

10-25-2013

Character education and parental involvement: impact on academic achievement

Katie Hood

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**CHARACTER EDUCATION AND PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT:
IMPACT ON ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT**

by
Katie Lynn Hood

A Thesis

Submitted to the
Department of Public Relations and Advertising
College of Communication

In partial fulfillment of the requirement

For the degree of
Master of Arts in Public Relations

At
Rowan University

April 26, 2011

Thesis Chair: Suzanne Sparks FitzGerald, Ph.D.

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this document to my parents and brother, Malcolm, Vicki, and Joseph Hood

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge my family and friends for their support in all of my pursuits, academic and otherwise. I would also like to recognize Rowan University, Galloway Township Public Schools, the Greater Egg Harbor Regional High School District, and public schooling advocates everywhere for their tireless efforts to brighten our future.

Abstract

Katie Hood

A STUDY OF THE RELATIONSHIP AMONG CHARACTER EDUCATION, PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT, AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT IN PUBLIC ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN SOUTHERN NEW JERSEY

2010/11

Suzanne Sparks FitzGerald, Ph.D.

Master of Arts in Public Relations

This study was conducted to determine (a) if a positive correlation exists between character education and academic achievement in three New Jersey public elementary schools and (b) if a positive correlation exists between parental involvement and academic achievement in the same three schools. NJ ASK data supported the notions that character education and parental involvement related to academic achievement. A content analysis of two documents about each school provided the researcher with the level to which each school promoted character education and parental involvement. Interviews with public school administrators and staff discussed the relationships that exist among these three factors and the levels to which their schools foster these relationships.

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Chapter 1

Problem Importance

The future of our world depends on a well-educated, properly-equipped society. Without academic, social/emotional, and ethical fluency, our communities are in danger. According to Jonathan Cohen, Ph. D., developing reflective and empathic capacities, problem-solving skills, and the ability to work with others are the same factors that allow adults to love, work, and participate effectively in a democracy (2006). New Jersey public school curriculum standards promote exactly these skills.

Our success as Americans and as a developing global community depends on people's willingness and abilities to make differences. If a cycle begins where children feel disconnected, unappreciated, and incapable, it may lead to a very ugly downward spiral of despondency and learned helplessness. This cycle is one of negative self-efficacy, and can powerfully influence motivation (Bogner, Raphael, and Pressley, 2002).

Sue Winton, of the University of Toronto, links America's renewed interest in character education to insecurities about students' academic achievement, moral decline, and the loss of a common culture (Winton 2008). It is important to give youth the tools for success. Through attention to character education and parental involvement in schools, communities nationwide can provide those tools.

Studying the relationships among parental involvement, character education, and academic achievement can likely lead to finding ways to improve future generations. If positive correlations between parental involvement and academic achievement exist, then parents, teachers, and the school community at large can build a culture of support for

children. Researchers Englund, Luckner, Whaley and Egeland (2004) have already found a positive association between parental involvement and academic achievement.

If a positive correlation between character education and academic achievement exists, curriculum improvements can be streamlined to include both traditional and nontraditional concepts. According to researchers Benninga, Berkowitz, Kuehn and Smith (2006,) “If it could be demonstrated that implementing character education programs is compatible with efforts to improve school achievement, then perhaps more schools would accept the challenge of doing both.” The same researchers go on to assert that high-quality character education leads to academic achievement.

Problem Validity

According to psychologist Abraham Maslow, people have a hierarchy of needs ranging from basic physiological ones to higher-level emotional and mental needs. When one tier of needs has been met, the next tier becomes the goal. Physiological and safety needs are generally not concerns for the average American, but the next two tiers can be.

Unfortunately, some people never feel a sense of belonging or respect from others. People are more willing to contribute if they feel they will be heard. When people feel connected to their communities, they become more active within the society. However, if people feel disconnected, they are less likely to participate, feeling as though no one cares if they do. Children are no exception.

Problem Statement

The research for this thesis involves the relationship among character education, parental involvement, and academic achievement. Does academic achievement improve

with character education in the classroom? Does academic achievement improve with parental involvement?

The responsibility to properly educate the nation's youth rests on everyone's shoulders, not just parents. Many parents in today's economic situation simply don't have time to provide an environment for their children to fully reach their social and esteem needs. Through character education, school officials can provide a more solid platform for children to feel like they matter.

The Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools requires American public schools to meet Maslow's first two tiers – providing lunch and a safe environment to all students -- according to the U.S. Department of Education's website. Many schools also strive to meet social and esteem needs through infusing character education in their curricula. The goal is that each child feels capable of becoming a valuable asset to his or her community.

“Over the past 32 years, Americans have said the single most important purpose of (public) schooling is to prepare people to become responsible and caring citizens or members of our communities” (Rose and Gallup, 2000). When students feel like valued members of a school community, they are more likely to engage in it. This includes joining clubs, building relationships with others, and participating in class. An increased sense of belonging and community, which will provide feelings of respect, confidence, and self-esteem can follow.

Delimitations

The research conducted for this thesis will refer only to public New Jersey elementary schools in Atlantic and Gloucester Counties and their students. It will not include information regarding private, charter, or parochial schools in New Jersey or any other state. Socioeconomic status will not be considered as a variable in this thesis because the schools being studied will be of similar status according to DFGs (District Factor Groupings).

Purpose

Studying the relationships among academic achievement, parental involvement, and character education can lead to improving current educational practices. In troubling financial times, districts and their taxpayers cannot afford to spend time, money, or effort on inconsequential programs. If this study's findings support strong correlations among parental involvement, character education, and academic achievement, schools will be better able to determine appropriate budget allocation.

Superintendents will determine the importance of developing and strengthening parent outreach programs and character education programs in their schools. Educators can craft more useful lesson plans for their students. Parents and community members might invest more time with their students and show more support for area schools when it comes time to vote. Students can enjoy improved academic success and self esteem if their scholastic experience progresses as a result of this study's findings. Researchers in the field agree that character education can lead to an overall enhanced educational experience.

Hypotheses

This thesis seeks to correlate character education in New Jersey public schools with academic achievement and with parental involvement.

H1. It is expected that when character education is taught in New Jersey public schools, a positive correlation with academic achievement will exist.

Marvin Berkowitz and Melinda Bier, experts in the field of character education, have identified character education programs that enhance academic achievement (Benninga, et al 449).

Jonathan Cohen, president of the Center for Social and Emotional Education, says there are over 300 empirical studies that support the notion that “when schools make these core processes integral facets of school life, student achievement increases and school violence decreases” (Cohen 2006).

H2. It is expected that a positive correlation will exist between academic achievement and parental involvement within the school community.

Researcher Danielle Lavin-Loucks supports this notion, saying that when parents, students and teachers work together, “this will instill a sense of self-esteem and pride that is vital for successfully accomplishing tasks and boosting academic achievement.” (Allen 2008) Englund, et al, (2004) also found that parental involvement is “moderately but significantly related to children’s academic achievement.” The article then cites eight separate studies (Christenson, Rounds, & Gorney, 1992; Fehrmann, Keith & Reimers, 1987; Izzo, Weissberg,

Kaspro, & Fendrich, 1999; Keith, Keith, Quirk, Cohen, Rosenthal, & Franzese, 1996; Keith et al., 1998; Miedel & Reynolds, 1999; Shaver & Walls, 1998; Stevenson & Baker, 1987) that support this assertion.

Method

The scholastic achievement of three elementary schools in Atlantic County, New Jersey will be reviewed. NJ Report Cards information as issued online by the NJ Department of Education will determine the level of academic achievement. One school will practice a high level of character education, one a medium level of character education, and one a low level of character education or none at all. The amount of character education and parental involvement will be initially determined by a content analysis of each of the schools' websites and a school narrative provided by the schools to the NJ Department of Education. Further assessment will be determined through personal interviews with employees at each school.

The literature review to follow this chapter will address what other researchers have found regarding academic achievement and its correlation to character education, parental involvement and its correlation to academic achievement, and the issues that can prevent districts from pursuing character education programs.

Definitions of Terms

1. ***Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs*** -- A hierarchical pyramid describing several needs people experience.
 - a. *Physiological needs* – literal requirements for human survival
 - b. *Safety needs* – personal and financial security/health and well-being

- c. *Social needs* – a sense of love/belonging, relating to friendship, intimacy, and family
 - d. *Esteem needs* – the need to feel respected, have self-esteem and self-respect.
 - e. *Self-actualization* – realizing one’s full potential
2. ***Character education*** – a term to encompass all teachings that help one develop as personal and social beings. It includes social and emotional learning, moral reasoning, cognitive development, life skills education, health education, violence prevention, critical thinking, ethical reasoning, conflict resolution and mediation
 3. ***Valuable*** – constructive, significant, an asset
 4. ***Public elementary school*** – a school funded by taxpayers that teaches students in grades K-6.
 5. ***Self Efficacy*** – a perception of one’s ability that is not necessarily accurate
 6. ***Curriculum Standards*** – In New Jersey, these are referred to as the Core Curriculum Standards. The standards describe what students should know and be able to do upon completion of a thirteen-year public education and provide local school districts with clear and specific benchmarks for student achievement in nine content areas.
 7. ***Academic Achievement*** – interchangeable with scholastic achievement, it refers to the grades and test scores students earn
 8. ***Parental Involvement*** – a parent or guardian taking time to attend school functions and help the student with schoolwork.

Chapter 2

The Call for Improved Academic Achievement

In 1996, New Jersey attempted to quell academic disparity among school districts by adopting new academic standards (MacFarquhar, 1996). The universal standards related to a variety of school subjects including mathematics, science, social studies, languages, literacy, health and physical education, and the arts. In accordance with a mandate from the New Jersey Supreme Court, the standards were supposed to help determine how to equalize financing for all districts by creating a universal baseline. A \$450 million spending gap existed among the richest and poorest districts at the time, and the standards were supposed to help determine how education efforts could best be financed.

The new standards were to “catapult us to the forefront of education in the nation,” according to former governor Christine Todd Whitman. Bipartisan uncertainty about the effectiveness of the new standards was evident, and some in the education world struggled to support the change. Fifteen years later, there’s still disparity and students perform inconsistently on state and federal achievement tests. The core curriculum standards did increase scholastic accountability, but students still fail to perform well. Also, funding for school districts does not necessarily reflect likelihood of academic achievement and still varies drastically.

With the implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001, schools nationwide were held to a separate set of standards, both academically and in terms of character. Schools are now meant to reach a certain level (Average Yearly Progress, AYP) academically, as determined by standardized tests, and each year they don’t, there

are consequences. Schools in New Jersey significantly contrast in their performance on these standards as well, and as a result there are varying levels of government involvement in schools across the state, attempting to fix what many have deemed “unfixable.”

Can Character Education Be Part of the Answer?

Jonathan Cohen, Ph.D., president of the Center for Social and Emotional Education, claims that state and national education leaders affirm character education’s ability to affect children’s abilities to learn and develop healthily (Cohen, 2006). Cohen references a “growing body of knowledge” that points to character education providing a foundation for students to learn effectively. He alleges that over 300 empirical studies exist linking “safe, caring, participatory and responsive” schools to increased academic achievement. When children don’t feel safe, he says, they have difficulty focusing on learning. If a culture exists where every student feels comfortable going to class every day, the student is better able to concentrate on subject matter and less on bullies.

Research supports the notion that high-quality character education can promote academic achievement (Benninga, Berkowitz, Kuehn & Smith, 2006). “Well-conceived programs of character education can and should exist side by side with strong academic programs,” say the researchers (2006). Roger P. Weissberg, president of the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL,) reviewed 300 studies with colleague Joseph Durlak, and found that students participating in character education programs performed at least 10 points higher on achievement tests than those who did not (Dovre, 2007).

Increased support for character education programs coincides with increased high-stakes testing of student achievement (Benninga et al, 2006). “Public and political emphasis on academic achievement and accountability has led both program leaders and education researchers to explore the relationship between the affective goals of character education and academic achievement,” (Dovre, 2007). The current push toward character education legislation began well before the NCLB Act was passed, though.

The Contemporary Character Education Movement

“Legal and curricular developments” of the 1960s and ‘70s led to contemporary character development initiatives (Glanzer & Milson, 2006). With increased secularization, new forms of character education began to develop. In the early 1980s, Lawrence Kohlberg developed a method of teaching character which treated schools as democratic communities which encouraged students to share responsibility for creating and enforcing school codes of conduct (McClellan, 1999).

In the 1990s, character education began to focus more on having teachers serve as role models and recognizing students who exemplify model behavior. Some researchers in the ‘90s viewed character education negatively, as an “ideologically conservative movement intent on inculcating virtues through adult exhortations for the purpose of ensuring compliant behavior among youth,” (Kohn, 1997; Nash, 1997; Purpel, 1997). However, most legislators and leaders in the field of education support character education as a positive movement that builds both individual and social dimensions.

Americans have never attempted to legislate such a specific vision of character education before (Glanzer & Milson, 2006). Since 1993, 23 U.S. states have adopted new legislation or adapted existing legislation related to character education. The U.S. government supports character education in addition to improving academic achievement and seeks to reward successful programs with grants (United States Department of Education, 2007). The government has rewarded character education programs with grants since the early 1990s, but in 2002, funding was expanded from \$8 million a year to \$25 million, representing its increased level of support under the No Child Left Behind Act.

In 23 states where legislation regarding character education exists, the primary virtues to be taught were respect, honesty, and truthfulness (Glanzer & Milson, 2006). Only three states explicitly stated their intention to include character education with already existing educational efforts. Despite lending itself to the topic, teachers rarely taught character education in conjunction with sex or drug education. Additionally, only eight of the states recommended partnership with key stakeholders, such as parents, in creating effective character education programs. Only nine states taught character education at all grade levels. Few states outline specific plans to fund staff training in character education.

Although many states support character education legislatively, they don't fully embrace it. They approach it from an old fashioned "do-as-you're told" stance instead of focusing on building a better, more responsible citizenry. When traditional character education is taught, it simply encourages kids to be obedient, not to retain the lessons.

Conflicting Views Regarding Character Education

Some schools feel that if they focus on teaching character, it will be to the detriment of increasing academic achievement (Benninga et al, 2006). Some parents disagree with teachers using their role as authority figures to influence their children's character development. Administrators might hesitate to take time away from core subject areas. Differences in teaching character might arise, leading to arguments about the "right" or "wrong" way to teach it (Brannon, 2008).

Renewed interest in character education may be attributed to "insecurities about students' academic achievement, and loss of a common culture" (Winton, 2008). In one of our nation's earliest attempts to quantify character education's success on actually affecting character in 1928, no relationship was found between student membership in organizations that were supposed to teach honesty and honest behavior in over 10,000 American students (Hartshorne & May, 1928).

Some fear that when character education is taught, students may simply "desire to conform to expectations or avoid punishment for failing to appear to comply," instead of legitimately changing their character (Winton, 2008). The type of character education this author refers to is "traditional character education," which is based mainly on "an idyllic, mythical past in which absolute truths were undisputed, character and morality were strong, values were shared, families were intact, institutions were respected," (Winton, 2008).

However, the new wave of character education focuses on creating a well-rounded asset to society instead of fostering obedient behavior. “Almost every scholar in the field of character education would insist that a legal approach to character education must be comprehensive and not merely an addition to an already packed school day.”

Comprehensive Character Education is Best

Comprehensive, rather than traditional character education, leads to the highest levels of academic success. This approach, according to the Character Education Partnership (CEP,) is described as a “different way of teaching;...a comprehensive approach that promotes core values in all phases of school life and permeates the entire school culture,” (Dovre, 2007). Infusing the existing curriculum with opportunities to learn good character is the most effective way for teachers to teach it.

The CEP is the nation’s leading professional organization for the character education movement, and says its mission is to work toward “developing moral character and civic virtue in our nation’s youth as one means of promoting a more compassionate and responsible society,” (CEP, 2005). The nonpartisan, nonsectarian group outlines *11 Principles of Effective Character Education* that could serve as the basis for determining solid programs in schools. The CEP also asserts that higher academic achievement comes as a result of enrollment in character education programs (CEP, 2005).

A guide created by the U.S. Department of Education to help character education program assessors quantify success in programs also lists several key components that indicate achievement. The guide asserts that, “for a school to foster character

development, it must provide a positive social environment, characterized by leadership; collegiality; a learning orientation among faculty; and ties among school, home and community” (United States Department of Education, 2007).

