

CHALKBOARD news

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KEEPING OUR PARENTS INFORMED

IMAGINE SCHOOLS
ARIZONA WEST REGION

MEASURING UP: THIS MONTH'S EDITION FOCUSES ON ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT—ONE OF OUR SIX MEASURES OF EXCELLENCE.

ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT A Measure of Excellence

At Imagine Schools we are serious about learning! That is why we evaluate the academic achievement of our students, teachers, and schools in a way that truly measures the improvement experienced each school year. We test each student in reading and math at the beginning and end of the school year.

Our chief measure of academic achievement in reading and math is individual student learning gains, which is the growth achieved by a student during one school year. We believe this is a better measure of a student's academic progress, and a school's instructional quality, than the "No Child Left Behind" proficiency ranking.

The fall test results show our teachers

where students individually and collectively stand, pinpointing strengths and weaknesses for each student. The year-end test results allow determination of how much each student has advanced during the school year in reading and math.

Imagine Schools students are making impressive strides in academic achievement! Students at schools that Imagine Schools has operated for two or more years have achieved an average growth of *1.14 grade levels in reading* and *1.21 grade levels in math* each year over the past two school years. Most public schools aim for student gains of one grade level each year, and many schools fall short of that target.

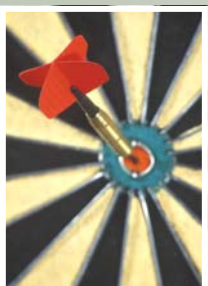
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SAVE THE DATE...

- Spring Break—dates vary by school
- Mar. 30 thru Apr. 17—AIMS/TerraNova Testing Window for grades 2—9
- Apr. 1&2—HS AIMS (Math & Science)

UPCOMING EVENTS...

- Imagine Schools National Character Education Writing Contest
- Individual School Visits from the North Central Association Commission on Accreditation and School Improvement
- Character Education Awards Luncheon



READY, SET, AIMS!

In just a few weeks, all schools in Arizona will be administering Arizona's Instrument to Measure Standards Dual Purpose Assessment (AIMS DPA). The testing window for AIMS DPA this year begins on March 30th and ends on April 17th for grades 3-9. Testing takes four to five days, and each school decides which days within this window they will administer the test. During this testing window, all second graders are required to take the TerraNova test.

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Dear Parents,

I have often been quoted as saying, "All schools are about academics." After all, that is the purpose of a school, right? To provide academic instruction?

Although that is my belief, some schools do a much better job of delivering instruction than others; it does beg the question....what is more important? Is it the selection of curriculum or is it the person delivering the instruction?

I firmly believe that with an established culture of trust and encouragement, students feel "safe" to learn. After all, part of the learning process involves making mistakes. Students need to be in a supportive environment to allow them to take that risk. However, on the other hand, teachers need tools...and tools in the right hands reap positive results.

That's where the selection of curriculum and support materials come into play. Without professional knowledge and the tools to implement meaningful instruction, a teacher would find it hard to be successful. Although I have always felt that a positive learning environment is

the first step, I would also agree that instructional materials and methods of instruction are equally important.

I do not want to ignore one more piece of the puzzle: the parent's role. *A student is always more successful when they view their parent and teacher as working in partnership.* Parents must be extremely careful expressing any dissatisfaction about the school or the teacher in front of the child. Children look to us as role models and mentors bringing stability to their lives. If adults, sharing this significant relationship, seem out of balance, children often times feel confused and insecure. So, let's strive together to provide learning environments of achievement and hope for all students we jointly serve within Imagine Schools.

Sincerely,



Linda L. Kiefner
Regional Director for Imagine Schools
Arizona West Region
Serving Imagine Schools at Avondale, Bell Canyon, Rosefield, Tempe, Sierra Vista, the Early Learning Center and Imagine Prep at Surprise
Linda.Kiefner@imagineschools.com
(623) 466-5293

Our Teachers are Learning Too! Academy Leaders aid the process.

At Imagine, we believe in utilizing the strengths and talents of our existing staff to facilitate learning for our teachers. Each school in the region chooses exemplary staff members to serve as Academy Leaders.

These instructional leaders from each campus make sure communication occurs between grade levels, and work with teachers to refine and improve instruction. Consistent communication occurs daily between Academy

Leaders at all schools within the region so ideas that work can be shared. This helps our staff work smarter, not harder.

Academy Leaders focus on academic achievement. They work hard to ensure that current research-based instructional strategies are modeled for individual teachers within their academy. All Academy Leaders attend a monthly meeting led by the Regional Curriculum and Instruction Coordinator. These

highly interactive meetings benefit all involved. They provide opportunity to discuss and practice instructional strategies, and collaborate on challenges as well as share successes.

The ultimate goal for all Academy Leaders is to make sure Imagine teachers are teaching smart and using the latest research-based instructional strategies so students achieve academic success!



Data-Driven for Success

Research acknowledges that analyzing data and using the results to determine strategies for learning is absolutely essential to school effectiveness and individual student academic success. Realizing this, the Arizona West Region devoted time and resources to learning how to effectively use data to drive instruction.

In October, we invited our Colorado Imagine colleague, Linda Gleckler, to share her wisdom and expertise with us. Linda spent her first day meeting individually with each school leader looking closely at school-wide and individual student data, including results of the AIMS, Terra Nova, DIBELS and STAR Reading and Math. This focused time with each Principal was extremely effective in prioritizing and planning instruction to enhance future academic achievement and school success. Individual school report cards and **Annual** Yearly Progress (AYP) data from the state were also reviewed.

