Arabic, Punjabi, Vietnamese, Toishanese, Cambodian, Laotian, Amharic, Oromo, and Somalian. The students' and staff's diversity is celebrated, appreciated, and considered one of Maple's greatest strengths.

Maple Elementary Seattle, Washington  
<http://www.seattleschools.org/area/main/ShowSchool?sid=2524>  
35 students, K-5

Asian	66%
Hispanic	15%
African American	10%
White	7%
American Indian	2%
Students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch	63%
Students Limited English Proficiency	38%
Student mobility rate	115%
Student: teacher Ratio	25:1

The commitment to diversity is apparent throughout the building. In the school's front hall, clocks representing the time in several locations throughout the world including Seattle, Hong Kong, Seoul, and London greet visitors when they first walk into the building. The library holds more than 100 multilingual books as well as English language books



reflecting many cultures. The student projects which decorate the walls also reflect cultural diversity; one set showcases students' favorite recipes from home, which ranged from Vietnamese salad rolls to spaghetti.

Led by Principal Pat Hunter, the school staff embraces the cultural diversity in many ways, translating paperwork into several languages and beginning each year with a multiethnic dinner to welcome all students and families. The Maple Creed reinforces respect for diversity: "I know that our country was built by people of all races, and I know that people of all races keep our country great."

The curriculum integrates several instructional strategies with the goal of aiding multilingual students in their journey into the English language. All teachers receive training in Guided Language Acquisition which integrates listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills into all subject areas. Teachers also use the Seattle Literacy Initiative strategies which include journal writing in all subjects, beginning in Kindergarten and extending through 5th grade. In addition, bilingual instructional assistants deliver instruction and support to students both within the classroom and by pulling out English language learners for small-group instruction.

### The Maple Way

Nearly two-thirds of Maple Elementary School students qualify for free or reduced-price meals, yet the school is ranked 11th among the district's 69 elementary schools for student achievement. A culture of self-discipline and high expectations is prevalent in every grade level at Maple Elementary and upheld by the students and staff alike. The school community operates according to the "Maple Way." Students who excel at following it become Maple Medal Winners, held up as examples to the whole school and given certain privileges, such as lining up first and posting their pictures in the hallway for everyone to see. The Maple Pledge sums up student expectations

As a Maple student:

I am responsible for my learning as well as helping others to learn

I will treat all people including myself with respect

I promise to work hard so I can be proud of my achievements

I know how to solve problems and make good choices

I promise to do my best at all times and NEVER GIVE UP!

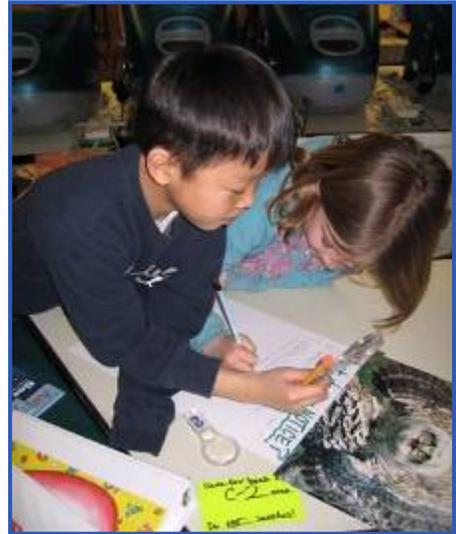
I will strive to do right to make my future look bright

Staff members also work hard and strive to serve as positive role models for students. In the words of one parent, "The principal and the teachers are willing to take the time to focus on the children; they are enthusiastic. It's more than a job to them." Just as students are expected to help their fellow students, teachers are expected to help their fellow staff members and share responsibility across grade levels for contributing to the success of every student. Teachers reported that they did not mind being approached by teachers in other grade levels to change aspects of the curriculum they deliver to students at their grade level if those changes would benefit students in other grades. "All kids are our kids" is the prevailing attitude. This shared sense of responsibility is spelled out in the school vision:

"The Maple School community of parents, staff, volunteers, and students is responsible for providing each student with the opportunity to have a positive and meaningful education in a pluralistic learning environment."

### Open Concept Community

Maple Elementary School is an "open concept" school. Few walls buffer noise or close off communication. Visitors to the school are usually surprised to see how well students can focus on their own teacher's voice in the midst of large open spaces, with other groups of students close by. All grade levels at the school have three classes which have no interior walls, allowing a visitor to view all classes simultaneously. Teachers claim that their open classrooms make it easier for them to work together because they can see what other teachers in their grade are doing and can share ideas and materials across classes. It is easy and natural to communicate frequently because no walls or closed doors serve as barriers. Grade-level teachers also have common planning time each day in which they can work together. The school's architecture lends itself well to the schoolwide philosophy of collaboration and sharing.



