

# Elizabeth Graham Elementary School

## Springfield Public School District 186

### School Context

Springfield Public School District 186 is the ninth largest school district in the State of Illinois. Springfield is located 200 miles south of Chicago and 90 miles north of St. Louis. The district is home to over 14,000 students in 36 schools; Elizabeth Graham Elementary is a pre-Kindergarten through fifth grade school housing approximately 300 students. The percentage of Hispanic students is low compared to the state at both the district and school level; as a result there are few English Language Learners. The district and school serve a large percentage of African-American students compared to the state. Elizabeth Graham Elementary has a very high percentage of low-income students (77.8 %). The school also deals with a high mobility rate (39.9 %). Elizabeth Graham Elementary runs on a year round, balanced calendar schedule beginning at the end of July with nine weeks of attendance followed by three week intercessions throughout the year with a six week summer break. Graham is one of two balanced calendar schools in Springfield Public Schools District 186.

Teachers are very aware of the state standards. The standards are posted in every classroom and teachers were quick to identify specific state standards that were linked to their goals. To align to state standards in the area of writing, teacher-developed documents indicate which elements of the language arts curriculum focus on narrative or expository text structure. The Quarterly Performance Statement for Math shows which topics need to be taught and for how many days. The Correlation of Learning Expectations to District Benchmarks document relates the mathematics topics to the district benchmarks and report card goals.

### Curriculum and Academic Goals

**The district central office translated the state standards into district standards and benchmarks which are more teacher friendly.** The state standards are broken down into grade level standards and defined into benchmarks and a body of knowledge for teachers. The body of knowledge illustrates the progressive development of what students need to learn across a series of grades. Continuums and pacing charts show teachers what they need to teach each quarter.

**Curriculum development is a cyclical process for the district that is institutionalized within the system.** The department of instruction at the district level keeps curriculum and standards current; district curriculum coordinators work with teachers year round. For new textbook adoption, the district central office puts a representational group of teachers and parents together. A couple of schools in the district will pilot the series that seems to most closely meet the district's needs. District and school administrators emphasize that the curriculum does not consist of textbooks. They see the curriculum as consisting of the standards, benchmarks and the body of knowledge with the text materials attached to it. The principal says: "The district standards are overarching and we use our curriculum to meet those standards."

### Student Demographics\*:

	<i>E. Graham EI</i>	<i>Springfield PSD</i>	<i>Illinois</i>
% Low Income	77.8	46.4	37.9
% Limited English-Proficient	1.4	0.3	6.3
% Mobility	39.9	27.4	16.4
Student Ethnic/Racial Distribution			
% White	60.1	60.6	58.6
% African-American	35.8	36.2	20.7
% Hispanic	2.4	1.4	17.0
% Asian/Pacific Islander	0.7	1.7	3.6
% Native American	1.0	0.2	0.2

## Staff Selection, Leadership and Capacity Building

### **Springfield District 186 tries to develop internal candidates for the principalship. District administrators actively recruit minority teachers.**

The district wants to deepen the pool from which they can draw and is looking at ways to tap into potential leaders within the district and to get people to think about themselves in terms of being a principal. Principal selection is initially handled at the school level. A site leadership team of teachers, parents and community representatives interview the candidates first. A district member sits in on these interviews. Two candidates are forwarded to the district. The superintendent for curriculum takes the candidates to a deeper level in this interview because "we are at a time where instructional leadership is crucial." To recruit minority teachers, district and school administrators go on recruiting trips to universities that are known to have high minority populations. The district also works with the NAACP and minority ministers in town. The principal tries to "hunt down good student teachers" when there is an opening. Candidates are interviewed and ranked by a group of principals first, and then the top candidates are interviewed by a team consisting of the principal and teacher representatives at the school.

### **The district has a strong mentoring program for both principals and teachers.**

Training programs are in place where teachers getting their administrative certification can work with a principal for a year. New principals have retired principals from the district as mentors for two years. The district organizes a 'new principals coffee' for new principals, their mentors and central office personnel once a month. For new teachers, the district offers a two-year voluntary mentoring program in conjunction with National Louis University and the Springfield Education Association. The Teacher Mentor (Induction) program used is the Educational Testing Service Pathwise Model based on extensive research on teacher induction. Mentors and District Trainers receive extensive training from ETS/ Pathwise certified trainers. Mentors attend four Mentor meetings and six Mentor Training Sessions. The Mentor Training focuses on:

- The roles and practices of a mentor to promote effective decision making in beginning teachers' lesson planning and preparation;
- How to assess teaching through observation techniques, examination of artifacts and analysis of student work;
- How to apply strategies for teaching to standards;

- Techniques for coaching and providing feedback for the purpose of improving practice.