The evening of day-one, Linda held a joint meeting with all school leaders to summarize her overall observations. Day two was spent with teachers discussing the importance of analyzing available data and utilizing the results effectively. Every teacher within our region was in attendance. This was collaborative time well spent. All staff walked away with a better understanding of how to meet individual student needs by using data as the foundation for planning lessons and monitoring student progress.

Imagine Schools believes that individual student learning gains is the most accurate way to measure academic success. Therefore, it is vital that we use all available resources to analyze a student's current academic level in order to provide the correct curriculum for advancement. We will continue to focus professional development time both regionally and at our individual schools on this topic.

Where Does Our Data Come From?

This year we have taken the meaning of data-driven instruction and decision making to a new level in our region. At Imagine Surprise Prep, we are piloting an electronic assessment program called Galileo. This fully integrated educational management system combines the strength of research and the power of technology to assist educators in promoting student mastery of local and state standards.

Through a system of benchmark tests aligned to the state standards, teachers can collect data and make instructional decisions for individual students based on the results of

these tests. Teachers can also use this program to build their own quizzes and tests to assess what they have taught in the classroom. This immediate feedback, as it relates to the standards, allows teachers to change their instruction to meet the needs of individual students. Differentiation at its best!

Because of this successful pilot and the importance of using data to drive instruction, other schools in our region will be looking at implementing Galileo for the 2009-2010 school-year.

Academic Achievement

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At Imagine Schools, we believe that there are four main ingredients of robust, successful learning. We work hard to provide these ingredients in the recipe for student achievement.

First, our schools have a dedicated school leader and a team of qualified teachers, all of whom are committed to implement the school's mission and achieve success in our [Six Measures of Excellence](#).

Second, we provide our teachers with an interdisciplinary standards-based curriculum that stresses mastery of

the basic building blocks of learning, while providing rich, varied subject matter that engages students' curiosity and imagination, as well as promoting positive character development. Third, we ensure that students are able to learn in a school environment that is safe, orderly, purposeful and nurturing.

Fourth, we work hard to involve parents and guardians in the school's educational mission, because we believe that students are generally more successful in school when parents and guardians take an active role in their children's schooling.

While we endorse the national push to increase math and reading test scores, Imagine Schools continues to emphasize educational balance. We integrate instruction in music, art, athletics, critical thinking, literature, science, writing, history, and technology with instruction in the critical skills of math and reading. Providing students with a balanced, rich program of study along with teaching the important foundations of reading and math is a priority in all Imagine schools, and is critical when developing communities of achievement and hope.



Ready, Set, AIMS

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The high school has already taken the reading and writing portion of the test, and will complete math and science the first week of April.

The purpose of this test is to provide parents, teachers, and school districts with information about a student's academic strengths and weaknesses. This statewide assessment is both standards-based, measuring a student's knowledge against the Arizona Academic Standards, and norm-referenced, comparing student's knowledge against students nationwide. Currently, students are assessed in the areas of reading, writing, and mathematics, with a fourth, eighth, and tenth grade requirement of science.

AIMS DPA is very important to schools in Arizona. The performance on this test is a major factor that helps dictate one of six AZ Learns profiles a school receives. On their annual state report card, a school's achievement rating can be labeled excelling, highly performing, performing plus, performing, underperforming, or failing to meet academic standards. If an underperforming or failing label is earned, the state enforces a series of accountability measures, and depending on outcomes, funding can be affected. This label can further impact

a school's bottom line by playing an influential role on parents' choice in determining where to enroll their student(s).

How can you help? Your child needs to be in school and focused on learning. Attendance over the next few weeks is absolutely crucial. Not only will students be practicing test taking and sharpening their skills through test preparation, the state requires that schools test a certain percentage of students each year.

During the week of testing, please ensure your child receives plenty of rest and eats balanced meals daily. Emphasize the importance of academic achievement and help your child understand how important it is to achieve their personal best. Utilizing Study Island (www.studyisland.com) and other test prep materials, both at home and at school, will also help prepare students for this important week of testing.

Most importantly, encourage your child to relax and release any anxiety related to testing. Let them know this is their time to shine; to show all that they have learned throughout the year! This is a golden opportunity to be proud of what they have learned!

"Every student can learn, just not on the same day or in the same way!"

--George Evans

quick bits of CHALK TALK

If you haven't seen them yet, check out your school's new website TODAY!

Imagine Avondale go to:

www.imagineavondale.com

Imagine Bell Canyon go to:

www.imaginebellcanyon.com

Imagine Rosefield go to:

www.imagnerosefield.com

Imagine Sierra Vista go to:

www.imaginesierravista.com

Imagine Tempe go to:

www.imaginetempe.com

Imagine Prep go to:

www.surpriseprep.com

In the Next

Chalkboard News:

The following issues will feature the Imagine Six Measures of Excellence—one measure at a time.

Up next...

Parent Choice

Chalkboard News

Editor: Theresa Wnenta

theresa.wnenta@imgaineschools.com

Tel: 602-547-7935



IMAGINE SCHOOLS OF ARIZONA WEST

Imagine Avondale

Imagine Bell Canyon

Imagine Rosefield

Imagine Sierra Vista

Imagine Prep at Surprise

Imagine Tempe

Imagine Early Learning Center

REGIONAL OFFICE

14850 N. 156TH AVE.

SURPRISE, AZ 85379

TEL: 623-344-1770

FAX: 623-344-1780