Leaders in the field confirm that successful character education initiatives relate to parental involvement in school and outside of it (US Dept. of Ed., 2007). Parent support and engagement is a key component in many effective character education programs, (Dovre, 2007).

Does Parental Involvement Also Relate to Academic Achievement?

Parental engagement seems to be “the primary vehicle by which to elevate academic achievement,” to many educators (Hara, 1998). Researchers for the past two decades have been trying to quantify parental involvement’s outcome on academic achievement in elementary school children (Marcon, 1999; Peressini, 1998).

A study to examine the relationships among parental behaviors, parental expectations, and children’s academic achievement supports the concept that early parental involvement is important to later academic achievement (Englund, Luckner, Whaley & Egeland, 2004). Study participants were 187 low-income families (child and mother) studied from child’s birth through third grade. Parental involvement has been cited by many researchers in the field as “moderately but significantly” related to children’s academic achievement. It can be hard to define “parental involvement” in schools because there are a variety of degrees to which parents can involve themselves. The study says it can be difficult to determine whether previous achievement predicts increased

parental involvement or vice versa. This study showed a higher level of parental involvement with increased academic achievement of the child.

A study conducted by William H. Heynes published in *Urban Education* in 2005 studied the effects of parental engagement on academic achievement in urban youth. In his study, the researcher concluded that a correlation existed between parental involvement and increased academic achievement (Heynes, 2005).

Leading character education organizations, namely the CEP, state that even though it is parents' responsibilities to teach their children character, character education is necessary in schools because some parents are not teaching their children well (CEP, 2005). Experts in the field say that, "in today's American family and current culture, children often are coming to school with problematic behaviors and attitudes. Therefore, character education has become a necessity in schools," (Brannon, 2008). Teachers agree that teaching character is as important as academics for young children, according to Brannon's research.

Character Education and Parental Involvement Lead to Academic Achievement

Accordingly, parental involvement and character education in schools (and at home) should intrinsically support one another in attaining higher academic success for students. Studies show character education programs positively affect students' achievement (Benninga et al 2003). This is partly because character education can help build a calmer atmosphere that better allows children to focus on learning. Parental involvement also leads to increased achievement (Fan & Chen, 2001).

Children learn better when their parents play an active role in their education (Richardson, Tolson, Huang & Lee, 2009). They also benefit when they are taught character education as a means to learn social and emotional skills. If schools embrace a comprehensive character education program and encourage parents to get involved, it is likely that students will improve academically.

In the following chapter, the researcher will discuss research methods to be employed to study the relationships among character education, parental involvement, and academic achievement.

Chapter 3

Context of the Study

The research conducted for this thesis will seek to support or reject the notion that academic achievement is positively correlated with character education and parental involvement. Important questions the researcher seeks to answer include:

1. To what degree, if any, does character education influence academic achievement?
2. To what degree, if any, does parental involvement in the school influence academic achievement?
3. Do schools that encourage character education and parental involvement also have students who perform better academically?
4. What types of resistance might school systems face when trying to implement parental involvement or character education initiatives?
5. What other factors might affect academic performance?

Instrumentation

Three methods of study – two qualitative and one quantitative – will be employed to answer these questions. A review of New Jersey's School Report Cards, issued by the Department of Education, for the 2009-2010 academic year will help this researcher determine three elementary schools to study. Factors to consider include district factor grouping (DFG) to ensure that the schools have similar socioeconomic statuses, length of school day, class sizes, and total cost per pupil. A content analysis of each school's electronic Message from the Principal, and each school's School Profile provided to the

NJ Dept. of Ed., will reveal information about what messages each school wants to convey to its publics. Personal interviews with an administrator or faculty member at each school will provide in-depth information regarding the level to which character education and parental involvement are actually practiced and supported, and the effect this has on students.

The schools to be studied will be determined in March, with the content analysis following shortly thereafter, and the interviews will be completed during the month of April.

This researcher will select three public elementary schools in southern New Jersey based on information published in the School Report Cards, such as socioeconomic status, time spent in class, and class size. This is to study schools similar in most characteristics except for level of character education and parental involvement.

The 2009-2010 New Jersey Assessment of Skills and Knowledge (ASK) test scores listed on the Report Cards will determine the level of academic achievement each school reaches. These scores are the standards by which educational policy is based in accordance with the No Child Left Behind Act. Information from these Report Cards will be compiled into a series of charts providing side-by-side visual comparisons of each school's information, and how they compare to each other, DFG and state averages.

Once the schools have been selected, the researcher will conduct a content analysis of each school's Web site. This will serve to assess each school's outward commitment to character education and parental involvement, or at least how they transmit these

commitments to the general public. Each school has a School Profile listed on the Department of Education's Web site which will be analyzed in addition to the Message from the Principal listed on each school's personal site.

Key words will include "character education," "values," "morals," "ethics," "family," "civic," "responsible," "respect," "trustworthy," "honesty," "fairness," "caring," "bullying," "teambuilding," "parent," and all variances of these words. Each instance in which these words appear will be recorded, as long as they refer to character education, parental involvement, or academic achievement. If words or phrases appear that are not included in the original list of key words, but are relevant to any of these three subjects, they will be added and included to the list. The goal is that this content analysis will reveal a strong, moderate, or minimal commitment to parental involvement and character education at each school.

Lastly, this researcher will conduct personal interviews with an administrator or guidance counselor at each school. The interviews will focus on character education initiatives in which the school engages, parental involvement the school encourages, and how these subjects relate to academic achievement in students. It is important to interview both administrator and "front-line" employees. Those responsible for enacting the rules, the administrators, can speak regarding the strategy behind implementing character education and parental involvement initiatives. Guidance counselors can speak anecdotally about real-life implementation of these programs. They could explain what works, what doesn't, and why.

Some questions that the interview will cover include whether or not the schools engage in character education programs or parental involvement initiatives, if any correlation exists among these subjects and academic achievement, potential areas for improvement, and how students perceive these subjects. These questions can find similarities and differences in character education and parental involvement programs at each school. They can determine the extent to which each school implements these programs, challenges the schools face in implementing the programs, whether they seem to make a difference, and whether they are supported by students.

The interviews will be conducted through e-mail so that the respondents can thoughtfully respond to the questions posed, and they can clearly state their responses without any researcher bias or interpretation.

The following chapter will contain the actual research conducted in accordance with the outlined research design.

Chapter 4

General Findings:

The charts to follow in this section give a lens through which to view the schools that have been studied. Radix Elementary School in Wil, Northfield Community Elementary School in Northfield, and H. Ashton Marsh in Absecon are very similar schools, which is why they were chosen for study.

When studying New Jersey public schools, it is important to consider district factor groupings or DFGs. DFGs group school districts in one of eight categories as determined by several factors such as socioeconomic status, percentage of the population without a high school degree, and unemployment rate, in addition to others. The lowest DFG is A, which is also known as Abbott districts. The highest DFG is I, which comprises the wealthiest districts. Radix is in the CD (3rd lowest) grouping, Northfield is in the DE (4th lowest,) and Absecon is in the CD (3rd lowest) grouping.

It is also important to consider the amount of time students are in school learning, the class size, and how much is spent per pupil in the district. These variables could greatly skew the data if they are too disparate. The researcher has included information about each school in several charts prefaced with a “1.”

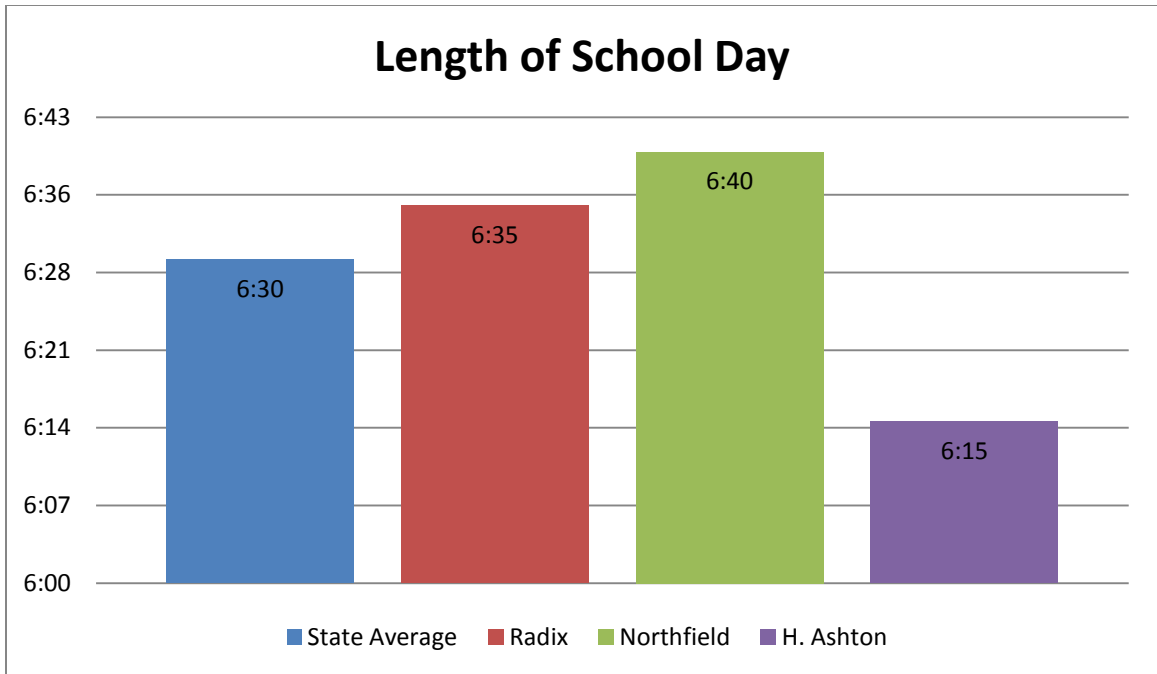


Figure 1.1

The above chart displays the amount of time students spend physically in the school building, including both instructional and non-instructional time.

H. Ashton Marsh Elementary School spends the least amount of time in the school building at six hours and 15 minutes. The other two schools included in the study are in school five to 10 minutes longer than the state average.

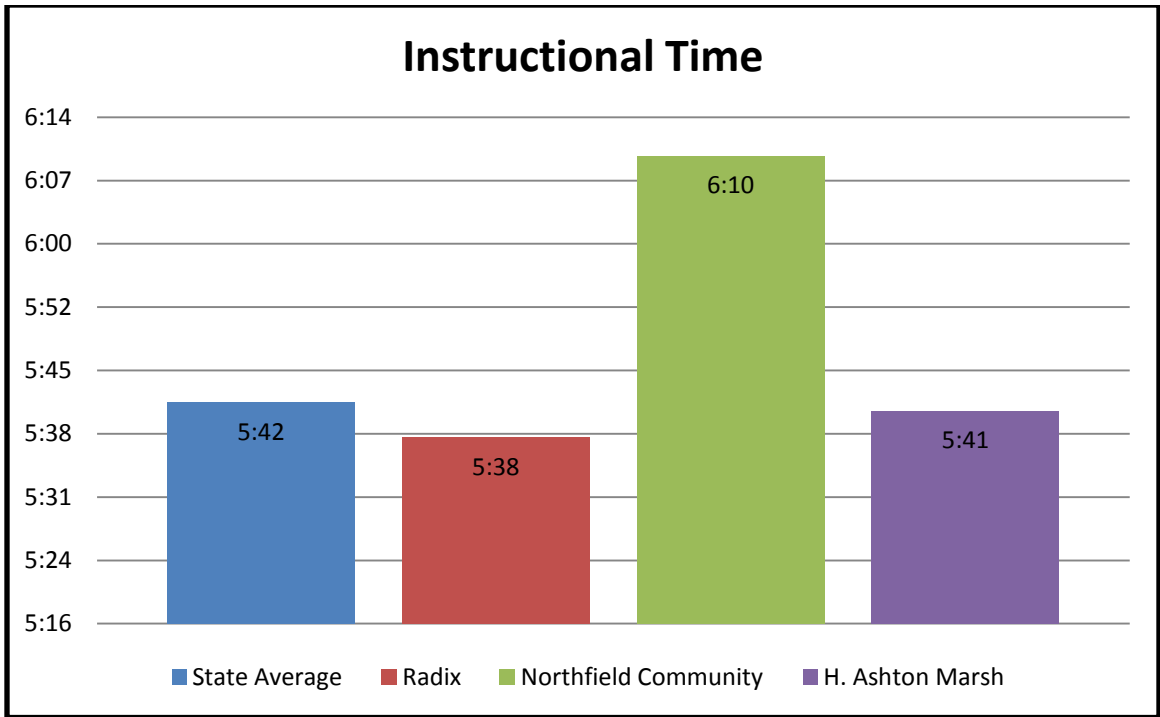


Figure 1.2

The chart above illustrates the amount of time teachers spend instructing the students.

Students in New Jersey public schools are physically at school an average of 45 minutes longer than they are being instructed. Northfield Community School has only 30 minutes of non-instructional time, whereas H. Ashton Marsh students spend close to the state average in non-instructional time. Radix Elementary School has nearly an hour of non-instructional time.

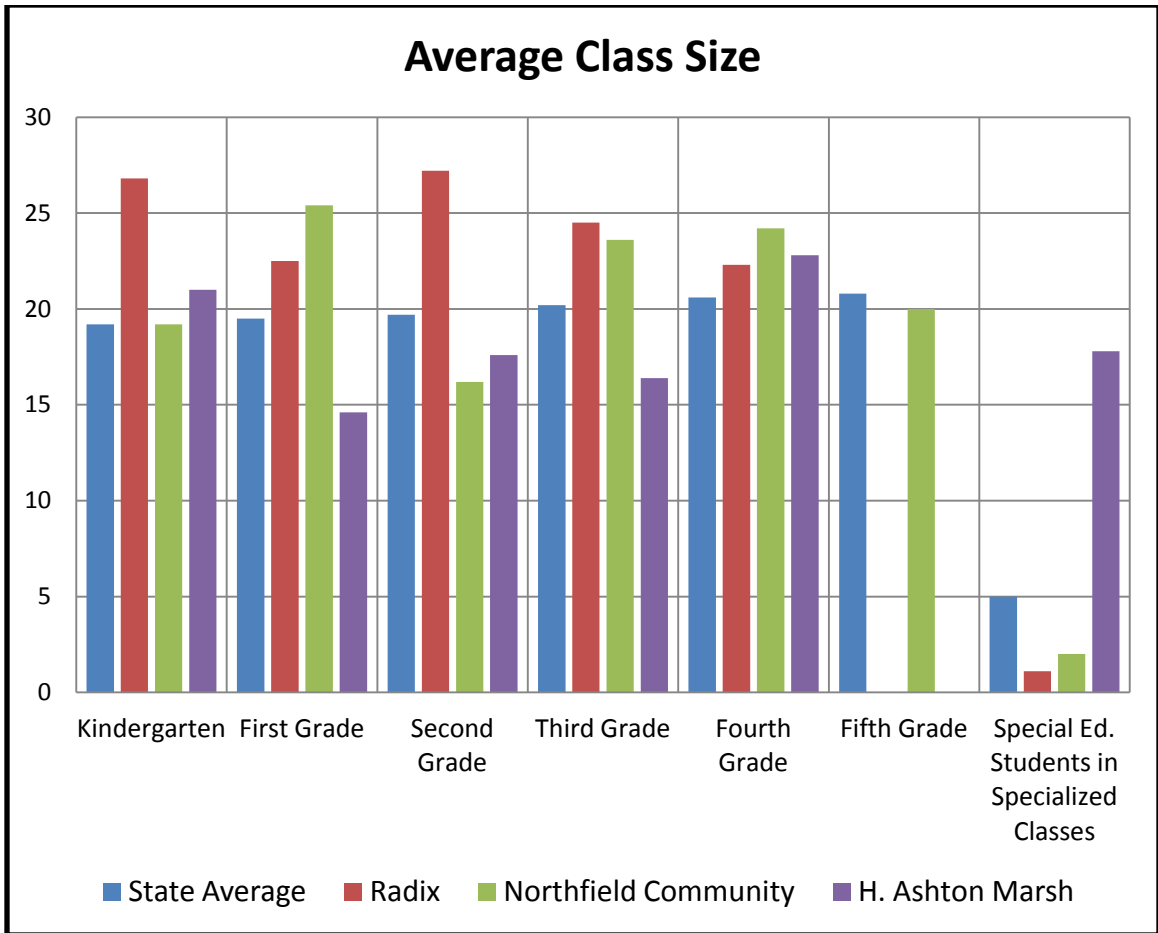


Figure 1.3

This chart displays the average class size by grade. Special education students in self-contained classrooms are represented in a separate category. Northfield is the only school with fifth graders.

