

# California Comprehensive Center (CA CC) High-Performing, High-Need School Profile

Prepared by CA CC partner, the American Institutes for Research

## Santa Fe Middle School Monrovia Unified School District

### Overview

Santa Fe Middle School is one of two middle schools in Monrovia Unified School District (see Exhibit 3 for school and district facts) in Los Angeles County.<sup>1</sup> Since becoming principal 10 years ago, Ron Letourneau has led the school's turn-around efforts. Since his arrival at the school in the 1999-2000 school year, Santa Fe has increased its API scores from 601 in 1999 to 793 in 2009. During that time, Santa Fe has won numerous academic awards and has scored above the state Academic Performance Index (API) target (see Exhibit 4).

Santa Fe's student population is diverse; 67 percent of students are Hispanic, 13 percent are English learners (ELs), and 68 percent are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch (see Exhibit 2). The student-to-teacher ratio at Santa Fe (22:1) is slightly lower than the statewide middle school average (23:1).

Additionally, Santa Fe has more teachers with advanced degrees and more experienced teachers than the average California middle school. However, the school has only half as many paraprofessional staff as the average middle school in California (see Exhibit 5).



**Exhibit 1. School API Rankings\* 2004-05 Through 2007-08**

	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08
Statewide ranking	6	7	7	7
Similar Schools ranking	9	10	10	10

\*Statewide rankings range from 1 to 10, with 1 being the lowest and 10 being the highest. Similar Schools rankings compare an individual school's API to 100 schools in its comparison group. Schools are divided into 10 equal groups from the lowest (1) to the highest (10).

Source: Academic Performance Index, 2004-05 through 2007-08

**Exhibit 2. Student Characteristics, 2007-08**

	School	District	Statewide MS Average
African American	8%	10%	8%
American Indian	1%	1%	1%
Asian	4%	3%	8%
Filipino	4%	2%	3%
Hispanic	67%	54%	47%
Pacific Islander	1%	0%	1%
White	15%	26%	31%
Other race/ethnicity	2%	4%	3%
Eligible for free/reduced-price lunch	68%	54%	52%
English learners (ELs)	13%	15%	20%
Special education	11%	9%	10%

Sources: California Basic Educational Data Systems (CBEDS); Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) Program; and Free/Reduced Meals Program & CalWORKS Data Files, 2007-08.

<sup>1</sup> The other middle school, Clifton Middle School, was profiled as a high performing school in 2008. To access this school profile, please see the following link on the SchoolsMovingUp website:

<http://www.schoolsmovingup.net/cs/smu/print/htdocs/smu/ideas/schools.htm>

## Overview (continued)

Based on interviews with the principal and administrative team, teachers, and students during a visit to the school, this profile details the following three strategies identified as being key to Santa Fe's success:

- Positive school culture with high expectations
- Communication among staff and between staff and school leadership
- Use of technology and data to improve instruction

## Why Santa Fe Was Selected

To identify high-performing schools across the state, we examined student and school performance data from 2004-05 through 2007-08. An overview of our methodology is posted on the SchoolsMovingUp website [http://www.schoolsmovingup.net/pdf/CA\\_CC\\_High\\_Perf\\_Schools\\_Criteria2009.pdf](http://www.schoolsmovingup.net/pdf/CA_CC_High_Perf_Schools_Criteria2009.pdf). Additionally, we selected schools to highlight based on the following criteria:

- **Substantially higher performance than predicted**  
As indicated by a Similar Schools rank of 10 in 2007-08 (see Exhibit 1), Santa Fe students are performing better than their peers in similar schools.
- **Meeting or exceeding subgroup performance standards**  
Santa Fe students in all numerically significant subgroups<sup>2</sup> are meeting or exceeding Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) goals in both English language arts and mathematics (see Exhibits 6 and 7).
- **Sustained performance over time**  
Santa Fe met all AYP requirements and was not identified for program improvement from 2004-05 through 2007-08. Santa Fe Middle School also met all Academic Performance Index (API) targets from 2004-05 through 2007-08 (see Exhibit 4).
- **High-need student population**  
The percentage of students at Santa Fe eligible for free or reduced-price lunch (68 percent) is higher than the state average for middle schools (see Exhibit 2).
- **No selectivity in admissions**  
Since Santa Fe is a regular, public middle school, it does not have any selective admissions policies and serves students within its attendance zone.