Protégés (new teachers) participate in an interactive training session and then use a package focused on the process of teaching to guide beginning teachers to become reflective practitioners. New teachers actively interact with their mentors in monthly meetings, are self-reflective and set goals. The district also provides a new teacher orientation day prior to the start of the school year.

### **Principals participate in professional development at the district and school level. Peer groups and walk-throughs provide opportunities for support and collaboration.**

The district asks that principals participate in all the professional development that teachers receive. Principals need to know about the materials that their teachers are being exposed to at their training. They need in depth knowledge on how to support the teachers in the implementations. In addition, all principals are part of a professional development process each Wednesday afternoon; topics this year included special education, technology and the implementation of a variety of programs across the district. Principals also go to targeted conferences outside of the district so they are not isolated or parochial. Peer groups are the contact point for practical discussions. Principals share ideas on how to handle problems, improve student achievement and motivation. They also conduct book studies to help change practices; this year's focus was on "closing the achievement gap." A principal's meeting at the district office takes place one a month. For one week during the school year, there are 'principal walk-throughs' where principals open up their schools for other principals and get feedback.

### **The district is moving towards providing on-going professional development that is tied to the school improvement plan.**

Several people interviewed remarked on the shift from "one shot" conferences or workshops to training that is ongoing and tailored to the needs of individual schools. Professional development time is released to the school (half a day each month) and tailored to the teachers' needs at each campus. The training is all-inclusive: the entire faculty from a building comes together to work within a common focus. Elizabeth Graham Elementary creates a focus for improvement by analyzing the assessment data. The Literacy Design Team administers a survey to determine teacher needs and the teacher instructional leader conducts classroom observations.

In response to reading and writing scores, staff at Graham Elementary selected literacy as their focus in the 2002-03 school year with particular attention to Guided Reading. On-site guided reading courses led by the Teacher Instructional Leader, district reading personnel, Title 1 and reading teachers took place once a month after school and during brown bag lunches. The school also sponsored staff book studies, which are attended by all classroom teachers, special education teachers, and paraprofessionals. Walk-throughs are part of the Ball Foundation grant. Teachers describe these walk throughs as “really powerful.” The walk-throughs focus on what quality student work looks like and which evidence teachers display that shows ‘what Elizabeth Graham is about as a school’. The Ball Partnership also includes the Focus on Results training program, which enhances the focus on specific instructional goals and the alignment of resources accordingly. Reading coaches, funded by the Reading First Grant, model lessons for teachers and conduct classroom observations. Most of their work focuses on how to meet the needs of individual learners. All teachers in the district received training in the Reading First modules prepared by the Illinois State Board of Education. All teachers in District 186 also received Standards Training specific to their grade and content areas through the District’s Department of Instruction. Some teachers also participated in the PBIS (positive behavior intervention and supports) training.

**The district provides extensive instructional support for teachers focusing on student work.**

District instructional coaches go into schools to work with teachers, as well as staff from the district department of instruction and school improvement coaches. District instructional support revolves around looking at student work: looking at assignments, using rubrics to identify how work may be improved upon, what does rigor look like in student’s work. The district

provides ‘anchor’ papers, so teachers can see an exemplary piece of student work and know what a grade ‘4’ looks like in the extended response assessment. Coaches go into the buildings and model lessons for the teacher followed by a debriefing session. Then the teacher tries the lesson followed by more debriefing. Teachers have the opportunity to share tapes of their lessons. The district website contains video clips of quality lessons in the reading/writing workshop for teachers to view, lesson plans, additional resources that can be used, etc. Most of the assessment pieces that teachers need and use are on the website as well.

