

TAKE ONE!



NBPTS

National Board for
Professional Teaching Standards

Julius Corsini Elementary School: How National Board Programs and a Principal Transformed a Failing School

Executive Summary

Historically, California's Julius Corsini Elementary School was a struggling school. Annual academic performance levels scraped the bottom in the Palm Springs Unified School District—ranking lowest in the school system and in the lowest 10 percent throughout the state.

The community surrounding this high-need school was tarnished with gangs, drugs and violence. Parent involvement was virtually non-existent, as many parents worked two and three jobs, and others were incarcerated.

“That school” was the label that many Corsini teachers gave it—with a teacher turnover rate hovering between 50 and 75 percent each year. Leadership was an afterthought, since no principal stayed more than three years.

Enter a new principal, Kiela Bonelli, who became National Board certified when she had been a teacher. In 2007, to jumpstart the school and faculty, Bonelli turned to the standards and assessment process developed by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS). She successfully used the National Board Certification process and *Take One!*, a component of National Board Certification, to focus the faculty on improving teaching and learning schoolwide. The school environment shifted to a culture of learning, and the faculty began collaborating in professional learning communities.

How Students Benefitted from NBPTS

- Student performance improvements in California's Academic Performance Index (API) increased by 55 points during the 2007-2008 school year and 49 points during the 2008-2009 school year, greatly exceeding the targets of eight and five points respectively.
- Student proficiency levels in English language arts and mathematics increased from 17 percent to 30 percent in 2007. The following year, 60 percent of students performed proficient or above in mathematics and 46 percent in English language arts.
- Julius Corsini was one of four schools in California to exit Program Improvement Year 5, meeting annual yearly progress (AYP) benchmarks in 2009 combined with an increase of more than 100 percent in the state's Academic Performance Index.

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Today, Julius Corsini is an award winning school—as one of only six schools nationwide to receive the National Principals Leadership Institute’s “National School Change Award” co-sponsored by the American Association of School Administrators and Panasonic.

- **Student test scores are up.** Corsini student test scores on California’s Academic Performance Index (API) increased by 55 points during the 2007-2008 school year and 49 points during the 2008-2009 school year, greatly exceeding the targets of eight and five points respectively.
- **Students are learning.** Proficiency levels in English language arts and mathematics increased from 17 percent to 30 percent in 2007. The following year, 60 percent of students performed proficient or above in mathematics and 46 percent in English Language Arts.
- **Parent involvement is at an all-time high.** The school’s recent achievements have motivated parents to become more involved in the school’s success. In one year’s time, back-to-school night attendance jumped from 15 percent to 90 percent. Meanwhile, attendance at parent-teacher conferences has increased from 45 percent to 95 percent.
- **Teachers are staying at Corsini.** For decades, the school’s teacher turnover rate had hovered between 50 and 75 percent each year. During the 2007-2008 school year, the teacher turnover rate was 5 percent, a 40 percent improvement from the previous year. In the 2008-2009 school year, the school lost only one teacher and that was due to retirement.

What made the difference at Corsini? A skilled principal successfully used the National Board Standards and assessment process to transform her school and increase teacher effectiveness.

“I truly believe that National Board (programs) developed the level of instruction at the school that I would not have seen otherwise,” Bonelli said.

What Julius Corsini Elementary School Teachers said about *Take One!*

Maribeth Petro: *Take One! has changed the climate of our school.*

Barry Wissman, third grade teacher: *We would meet regularly to go over common questions that we had and bounce lesson plan ideas off each other. I can’t imagine someone doing this in isolation. The whole campus was involved. It changed our school culture. The level of trust between colleagues soared.*

Lisa Box, fifth grade teacher: *We didn’t really know what we were getting into. Principal Bonelli wanted 100 percent participation. Everyone was excited about it. I knew I would regret it if I didn’t try.*

Nathan Allen, fifth grade teacher: *I find myself using my assessments all the time to guide my instruction.*

Brandi Rosen, fourth grade teacher: *I don’t think I would ever be this far along as a new teacher if it wasn’t for Take One!.*

The Corsini Story

Beyond the hotels and spa resorts in the desert of Palm Springs, Calif., is Julius Corsini Elementary School, located 100 miles west of Los Angeles. One of 15 schools in the Palm Springs Unified School District, the campus is in Desert Hot Springs, a community with the highest crime rate per capita in the region.

A 15-minute car ride separates golf courses and luxury hotels from this Title I school, where 95 percent of the students are on free or reduced lunch and 95 percent of the students are English language learners.

