



Alaska School SPOTLIGHT

Big Lake Elementary | **A Growth Profile**

February 2024

Big Lake Elementary School is the home of the Grizzlies.

We are nestled in Big Lake, Alaska, just 15 miles north of Wasilla, and are part of the Mat Su Borough School District. For the current school year, Grizzly Country is home to 335 students and the growth in reading our school has accomplished is something to celebrate. As a school, we have made a 23% leap in reading achievement since the start of the school year. We attribute that growth to our team approach, master schedule, instructional framework and our collaborative time for team planning and data analysis. This year's journey at Big Lake Elementary starts with our team and here is a little bit more about our recipe for success.



At BLE, we are a team who believes relationships with our students, staff and families are the foundation of everything we do and all learning that happens. Our staff is a group of people

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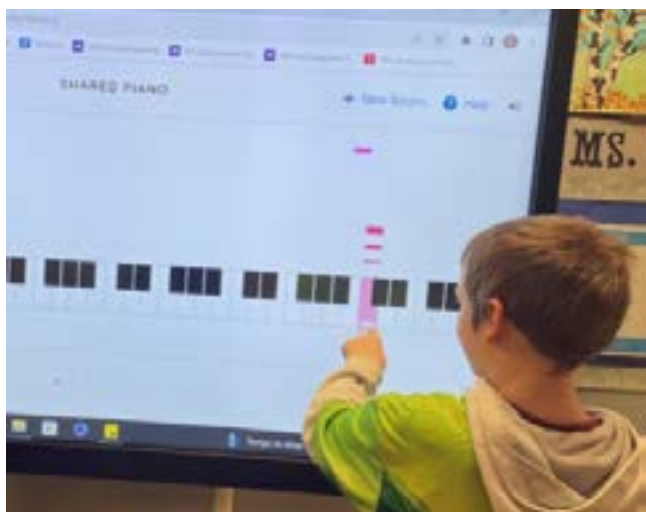
committed to kids. We are committed to their learning and growth, committed to their safety and well-being, committed to the whole child and whole family. Staff are committed to doing their best to help kids grow in an environment that fosters learning coupled with high expectations. As a community centered school, positive relationships with our students and

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Our Mission: An excellent education for every student every day.

their families is where all learning begins. First thing every morning, kids are greeted as they enter the school. Regardless of job title, all staff make greeting kids their top priority. The feeling of connectedness at Big Lake Elementary allows students to feel safe, secure and supported when learning challenges happen. We all know when kids feel safe, they are more inclined to take learning risks. Our school is no different. Positive relationships with students is our top priority and we are a team who works together to achieve great things.

Last spring, our school felt compelled to make changes to support post-Covid learning gaps and set high expectations for both academics and behavior. The leadership team in collaboration with all staff, created a new master schedule and frameworks for reading instruction to take learning to the next level for all students. At BLE we believe in order to close the learning gap, students must be exposed to grade-level standards. Research indicates that if you never expose them to grade level work, they will never be able to perform at grade level. This means at our school, both general education and special education students are exposed to grade level standards. Although this concept sounds simple, the work to make it happen is heavy lifting.



As a team valuing relationships, consensus is key, especially when the master schedule is the topic. Our leadership teams at BLE include teachers from early childhood, intermediate, special education and support staff. We also include parents and administration to ensure a well-rounded view of our school and the needs which drive long-term planning. We utilize our leadership teams to draft ideas, talk with constituencies and return to the ta-

ble ensuring suggestions for change are supported and achievable. Within these teams, the collective vision focused on a master schedule to maximize student learning. The teams also drafted school-wide structures to support learning including: whole group, small group and a skills block now known as What I Need (WIN time.) WIN time is our enrichment platform for advanced learners, forward

progression for grade level learners and remediation for those below grade level. These structures have come to support schoolwide differentiated instruction where needs for all students are being addressed.

Our Grizzly superpower is our team and the consistent effort to do the right thing for kids.

A critical and final component for school growth this year is collaborative time for staff. PLC Team Time is a district wide initiative in MatSu. At Big Lake Elementary, it is one hour weekly where staff gather in teams to review and analyze student data as well as plan for student learning. In our building, teams can be based on grade level or department and focus on collective teacher efficacy. The collective data analysis time allows for quality planning, roster modification and differentiation of instruction for small group and WIN time.

I often make reference to strengths a person has as their superpower. Our Grizzly superpower is our team and the consistent effort to do the right thing for kids. The school is the center of the community and the community is the center of the school. Our team approach, master schedule, instructional framework and collaborative time for team planning and data analysis have provided a framework for amazing growth. As a school and community, we can't wait to see how high we can go.



Has your school proven great success increasing student reading proficiency utilizing evidence-based curriculum and materials? Do you have something you are really excited about as an outcome of a shift to Science of Reading best practices? We are interested in hearing what amazing things are happening in your school to positively impact student reading proficiency and achievement. Please submit your story to the e-mail below. You may be chosen as the next school spotlight in a future edition of the Alaska Reading Newsletter.

Please e-mail your submissions or questions to: Jenn.Miller@alaska.gov

You can view all editions of the Alaska School Spotlights here:

<https://education.alaska.gov/Alaska-Reading-Resources/alaska-school-spotlights>

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