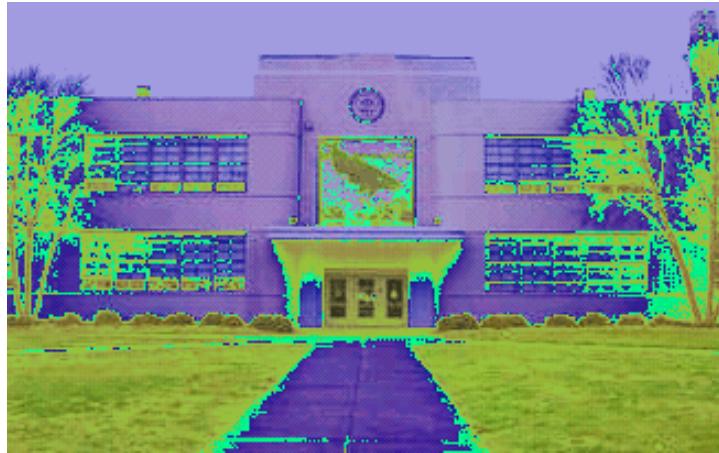


Ocean View Elementary School

Norfolk, Virginia



Although the broad stairs that join its two floors bear perceptible grooves created by years of footsteps, Ocean View Elementary School was built to last. Now 70 years old, its Art Deco style is still timely, and the school is surrounded by lush lawns dappled by shade trees. A student butterfly garden awaits returning Swallowtails



Ocean View Elementary School was built to last.

Even though Ocean View is within walking distance from the Chesapeake Bay, its student population is financially modest and ethnically diverse, and during the 1990s it confronted the underachieving fate of many schools with similar demographics. Officially labeled a “school in need of improvement” according to required federal state assessments, Ocean View Elementary School continually failed to reach state accreditation standards.

LEADERSHIP: THE JOURNEY

Reversing Ocean View’s course was neither quick nor easy. Soon after Lauren Campsen became principal in 1999 (after four years as vice-principal), she set out to overturn the school’s standing and restore state accreditation. In time, the school would adopt a handful of powerful practices—strong leadership, cross-school teams, curriculum alignment and common formative assessment, and the “three instructional power strategies.” But the journey was a winding one.

An initial step was the district’s hiring of consultant Doug Reeves (currently of The Leadership and Learning Center, Denver, CO) to help improve classroom instruction. When the district arranged to send some administrators to a follow-up workshop on Data Driven Decision Making, Ms. Campsen made sure she was on the list.

Student Demographics

Ocean View Elementary School, Norfolk, VA

www.nps.k12.va.us

559 students, Pre K – 5

African American	47%
White	45%
Hispanic or Latino	8%
Students eligible for free/reduced price meals	60%
Students with Limited English Proficiency	6%
Special Education Students	9%
Student Turnover Rate	50%
Average Teacher Turnover rate	12%
Student/Teacher Ratio	17:1

Central features of Reeves’s method are common formative assessments, with test questions carefully aligned to grade-level state and district learning objectives. Ms. Campsen began by requiring all teachers to enter their student test data (at that time by hand) into classroom data notebooks, and to post their test data results in the hallways by their classrooms.

With her teachers’ attention focused on test results, Ms. Campsen assured herself that Ocean View teachers would adapt their instruction based on their students’ scores, just as Doug Reeves said. Wrong! At Ocean View and throughout the district, teachers pushed back, asserting, “This is too much work.” “All my time is spent entering test data in the notebook.” “I do not have time to analyze the data, and I don’t know what to do next.”

LEARNING TO LEAD

The next summer Ms. Campsen attended another training, where she analyzed her leadership style and concluded she was not being bold enough. Disbanding the school’s site-based management team, which was not holding teachers accountable for test results; she implemented grade-level teams and a lead data team to coordinate test development, analysis, and instructional support.

Placing her strongest allies on the teams, she then had the pieces in place: formative assessments and focused teaching, re-teaching and re-teaching again where necessary. Ocean View lost several teachers during this time, aggrieved by her dogged work ethic and focus on data.

Ms. Campsen describes her change process as “more about the journey than the destination. The vision is that we are all on the same train, on the same track, going the same direction.” As a result, student test scores soared at the end of the 2002 – 2003 school year. State accreditation was achieved and Ocean View met the federal targets for improvement.