The state average class size was lower in general than at the schools researched. Radix has class sizes slightly above the state average. Northfield has class sizes close the state average. H. Ashton Marsh has class sizes lower than the state average, except for in self-contained special education classes. Marsh has higher numbers of special education students than the other schools and the state average.

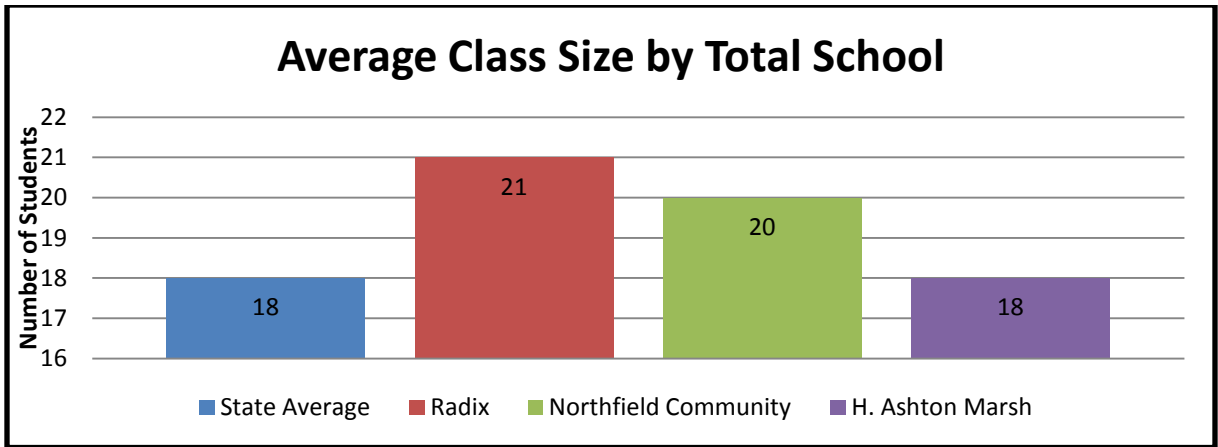


Figure 1.4

The above chart demonstrates the average class size by school and by state average.

Radix and Northfield each have two to three more students per class than the state average. H. Ashton Marsh is very close to the state average class size in terms of the whole school population.

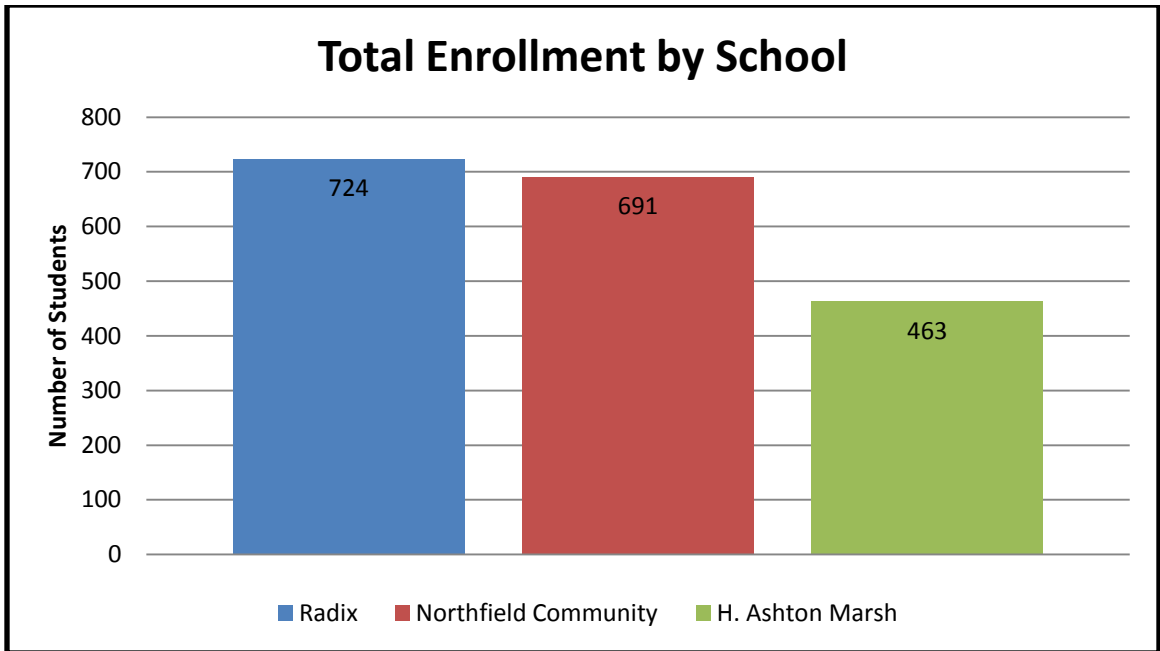


Figure 1.5

This chart shows how many students are enrolled in each school.

Radix is the most populated school with 724 students. Northfield has approximately 30 students (5%) fewer than Radix. H. Ashton Marsh approximately 230 students fewer than Northfield and is about one-third the size of Radix. However, class sizes are similar, so students have a similar classroom experience despite being part of a smaller school.

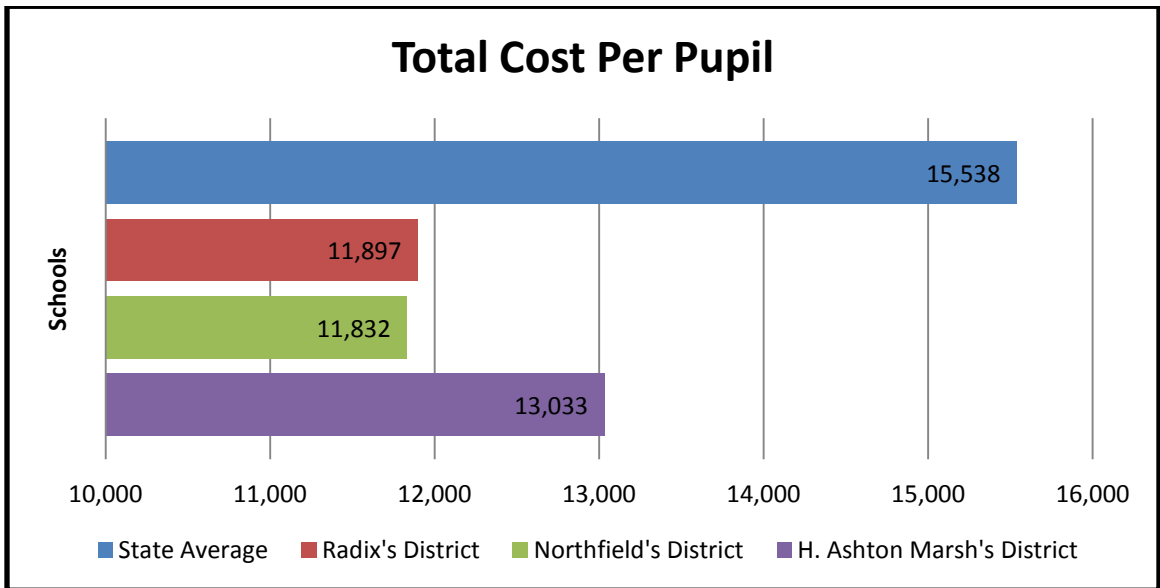


Figure 1.6

The following chart displays the total cost per pupil that each school district spends compared to the state average. It includes faculty, staff, and administrator salaries, school supplies, plant operation fees, and all other school expenditures.

The state average of spending per pupil by district annually is \$15,538. Each of these school districts spent considerably less than this, with Northfield's district spending the least, then Radix's, and then H. Ashton Marsh's.

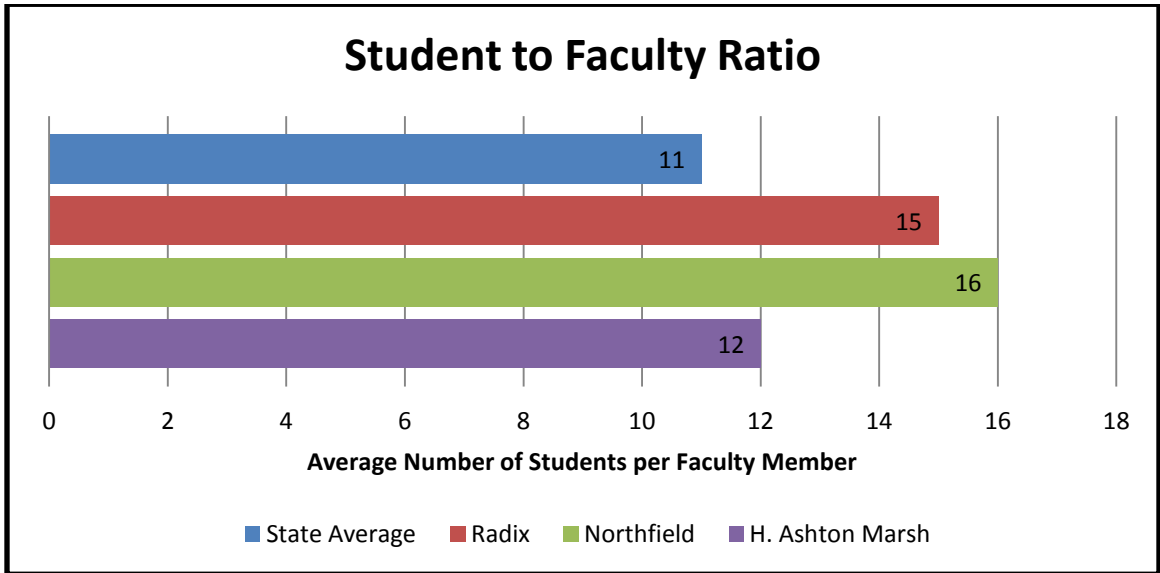


Figure 1.7

The following chart illustrates the number of students per faculty member at each school compared to the state average.

Northfield and Radix each had four or five more students per faculty member than the state average, but H. Ashton Marsh only had one more.

Now that it has been determined that the schools are comparable in important factors that could otherwise skew academic performance, the researcher can more accurately assess whether or not character education or parental involvement can be credited to improved academic achievement. Content analyses will be used to determine the level to which character education and parental involvement are promoted in each school. In-depth interviews with a member of each school's staff will provide further detail into the character development and parental involvement initiatives each school engages.

In the charts to follow, the researcher has included information about how third and fourth grade students at each of the schools performed in language arts, math, and science testing. The tests conducted were the New Jersey Assessment of Skills and Learning. They were conducted during the 2009-2010 academic year. This test is the basis on which the Department of Education determines whether schools reach "Adequate Yearly Progress." The results of these tests are also what the researcher will use to determine "academic achievement" in each of the three schools studied.

Hypothesis 1: It is expected that a positive correlation will exist between character education and academic achievement.

According to the content analyses, 62.5% of Radix's communication focuses on its character education. Its message from the principal speaks only about its Bucket Filler character education program, and not at all about academic achievement or parental involvement.

In the interview with the school's principal, Radix's employees explicitly encourage character education daily, weekly, and monthly through a variety of initiatives. Teachers and guidance counselors also encourage parents to use character education at home. The principal explained that when students are placed in an unsafe or unwelcoming learning environment, it can be difficult for students to concentrate. Since Radix encourages such a high standard of character in its students, she believes this contributes to the students' academic successes. She does not have any research to support her claim, however. Students and employees have embraced character education at Radix.

Through these research methods, the researcher has concluded that character education is very strongly promoted at Radix Elementary School.

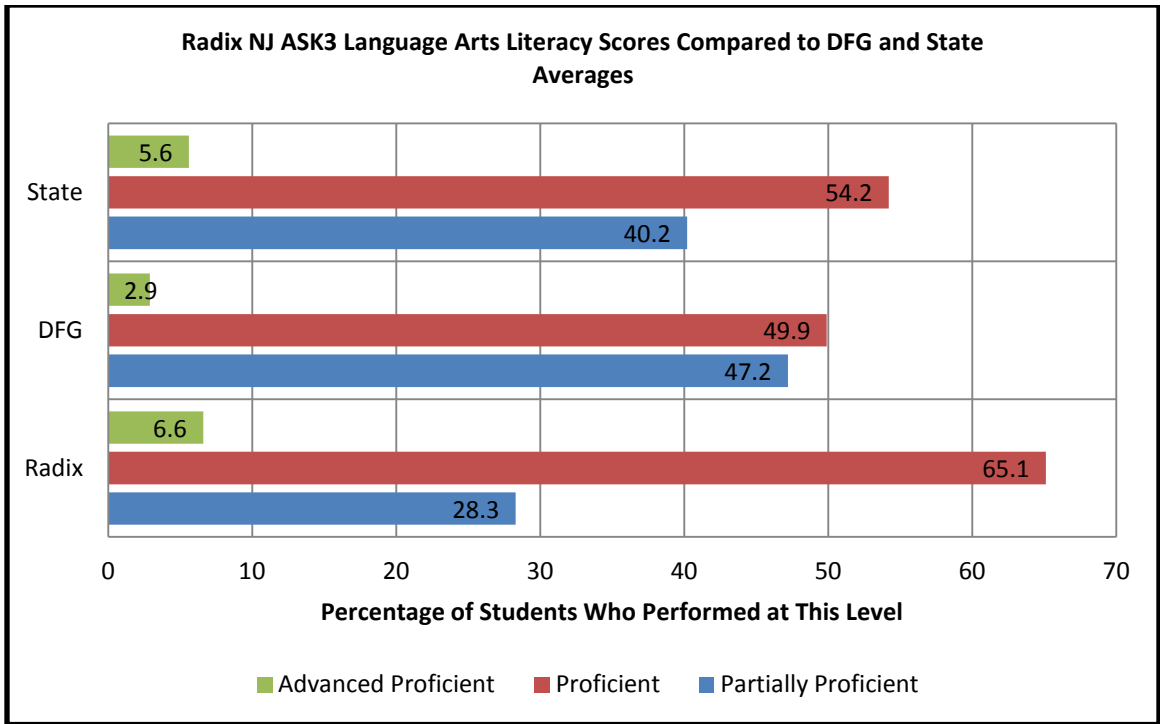


Figure 2.1

The above chart displays Radix’s NJ ASK3 Language Arts Scores compared to its District Factor Group (DFG) and the state average.

Radix performed considerably better than its DFG and state average in this test.

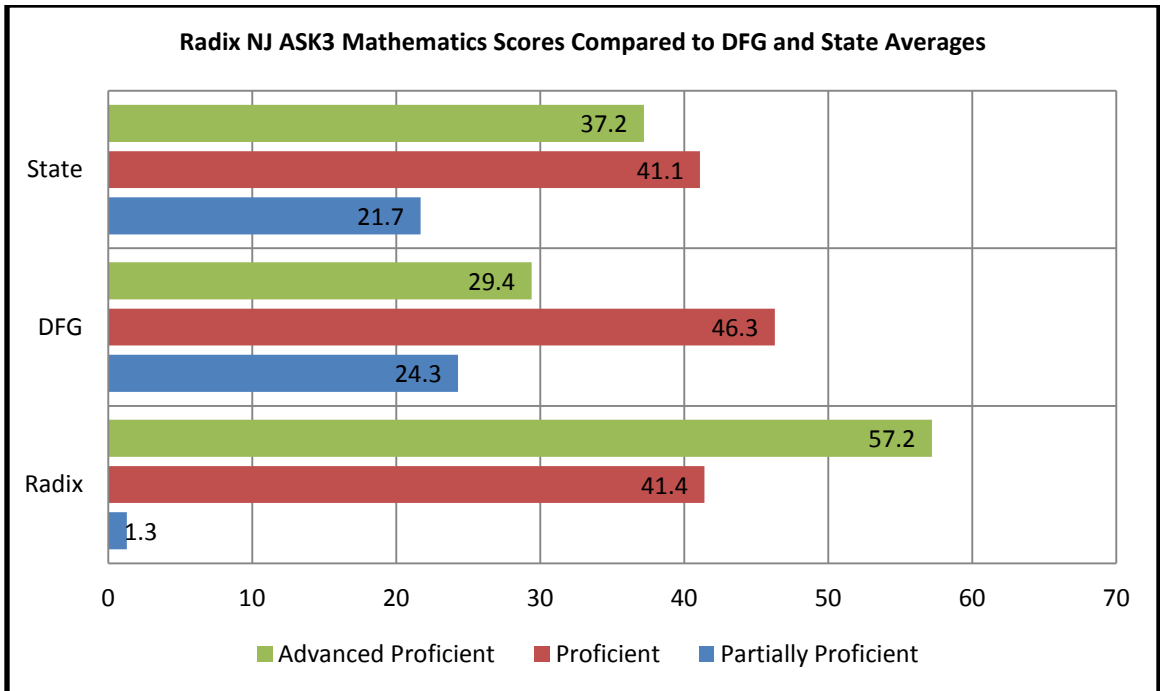


Figure 2.2

This chart illustrates Radix’s NJ ASK 3 Math Proficiency compared to its DFG and state averages.