### Exhibit 3. School and District Facts, 2007-08

	School	District
Location	Monrovia, Los Angeles County, CA	
Grade span	6-8	K-12
Number of schools	N/A	8
Enrollment	637	5,962

Source: California Basic Educational Data Systems (CBEDS), 2007-08

#### *Recent School Awards*

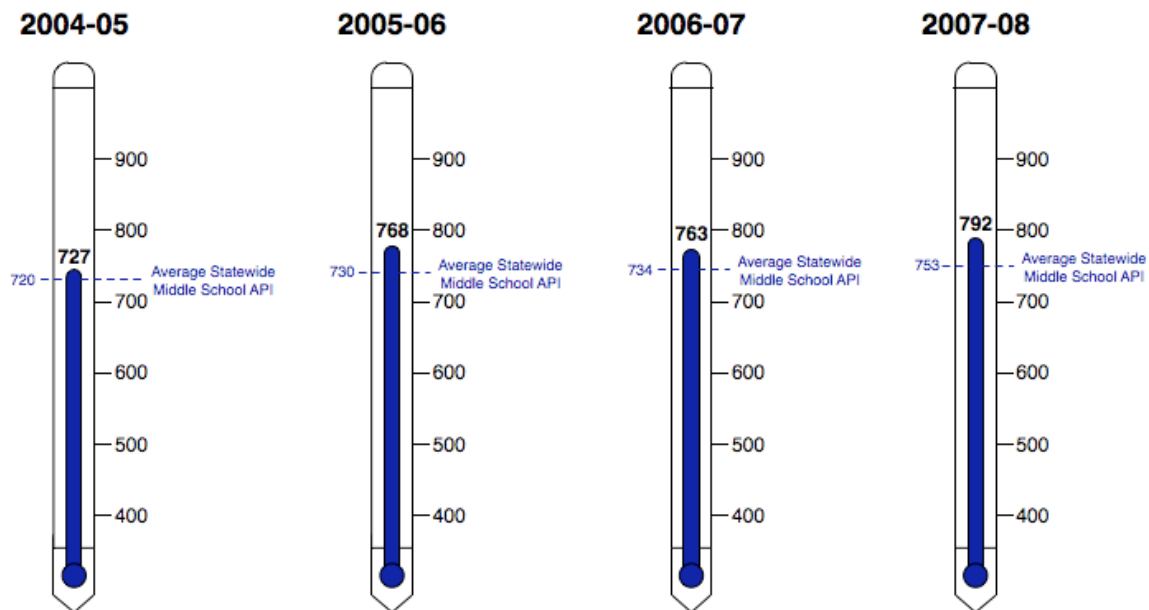
- California Distinguished School, 2009
- Support Personal Accountability Report Card (SPARC) Academy Award, 2001-2008<sup>3</sup>
- SPARC, Governor's Trophy, 2008<sup>4</sup>
- SPARC, Commendation, 2009
- Los Angeles County Science Olympiad, Ninth Place, 2008

<sup>2</sup> A subgroup is defined as numerically significant for percent proficient if it has 100 or more students with valid scores or 50 or more students with valid scores who make up at least 15 percent of the total valid scores.

<sup>3</sup> The SPARC award was developed by an advisory group of Los Angeles County counselors, counselor supervisors, counselor educators, and California Department of Education consultants in recognition of outstanding student support programs.

<sup>4</sup> The SPARC Governor's Trophy award is in recognition of receiving an Academy Award for seven consecutive years.

### Exhibit 4. Schoolwide API Scores for Santa Fe Middle School Compared to the Average Statewide Middle School API, 2004-05 through 2007-08



Source: Academic Performance Index, 2004-05 through 2007-08

## Factor 1: Positive School Culture with High Expectations

### High expectations for all students

Principal Letourneau noted that when he first came to Santa Fe, staff seemed to have low expectations and sometimes spoke negatively about their students. The principal focused on changing this mindset, and now staff share a common understanding of high expectations for all students at Santa Fe. Yvonne Koskela, the Program Advisor at Santa Fe, explains that “if the teachers believe it, the kids believe it, and then they succeed.” Staff are made aware of the school’s culture of high expectations in the initial job interview. Principal Letourneau reported that he only hires teachers who clearly express high expectations for their students. Also, once hired, teachers begin a two-year probationary period, and only receive tenure if they show that they are a good fit for the school. Staff also regularly communicate their expectations to students. For instance, in many classes, students are given rubrics specifying the teacher’s expectations for specific assignments, which parents must also review and approve.