With some amazement, teachers concluded, “My gosh, all that stuff we had to do really works!” Today they say that working at Ocean View is like working at no other school. “I had a gosh-awful first year; college didn’t prepare me for what I had to learn here,” notes a second-year teacher. Another new teacher adds, “After what you learn here and what you do here, you could go anywhere in the country.”



Lauren Campsen became principal in 1999.

GRADE-LEVEL TEAMS

Teachers regard their grade-level team as their first line of support for new teaching strategies and curriculum adaptations, followed by school-based and district-level content specialists. Ms. Campsen recalls that it took a whole year for these teams to learn how to work together, track progress, and improve instruction; trust and transparency develop over time, she notes. She assigns teachers to grade-level classrooms strategically, based on experience, strengths, and needs. One priority is to have a male teacher at each grade level as a positive male role model.

Grade-level meetings take place daily; the principal and math, literacy and other specialists visit grade-level teams regularly and as needed. Fortunately, the district embraced teaming, and provided sufficient resource personnel (PE, art, music, and media), so each grade level has a daily 45-minute period for common and individual planning.

Grade-level meetings prompted teachers to emerge from their solitary classrooms and learn from each other's work. They began to discuss student needs openly, reveal concepts they are struggling to teach, plan joint grade-level projects, and to analyze data and more data from monthly formative assessments. Teachers now arrive at meetings armed with data notebooks, ready to show and compare their assessment results, and eager to exchange ideas with colleagues.

At one grade-level meeting, a third-grade teacher says, "We are now so experienced at focusing on specific skills. We have both mega strategies across skill areas and micro activities specific to each skill area. We now have really cool activities for remediation and interventions when before we had little." Another adds, "If someone is having difficulty, you can go to anyone for help. ... Ideas do not stay in the classroom. It is about this grade and beyond."



Computer lab: technology-based intervention

VERTICAL TEAMS

Vertical teams are content-based (language arts, math, science, and social studies) with grade-level, special education, and resource subject representation. Meeting twice a month before school, these teams work across subject and grade levels to generate ideas for adapting and adjusting teaching and curriculum, based on specific content-based formative assessment and state test items. Chaired by a content specialist, vertical teams discuss gaps in grade-level learning and explore teaching strategies and activities in the lower grades that might help prevent such gaps. Representatives on the vertical teams are charged with taking ideas back to their grade-level teams.

For example, third graders were struggling with the concept of physical and behavioral adaptations in a science unit on climate. Kindergarten and first- and second-grade teachers conferred on how to introduce this

concept with age-appropriate activities, such as discussing seasonal changes in clothing colors, types of clothes, and animal colors and coverings. “Vertical teams keep us looking back and ahead,” a teacher explains.

Content specialists are sustained at Ocean View in several ways. In early 2000, the district funded literacy coaches in all schools, and three years later, Ocean View received district equity money for a math and science specialist. Other state remediation money funds intervention support.

CURRICULUM REALIGNMENT

Early in her school’s journey, Ms. Campsen realized the need for serious curriculum realignment, with support for all teachers to “teach kids not subjects,” as the saying goes. Fortunately, when the district imposed grade-level benchmark testing three times a year based on Virginia Standards of Learning (SOL), it also provided grade-level curriculum guides and pacing charts (now online and complete with abundant teaching strategies and learning activities).

With the state articulating what to teach and the district determining when to teach it, teachers had to determine how to teach, based on student needs. “We had to adapt our styles of teaching to our students and what they are facing,” explains Ms. Campsen. Together, she and her teaching staff and curriculum specialists developed (and continue to use and improve) school-based weekly curriculum roadmaps for each grade, identifying the SOL skill to be taught.

Teachers now annotate their daily lesson plans with information on the targeted SOL objective, Bloom’s taxonomy level, materials, sequence of activities and anticipated outcomes, and a closing, or summary, statement. This has required great diligence and attention to detail. Please click here <http://blueribbon.rmces.com/2008Reports1.pdf> to track the math standard on the concept of a variable through these documents to see the close alignment of lesson plans to the state department education frameworks.