**Teachers have ample opportunities to collaborate. Student work is used to provide meetings with a clear instructional focus.** Teachers at Elizabeth Graham collaborate through the site leadership team, once a month in-service, PBIS team, balanced literacy team, literacy design team. Mandatory grade level meetings take place for half a day every other week. Teachers look at student work and determine what they need to do to enhance their students’ performance. The Reading First coaches also meet with grade level teachers twice a month.

### Instructional Programs, Practices and Arrangements

**The series for core subject areas are dictated by the district central office to ensure alignment with state and national standards.** The district used to have a massive adoption system involving a high number of teachers and piloting programs for a year. Now the process is more streamlined. The district just adopted a new elementary reading series. The superintendent of curriculum: “We looked at the needs directed around Reading First, which requires the adoption of new materials. We looked at the five

#### Teacher Demographics\*:

	<i>E. Graham EI</i>	<i>Springfield PSD</i>	<i>Illinois</i>
Average Teaching Experience	--	14.3	13.9
% of Teachers with Bachelors Degrees	--	55.7	53.9
% of Teachers with Master’s Degrees	--	44.3	46.0
% of Teachers with Emergency or Provisional Credentials	1.2	0.3	2.5
% of Classes Not Taught by Highly Qualified Teachers	0.0	0.1	2.1

elements: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension. We looked at data. We developed a criteria sheet of our needs; we needed to enhance higher level thinking. The department of instruction chose three programs to share with a larger group; we had representatives from each elementary school. We also had some materials from each of the three programs available at each school for the teachers to look at. We had the representatives from our schools listen to the presentations from the companies. Then we compiled data and consulted with the reading coaches. The curriculum council and principals shared the choice with the teachers. It was quick process, but the decision is a good one.” The principal explains that they supplement the series to match the expectations on the ISAT.

**The district includes schools for gifted students. Elizabeth Graham uses flexible grouping.** The large picture at the district level shows grouping of students. The district includes an elementary magnet school for gifted students, a middle school gifted school, there are special education students throughout the district and at the high school level students have choices in weighted classes. Elizabeth Graham Elementary two cross categorical special education classrooms. Teachers use flexible grouping in their classrooms. During guided reading student are grouped by ability level. Teachers use the Developmental Reading Assessment recommendations from the Title 1 teacher to group the students. For other assignments, teachers make sure they have heterogeneous grouping. The mathematics centers for example are not grouped by ability-level. Elizabeth Graham Elementary is experimenting with multi-age grouping and looping as well.

**The district established a guide for principals to help teachers allocate instructional time. Minimum times are based on the use of district adopted programs which should receive priority.** Teachers in District 186 use the Three Block Literacy Framework which includes an one hour Reading Workshop block, an one hour Writing Workshop block (45-60 minutes at primary grades) and a 30 minute Word Knowledge block. Teachers teach daily mathematics lessons of 60 minutes and 15 minutes of daily routines outside the formal mathematics time. The mathematics lessons need to include 10 minutes of Number Sense Focus (Math Chat) and 50 minutes of investigation. Teachers feel supported in their efforts to make meet the standards by uninterrupted blocks of time in their schedules for reading, writing and mathematics. The principal and teachers interviewed at Elizabeth Graham Elementary are very positive about the balanced calendar at Elizabeth Graham. They say their students need continuity of instruction. According to the principal, families outside the Graham’s attendance area opt to enroll at Graham because of the balanced calendar.

**The accountability system has changed the instructional practices within the district and school.** The assistant-superintendent feels that it made it possible for the district to leverage their work. “The accountability system sets a bar and people feel a great deal of pressure to meet those standards. It has given schools the opportunity to look at their practice and “clean their plate”. We were able to remove some things that we did because we had always done them, not because they were good instructional practice. It helps us to get people’s attention; no one can be complacent.”

#### Instructional Information\*:

	<i>E. Graham El</i>	<i>Springfield PSD</i>	<i>Illinois</i>
Pupil/Teacher Ratio	—	17.6	18.4
Average class size			
- Grade K	18.0	21.8	20.6
- Grade 1	15.0	17.3	21.3
- Grade 3	22.5	21.5	22.5
<b>Time devoted to teaching core subjects (minutes/day in grade 3):</b>			
- Mathematics	60	60	56
- Science	35	44	30
- English/ Language Arts	150	115	146
- Social Science	35	43	31

The principal says: The accountability system created a higher sense of urgency, which is a good thing. We have streamlined our curriculum to get to the meat, to meet the standards. There is no time to have fun at school anymore.”