Radix performed considerably better than its DFG and the state average. It is important to notice that Radix only had 1% of students performing at the partially proficient level, with the state average and DFG average closer to 20-25%.

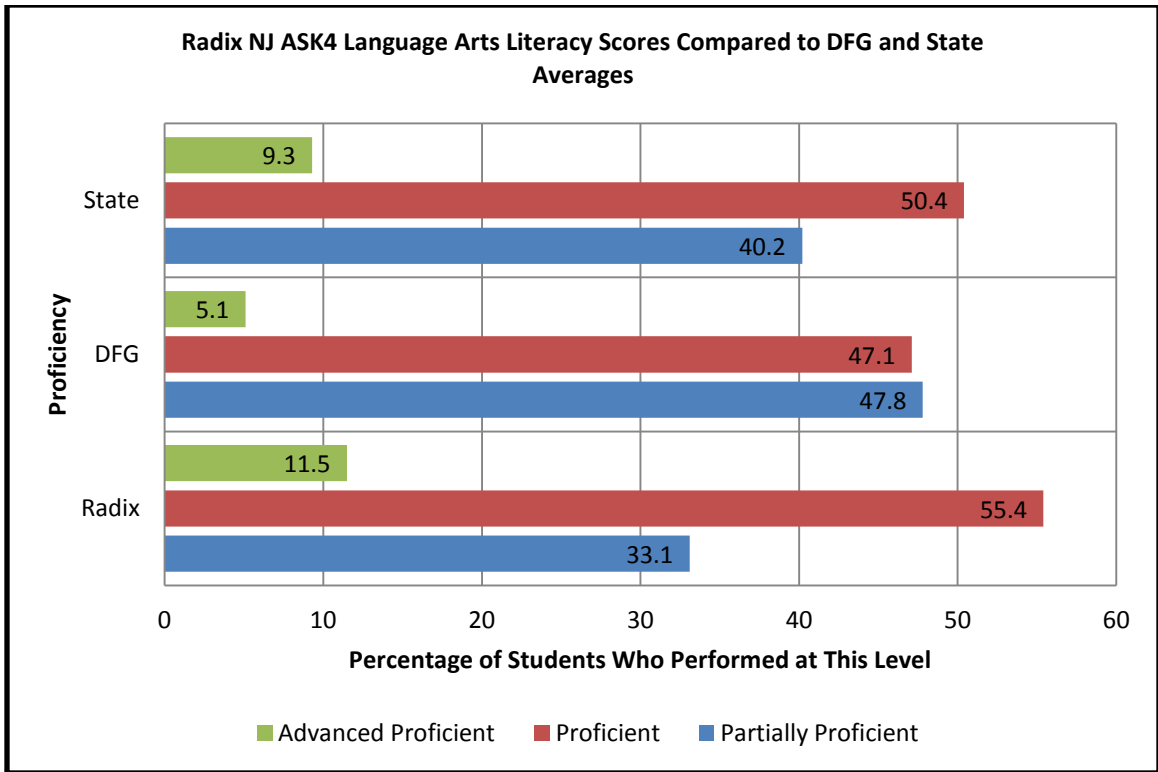


Figure 2.3

The chart above illustrates Radix’s NJ ASK 4 Language Arts Literacy Proficiency compared to its DFG and state averages.

Radix had slightly more than the state average of students who were advanced proficient. It had nearly 15% more proficiency than its DFG.

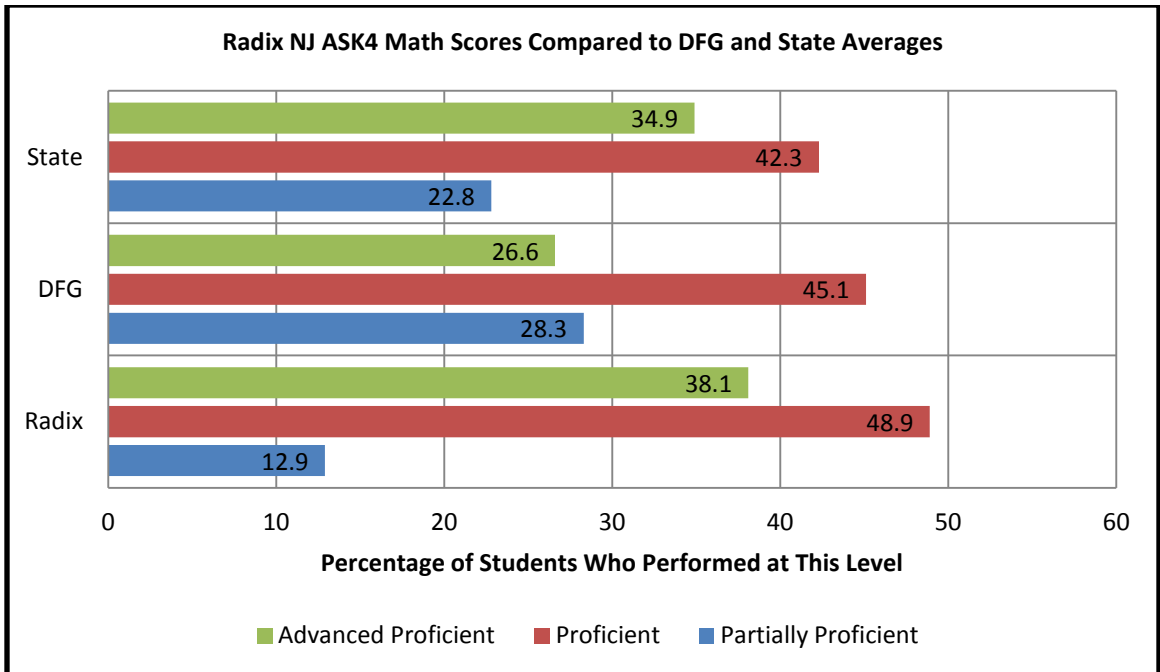


Figure 2.4

This chart illustrates Radix’s NJ ASK 4 Math proficiency compared to its DFG and state averages.

Radix performed better than both the state average and the DFG in all proficiency levels. The DFG was considerably weaker than the state average in this test for this grade level. Radix had 10% fewer partially proficient students than the state average, and 15% fewer than its DFG.

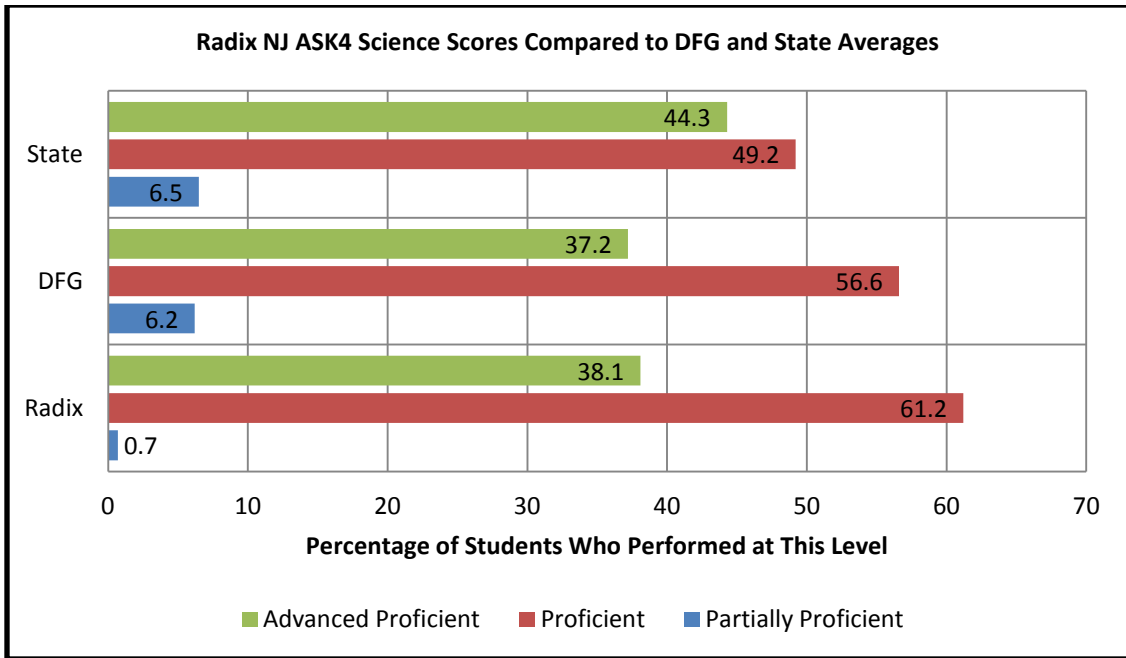


Figure 2.5

The chart above illustrates Radix’s NJ ASK 4 Science proficiency compared to its DFG and state averages.

Radix performed better than the state and DFG averages. Although the state had more advanced proficient students on average, Radix had fewer partially proficient students and virtually all students achieved proficiency.

According to the content analyses, Northfield talks about character education in 12% of the documents studied. The principal's message discusses character development only 3% of the time, but the school narrative is comprised of 9% character education verbiage.

In an interview with a guidance counselor at Northfield, the school practices character education weekly through lessons designed to develop social skills. The school implemented an anti-bullying program and research has shown that academic achievement improved from before the program existed. He also discusses the importance of students feeling free to concentrate on learning instead of stressors in their learning environment. He believes that teachers who promote character education have more successful students.

The school is in the process of adopting a new character education program, the Jostens Renaissance program, but the guidance counselor says that there are everyday moments that can be used in the classroom as part of character education. He asserts that capitalizing on these moments can help bolster character education even in an informal setting, in coordination with mandated curricula.

From the information provided through this interview and in the content analyses, the researcher has concluded that Northfield practices a moderate amount of character education.

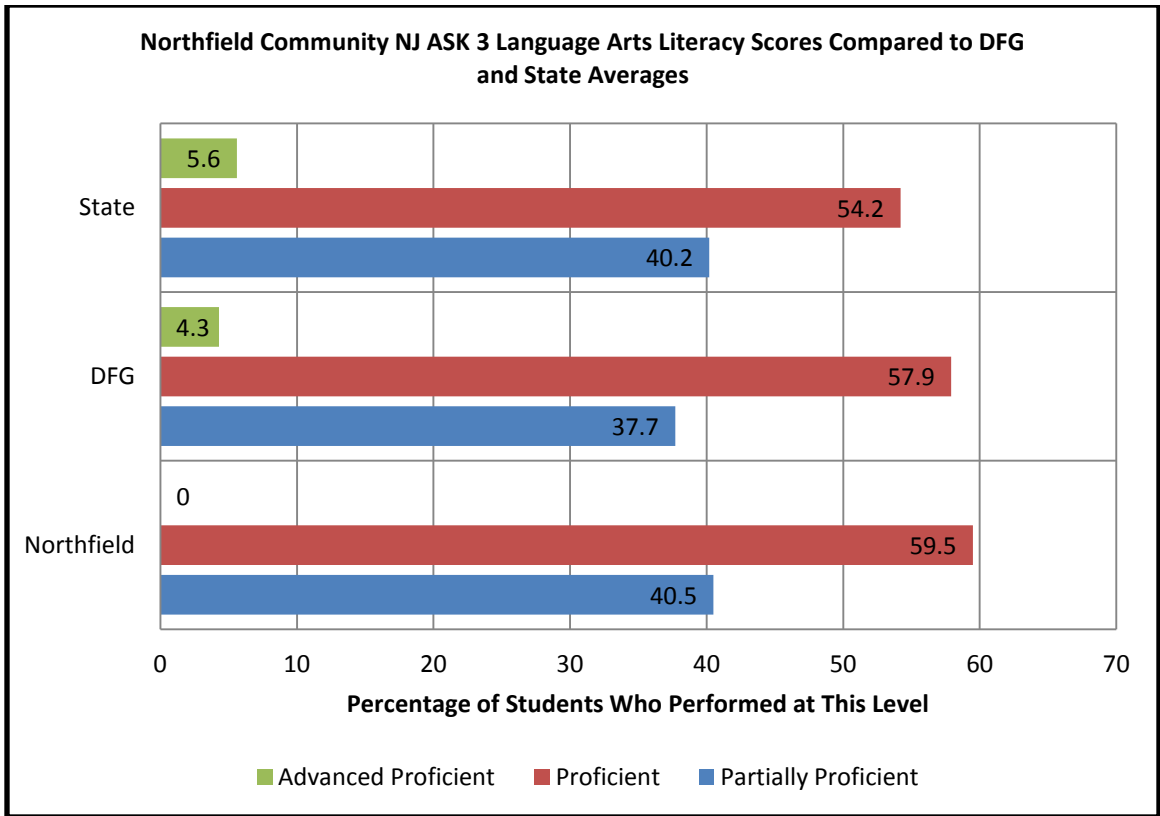


Figure 3.1

The chart displays Northfield Community Elementary School’s NJ ASK3 Language Arts scores as compared to its DFG and state averages.

Northfield performed approximately the same as the state average and its DFG for this test. The most noticeable result is that no students earned advanced proficiency.

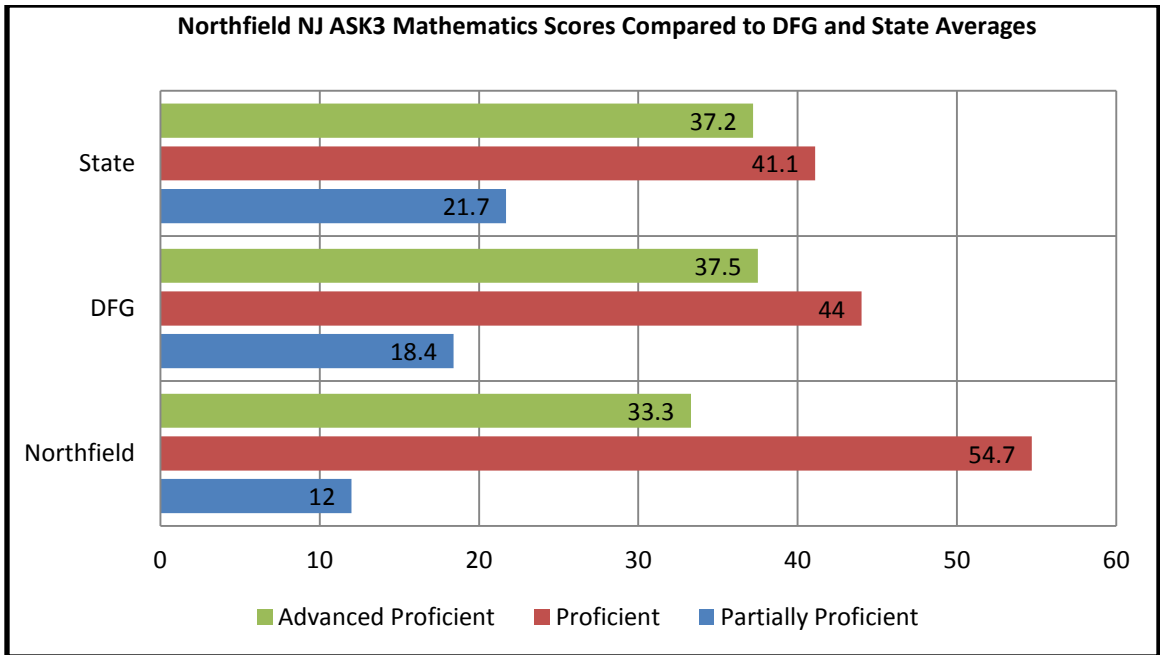


Figure 3.2

This chart displays Northfield Community Elementary School’s NJ ASK3 Math scores as compared to its DFG and state averages.