### Positive school atmosphere

Staff and students consistently refer to Santa Fe as a safe place and a positive learning environment. According to the principal, school beautification efforts have changed what once looked like a “juvenile detention facility” into a desirable place to be. Although discipline used to be a problem on campus before the school started improving, when a wave of gang violence occurred in the neighborhood, attendance remained high as parents and students felt the school was a safe place in the community. However, Santa Fe is more than just a refuge from violence. Students and staff emphasize the school’s encouraging and supportive atmosphere. Staff speak positively about students and support them during instruction as well as out of the classroom. Teachers commonly participate in or attend after-school events, such as the student-teacher flag football game, school orchestra concerts, and the national Science Olympiad<sup>5</sup> competition.

<sup>5</sup> The Science Olympiad is an annual competition in which teams compete in rigorous standards-based challenges with an emphasis on active, hands-on group participation.

### Students are not anonymous

Santa Fe utilizes several measures to ensure that every student receives individual attention. Staff, including the principal and vice principal, “adopt” five to six students who are either quiet or who tend to misbehave. By assigning students to individual staff members and by coordinating the process so that different teachers focus on different students, more students receive one-on-one attention and develop relationships with staff. Also, the principal and vice principal have personal conversations with misbehaving students, often emphasizing the importance of taking responsibility for their actions. According to Principal Letourneau, these strategies have been instrumental in producing higher attendance and lower discipline issues and suspensions at the school.

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*Every teacher on campus has high expectations for the kids. No excuses ... All we can control is what goes on at school... We not only have high expectations for the kids but we also give them the ladder to get there.*

Suzette Williams,  
6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> grade English teacher

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Santa Fe also aims to provide other opportunities for students to receive additional support through homework clubs (after-school work with Santa Fe teachers that is required for some students and optional for others), after-school enrichment activities, and lunch-time interventions. In addition, ELs are often shadowed by a tutor who provides them with additional support in certain classes. In addition to the tutor, English classes also have an aide to assist ELs. Some ELs and special education students also receive after-school homework help and language development with a teacher who gives them specialized attention. Finally, local junior college students participating in a federal work-study program<sup>6</sup> are placed in certain intervention classes to tutor and provide additional attention to struggling students.

The leadership team also works to foster positive relationships with students. Principal Letourneau and Assistant Principal Rick Crosby greet students and parents when students are dropped off at school in the morning. Students joke with Principal Letourneau and Assistant Principal Crosby in the halls, and the administration knows students by name. Assistant Principal Crosby confers with Santa Fe students both on and off campus, working to ensure that students respect property in the school and the neighborhood.

### Exhibit 5. Staff Characteristics, 2007-08

	School	Statewide Middle School Average
<b>Teacher Characteristics:</b>		
Number of students per full time teacher	22 : 1	23 : 1
Average years in education	15 years	12 years
Percentage with greater than BA degree	93%	82%
Percentage with full credential	93%	93%
<b>Full Time Staff per 500 Students:</b>		
Administrators	2 : 500	2 : 500
Pupil services	1 : 500	2 : 500
Paraprofessionals	2 : 500	4 : 500
Clerical	2 : 500	3 : 500

Source: California Basic Educational Data Systems (CBEDS), 2007-08

<sup>6</sup> The federal work-study program provides financial aid, which eligible college students can earn through part-time employment at their postsecondary institution.