### The instructional focus at Elizabeth Graham Elementary is on literacy and extended response.

Students’ writing assignments, five-finger re-tell responses to literature and math extended responses are displayed in the hallways. Modeling is an important instructional practice; teachers teach lessons in good writing and have students emulate the model. Teachers post students’ work and identify it with the corresponding benchmarks so students know what the target is. Teachers also share rubrics with their students to let them know what the expectations are.

### Monitoring: Compilation, Analysis and Use of Data

**The district provides a quarterly assessment in reading and math for each grade. Some assessments are required; others are recommended.** Each school is required to administer at least one extended response assessment each quarter; it is recommended that schools administer both the *Language Arts and Mathematics Extended Response* quarterly. The *Naglieri Nonverbal Ability Test* is administered in Kindergarten. The test results are used to help identify those students who may qualify for gifted and talented services. The *Multiple Assessment Series* for reading and mathematics is administered in grade 2. The scores are reported back

to the schools in a customized standards based format so that teachers can predict how students will achieve on the *Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISAT)* in third grade. The *Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS)* in reading, mathematics, writing, science and social science is administered in grade 4. This assessment allows teachers to compare how their students and school are doing compared to other students at the same grade level across the nation. The main purpose of this test is to identify students who are eligible for talented and gifted programs in District 186. The district customized the results of various publishers’ tests to see how they match with their standards to accommodate consistent assessment across the district.

### The focus of District 186 on Language Arts is reflected by the large number of assessments the district administers in the areas of reading and writing.

The *Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA)* is an individually administered reading assignment that is administered in the fall and spring in grades K-2. The DRA can determine a student’s comprehension level along with their accuracy and fluency rate. The DRA scores guide teachers in placing students into small guided reading groups. A recently developed intermediate DRA is being used to determine the instructional reading level of students reading below grade level in grades 3-5. The *Illinois Snapshot of Early Literacy (ISEL)* was developed in Illinois for K-2 grade students to help determine students’ early literacy development. All schools receiving funds from the Illinois State Board of Education Reading First Grant are required to administer the ISEL at the beginning and end of the school year. First through fifth grade teachers administer district *Writing Assessments* at the end of each quarter. The assessments are intended to be similar to the writing portion of the ISAT. *Integrated Theme Tests* are optional in grades 1-5. Theme tests give students practice in responding to the critical areas of word knowledge, comprehension and writing and are similar to what second, third and fifth grade students are expected to be able to do on the MAS and on the ISAT. Kindergarten teachers give additional assessments in the areas of Letter and Sound Identification at the beginning of the year and at the end of each quarter. The *Word Knowledge Assessment* is required in Kindergarten and optional in grades 1-5. All teachers are encouraged to hold *Individual Reading Conference Assessments (IRCA)* with students each quarter.

**Student Achievement\*:** Percentage of students scores meeting or exceeding the Illinois Learning Standards for the grades and subjects tested on the ISAT.

<b>E. Graham El</b>	2001-02	2002-03
<b>Grade 3</b>		
Reading	59.1	63.4
Mathematics	59.1	79.1
Writing	31.8	42.5
<b>Grade 4</b>		
Science	29.7	54.0
Social Science	29.7	46.0
<b>Grade 5</b>		
Reading	39.5	47.2
Mathematics	40.9	52.8
Writing	62.2	30.6

**Student performance is measured and reported based on state standards.** The district has developed a standards based report card to give a clear message to parents about what their children know, what they are able to do and what they need to learn in relation to the state standards. All schools will start using this report card next year. Students are graded by student work, observations, assessments and district assessment. Performance and effort are rated separately. Teachers also monitor students on a daily basis by looking at cumulative folders, running records and student work. The reading coach explains: "We talk to the teachers and provide students with feedback; we use student work to determine where students are. We look at standards to determine "next-steps" for the students. We look at writing to drive spelling instruction, use running records to determine reading instruction, use "read-alouds" to develop comprehension, books for content area, we use modeling." Student data are stored in the district's Information System which includes students' electronic cumulative folders and assessment data. Every student is online, and parents get training to access their child's information. The district is working on making the system more dynamic by having all the quarterly district assessments online as well.