INSTRUCTION

Instructional strategies across the curriculum include whole-class and small flexible group instruction, hands-on group projects, independent computer work stations, and individual practice. During a two-hour block for reading and writing, teachers use guided reading and differentiated instruction; they focus on deep implementation of phonemic and phonological awareness, vocabulary, text comprehension, and fluency.

The math curriculum is intended to shift instruction from the teacher’s “telling” to a model in which the teacher plays facilitator and coach, combining direct instruction with inquiry-based learning about math concepts and



Maritime studies feature experiential learning.

applications such as number sense, patterning, measurement, and problem-solving. Science and social studies curricula follow a similar pattern of building understanding through active teaching and learning about the natural, physical, social, geographic, civic, and political world. Ocean View's maritime studies provide real-life experiences for students through experiential and service learning projects, such as the Bay Savers Project, through which students have raised more than 300,000 oysters. Under supervision by the part-time maritime teacher, a retired director of Norfolk's science center, the fifth-grade maritime club is growing and replanting sea grass along its local shoreline.

THE “BIG THREE” POWER STRATEGIES

As a result of investigations by the content specialists and collaboration among faculty, Ocean View is fully invested in their “Big Three” power strategies: Justify your Answer, Compare and Contrast, and Focus on Content Vocabulary. They are seen as key in this school's formula for academic success.

By deploying these strategies in every class every day, teachers believe their students are gaining meta-cognitive skills—they are learning how they think by examining and articulating how they reached their answers and how they understand the meaning of new concepts and meaning of words. This process also provides teachers with “early and often” assessments of students' understanding. During her classroom observations Ms. Campsen expects to hear “justify your answer” and “compare and contrast” and discussions of vocabulary words gleaned from all subject areas. In her view, implementation of the three power strategies should be so deep that asking the students to justify answers triggers students' thinking process.



Students learn to justify their thinking.

In a fourth grade classroom, a teacher guides a small group, re-teaching fractional equivalencies. To her five attentive and eager students, she asks “Who would like to explain your answer?” A student volunteers, “Using the lowest common dominator.” “Justify?” the teacher prompts. “Have to find the equivalents,” the student says. “Justify?” she prompts again, and the student explains, “That they are the same.”

A class of first-grade students is editing a sentence as part of their daily review session. From the board, the teacher asks, “What needs editing in this sentence?” Many hands shoot up. “Wednesday needs a capital,” a student opines. “Justify,” the teacher says. “Because it is the beginning of the sentence,” the student replies. “Good,” the teacher says, “Did anyone else have a different way to justify the capital?” Another student explains that Wednesday is capitalized because it is a day of the week, “Yes,” the teacher says, “Wednesday gets a capital for two reasons: beginning of a sentence and a day of the week.”

This is followed by a class discussion about animal types—mammals, amphibians, reptiles, and birds. Referring to the science word wall and pointing to each word, the teacher prompts: “We learned that a mammal is—”. Students answer, “A mammal is an animal that feeds milk to its young.” After going through the other animal types in the same fashion, she asks a compare-and-contrast question: “How are a bird and fish alike and different? Think first, no hands up. We are thinking of one way they are alike and one way they are different.” Using a Venn diagram, she guides the class through the fish and bird comparisons and contrasts, modeling the activity. “What we write in the middle is what they have in common,” she coaches them, “What we write on each side is what is different.”

The power strategies are ingrained in students’ independent work. They use different colored markers to highlight content and test question vocabulary and routinely jot down written rationales for why they chose a specific response from multiple choices. In reading, for example, students justify their reasoning by linking the highlighted key vocabulary words in questions to the sentence or phrase in the passage that provides the correct response. Click

here <http://blueribbon.rmcs.com/2008Reports/10.pdf>

to view a sample of a student’s monthly reading assessment and this justification method and here <http://blueribbon.rmcs.com/2008Reports/11.pdf> for a sample fifth-grade monthly problem-solving assessment, which also illustrates the use of the vocabulary and justification power strategies. In the January math Problem Solving Assessment, the student has highlighted key words in the questions and labeled all answers, even the wrong ones, to show his thinking and work.



A guided reading group studies a text.

“This helps [students] master test vocabulary as well as content vocabulary,” a teacher explains. “A couple years ago we found many students got tripped up on words and phrases that they found in test questions like ‘give the meaning of’ and ‘which one best explains’.”

