

My name is Jeremy Pitts and I've taught third grade at North Elementary in the Moses Lake School District since 2001. This year I am on release as our Union president. During that time, we've had seven principals and a turnover of about 90% of our certificated staff. We were a School of Distinction in 2005 and have been in an out of priority status numerous times. The demographics of our school have remained pretty similar over the years: about 65% Hispanic students, about 30% Caucasian (including Russian and Ukranian), and roughly 4% two or more races and about 1% African American. We have been right at or above 90% Free and Reduced lunch for as long as I can remember.

There are probably plenty of reasons we were in school improvement but the biggest pieces communicated to us over the years were Reading and Math test scores. One day out of the year and one test determined the fate of our school on the school improvement list. The scores did not take into account student growth or any number of factors that play into test scores. Morale at North Elementary has had its ups and downs. I can say with certainty that almost all of the "downs" have come at times when we've been notified that we were going into school improvement or that we did not make it out.

The communication from District coaches and OSPI coaches that have visited has always been to just focus on Reading and Math. We can get good "scores" by doing that but it is a less rich educational experience for my students than I had as a student and less than I would want for my own two daughters. In the years we have been identified as being in priority status the vast majority of instruction is only in reading and Math and only on the District approved curriculum for those subjects. No integration for History or Science. Definitely no Art. If a student had to miss Music or PE so that they can make up a Math or Reading assignment, then that's what typically happened. In no way is that an appropriate education, but when the focus is on a score, then that's all that matters.

One of the most frustrating pieces of the entire process has always been the funding that is attached to schools in priority status. For at least the last 4 years, we've received an additional \$30,000 from the State and have used those funds for professional development, parent nights and other activities to help increase parent involvement, as well as just time – time for teaching teams to get together over the summer and map out the curriculum or plan new units (for Reading and Math, of course). This year we are getting out of priority status, which is a great thing, but it also means that we lose the money that comes with that. Now there will not be additional funds to pay for professional development or pay for parent involvement activities. Losing the funding means that we lose the ability to do the very things that helped us improve enough to get out of school improvement. I've heard about the competitive grant idea for schools on priority status and I can't help but think that if we want ALL students to succeed, then we shouldn't make their schools/staff compete with others to get necessary funding in order to be successful. We've also been lucky enough to be part of a healthy snack grant and my students have been able to have fruits and vegetables as a snack at school. Most of the time these are items my students have never eaten before.

Among our staff, the consensus is pretty clear on pieces needed to continue to best serve our students – small class sizes for more than just K-3, a well-rounded education that includes Art, PE time that meets the state requirements, more Nurses, more Counselors, an actual Library program that is more than just checking out books, more time for recess, more time for actual teaching, and behavior supports. All of these things cost money and removing this necessary component ultimately hurts the learning of my students.