**Springfield Public School District #186 has a District Peer Review Process in place to review the school improvement plans.** The district peer review team consists of deputy superintendent of schools, the director of federal programs, the director of school improvement, the coordinator of language arts, the coordinator of mathematics and the coordinator of standards and benchmarks. The district peer review team meets within the first 45 days of the school year to review the school improvement plans using the 48 indicators within the 10 components of the Illinois State Board of Education's rubric, "School Improvement Plan: Components and Criteria for Development, Review and Revision" as a guide. School Improvement Plan Rubric score sheets are returned to the building principal submitting the School Improvement Plan within three days of the review date to aide in the self-reflection process at each school.

**Principals are evaluated once a year. Each principal within the district works with a district cabinet member to develop two or three individual goals that are aligned to the school improvement plan.** Principals are required to provide evidence of the accomplishment of the goals. A district cabinet member also visits the school for a walk-through and formal evaluation. District cabinet members help with

the evaluation procedure, identify strengths and weaknesses, and try to get an sense of how they can support this principal. The evaluation ends with a goals conference and then a written evaluation conference.

**Non-tenured teachers are evaluated two times per year, tenured teachers are evaluated every other year.** A pre conference takes place before the evaluation. If a teacher gets a negative evaluation, he/she has 90 days to improve his/her performance or he/she will be dismissed. Student achievement data is not used in the evaluation. Reading First Portfolio Forms are used to evaluate teachers' deliverance of the Reading First program.

### **Recognition, Intervention and Adjustments**

**Student interventions focus on literacy. Low-performing students receive daily tutoring.**

Students who are below grade level in literacy areas are targeted based on assessment scores on the MAS and DRA. Quarterly Intervention Plans are developed to help these students improve. These plans are shared with parents and include them in the process, e.g. by asking them to read with their children every night. The intervention plans are re-assessed throughout the year to see if students still need the intervention or if the plan can be dropped. Teachers use student interventions such as a double dose of guided reading, modified directions or assignments and small group instruction after large group instruction has been given. Low-achieving students receive one-to-one attention each day. Reading Recovery teachers and resource teachers pull out students who need more attention. Tutorial assistance through the Reading Excellence Act was offered for two years, but will be discontinued because federal funding is no longer available. Tutoring services were provided two nights a week for 15 minutes with the reading coach and 45 minutes with a tutor. The goal was to have students reading at grade level.

**The Flexible Service intervention program is used to provide pre-special education services and reduce the number of special education referrals.**

Students in Flexible Service are assigned to classes where teachers are highly skilled. Of the 27 students served last year, 13 students were made eligible for special education services (3 of the referrals were based on behavior, the rest were academic concerns).

**The balanced calendar schedule of Elizabeth Graham Elementary includes 3 weeks of extended learning for struggling students.** The Extended Learning Opportunities Programs are offered during one week of each of the three intercessions for a total of fourteen additional school days. Students are identified by teachers with each grade level choosing 5-10 students to create classes of 10-12 students each. A total of 100-120 students are served. Pre and post testing during the intercession is conducted using extended response samples. Word knowledge is assessed weekly. Two teachers receive extra pay and the district secretary receives a stipend to manage the program. Teachers who teach during intercessions receive 2 hours of planning time and professional development each day. Teachers receive regular progress reports on their students, including actual test scores. Title I funds fund the program.

**Elizabeth Graham has formal programs in place for students with non-academic problems.** The Positive Behavior Interventions and Strategies Program (PBIS) is designed for students with behavioral problems. Students are identified by individualized functional assessments and grouped according to common issues. An internal coach (teacher volunteer) manages the program. The number of referrals at Elizabeth Graham has declined significantly from 400 referrals in 2000-2001 to 104 referrals in 2001-2002. Verbal aggression is the main reason for referrals. The program has been very successful as evidenced by the reduction in in-school suspensions from 72 to 28, reduction in out-of-school suspensions from 54 to 11. During this school year, the school is tying referrals and progress to DRA data. The Student Assistance Program (SAP) includes a half time SAP coordinator who works with children who are suffering from the effects of family substance abuse, violence, loss of loved ones, and other issues that might impede student development and achievement. SAP coordinator works with individual students as well as student groups. SAP groups meet one hour per week for a semester. Group topics include life skills, anger management, dealing with loss, etc. The groups provide pre and post question data. The SAP also offers staff training to enhance effective education for students at risk.