Teachers also believe that the open classrooms contribute to a strong sense of community in which they feel that all of the students are "their students," and teachers share responsibility for all students' success. Students learn early at this school to be respectful of their teachers and fellow students and to focus on their assigned tasks. The need for discipline is rare in the upper grades because students have internalized early that they are at Maple to learn.

### Curriculum Aligned to State Standards

Maple members staff initiated a schoolwide transformation process in 2000, and staff began to concentrate on teaching the skills measured by the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL). In the first year, staff focused on math instruction, improving the school's average by 21 percentage points. The next year teachers focused on writing skills, and began using strategies from the National Urban Alliance to help students write more fluently. Consequently, the percentage of students who met state standards in writing increased 12 percentage points in a single year. Next, the school focused on reading and began using a reading program that improved reading fluency and comprehension. Reading scores increased by 15 percentage points. Maple's focus on standards and deliberate approach to improving instruction in targeted areas has proven to be a successful strategy for improving student learning. Instructional materials are selected to support an inquiry-based approach to instruction.

Writing is the foundation of Maple's curriculum. Starting in Kindergarten, students write every day and in every subject. Writing instruction is based on several research-based programs. Reading materials include a variety of publishers as well as numerous teacher-made materials.

Students use hands-on science kits to learn science by inquiry. Math instruction involves the use of books from multiple publishers and a variety of manipulatives. Teachers make extensive use of technology for instructional purposes, including document cameras and computer stations. From a single vantage point, a 4th grade observer watched one teacher discuss equivalent fractions by showing examples of student work on the document camera. In the adjacent class, students were gathered on the floor by a whiteboard as the teacher illustrated equivalent fractions on the board. On the other side of this class, students used strips of paper to illustrate various equivalent fractions. As a teacher noted later, "We're allowed to teach the standards in our own way, but the open space lets us see how our fellow teachers are doing it so we can get ideas from them."

### Writing Across the Curriculum

At 9:40 a.m. in a first grade classroom, students write in their journals in response to a prompt asking about their weekends. Undistracted by the constant hum of sound spilling from the adjacent spaces, they take to the task while a teacher moves from desk to desk, offering encouragement and suggestions. Science, social studies, math, and



vocabulary words posted on the class walls form a kaleidoscope of language and colors. By the time the lesson shifts to direct instruction on adjectives, most of the students could tell a visitor why they were writing in their journals beyond a mere "the teacher told us to."

Earlier that morning, the visiting team had met the school leadership team in the library—a spacious room, its echo stolen by walls of thickly stacked book shelves. Students in pairs or by themselves searched the shelves. Many of

the books are fiction, but just as many others are biographies and histories. A girl flipped the pages of a book on climates and another on reptiles, weighing her selections pensively. Another student reached for a book set out for display. These displayed books (at least 25 in all) stood atop the four foot shelves that mark the perimeter between the library and the "hallway" of this open-concept building. A theme connects these books—the stories they offer and histories they describe mirror the faces of the children in the building.

In the afternoon, a different first grade teacher begins a math lesson. Later in the lesson students will use manipulatives to practice adding coins. But this lesson starts with students reading a story about counting—a story that illustrates the differences between value of money and a quantity of coins. The main character in the story errantly trades one quarter for two dimes, thinking the two dimes increased her wealth over the one quarter. Rather than simply tell students why the trade was a bad one, the teacher invites students to make inferences about the character's thoughts and make predictions about the character's future actions. Students are even asked to explain why they have the ideas they have. Higher order thinking skills are getting a workout.

Interviews indicate these first grade classrooms typify practice at Maple. "Writing is the foundation of the curriculum and embedded throughout the content areas," says the principal. Teachers agree. "Writing is the foundation in every subject, so students get lots of it," say the Kindergarten teachers. "We write all day, including in math and science," fifth grade teachers report. Second grade teachers highlight the "strong focus on the writing process at all grade levels" when asked what makes Maple successful.



While visitors saw rich literacy environments across classrooms, they didn't see strictures or scripts in teaching. This school isn't handcuffed to formalities, says Hunter, "but we are

very intentional about what we want to do." Two formal programs undergird teachers' abilities to infuse writing across the curriculum: Guided Language Acquisition Design (GLAD) and the National Urban Alliance's (NUA) Seattle Literacy Initiative to accelerate reading and writing. According to its website ([www.projectglad.com](http://www.projectglad.com)), "GLAD is a model of professional development . . . tied to standards, that trains teachers to provide access to core curriculum using local district guidelines and curriculum." Teachers call GLAD a holistic approach and praise its emphasis that "literacy should be incorporated into everything."

NUA's website ([www.nuatc.org/projects/seattle/seattle.html](http://www.nuatc.org/projects/seattle/seattle.html)) describes it as a 72-hour training that lets teachers and schools translate district standards into instructional strategies that:

- Enable all children to meet the reading standards;
- Provide structures for support of a common literacy focus in each school; and
- Improve learning across the disciplines by accelerating the learning of reading and the ability to compose and communicate understanding.