COMMON FORMATIVE ASSESSMENTS

At Ocean View, assessment is tightly woven into the whole fabric of teaching and learning. As in many other successful schools and districts, student learning is regularly assessed. Where Ocean View stands out, however, is in its monthly formative math, science, and social student assessments. Developed by the content specialists and based on the SOL objectives taught each month, these are 10-question, multiple choice assessments. The initial assessment is known as Form A; if students do not achieve 80% proficiency on Form A, they receive a “double or triple and even fourth dose” of instruction. Following that additional instruction, they then take Form B.

To strengthen students' test-taking skills, the school developed Form A and B. Both resemble the state's annual assessment design, bubble-sheet format, and focus. Click <http://blueribbon.rmces.com/2008Reports/2.pdf> here to see a sample Form A assessment for second-grade science. The district also provides software to score assessments and produce charts and tables based on Form A and B results, freeing teachers from hand-scoring and summarizing.

Since each question on all Form A assessments represents a specific SOL skill, content specialists are also able to produce grade-level and student-level reports with item analyses. Click <http://blueribbon.rmces.com/2008Reports/3.pdf> to see one teacher's summary monthly math scores. Click here <http://blueribbon.rmces.com/2008Reports/4.pdf> to see the January Form A student intervention chart of missed items for grade 5 teachers. This chart sets the gears in motion for extra help. Click here <http://blueribbon.rmces.com/2008Reports/5.pdf> to see a chart summarizing fifth-grade math results from September to January.

Students track their individual monthly assessment results in Student Progress Portfolios. For each area they respond to the questions "What did I do well? What do I need to work on?" They confer with teachers about their strong and weak areas and set personal achievement goals. Students and classrooms earn rewards such as a pizza party when they meet goal levels consistently on Form A and B. "Students really know what rewards are offered for what performance level. It is very concrete," a teacher says. "They work hard to get to the next level."

Reading skills are assessed differently. Instruction focuses on 12 reading comprehension standards that include items such as author's purpose, cause and effect, fact and fiction, and making predictions. Teachers selected these standards based on current research and practice. Click here

<http://blueribbon.rmces.com/2008Reports/6.pdf> for a list of the 12 comprehension standards. The monthly reading assessment, created by the literacy specialist, is called SR3: Study, Read, Respond, and

Return. Students practice and take a monthly SR3 tests; teachers track their skills attainment. Click here <http://blueribbon.rmces.com/2008Reports/7.pdf> for a Grade 4 February Reading Assessment Chart showing disaggregated result for the high, middle, and low reading groups. In consultation with the literacy specialist, the teacher develops intervention groups and activities based on these monthly results, often re-teaching concepts to the entire class in a different way



Paired reading

Ocean View teachers use a four-square writing process that builds on students' knowledge of spoken and written language to plan, compose, revise, edit, and publish. (The principal notes that writing scores have improved by adding a final revise-and-edit step.) Fifth-grade teachers and students use the district writing rubric to prepare for the SOL writing test. Click here <http://blueribbon.rmces.com/2008Reports/8.pdf> to see the rubric.

SYSTEMATIC INTERVENTIONS

The teachers' daily lesson planning and the classroom structure reflect an intervention philosophy. All teachers differentiate instruction through small-group instruction and individual activities. Students are often clustered in mixed ability groups of three, four or five students and groups often enjoy fun competing during learning activities. A resource teacher notes, "This can be very good for the gifted students because they reinforce what they know by teaching others."

During the math and reading blocks, after the whole-class lesson, students move smoothly to small groups whose makeup is fluid because they are based on weekly mini-assessments. All students are in groups at different times during the day, so no stigma is attached to being pulled for re-teaching. Students reinforce new skills during independent work at their desks and at computer stations loaded with software packages for math and reading skills practice. There are few behavior issues as students work together and move in and out of their instructional groups. Students are polite and solicitous; "excuse me" and "can I help you?" are common phrases.

Additional targeted instruction occurs outside of the regular class time so the students do not miss current lessons. Just before recess, a teacher may pull a student or small group aside to reinforce or re-teach a missed skill. One fifth-grade teacher said, "I often grab a few minutes whenever I can; I make instructional time for a student who was absent or just not getting it. We don't want them missing out on learning the regular curriculum."