**Elizabeth Graham Elementary uses remediation plans for struggling teachers.** If there is an area that needs improvement in the course of the year, the principal and teacher develop a plan. It might include journaling, taking a class, getting some training. Classroom management is an area where teachers often need help. The principal matches teachers up with someone who does a good job in that area. The school also has coaches available. The principal feels that remediation has been successful; she has not had to dismiss anyone; others principals in the district have had to do that. She also feels that the school's focus on professional development has really helped to get the teachers on board. She says: "We do have things that are "non-negotiable"; 90% of the teachers are implementing the new innovations and about 10% teachers are dragging their feet."

## Factors Influencing District and School Practices

### Resource Allocation

**The Reading First grant and Title I funds provide important resources for Elizabeth Graham.** The principal: "We are a Reading First school grant which is a bonus. That grant allowed us to get funds, materials, and a coach in our school. We take lots of the offers we are given. Students with high poverty levels get Title I money. This helps me be able to create equity across the board."

### Resource Allocation\*:

	<i>Springfield PSD</i>	<i>Illinois</i>
Instructional Expenditure per Pupil	\$4,625	\$4,842
Operating Expenditure per Pupil	\$8,516	\$8,181
% Expenditure per Function		
Instruction	45.4	45.5
General Administration	1.8	2.5
Supporting Services	36.7	31.0
Other Expenditures	16.2	21.0

\*Financial Indicators 2001-02

### **Local influences, Relationships and Communication**

**The district actively communicates district standards to parents. Elizabeth Graham employs a parent educator to facilitate parent involvement and communication.** The district developed brochures for each grade level describing the district learning standards and benchmarks by subject. "The benchmarks represent a general outline of the content and skills taught. They provide parents and teachers with a common set of expectations for what students should know and be able to do. When parents and teachers work together as partners in the education process the children will have the best opportunity to learn and succeed in school." Rather than being a fund raising organization, Graham's PTO is primarily focused on getting parents involved with the school. Elizabeth Graham uses Title I money on a half time parent educator who makes home visits to parents or provides transportation for parent teacher conferences. Parents give input with regard to their satisfaction with programs through questionnaires and surveys. In response to parent input, programs are offered at lunchtime and immediately after school. Food and childcare are provided.

Programs offered in the 2000-2003 school years included:

- Meet Your Teacher Ice Cream Social
- Family Reading Night
- Family Math and Science Night
- ISAT Preparation using Technology
- Music and Fine Arts Night
- Chats with the Principal (4 times yearly) to communicate School Improvement Goals
- Writing Night
- Extra Parent Conferences

Elizabeth Graham keeps track of all the parent activities that are held at school. Parents can evaluate all the gatherings.

### **Core Beliefs About Teaching and Learning**

**The district is concerned about the performance requirements of No Child Left Behind.** The superintendent of curriculum: "Mostly we agree with the concepts of NCLB. We are not afraid of the accountability. We are not afraid to talk about how we are doing. We think that the sanctions are out of order. We don't think that choice is the appropriate first sanction. And we think the federal timeline is too fast, the way the sanctions keep coming one right after another. The hurdles for making AYP are going to move so fast, we don't know if we can move our population that fast. We currently have 10 schools of the 36 schools in the district on the early warning list or watch list, and we have another 6 in the wings that could be joining them. But you have to ask 'why are schools there?' We know a number of our school are there because of lack of progress in single cells, rather than lack of progress overall."

**Administrators and teachers believe all children can learn, but report being challenged by their students' home environment.** The superintendent: "We believe that all children can learn. I have no hesitation in making that statement. We will close the achievement gap for children in this district. It is not just lip service. We believe that we can do this." A teacher's response to the statement 'all children can learn' is: "True! You need to believe this in order for them to learn." Another teacher comments on the challenges faced by students in her classroom: "The home environment is the greatest challenge for our students. They deal with lack of stability, not having support at home. Survival in daily life is the most important thing for many of our students, and this inhibits them from being all they can be in the classroom." The principal of Elizabeth Graham says: "I think many schools define success by having kids reach a certain level, but I think it is important to breed life long learners."