Northfield performed similarly to the state and DFG averages. It more closely resembles its DFG than the state scores. It still performed better than both the state and DFG averages.

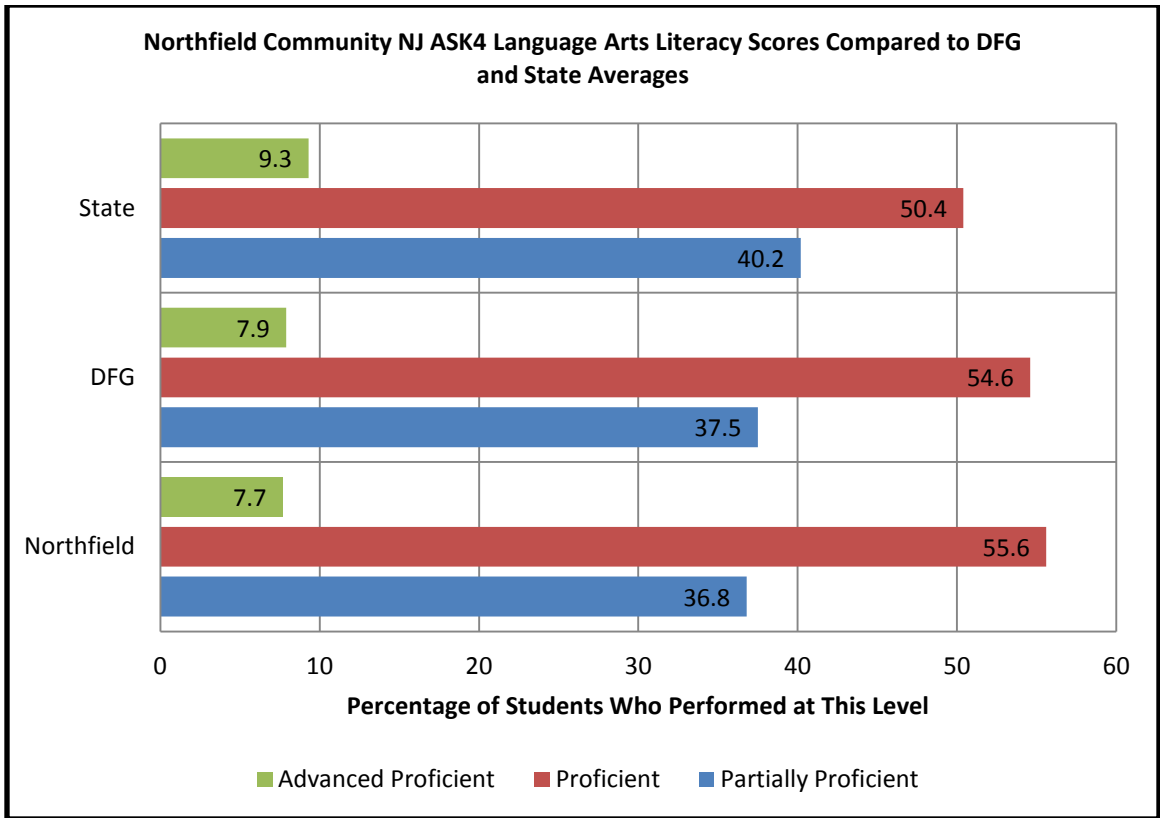


Figure 3.3

This chart displays Northfield Community Elementary School’s NJ ASK4 Language Arts Literacy scores as compared to its DFG and state averages.

Northfield performed very similarly to the DFG and state average.

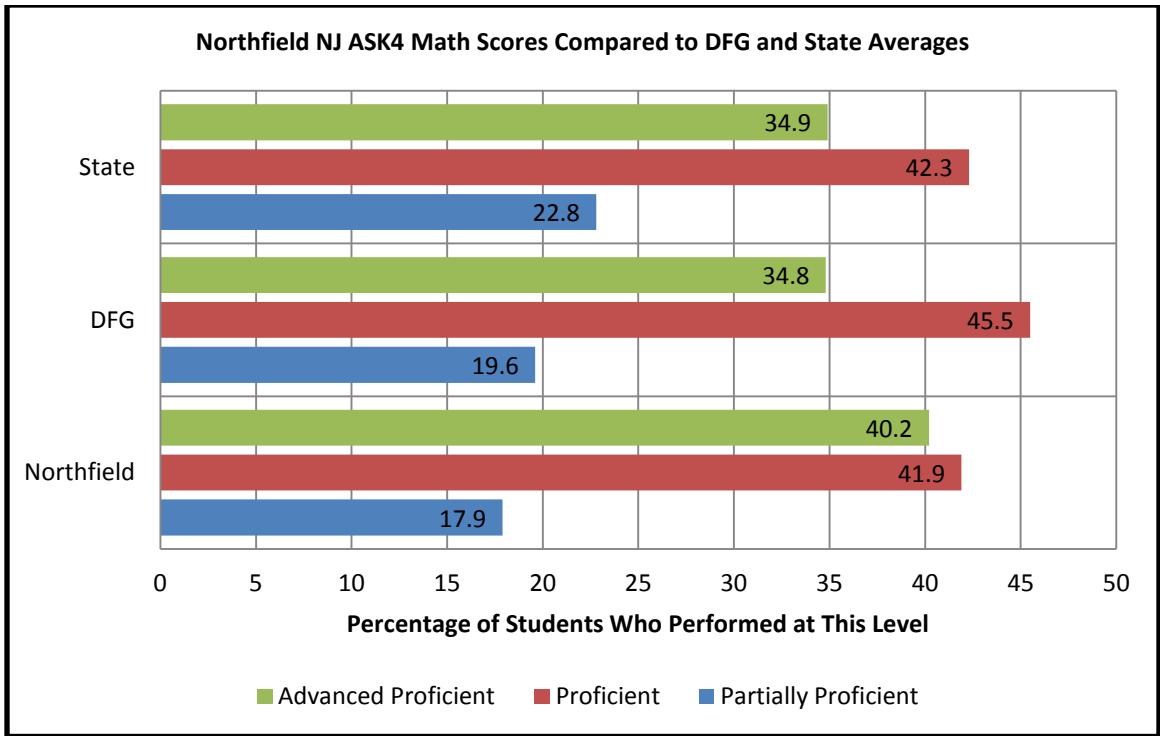


Figure 3.4

The above chart displays Northfield Community Elementary School’s NJ ASK4 Language Arts Literacy scores as compared to its DFG and state averages.

Northfield performed slightly better than the state and its DFG averages. It had 5% more advanced proficiency and 5% fewer partial proficiency than the state average.

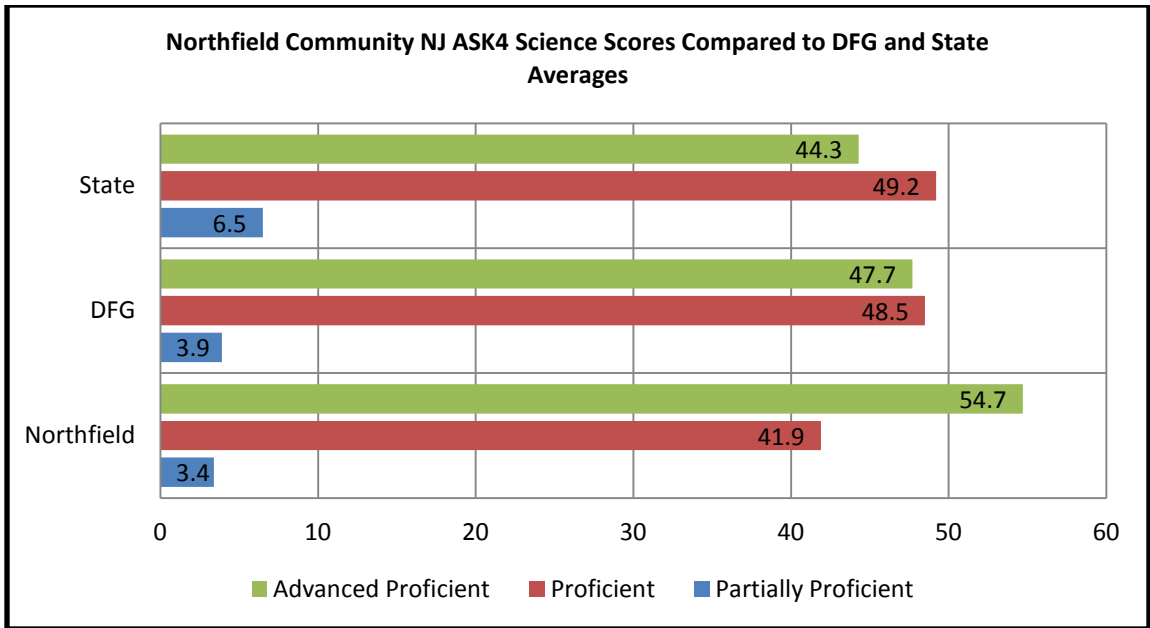


Figure 3.5

The chart displays Northfield Community Elementary School’s NJ ASK4 Science scores as compared to its DFG and state averages.

Northfield performed slightly better than the state and DFG averages. Northfield had 10% more advanced proficient students than the state average, and 3% fewer partially proficient students than both the state and its DFG.

The last school studied is H. Ashton Marsh Elementary School in Absecon. 3% of the literature provided from this district focuses on character education initiatives. In an interview with a guidance counselor at this school, the researcher learned that the school implements character education in classroom lessons, community involvement programs, and guidance lessons. It is unclear how frequently these lessons and programs occur. The school practices the *Character Counts!* program, but the guidance counselor said one of the challenges the school faces in effectively teaching character education is their “follow through” since there isn’t a clear team responsible for implementing the program.

Through the information provided, the researcher has concluded that H. Ashton Marsh practices minimal character education.

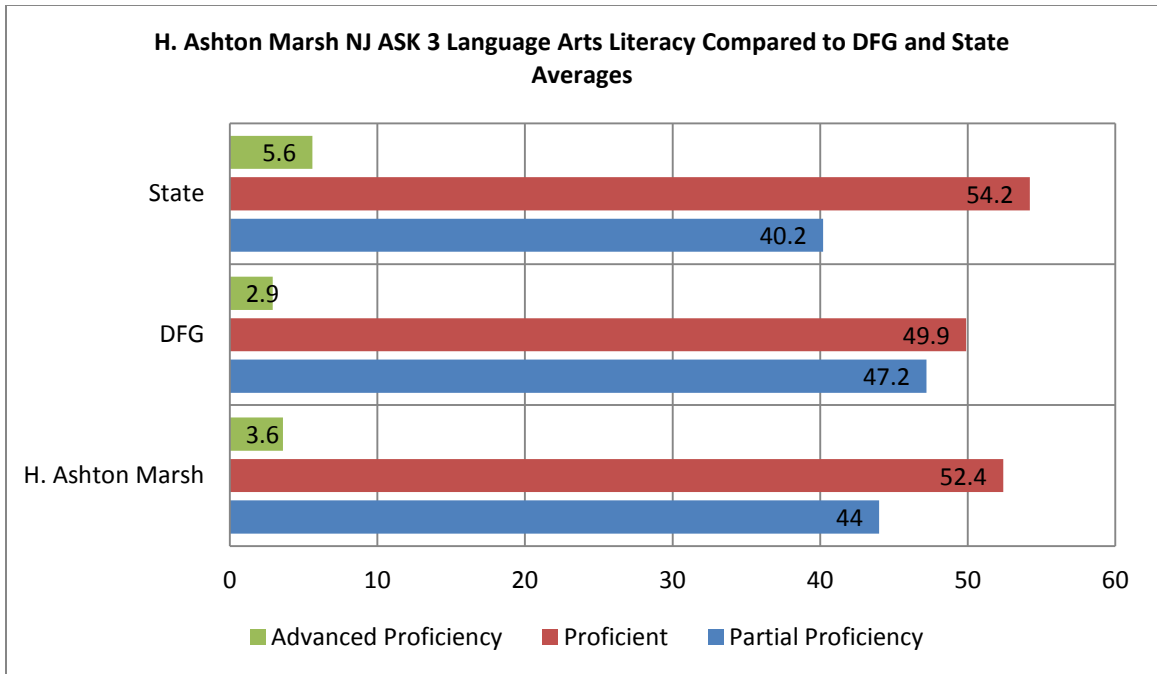


Figure 4.1

The chart demonstrates H. Ashton Marsh’s NJ ASK 3 language arts literacy scores compared to its DFG and state averages.

H. Ashton Marsh performed minimally better than its DFG. The school’s students performed worse than the state average. It is the only school being studied that had half of its students perform at the partially proficient level.

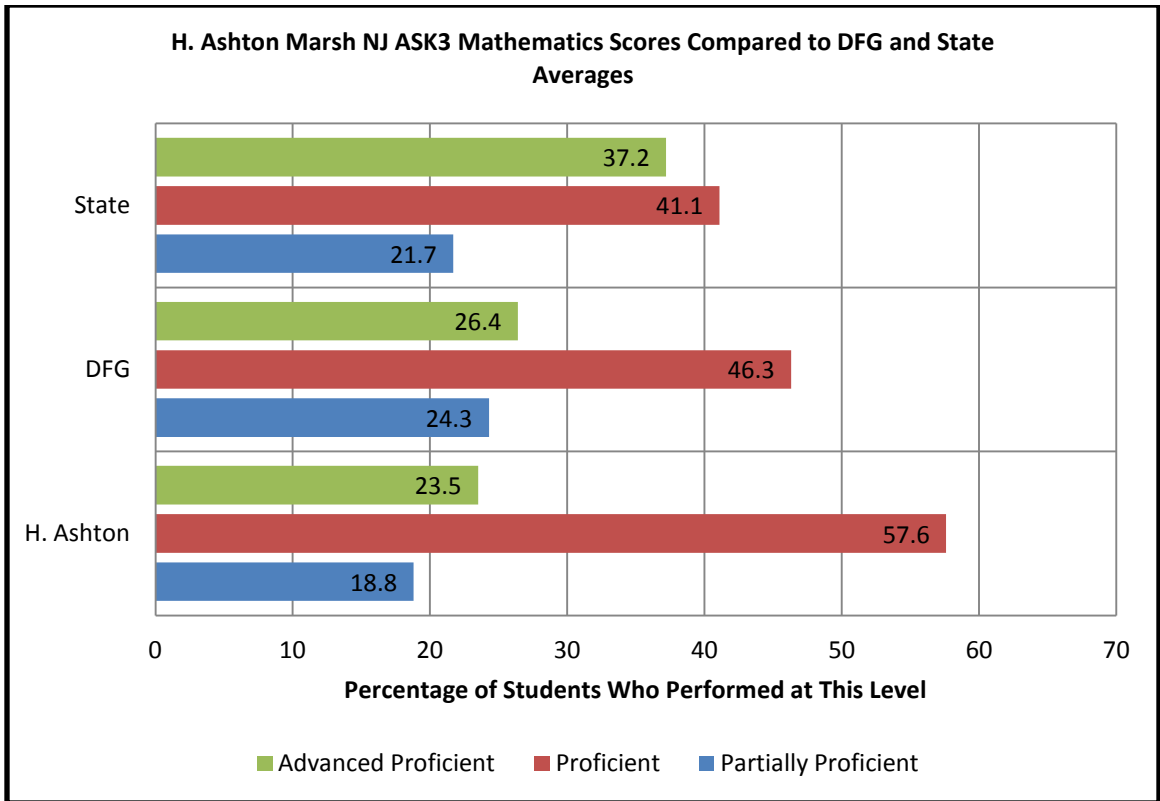


Figure 4.2

This chart demonstrates H. Ashton Marsh’s NJ ASK 3 Math scores compared to its DFG and state averages.