Students who show areas of greatest need from their Form A results are identified and teachers pull students from grade-level classrooms during common grade-level resource time (art, music, and PE) for deeper "second dose" intervention as needed. These intervention specialists—content teachers or sometimes part-time retired teachers—use specially developed materials to re-teach targeted skills. The intervention is often short-term; the skill gap is closed after re-teaching.



Recording data from oyster flats

Students who require a “third dose” of intervention receive it in small-group after school instruction, with parent permission. Initially, teachers provided this after school instruction voluntarily; now Title I funds support the program. This program benefits students by mixing them with different peers and teachers. Summer school provides a fourth and final opportunity for students to gain proficiency and not be retained.

This “dosing” is not remediation, but data-based intervention, the principal says. A teacher explains that “The scores on Form A really pinpoint areas that I might not see. There is so much material to cover. I appreciate the data results.” Click here <http://blueribbon.rmces.com/2008Reports/9.pdf> to view the results of fifth grade monthly math Form A and B assessments. The principal reports that the student results on Form A and B closely align with scores on the state accreditation tests, meaning that students who pass (attain at least 80%) Form A or B are likely to pass state tests.

NOT EITHER OR, BUT BOTH AND

At Ocean View, special education does not mean “instead of, but in addition to.” Inclusion classrooms are planned and team-taught by regular and special education teachers together. “It is a whole range of services and supports that any child might need to be successful in a classroom,”

says the assistant principal. “When you go to a classroom, you cannot spot what kids are ‘special’.” In addition to regular classroom instruction, special education students receive an additional hour and a half of reading daily. Gifted and Limited English Proficient students are also placed in cluster classes under the sheltered instruction model. Students not identified with special needs, but who have demonstrated gaps in specific skills, join small-group focused instruction with special education and students with limited English proficiency.



One-on-one intervention

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Both teachers and administrators acknowledged that “the Ocean View Way” is hard work. The district offers many professional development opportunities; there is a three-year teacher mentoring program for new teachers. Ms. Campsen offers extra support for teachers new to the profession or new to the school. By the second week of school, teachers are required to turn in daily lessons plans for her review and comment. Specialists work with all new teachers during the year’s first quarter, modeling lessons, providing support, and making sure the curriculum road maps are “hitting it,” the principal says. The assistant principal is constantly in classrooms in these early months modeling classroom management skills. “Student behavior issues can “kill a new teacher,” she notes.

Ms. Campsen does not do formal observations of new teachers until early winter, by which time, “New teachers should be able to do a decent lesson,” she says. “If not, we need to talk about it.” Her frequent principal walk-throughs include a 10-minute observation during a guided reading lesson, during which she records everything said and done, listening specifically for deep implementation of the power strategies. Click here <http://blueribbon.rmcses.com/2008Reports/12.pdf> for a sample evaluation narrative on deep implementation.

In building the Ocean View team, Ms. Campsen says she looks for teachers who are open to new ideas and not easily intimidated. A veteran teacher says, “There’s never a dull moment here. We never sit still and never sit at our desks, but all of this work shows. Our kids passed the SOL, just about all of them.”

ASSESSMENTS AND INTERVENTIONS: HIGH EXPECTATIONS

Ocean View’s 2009 mission is universal proficiency—“100% proficiency by all students in all tests in all grades.” To this lofty end, administrators, teachers, and students set high goals and expectations. As one teacher explains, “On the first day of class, this is really important: I tell students what my goals are for student achievement. ...I tell them I cannot achieve my goals without you achieving yours.” Another teacher comments, “We have high expectations, which trickle down to the kids.”

To illustrate high expectations, two students with special needs in the principal’s office showed her their writing samples. “I hope I can do better on the state writing this time,” one student says. Examining the work, the principal replies warmly, “Just look at what you have done here. I don’t hope you can do better, I expect you to do better!”



A teacher meets with a guided reading group while a student works independently.

STUDENTS AND PARENTS

Students respond positively to the tightly orchestrated teaching and learning at Ocean View. “I like reading because I like to read and answer questions at the end and doing SR3,” a fifth grade student says. “I like to reread and search the passage, and highlight and justify my answer. It helps you.” Asked what “justify your answer” means, the student explains that “there’s proof that you know and understand what you wrote down.” A third grade student praises the teachers: “They take a long time to get you to understand stuff so you don’t fail. Teachers want you to pass.”

