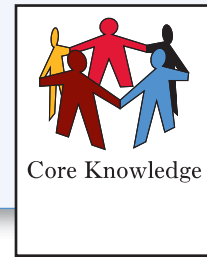


V. Federal Hill Preparatory School Baltimore, Maryland



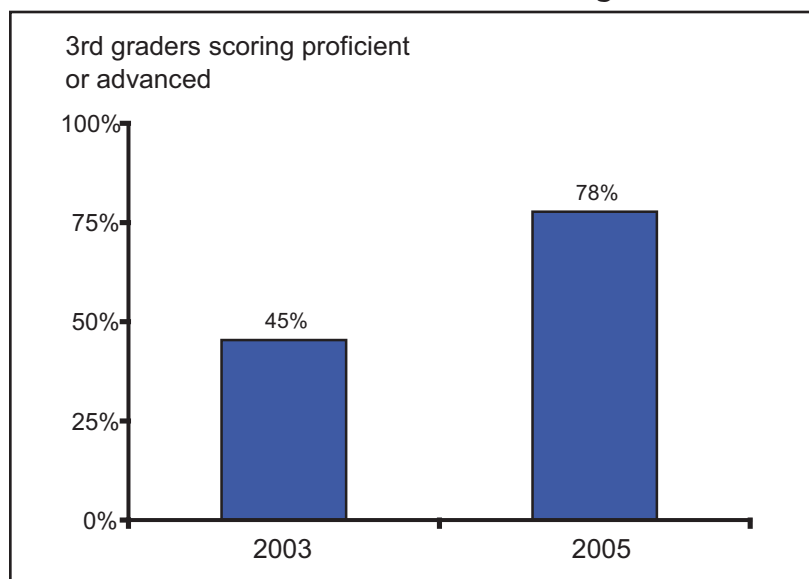
Grades PK–8

Enrollment: 311
Low-Income: 68%
Non-White: 77%

Felicitously situated in Baltimore’s historic Federal Hill neighborhood, just blocks from the kid-friendly Maryland Science Center and other famous attractions at Inner Harbor, Federal Hill Preparatory School strives to offer a rich and demanding curriculum to its more than 300 students. The staff’s hard work to achieve that goal is beginning to bear fruit: Last year Federal Hill exited “school improvement” status after spending years on the state’s list of low-performing schools.

“I think it was the combination of Direct Instruction and Core Knowledge,” says Sharon Van Dyke, the school’s principal. Indeed, Federal Hill offers a compelling rebuke to the myth that schools can’t use a “scientifically based” reading program and at the same time implement a rich curriculum that spans core subject areas.

Federal Hill Makes Great Strides in Reading Achievement



Even so, when Federal Hill first began implementing Core Knowledge three years ago, Ms. Van Dyke’s aim was to keep the two programs strictly apart. “I have to say when we first went into it I didn’t look at the math and English. I was thinking we’re doing Core for social studies and science and Direct Instruction for reading and math. But once I really got into it, I realized we could mesh them a lot more.”

She explains that, “In Direct Instruction, they use a lot of science and social studies content for their reading. Then we looked at the stories and sayings, and it just started to evolve. One of the consultants helped me look more closely at Direct Instruction and we found we could match Core

up with it. That wasn't our focus at the time. Originally, we did DI because we needed something scripted to make sure kids were learning the math and reading skills. But it turned out that they can work nicely together."

Eventually Federal Hill moved beyond science and social studies and began incorporating the literature specified in the Core Knowledge Sequence. Each quarter teachers responsible for language arts incorporate a certain set of Core Knowledge texts that match up with genres on Maryland's state tests. "We took our required genres, laid them out by quarters, and then mapped on the Core Knowledge content and materials," explains Ms. Van Dyke.

When Federal Hill expanded its implementation of Core Knowledge, it also became much easier to collaborate across disciplines. Each grade level team meets regularly to plan out the sequence of content for each quarter. "So if my social studies teacher is teaching World War II, my English teacher will be doing the Diary of Anne Frank," says Ms. Van Dyke.

That isn't to say implementation has been easy. Grant money paid for four new state-of-the-art laboratories, but some teachers were initially uncomfortable using them. "Elementary teachers in general are not content trained," explains Ms. Van Dyke. "They take a three credit course on Teaching Science in the Elementary Classroom, and that's often as far as it goes. There was resistance—not outright resistance, but passive resistance. It was more fear of the unknown, but we've worked hard for two years to get them all comfortable, and now they are."

She started out by requiring all teachers to teach a lab lesson at least once per quarter, "to get your feet wet at least." Now they use labs for every unit. The school also found a volunteer who helps teachers with the heavy lifting of prepping lab materials for particular lessons. The school also takes advantage of its location: Federal Hill has special arrangements with local museums—such as the Museum of Industry and the hands-on Maryland Science Museum—that provide teachers and students with free admission as often as they like.

Finally, the Core Knowledge history curriculum often provides an opportunity to mix learning and creativity: "We have a partnership with UMBC [the University of Maryland, Baltimore County]. A theater professor and two of his students worked with my fifth grade to develop a play about the Civil War, which was a half hour overview from the beginning to the end of the war. Their teachers taught lessons about the war, and then the children did the rest of the necessary research and wrote the script. ... It was wonderfully creative."