## Factor 2: Communication Among Staff and Between Staff and School Leadership

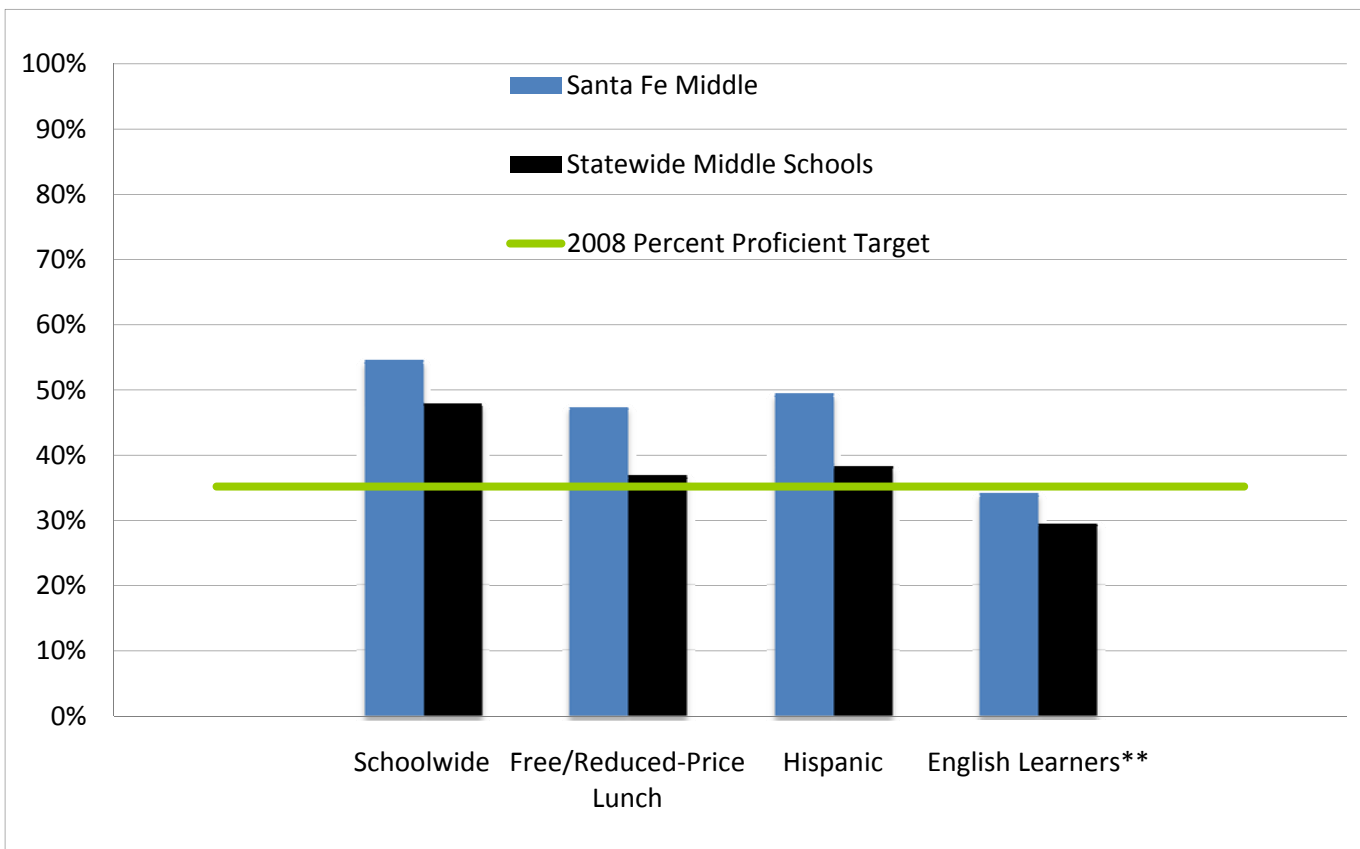
### Staff communication

Santa Fe staff frequently communicate in many different ways with each other regarding courses, students, and ways to improve the school. Once a month, teachers participate in department or grade-level meetings. However, informal collaboration occurs every day. For instance, teachers often email each other when they encounter problems with a student in order to alert others that they should observe the student more closely that day. Teachers are encouraged to spend occasional free periods observing their colleagues' teaching strategies and often discuss useful classroom strategies with other teachers. Veteran teachers work with new Santa Fe teachers in the Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment (BTSA) program and update school administrators as to their progress.

*I really believe that you have to have confidence in your teachers and what they're doing... They have to [use] standards-based [instruction] but you have to give them freedom to experiment and to learn to meet the needs of the kids in a way that they're most comfortable. You can't dictate to them how to do it. You have to have the confidence that you have the right people in the right spot to do the job.*

Ron Letourneau,  
Principal

**Exhibit 6. Schoolwide and Subgroup\* English Language Arts AYP Proficiency Targets and Scores for Santa Fe Middle School Compared to Average Statewide Middle School Scores, 2007-08**



\*Subgroups are ordered proportional to size.

\*\* Passed by "Safe Harbor." Safe Harbor refers to a provision where, even when a school does not meet the statewide goal in a given year, the school will still make AYP if it reduces the percent of students who are not proficient by 10% from the previous year (and makes progress on the other academic indicator).

