

Praise for Oak Grove District

STUDY SHOWS POLICIES FOSTER IMPROVEMENT

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By Luis Zaragoza

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San Jose's Oak Grove School District is singled out in a new report that focuses on high-poverty school systems whose policies of openness, ongoing professional development and high expectations have led to higher student achievement.

Researchers who conducted an extensive statewide survey of districts at different levels of achievement found some common practices among districts seen as fostering rather than impeding reform:

- Using test scores to identify and respond to knowledge gaps in students, not just as an end in themselves.
- Investing in professional development for teachers and administrators.
- Reporting publicly on the success of meeting explicit achievement goals.

In Oak Grove, for instance, the district maintains a five-year plan that is continually updated so that the public can see where their local schools are headed, said Manny Barbara, district superintendent.

Oak Grove trustees are scheduled to receive information on the 2006-11 plan Thursday.

According to state records, about 40 percent of Oak Grove's more than 11,700 students in grades K-8 qualify for free or lower-cost lunches, an indicator of the district's poverty level. Nearly 29 percent of students are learning English. Both numbers are indicators of students who will probably struggle in school.

Other districts singled out in the report, "Minding the Gap: New Roles for School Districts in the Era of Accountability," were Elk Grove Unified in Sacramento and Rowland Unified in Los Angeles County.

Summing up a key finding of the report, Merrill Vargo, executive director of Springboard Schools, said "districts do matter," despite often being portrayed as the bad guys in the push for school reform.

Springboard, which compiled the report, is a non-profit, San Francisco-based network of educators dedicated to raising student achievement. It was founded as the Bay Area School Reform Collaborative in 1995.

Contact Luis Zaragoza at lzaragoza@mercurynews.com or (408) 920-5803.