H. Ashton Marsh had fewer advanced proficient students than the state average and DFG, but also had fewer partially proficient students.

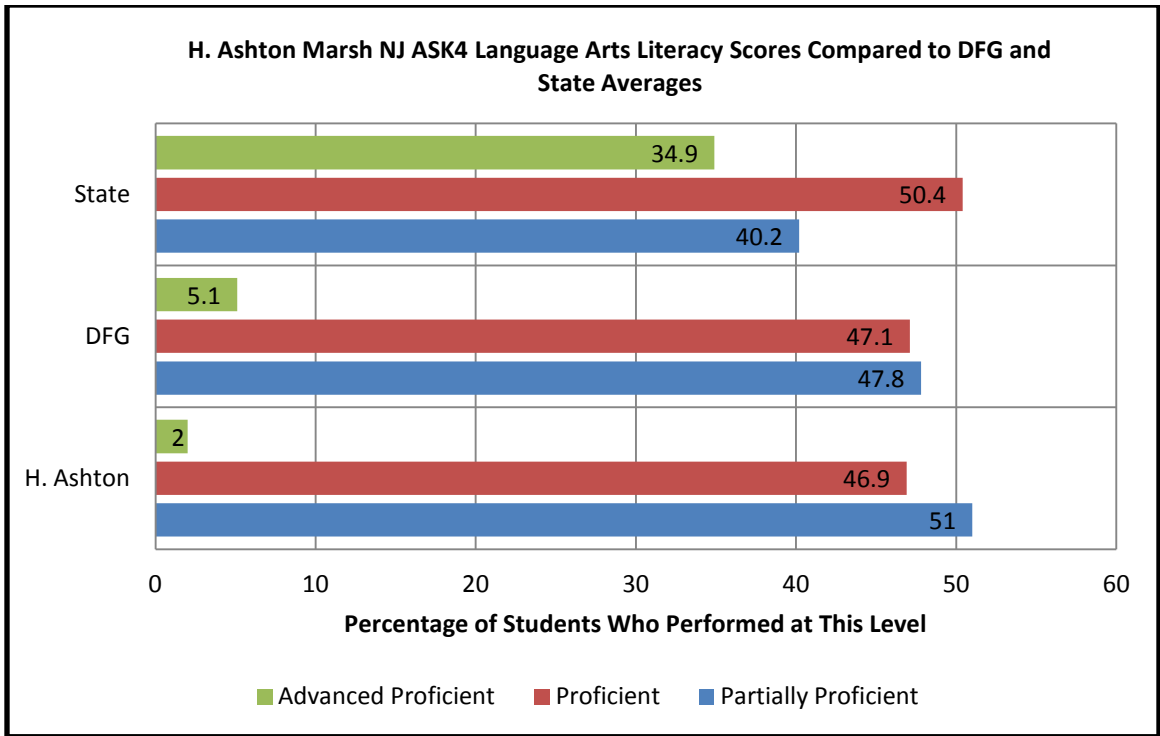


Figure 4.3

This chart demonstrates H. Ashton Marsh’s NJ ASK 4 Language Arts Literacy scores compared to its DFG and state averages.

H. Ashton Marsh performed worse than the state average, but better than its DFG. It had 13% less total proficiency than the state average.

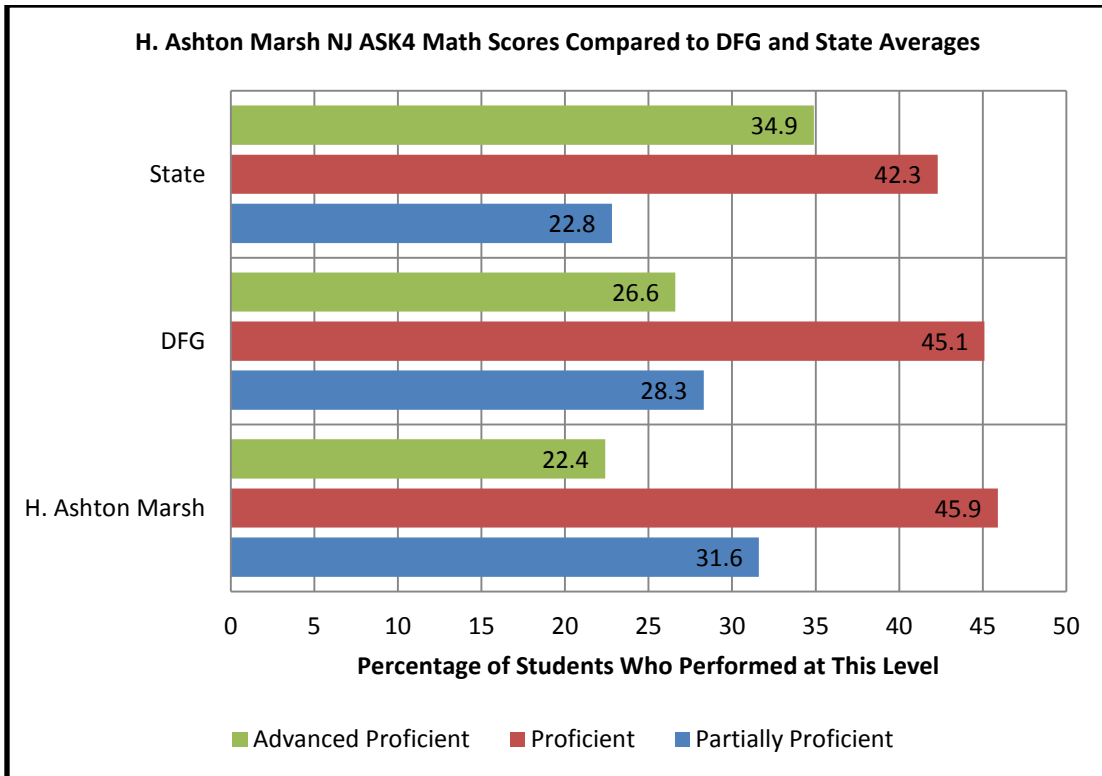


Figure 4.4

The above chart demonstrates H. Ashton Marsh’s NJ ASK 4 Math scores compared to its DFG and state averages.

H. Ashton Marsh performed worse than the state average and its DFG, with fewer proficient students in general. It had 13% fewer advanced proficient students and 11% more partially proficient students than the state average. H. Ashton Marsh performed slightly worse than its DFG.

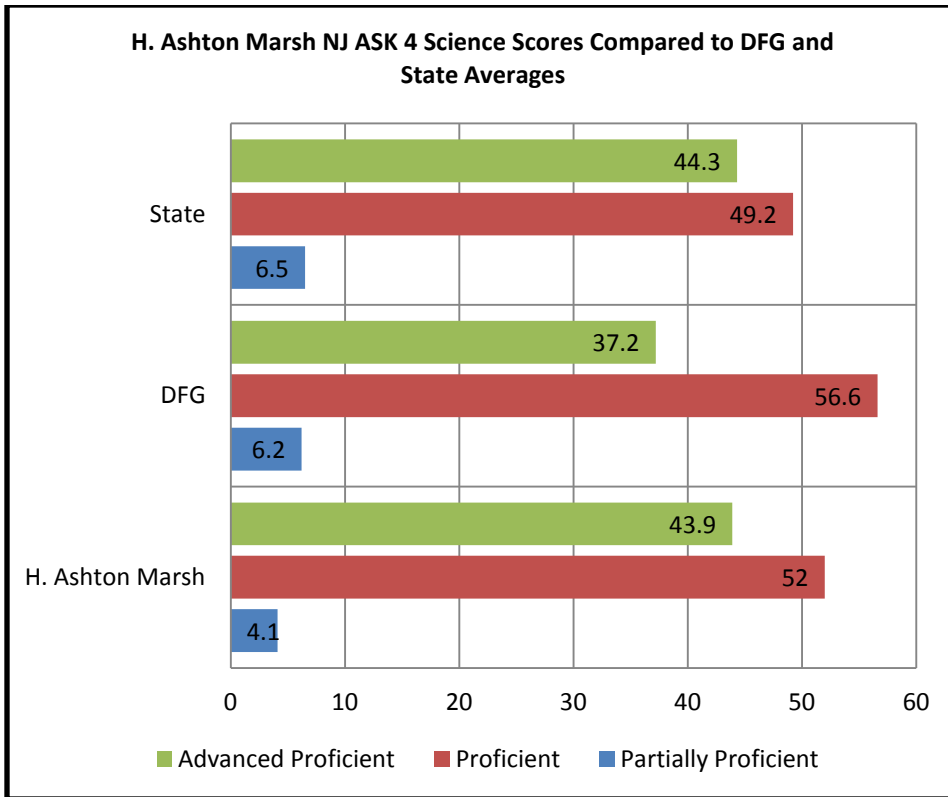


Figure 4.5

The chart demonstrates H. Ashton Marsh’s NJ ASK 4 Science scores compared to its DFG and state averages.

H. Ashton Marsh performed very similarly to DFG and state averages. It had slightly more students that were proficient overall.

Radix seems to have the strongest commitment to character education, and performed the best. Northfield has a moderate commitment to character education and performs on par with the state average. H. Ashton Marsh has a moderate character education program and performs moderately worse than the state average but generally better than its DFG. This research supports hypothesis one.

Hypothesis 2: It is expected that a positive correlation will exist between parental involvement and academic achievement.

A content analysis of Radix's message from the principal and school narrative revealed no outward communication about its commitment to building strong relationships with parents to encourage their involvement. However, in speaking with the principal, parents are encouraged to get involved with their students. There are biennial parent-teacher conferences, assemblies which the parents may attend, and an open-door lunch policy. Parents are also encouraged to volunteer during classroom parties, field trips, and school dances. The principal asserted her belief that students perform well academically when their parents are engaged in their child's education, although she didn't have any official data confirming this. She believes students embrace having their parents involved in school.

Based on the information provided to the researcher, it appears that Radix has a moderate level of parental involvement.

Northfield Community Elementary School's documents revealed 15% of its content to be about parental or community involvement. An interview with the school's guidance counselor confirmed this increased level of parental involvement over Radix. Parents are involved in the PTA and Education Foundation, volunteer in the classroom, and support community initiatives like the Art Goes to School program. The guidance counselor agreed that parental support is integral to a child's successful learning, despite having no formal research to support this notion. The school offers parents access to each child's grades and prides itself on being transparent with parents on what goes on in the

classroom. It can be difficult to get parents involved, however, because work schedules often differ from class schedules, so unless a parent has an alternative work schedule, it can be difficult for them to connect with the school.

Based on this research, it seems Northfield has a strong commitment to parental involvement.

H. Ashton Marsh's content analysis revealed a similar communicated commitment to parental involvement, with 14% of its content related to parental or community initiatives. The guidance counselor listed similar activities for parents to get involved as those that exist in Northfield, including in-class volunteer opportunities and Family Fun activities. Parental involvement benefits all students, according to this school member, especially through fundraising. She said even though not all parents can attend school functions, they can still reinforce ethical values at home.

In this research, it appears that H. Ashton Marsh has a moderate commitment to parental involvement.

In the charts that will follow, the academic achievement at each school is displayed.

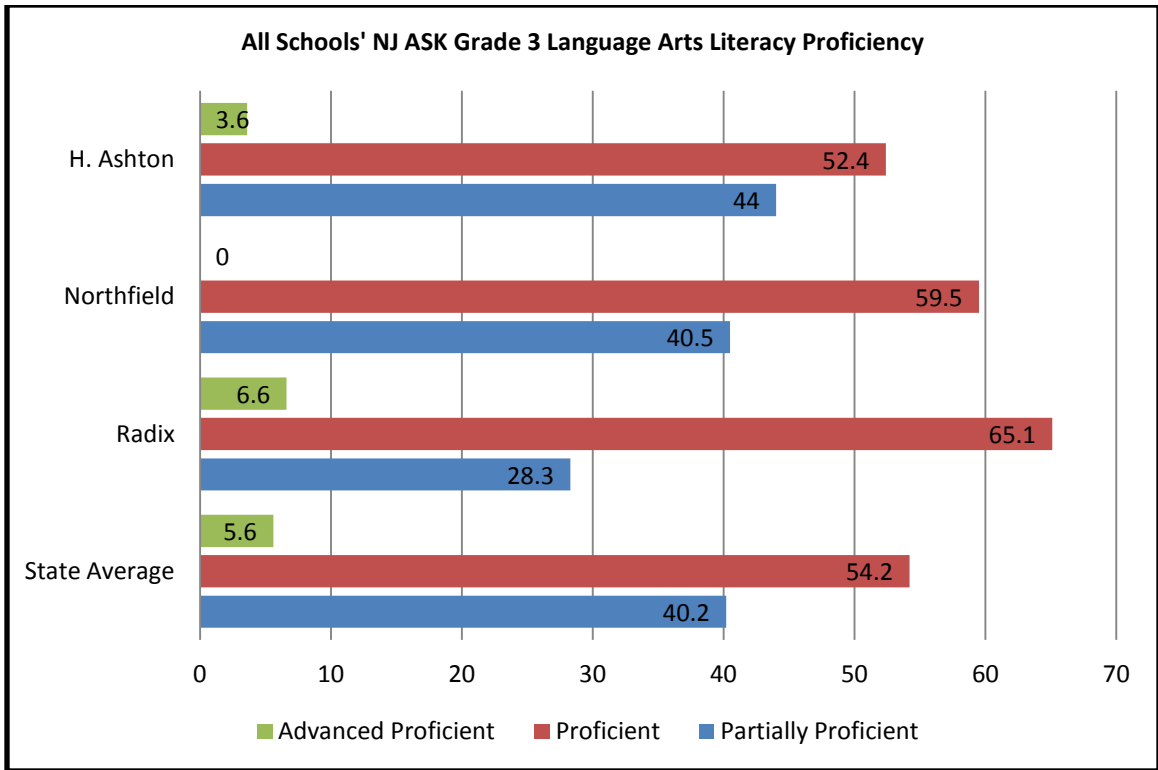


Figure 5.1

The above chart compares the levels of language arts literacy proficiency that third grade students achieved at each school to the state average.

Radix is the only school with an advanced proficiency (6.6%) above the state average (5.6%). The majority of Radix students performed at the proficient level. Radix had over 10% more proficiency than the state average. No Northfield students achieved advanced proficiency. Forty percent of Northfield’s students were partially proficient and 60% were proficient. H. Ashton Marsh is the only school that performed below the state average for proficiency. Forty-four percent of H. Ashton Marsh’s students were ranked partially proficient in language arts literacy, with 52% performing at the proficient level and 3.6% performing at the advanced proficient level.

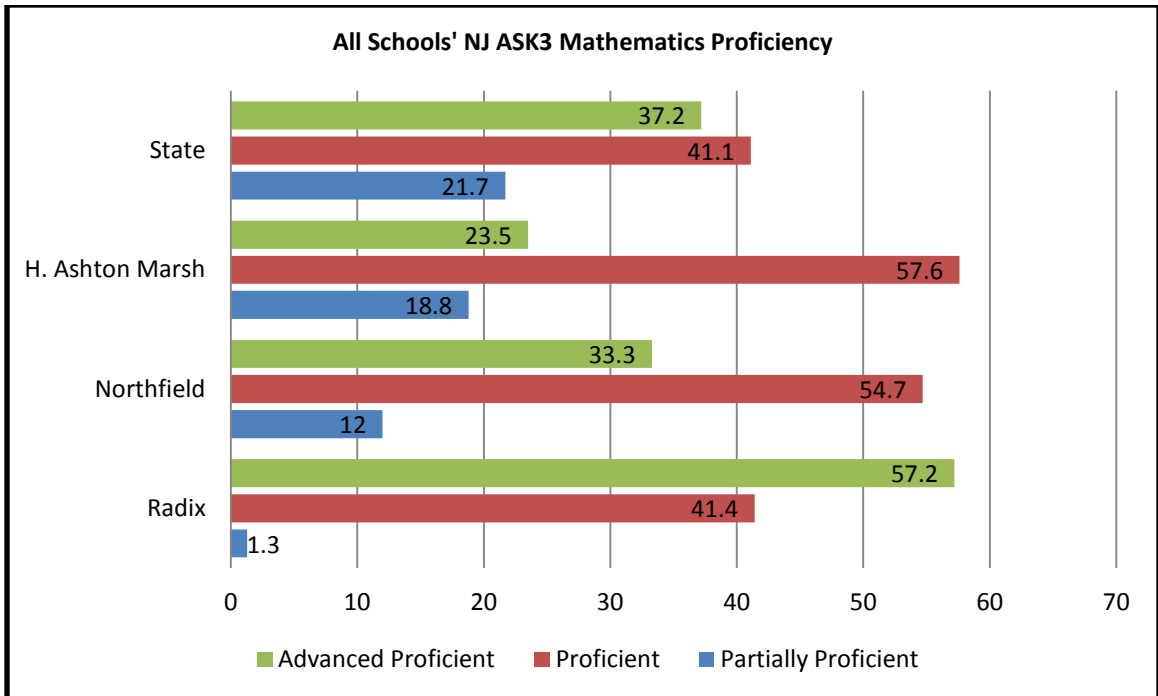


Figure 5.2

The chart compares the levels of mathematics proficiency that third grade students achieved at each school to the state average.