Source: California Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), 2007-08

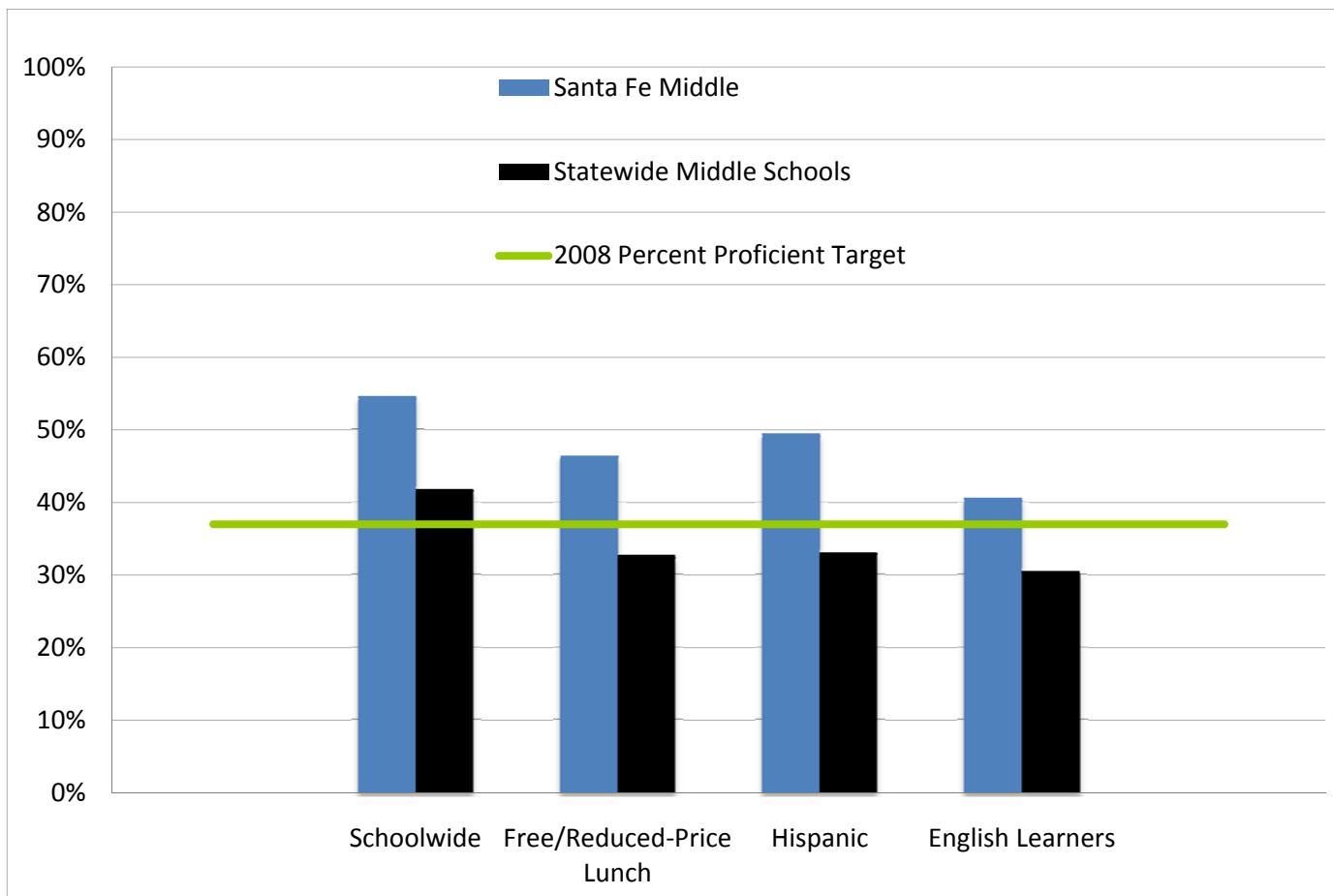
Staff also go beyond school requirements to communicate with other educators and to enhance their instruction. Department chairs joined the leadership team at the 2008 Effective Schools Conference in Ontario, Canada and then began conversations with the rest of the staff regarding next steps the school could take to address issues raised in the conference.