In 2006, only 17 percent of the student body scored proficient in English language arts and 20 percent were proficient in mathematics. Student absenteeism had reached record-high proportions, second only to the local alternative high school in a district comprised of 26 schools. Very few parents participated in parent-teacher conferences.

For decades, the school's teacher turnover rate had hovered between 50 and 75 percent.

Corsini had no culture of learning. Professional learning communities did not exist among the faculty. Teachers did not have adequate planning time. Parents looked across the freeway to find other schools for their children. Teachers wanted out.

A Tipping Point

Through the implementation of National Board programs starting in 2007, Bonelli, a National Board Certified Teacher-turned-principal, began to face the school's challenges head on.

Discarding the one-size fits all professional development, 100 percent of the staff—43 teachers, one reading coach and two administrators—began a professional journey that changed the school. The faculty decided to pursue either *Take One!* or National Board Certification. The improvements in the learning culture among students, test scores and the quality of instruction transformed Julius Corsini. Today, Corsini is one of the most effective schools in the region.

"I truly believe that National Board is what made the difference in our school site," said Bonelli. "The level of conversation at the school has changed from 'what's going to happen at the next field trip' to 'how can we help every child.' I have the neediest kids in the district, and they need the best teachers."

The school's recent achievements have motivated parents to become more involved in the school's success. In one year's time, back-to-school night attendance jumped from 15 percent to 90 percent. Meanwhile, attendance at parent-teacher conferences has increased from 45 percent to 95 percent.

School improvement didn't stop with student performance. During the 2007-2008 school year, the teacher turnover rate was 5 percent, a 40 percent improvement from the previous year. The school lost one teacher during the 2008-2009 school year and that was due to retirement.

Fast forward to the 2009-2010 school year. "When I walk through classrooms now, I can see meaningful instruction going on," said Bonelli, who achieved National Board Certification in 2000 while teaching first grade at Joshua Tree

Elementary School in Joshua Tree, Calif. “Teachers are not afraid to go away from the curriculum because the curriculum was not written for high-need students.”

“The talk around school among the teachers changed,” said third-grade teacher Barry Wissman, who achieved National Board Certification in 2009. “What used to be ‘what does the curriculum say we teach this week’ is now ‘what is best for the students and how can I change my curriculum?’ We became much more reflective and cognizant as a staff of what we were doing, instead of just doing it because it was required.”

In a story published in the Feb. 13, 2009, edition of the Desert Sun newspaper about the success of Julius Corsini, Jack O’Connell, California’s superintendent of public instruction said, “It’s a real tribute to the teachers here. Their students will be the beneficiaries.”

Teacher retention concerns are a thing of the past at Corsini. “My site was a school where no one wanted to be,” Bonelli said. “Five years ago, if you were asked, ‘where are you from,’ and said, ‘Julius Corsini,’ you’d hear the groans across the district. Now, we have people who want to be at our school site, because they see the level of professionalism with our teachers and how they enjoy working together. They’ll do whatever it takes to be the best at instruction.”

“I see a stronger involvement from families now,” said Josie Powell, the mother of two children who attended the school. “Teachers are more open to communicate with families to make sure their children are involved. That shared partnership is critical for a child’s success. I’m grateful for the improvements in the school, and I feel that they care for my child’s education.”

As a result of National Board programs, the school is no longer seen as “that school.” It’s now seen as a leader in the district.

For more information on National Board Programs:

- Call 1-800-22TEACH (1-800-228-3224)
- Visit nbpts.org

What is *Take One!*?

Take One! is administered by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, a nonprofit organization focused on advancing the quality of teaching and learning by developing standards and an assessment for accomplished teaching. *Take One!* provides standards-based professional development to improve teaching practice and links student learning to effective instruction. Schoolwide participation stimulates development of learning communities organized around professional teaching standards.

The program can be used as stand-alone professional development for any educator and by licensed teachers as an initial step in becoming candidates for National Board Certification.

Through *Take One!*, teachers and principals can build professional learning communities to collaborate in advancing student success by:

- Developing and demonstrating content knowledge and effective pedagogy.
- Using video to analyze and reflect on practice in subject and developmental areas based on NBPTS Standards.
- Working collaboratively with a common language based on the NBPTS Standards and NBPTS Core Propositions.
- Analyzing student work on multiple levels to focus instruction more effectively.
- Using assessment tools and student data to positively impact learning.

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