Teachers point to the empowerment that GLAD and NUA have given them to implement writing strategies consistently across the content areas and grade levels. The principal applauds the school's efforts to inculcate writing and rich print experiences across the school, and she recognizes these efforts need continual review and support.

Teachers say they are not seeing as much evidence of GLAD around the building as they want, so they have discussed having a trainer come to a staff meeting and discuss the strategies. Then they will have the trainer come back to follow-up.

### Continuous Examination of Student Progress

Asked what factors make their school effective, the principal and most teachers concur that the key is individual student attention. "I think it's the way we look at each child. We know which kids aren't meeting standards and we get help for them," says one teacher, and another adds, "We identify kids early and work with them. We don't let kids fall through the cracks."

They are referring to the school process for continually examining student progress in order to re-teach and differentiate instruction to both accelerated and struggling learners alike. At the heart of this process lies the Student

Intervention Team (SIT). Every Friday, the SIT convenes to examine one or two students' social, emotional, and cognitive progress. Serving on the Student Intervention Team are the principal, school counselor, resource specialist, teachers, and two parents. The SIT process is systematic: the team begins by looking at data—student standardized test scores, student work, classroom-based



assessments, and written progress notes from teachers. These data establish a body of evidence for what the team sees is happening with the student, then the team moves to making normative assessments, asking "What are the student's weaknesses and strengths?" Finally, the team considers the school's available resources and prescribes interventions.

While the SIT process is formal, any adult involved in the school, including a parent, can refer a child. Moreover, teachers aren't shy about referring a child: absent are fears that someone may blame poor instruction as the

explanation for the student's struggles. "As a professional it behooves you to be open," says one first grade teacher. "If a student does not meet standards," she continues, "then there must be something written about why."

In fact, a school culture that encourages collaboration and discourages privacy of practice finds particular expression when it comes to identifying individual student needs and taking action to meet them. A collective understanding pervades Maple that for even the most skilled teacher, re-teaching and re-strategizing is a necessary aspect of teaching practice. As a third grade teacher said, "Just because you taught the curriculum doesn't mean that all the students learned it."

Decisions to regroup, re-teach, or enrich don't always flow from the SIT. In fact, most instructional change comes from teams of teachers continually analyzing data from curriculum-based assessments and district assessments. The term "enrich" isn't trivial. "We don't just focus on the low kids," says a third grade teacher. Instructional differentiation also involves tweaking instruction for students who learn the standards quickly. The term "instructional tweaking" is not trivial either. While recommendations from the SIT tend toward formal interventions such as referring a student for auditory disability testing, adjustments stemming from grade-level team meetings tend to cue smaller and more frequent adaptations, such as grouping students differently during math. It's precisely because teachers hold grade-level team meetings regularly that changes are small. Indeed, a collective responsibility to make small but continuous improvements is a cornerstone of Maple's success.



Of course the operative term in making improvements is making them, not planning them. Brilliant recommendations that die on the planning vine don't help students. Fortunately, at Maple, there's plenty of harvest. Whether it's a modification stemming from a grade-level team meeting or a more formal SIT recommendation, Maple has resources that enable it to carry out prescribed interventions. A cadre of instructional assistants and English language learner specialists are organized and re-organized, configured and reconfigured to respond to students needs. Like water flowing past stones in a stream, Maple's staff dynamically envelops the changing needs of Maple's students. Maple funds instructional support staff through a combination of IDEA, Title I, local dollars, and donations.

The instructional response process hasn't always worked so reliably. "At one time there was no communication among and within the grade level and there was little follow-up to the SIT," says one staff member. "I've seen Ms. Hunter make a difference," she adds. Just as Maple didn't inherit strong communication, it didn't create the SIT process *ex nihilo* either. The principal acknowledges that Maple imported the SIT concept from other schools and then the SIT team and counselor developed and adjusted the process over time.



When teachers say, "We pull together to look at the individual child," or "We know that we can go to any of our colleagues and get support," it is clear that both technical—SIT meetings, for example—and cultural elements are at work. Asked which practices she would encourage other schools to replicate, Principal Hunter says, "If a school wants to replicate, then it first needs to look at itself and see what can be done; you can't just purchase a curriculum and expect to have that work." As for Maple's next level of work, "We're focusing on how we can improve the SIT team follow-up," says Hunter. It is safe to say this will happen in small, continuous steps.

Maple Elementary School State Criterion-Referenced Tests					
% proficient and above: 4th grade Reading					
	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
All	59	59	78	87	91
Low income	50	56	73	84	93
ESL	38	39	37	81	80
% proficient and above: 4th grade Math					
	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
All	63	53	78	79	82
Low income	50	47	75	73	79
ESL	38	26	26	78	67