### School leadership

Staff credit Principal Letourneau, along with Assistant Principal Rick Crosby and Program Advisor Yvonne Koskela, for spearheading Santa Fe's success and cultivating the school's positive atmosphere. Principal Letourneau describes his job as setting the school's tone and vision and then stepping back to support the staff as they work to realize these goals. In this way, the school leadership clearly articulates expectations of teachers and supports teachers in achieving those expectations. For instance, in 2002-03, Principal Letourneau told school staff that Santa Fe would reach an API of 800. At the time, the school had an API of 660 and the staff did not believe this was a realistic goal. However, the school achieved an API of 792 in the 2007-08 school year (see Exhibit 4) and aspires to break 800 in the coming year.

In addition to setting the overall tone for the school, the school administrators walk through the school daily, observe classes, and speak with teachers within 24 hours of a classroom visit regarding their observations and provide constructive criticism.

**Exhibit 7. Schoolwide and Subgroup\* Mathematics AYP Proficiency Targets and Scores for Santa Fe Middle School Compared to the Average Statewide Middle School Scores, 2007-08**



\*Subgroups are ordered proportional to size.  
Source: California Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), 2007-08

## Factor 3: Use of Technology and Data to Improve Instruction

### Use of technology to enhance instruction

In the past few years, Santa Fe has integrated technology into many aspects of the school. The school now has two open computer labs with 70 computers and one paraprofessional for the approximately 600 students on campus. Students can use the labs during lunch or recess to do work for a class. Some teachers have begun incorporating more interactive computer assignments into their courses. For example, one history teacher had students create short films out of concepts they studied in class. The computer labs also enable students to make use of a variety of computer-based interventions. Recently, the school invested in a language-learning software called Rosetta Stone<sup>7</sup> to use as a computer-based intervention for ELs.

In addition to the computer lab, the school has also purchased 10 SMART Boards for individual classes and is gradually acquiring more. SMART Boards are digital, touch-screen whiteboards that are similar to oversized computer screens. Teachers can use a SMART Board to go through problem sets, to graph equations as a graphing calculator, or to help students learn to organize their essays. It allows staff to keep their classes more organized because the teacher uploads all pertinent information into the SMART Board before class. According to both students and teachers, students enjoy the interactive nature of the SMART Board.

Santa Fe also utilizes technology to facilitate parent and teacher communication. School Loops is a district-wide online grade book that enables students and parents to access up-to-date student grades and assignments.

### Use of data to drive instruction

Santa Fe regularly tests students, analyzes data, and utilizes the resulting information to improve student achievement. Technology has helped teachers effectively compile these data. Data from Data Director—a data system that compiles each student's scores from benchmark assessments and state tests—allows teachers to determine what needs to be re-taught in order for students to grasp a concept. Mathematics and English teachers also utilize the standards-based Tungsten computer program<sup>8</sup> to monitor student progress. Data generated from these monthly assessments are used to guide instruction and to identify students who may be in need of additional support. The immediate feedback from Tungsten also helps to motivate students who enjoy seeing their progress and gives students pride in seeing how much they are learning. Teachers often have students analyze and correct their mistakes so that they can learn and improve. In addition, teachers are able to use the data to study the performance of different subgroups.

Santa Fe also has monthly department meetings, grade level meetings, and data meetings. Each of these meetings is used to look at data from a different perspective. Principal Letourneau explains that “you cannot move forward until your staff is at the point where they can look at each other's test scores and have difficult discussions about the data.”

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*We've talked about data for many years, but our principal set the tone earlier this year by saying that this is the year we need to have difficult conversations and really look at test scores. He said it in a way that people were comfortable showing each other their scores and discussing what things are working for them.*

Yvonne Koskela,  
Program Advisor

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<sup>7</sup> Rosetta Stone is a language-learning software available in over 30 languages that teaches a new language directly, without translation.

<sup>8</sup> The Tungsten computer program is a standards-based, electronic, formative assessment tool which students take monthly in mathematics and English. Student scores are automatically scored and reported online.

**More Information:**

- For more information about this school please go to the school's website: <http://fetponline.org/SantaFe> or contact Ron Letourneau, Principal, Santa Fe Middle School, Monrovia, California: [rletourneau@monrovia.k12.ca.us](mailto:rletourneau@monrovia.k12.ca.us) or (626) 471-2700.
- For more information about other high-performing, high-need schools, please see other school profiles on the SchoolsMovingUp website: <http://www.schoolsmovingup.net/cs/smu/print/htdocs/smu/ideas/schools.htm>.
- For more information about this study, please contact Mette Huberman, Senior Research Analyst, American Institutes for Research, Palo Alto, California: [mhuberman@air.org](mailto:mhuberman@air.org) or (650) 843-8174.