Radix performed 20% higher than state average in terms of advanced proficiency. More than half of Radix’s students were determined to be advanced proficient in math. A quarter of H. Ashton Marsh’s students achieved this level and one-third of Northfield’s students did.

The state average of total proficiency is 78.3%. Radix achieved 99% proficiency, Northfield had 88% proficiency. H. Ashton Marsh had 72% proficiency, again making it the only school to perform below the state average.

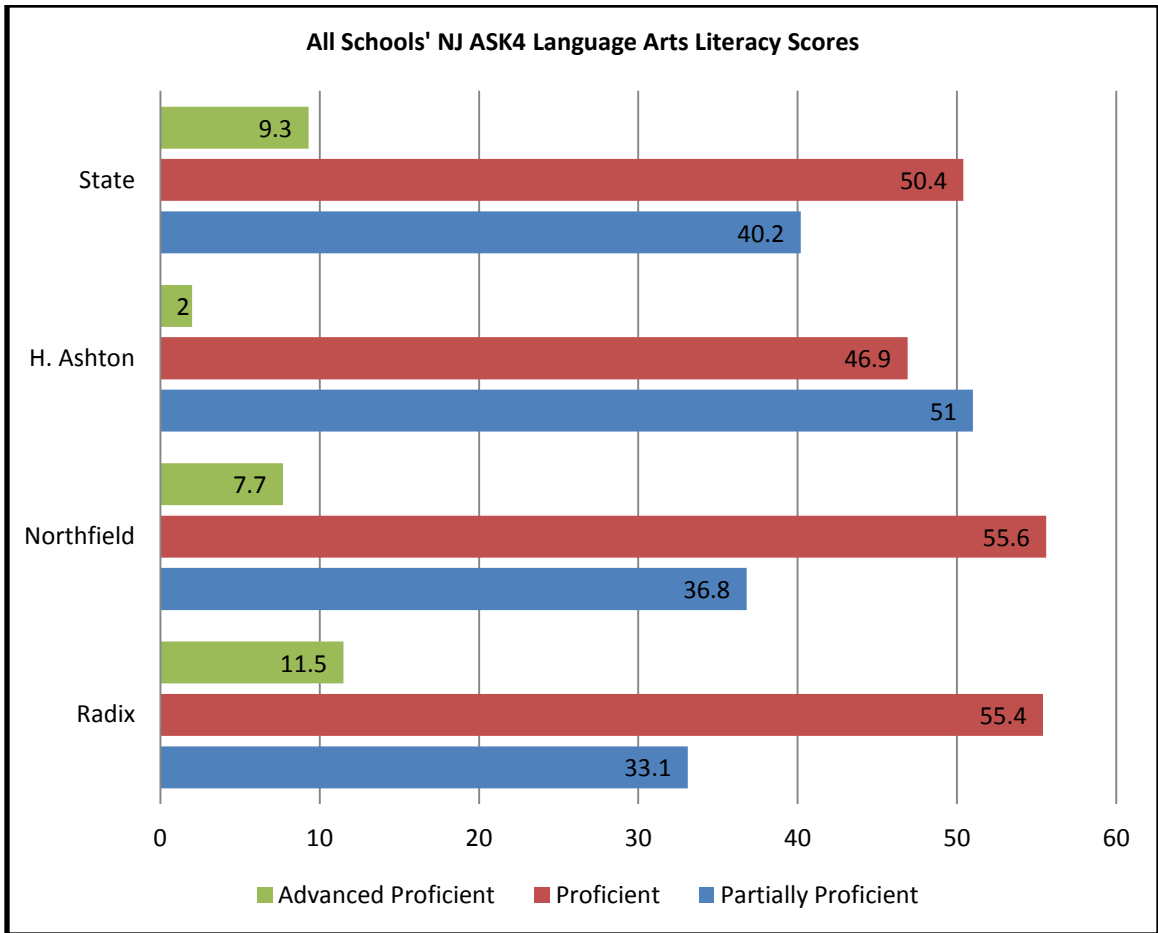


Figure 5.3

This chart compares the levels of language arts literacy proficiency that fourth grade students achieved at each school to the state average.

Radix and Northfield performed better than the state average in the grade four Language Arts Literacy NJ ASK test. H. Ashton Marsh performed considerably worse. 67% of Radix’s students were proficient at this grade level. Sixty percent of students were proficient on average. Sixty-three percent of Northfield students were proficient on average. Only 47% (less than half) of H. Ashton Marsh’s students were proficient.

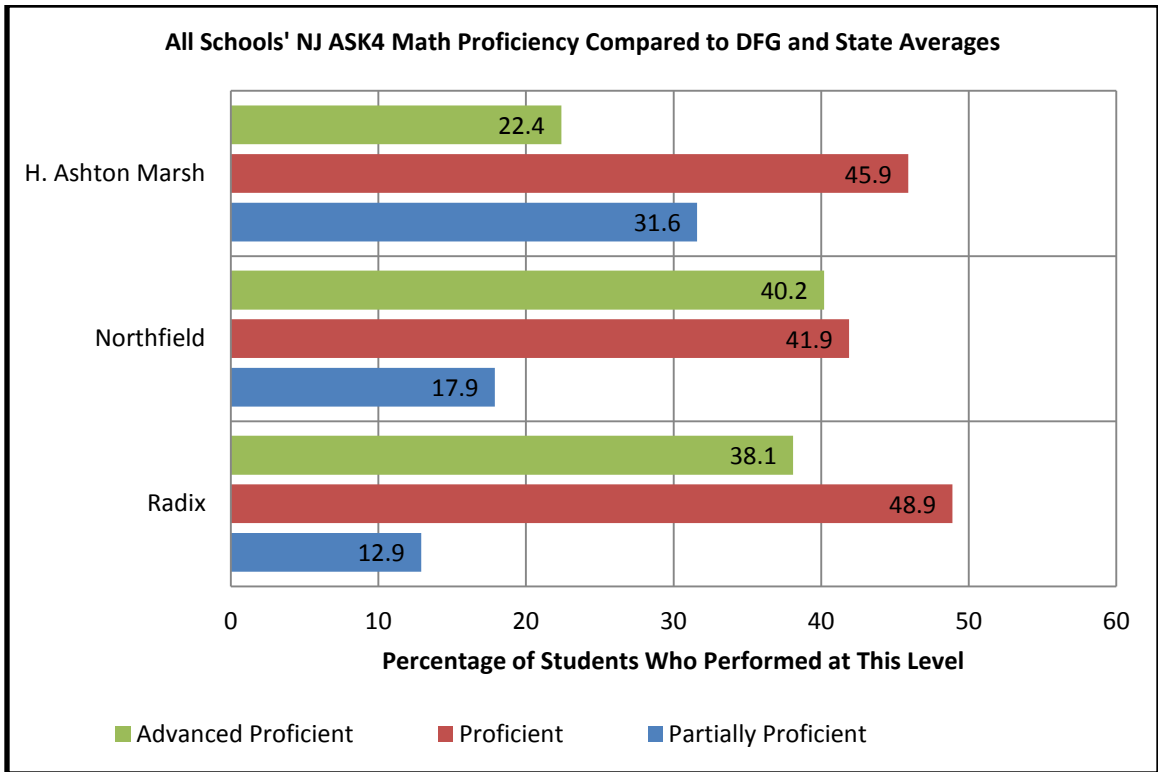


Figure 5.4

The above chart compares the levels of mathematics proficiency that fourth grade students achieved at each school to the state average.

Seventy-seven percent of students in NJ were proficient in math in grade four. Three-fourths of H. Ashton Marsh’s students were proficient. Eighty-two percent of Northfield students were proficient. Eighty-seven percent of Radix students were proficient. H. Ashton Marsh is the only school that performed worse than the state average. Northfield actually had more advanced proficient students at this grade level than Radix.

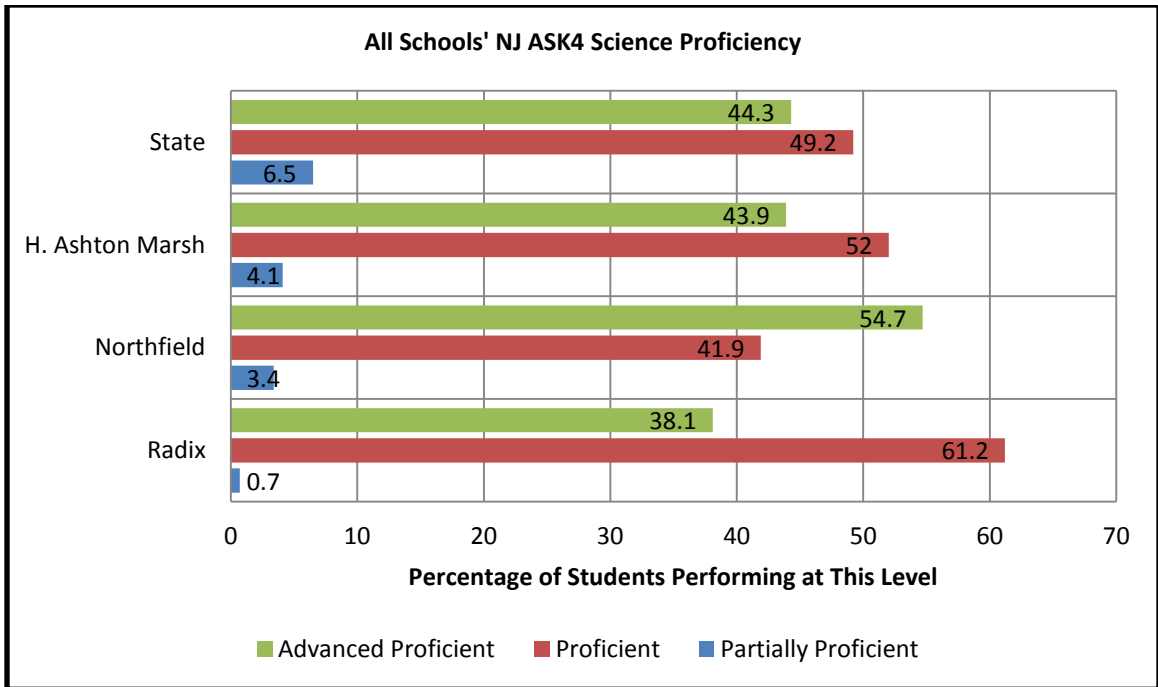


Figure 5.5

The above chart compares the levels of science proficiency that fourth grade students achieved at each school to the state average.

Ninety-four percent of students were proficient by state average. All of the schools being studied performed better than that, with fewer than 1% of students at Radix not earning proficiency. Northfield had the most advanced proficient students, Radix had the most proficient students, and H. Ashton Marsh had the least proficient students.

The second hypothesis is also supported, but the relationship is not as clear according to this research.

In the next chapter, the researcher will discuss why these hypotheses are supported. There will also be discussion of areas for further research.

Chapter 5

In the previous chapter, charts displayed the levels of academic achievement in three Southern New Jersey elementary schools. These charts, in combination with in-depth interviews with staff members at each school, and content analyses of communication materials distributed from the school, have helped the researcher to determine whether the supposition that character education and parental involvement lead to academic achievement can be accepted or rejected.

It appears that there is a strong correlation between character education and academic achievement. Radix Elementary School practiced the highest level of character education, and its students performed the best on the performance tests. Students at this school regularly performed better than the other schools studied, its District Factor Group, and the State Average. It can be assumed that this is at least partly due to its award-winning character education program.

Northfield students also performed well, but not as strongly. Their commitment to character education appears to be weaker than Radix's, and their scores reflect it. Although the students did not perform poorly, they did not perform as well as Radix's students did, and their character education program is not as well-practiced.

H. Ashton Marsh students performed the worst. They also had the least commitment to character education of the schools studied. These students performed worse than the state average. The students also scored worse than those in their DFG on occasion. H. Ashton Marsh students invariably performed the worst of the other two schools studied.

Parental involvement does not seem to have as strong of a relationship with academic achievement. Parents are not particularly involved at Radix, yet the school performed the best. Parents are more involved at Northfield and H. Ashton Marsh, but neither of these schools performed particularly well on the test. The second hypothesis, it is expected that a correlation will exist between parental involvement and academic achievement, has also been supported, but to a lesser degree. Although other researchers clearly confirm the correlation between parental involvement and academic achievement, and respondents all have anecdotal examples attesting to this, it was not clearly evident in this research.

If the researcher could do this study with better, more abundant resources, the study would be conducted state-wide to gain a fuller understanding and a more generalizable conclusion. The sample in this study was chosen at convenience, thus the results are not scientifically significant.

More respondents would also lead to a stronger conclusion. Only speaking with one member from each school does not provide a full enough understanding of how the schools operate and engage in character education or parental involvement. It would also be helpful to conduct the interviews in person rather than through e-mail. Nonverbal communication and the ability to quickly clarify responses from respondents would have been beneficial.

If the study were to be conducted over a period of several years, a clearer picture could develop of how the relationship between character education, parental involvement, and academic achievement exists (or doesn't).

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Appendix A

NJ School Report Card – Radix Elementary School Profile

The goal of Radix Elementary School is to address the academic, as well as, the social and emotional needs of our children. We want students to enjoy the learning process while acquiring the skills for a lifetime of learning by infusing technology and character education into programs that address local, state and national standards. We are proud of the fact that our children in grades three and four met all NJ ASK 3/4 AYP requirements as a result of last year's state testing program.

We provide an exceptional balanced literacy program that creatively teaches communication skills designed to promote reading fluency and creative writing skills. Student achievement continually shows positive growth in the areas of writing and language arts literacy. Teachers use authentic literature and guided reading strategies, along with leveled readers and assessment driven instruction, to meet the needs of all students. Student writing has been enhanced in all grade levels through the use of the "Four Square" prewriting strategies, Writer's Workshops, and a variety of teacher inservicing utilizing writing programs such as Rosemary Howell, The Writing Academy, Being a Writer and Writing with Spice. As a district we are in the midst of preparing to pilot several of these writing programs in each elementary school, and in fifth grade, in order to provide genuine feedback when selecting a K-12 writing program.

Our mathematics program promotes the use of manipulatives, hands-on explorations, critical thinking skills, creative lesson development and implementation, and problem solving using open-ended questions. Furthermore, teachers provide daily practice of math concepts by providing "Do Now's" for review, daily word problems for critical thinking, 10-15 minutes of daily fact practice and continuous repetition of skills for mastery.

Radix Elementary is extremely proud of our Nationally and State-recognized Character Education Program, which is unique because it uses both a school-developed ideology in combination with the NCLB approved "Community of Caring" program. In the past, students were extrinsically rewarded for exhibiting good character. Now students exhibit the Core Values because of the intrinsic reward they feel for doing what is right. Radix Elementary was selected by the Character Education Partnership (CEP) as one of ten schools nationally to receive the National School of Character Award. This prestigious honor was announced at CEP's National Forum in November 2007. As a National School of Character, Radix received a \$20,000 grant to promote Character Education at both the state and national levels. In addition, Radix Elementary School received the New Jersey School of Character Award presented by the New Jersey Center for Character Education and the Department of Education.