Students even appreciated the public charts in the hall. “It’s like you’re showing off your grade, but it helps to see how the whole class is doing. If you have questions, teachers will work with you and let you take a second chance to maybe boost your score to a 90. ...Teachers show patience and talk it through.” Students also cite the food and fun assemblies during SOL time and rewards for monthly classroom assessment results.

Ocean View has a sunny, cheerful family center where parents meet for “Cut, Chew and Chat” sessions on Thursday and Friday mornings. Led by a full-time parent liaison, parents create educational materials teachers have requested, while at the same time learning about the school and grade-level activities. This background helps parents understand their children’s work. As one parent recalls, her son balked at justifying his answer. “He knew he was right and didn’t see the point. I helped him understand that his teacher needed to know where he came up with the answer. ...and this will help him choose the right answer on the SOL and other tests. Another parent comments, “Teachers and administrators are strict but fair, especially with zero tolerance for fighting, and parents appreciate this eventually and their kids too.”

Parents know about the incentive awards for academic achievement and liked the tiered recognition groups. “Awards are for incremental achievements, not just the few top tier students... and are used to motivate others,” a parent says. Parents of middle school students observe that their children were well prepared, both academically and socially, for sixth grade.

DISTRICT AND STATE SUPPORT

Norfolk Public Schools has been instrumental in Ocean View’s success. It supported training in data-driven decision-making and teaming, developed curriculum pacing guides, provided scanning software for grade- and student-level item analyses reports, and underwrote additional instructional staff. Its very successful new teacher mentoring program has retained 86% of new teachers after three years. The Senior Director for Leadership and Capacity Development, Norfolk Public Schools, reported that district content coordinators spend at least 70% of their time in schools, based on need. Reflecting on Ocean View’s journey to success, this director describes Ms. Campsen as having “the will and self-accountability to really push. It takes courage. She says to her staff that we can do this together.”



Cooperative group support enables students to learn from each other.

Ocean View has served as a mentoring school to three other schools in the district and Ms. Campsen frequently presents at district principal meetings. Recently, she presented findings from her teacher evaluations and ideas about the district’s new initiative—classroom walk-throughs.

SUSTAINABILITY

The practices that contributed to Ocean View’s success—common formative assessments, teaming, systematic interventions, and the big three power strategies—are concrete, observable, and rational. Underlying these practices,

however, are extraordinary values demonstrated by the school's staff: a willingness to work hard, commitment to a vision, and collaboration among all players.

Asked how Ocean View, or any successful school, can sustain its high achievement, knowing full well that administration and teaching staff will turn over, faculty members offered the following:

Focus on the achievement gap. To be most useful, data must answer: How are students at the bottom improving? Are those at the top losing ground? How many low-income and minority students are in the highest group? Ocean View has set a goal for the subgroup achievement gap to be 3% or less on each test.

Build on what you have. Teachers advised taking small steps towards a vision, focusing on what is working, adding next steps one by one, and always piloting new ideas. Teachers should request technical assistance as needed to do this.

Communicate constantly. At Ocean View, teachers pointed to constant communication among all players—content-area specialists, coaches, tutors, paraprofessionals, special education teachers and more—as a critical variable for success.

Teach the whole child. With a 60% poverty rate and 26% student mobility rate, Ocean View is the second highest achieving school in the district, in part because students' emotional needs are attended to. The guidance counselor and parent liaison spend time with parents and help teachers with parental support and communication

Value accountability. All faculty members must take the responsibility for raising students' test scores. The principal has now distributed leadership to her lead data team, vertical teams, and grade level teams, structures which will sustain student high achievement as long as universal student proficiency remains the clear goal.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- What elements are in place in my school for tracking student progress and using results? What is missing?
- Why might Ocean View's three power strategies be promising in any classroom?
- As we strive for all students to achieve at high levels, what two ideas from Ocean View could I suggest my school consider? What might those ideas look like in my school?

Ocean View Elementary School Virginia Standards Achievement Test % proficient and above: 5th grade English Language Arts					
	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08
All	85	85	94	100	100
African American	85	82	93	100	100
Low Income	85	83	96	100	100
% proficient and above: 5th grade Mathematics					
	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08
All	89	92	85	99	97
African American	89	96	75	100	100
Low Income	89	89	80	98	96