We are excited to see the infusion of technology within the academic content areas through the use of a 26-station computer lab, many interactive whiteboards, class sets of

response clickers per grade level, several mobile classroom carts containing iBook computers and a demonstration DVD computer. Teachers utilize presentation carts containing a 25" monitor, computer, scanner, and digital camera. The technology program has been enhanced with the addition of a mobile distance learning lab that has enabled our children to take numerous virtual field trips to support all curricular areas. Our school uses a totally wireless system allowing students to access the Internet from any location in the building and provides software necessary to use the various forms of media to enhance the learning process. Students are provided an opportunity to experience learning through the use of project and problem-based learning and virtual field trips all over the world. School personnel have presented technology seminars at state and national conferences. We are looking forward to professional development for the enhancement of instruction with infused technology.

A positive school climate has been created by our staff, parents, and students. Our very active PTA has also been instrumental in purchasing equipment and providing assemblies to enhance our fine academic programs and improving school climate. In addition, the school offers chorus, art club, ecology club, library club, student council, K-4 student and staff yearbook, safety patrol, peer mediation, and a welcome committee for new students. Student interest and spirit is heightened by the following: Student of the Month Program, spirit days, scheduled reading and mathematics motivational programs, school fair, and educational assembly programs. Our students' scholastic achievement is accredited to the numerous teachers who continue to improve their pedagogy through involvement in graduate level courses, professional seminars, teacher in-services, instructional strategies, professional improvement plans, and curriculum development.

Appendix B

Message from the Principal – Radix Elementary School

Radix Elementary: Where Bucket Filling is a Way of Life

Dear Radix School Community,

This year we are enthusiastically introducing a new character development program called Bucket Filling.

Bucket filling is an easy-to-understand concept: **Everyone carries an invisible bucket that holds our good thoughts and feelings. When our buckets are full, we feel happy and when our buckets are empty, we feel sad. Occasionally, we may need to cover our bucket with a lid to keep others from dipping into it.**

Children quickly understand that they can fill buckets when they do and say things that are kind, considerate, caring and respectful. They also learn that when they are mean, inconsiderate, uncaring, or disrespectful, they dip into buckets and remove those good feelings from others. Even the youngest child understands that actions and words can either fill a bucket or dip into it. *I'm sure we all know some adults in our lives that need an understanding of this concept as well!*

Please help support our endeavor by encouraging your children and family members to be active bucket fillers, recognizing your child's efforts to be bucket fillers, and reiterating the negativity of bucket dipping.

If you would like to learn more about bucket filling, visit the Bucket Fillers website, www.bucketfillers101.com. Bucket Fillers also offers a free weekly e-newsletter for parents and teachers.

Please click on the links to find bucket filling ideas you can print and use at home. There is also a form to complete for those extraordinary bucketfilling activities your family has participated in. Please complete the essay for this form, sign it and return it to the principal for our monthly Bucket Filler Celebrations.

Looking forward to making positive changes in our classrooms, schools, homes, and community as our children, staff members and family members learn to fill buckets wherever they go.

Respectfully,

Mrs. JoAnne Rumpf, Principal

Appendix C

NJ School Report Card - Northfield Community Elementary School Profile

The Northfield Community Elementary School is the first floor of the one building campus that houses the Northfield Community Middle School located on the second floor. We foster a climate of high academic standards, individual and small group instruction are implemented on a daily basis, student responsibility for learning and a focus on higher-order, open-ended problem solving in responses to the essential questions of the lessons.

This elementary school consists of a special needs pre-school through fourth grade, made up of approximately 600 students from a very involved community that understands and highly values the education of our children. We have a highly knowledgeable, creative and dedicated faculty who work endless hours to provide excellent lessons and an inviting and safe environment for our eager students. Our educators work tirelessly to design age appropriate instruction, using qualitative and quantitative data to drive the instruction at different ability levels, readiness, and interests for student growth inspiring development that focuses on creativity, critical thinking, communication and collaboration.

Our Integrated Language Arts Program features the SRA program by McGraw-Hill in Kindergarten and grade 1 as well as Story Town by Harcourt in all grades. In the area in of Mathematics, the Scott Foresman series is employed by our teachers. The disciplines of Science and Social Studies are integrated throughout Language Arts and we are also progressing in the area of technology integration during everyday instruction. As a kindergarten through grade four school, our curriculum is reviewed and revised on a continual basis to ensure alignment with the New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards.

In the area of extra-curricular activities we have a variety of clubs such as the Book Club, PALS Homework Club, Chess Club, and the a Media Club. We also have an Art Goes to School Program that fosters a school-community relationship and gives the students a chance to develop an interest in artistic creativity. In addition, we have a parent volunteer in-service that encourages our parents to be in our school as helpers during lunch, playground, computer lab and media center times.

To maximize student educational potential we work as a collaborative team to take full advantage of our in-house experts as we continue to grow as a professional learning community. Throughout our daily function as professional educators, we consistently strive to differentiate instruction by adjusting content, process and product in response to student readiness, interests and learning profile. We also incorporate character education using the tenants of the Skills Streaming Program and Olweus Bullying Prevention Program.

Unfortunately, our grade three and four sub-categories labeled “economically disadvantaged” did not meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in Language Arts Literacy (LAL) according to the results of the NJASK tests taken in April of 2010. Therefore, we have enacted an action plan to enhance the results of the upcoming year’s NJASK test such as the implementation of Learnia, Reading A to Z online, an intense articulation program among the principal and teachers to examine data to drive instruction on an individual basis, a parent night to educate our community about our use of Sustaining Best Practices in Literacy and Increasing Student Achievement on the NJASK as well as teacher professional development opportunities.

As principal, my focus is to enhance our teacher and support staff’s ability to meet the needs of individual students, ie. differentiated instruction, as identified above. This encompasses the coordination of our Intervention and Referral Services Committee (I&RS).

In conjunction with our guidance department, we continued to implement a whole school initiative to address anti-bullying entitled the Olweus Anti-Bully Program and skills streaming, as identified above. This program provided curriculum and support which guided teachers when addressing issues associated with bullying. Our students were also able to view a presentation by John Halligan, a nationally acclaimed presenter, concerning bullying, cyber – bullying and Suicide Prevention. Other guidance responsibilities included: NJ PASS testing, CogAT testing, ASK testing, Intervention and Referral Services, led by the principal.

The Northfield Education Foundation and the PTO were an integral part of the support structure that exists at Northfield Elementary School. These organizations continued to be vital to the success of our students by providing funding for activities, special projects and assemblies. Grants were offered to teachers for projects that enhance the learning process or for classroom instructional materials/supplies. The NCS staff recognizes that enjoying this positive relationship with the NEF and PTO helps to provide a strong infrastructure for our students and this promotes educational excellence and high achievement.

Appendix D: Message from the Principal – Northfield Community Elementary School

It is my please to Welcome Everyone to the 2010-2011 School Year.

As the Elementary School Principal, I want to express how important your child and their successes are to me. Your involvement is vital in helping us educate every child that walks through our doors. As parents, you are the heart and soul of your child. As educators, we provide the platform to build their knowledge and skills; together we can provide the foundation for their successful future.

Education is the process by which every individual attains knowledge and achieves personal growth. The purpose of education is to provide every individual with the skills that enable them to compete, contribute, and meet the challenges in a changing complex society. Education is a community endeavor. All children can learn and have intrinsic worth and unique value. Children should have the opportunity to reach their maximum potential. Higher expectations produce the potential for higher results. As children experience life's changes, they grow.

At the Northfield Community Elementary School, we nurture young minds in a supportive and positive atmosphere so that one-day all their students may accomplish their dreams.

Please know that I believe in open communication between the school and community. I feel collaboration among all of the stakeholders in the school and community is crucial to providing a safe, supportive environment that promotes academic excellence in teaching and learning. Together we can encourage our students to use critical thinking to become lifelong learners and productive citizens. Anytime that I can be of assistance, please do not hesitate to stop by, phone or email me – my door is always open.

Sincerely,

Dr. Joseph S. Campisi

Principal, Northfield Community Elementary School

Appendix E: NJ School Report Card - H. Ashton Marsh Elementary School Profile

The H. Ashton Marsh Elementary School serves the children of Absecon in grades kindergarten through fourth, as well as housing two sessions of a half-day preschool handicapped program. We also house one self-contained, multi-disabled class. The curriculum focuses on reading, writing, mathematics, social studies, and science. Our constant focus on literacy has allowed us to implement a balanced literacy program which is uniform and progressive throughout all grade levels. Grade one however, will be experiencing a total leveling of their language arts program; having eleven teachers involved including those from Title I, LRC, ELL and regular education. The Diagnostic Reading Assessment (DRA) is also implemented in order to more accurately focus in on an individual's reading and instructional levels. We will continue to implement the Study Island program for grade four. Students are immersed in writing through the execution of The Writer's Workshop. It is a part of each student's schedule everyday. Marsh utilizes the most current and valid techniques to deliver on this level of instruction. The Phonics First program is also employed both before and afterschool for those students meeting the approved criteria. We house an I&RS/RTI committee to aide in student achievement. Special area subjects such as art, music, library, technology and physical education are also part of our comprehensive educational program. Chorus and instrumental music instruction are offered after school. A basic skills program for math and language arts is provided to students who are eligible and replacement and/or in class support and speech services are available based on the individual needs of students as deemed by our Child Study Team. An ESL program also assists students who may require these services. Students in grade four may enter our targeted program for the gifted and talented based on criteria. Whole school enrichment is offered to grades kindergarten through three. We also offer academic after school programs in the areas of literacy and mathematics to assist students in need.

Our school philosophy is that learning activities should be individual as well as cooperative in order to accommodate all types of learner. They are designed to encourage problem solving and the sharing of ideas and experiences. This is evident through our utilization of technology as well as differentiated instruction in the various programs presented throughout the year. Our newly designed computer lab and the presence of technology throughout the school encourage students to look beyond what is obvious and to explore. Throughout the school year musical concerts, class trips, community based presentations, International Day, Author's Day, Book Swap, Movie Night and other programs provide students a broad experiential base to build on that are both fun and meaningful.

The educational mission of our school focuses on a teaching-learning environment that is child-centered and provides for active student involvement in learning and thinking. In addition to regular classroom learning activities, the students participate in a Character Education program that helps students to care about and act upon core ethical

values. The Character Counts program incorporates the "Six Pillars" of character. Trustworthiness, respect, kindness, responsibility, caring, and citizenship are intertwined into the daily school life as we reach out to others in our school and community. Peer mediation as well as group and individual counseling are provided to assist our children and families. Many student-centered projects are done for and with the surrounding community of Absecon.

A strong and active Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) and Volunteers in Public Schools (VIPS) offers assistance to school programs and the many dedicated professional staff members here at Marsh. The Absecon Education Foundation also helps to expand and enhance the mission of our district.

The H. Ashton Marsh School was a 2000-2001 recipient of a Best Practice award from the New Jersey Department of Education in Language Art Literacy for an International Theme Project in grade four. The H. Ashton Marsh School was also chosen as Atlantic County's most improved school for the Healthy Schools Initiative sponsored by AtlantiCare in 2008 and won their top grant in 2009 and 2010. We have also integrated a best practice gardening program as well as the Cross-fit and CATCH program in conjunction with AtlantiCare. A comprehensive professional development program and activities provide the teaching and paraprofessional staff opportunity to model life-long learning, to be innovative and to continue to grow as professionals.

Appendix F: Message from the Principal – H. Ashton Marsh Elementary School

The H. Ashton Marsh Elementary School serves children from kindergarten through fourth grade. We also offer a half-day preschool handicapped class both in the AM and PM. Our well-defined curriculum focuses on the areas of language arts, writing, mathematics, social studies and science. These disciplines are delivered through various techniques steeped in differentiated instruction and cooperative learning. Specialty classes, such as art, music, library, computers and physical education are offered to all students.

Please remember to visit the Marsh Messages Section for current as well as past newsletters entitled Marsh Messages.

Highlights of some of our wonderful programs appear below:

Kindergarten

We offer a full day kindergarten program to all students who turn five by October 1st. Our program consists of an activity-based interactive “hands-on” approach to learning. The program incorporates balanced literacy and Writer’s Workshop as a primary focus to language development and teaches the concepts of mathematics through the use of manipulatives and problem solving techniques. Learning centers offer a rich variety of activities that engage children in problem-solving, creative thinking, making choices and social interactions. An in-depth social development program is also a part of the kindergarten curriculum that is taught to all by the guidance counselor.

Literature-Based Reading Program

Macmillan/McGraw-Hill’s “Treasures” is the textbook program primarily used by the teachers in the Marsh School. We are very proud of our students’ progression in this magnificent program. This balanced literacy approach incorporates the concepts of vocabulary, language skills, phonics, writing and reading to students of all ability levels. Theme-based activities and group discussions offer experiences in critical and abstract thinking skills. Students’ writing abilities will be honed with the addition of a Writer’s Workshop and challenged every year with the annual Author’s Day. Authors and/or poets of popular childrens’ books are brought in to spend the day with the children discussing their backgrounds in writing and their enriching careers.

Mathematics

The Scott Foresman math textbook series is the foundation for our math program. We also utilize the Everyday math curriculum. Mathematical concepts are taught

incorporating higher-order thinking skills and are made relevant through hands-on experiences.

Technology

Computer technology is incorporated into every grade level through teacher instruction and the availability of a computer lab. All computers have internet access available for class use. We utilize an overhead projection system in the classroom as well as a Front Row audio enhancement. Our computer to student ratio is excellent.

English as a Second Language

English as a Second Language (ESL) Program

Students whose native language is something other than English are taught the English language and the culture of the United States by two certified ESL instructors. These two specialists service students in grades Kindergarten through fourth.

Special Education and Basic Skills Instruction

Students in grades kindergarten through fourth receive instruction through replacement services or in-class support, whichever is deemed most appropriate by the Child Study Team. Replacement reading/language arts and mathematics classes are offered in a resource room environment by special education teachers who are responsible for each child's grades in these subject areas.

In-class support is provided to those students whose needs can be met in the regular classroom setting. Their instruction is delivered through a collaborative approach by the special education teacher and the regular classroom instructor.

Basic Skills instruction is available to those students who need reinforcement in the areas of language/reading and/or mathematics. This program is provided for students in grades kindergarten through fourth and is administered in a small group setting.

Pre-School Handicapped Program

The Marsh School offers two half-day sessions for pre-school special needs students between the ages of three and five. The program focuses on each child's pre-academic readiness, motor skills and social skills development.

Pupil Assistance Committee

The Marsh School offers an I&RS Committee (Intervention and Referral Services) that meets to discuss the needs of students experiencing academic or behavior difficulties in the classroom. This committee is comprised of the guidance counselor, experienced

staff members and the administration. Through meetings and discussions, strategies are created and implemented to assist the child in the regular classroom setting.

Community Involvement

Students in the H. Ashton Marsh School are very aware and concerned for those less fortunate and contribute generously many times during the school year to charities and organizations in the area. During the Winter Holiday, each grade level adopts a different charity or organization and collects the items most in need for that group. Students have also communicated through packages, cards and letters to our fellow Americans serving in the armed forces.

The School is also very receptive to community involvement. The community is invited to participate in many activities. A strong and active Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) provides financial support for field trips, teacher requested curriculum supplies, and offers after-school enrichment classes to the students. An active and energetic group of Volunteers in Public Schools (VIPs) provides endless hours of assistance in the school for the teachers and administration.

Chorus

The Marsh School Chorus is an organization that is open to fourth grade students. The students rehearse two days a week after school starting in mid-September. Their performances include a Winter Concert, singing at local nursing homes and malls, senior Citizens' dinners, and anywhere else they are invited to sing. One year they even sang the National Anthem at Veteran's Stadium for the opening of a Phillies game. Students learn to sing in two and three part harmonies, through various types of music. Most importantly, they learn to work together to achieve their goals.

Instrumental Music

The Marsh School offers an instrumental music program to students in grade four. Students are offered group lessons during the week. Various concerts are performed during the year for the school and the community.

Building Character, Building a Program

The Character Education Program in the H. Ashton Marsh School is a deliberate effort to help students understand, care about, and act upon, core ethical values. The Character Counts program incorporates the "Six Pillars" of Character into the life of the school: trustworthiness, thankfulness, responsibility, fairness, caring and citizenship. Absecon is reaching out to parents and the community to foster the character development of our students. Each month a new character trait is introduced and taught through insightful lessons woven and integrated into core subject areas. A recognition ceremony occurs at the close of the school year.