



#1 in Butte County for ELA - Bangor Union Elementary School District's 2024–2025 CAASPP Success

In a small, rural corner of Butte County, just south of Oroville and near the Yuba County line, lies Bangor Union Elementary School District. They are proving that size does not define success. The K–8, single-school district earned the #1 CAASPP English Language Arts score in Butte County for the 2024–25 school year. They outperformed even much larger districts, including Chico Unified School District. Chico Unified has traditionally led countywide rankings.

With about 91 students, six teachers, a dedicated support staff, and a deeply engaged community, Bangor Union achieved something remarkable. For Superintendent/Principal Scott Otis, the results were both exciting and affirming. The ranking mattered not just for its place, but for what it represents.

“When the results were finalized, it was a strong affirmation of the instructional focus our teachers have committed to and the culture we have built around student learning,” Otis shared.

Celebration followed quickly. Within hours of receiving confirmation, Otis visited classrooms to share the news and personally thanked teachers. He hosted an impromptu ice cream social for students and treated staff to a well-earned Taco Tuesday. He noted that the ability to respond quickly and celebrate together is one advantage of being small and nimble.

But the success did not happen overnight.

Much of the credit for Bangor Union’s strong performance belongs to former Superintendent Scott Johnson. He laid the instructional foundation by shifting practices away from test familiarity and toward deeper learning. Rather than focusing on answering specific test questions, teachers concentrated on the skills behind the questions. They emphasized vocabulary development, comprehension, analysis, and critical thinking.

Instruction moved beyond “teaching to the test” and instead centered on helping students understand how to think. Teachers used small-group instruction to target the underlying skills students needed. This focus was not only for state assessments, but for all learning. This intentional, long-term approach still guides instruction today.

Superintendent/Principal Scott Otis has embraced and strengthened this model. He noted that the same skills students use to succeed on the CAASPP ELA exam are the ones they need for classroom assessments, real-world problem solving, and life beyond school.

Creating a culture where it is okay to say “I don’t know” has been a key focus this year, Otis explained. Students are encouraged to see uncertainty as the starting point for learning, not



something to hide. That mindset has opened the door to more meaningful small-group instruction, one-on-one support, and peer collaboration.

To further strengthen this culture, the school introduced a student mentor club, providing structured opportunities for students to support one another academically and socially. The goal is not only academic growth, but also character development and confidence, reinforcing that students learn from teachers and from each other.

Reading and writing instruction extend well beyond the classroom. The school librarian plays a major role in literacy intervention, working closely with teachers to provide targeted instruction based on student needs. Younger students focus on foundational skills such as letter recognition and early reading, while older students engage in writing development, analysis, and critical thinking.

This layered approach ensures students receive both standards-based instruction and personalized support, meeting them where they are and helping them grow.

Perhaps the most powerful driver of Bangor Union's success is its strong partnership with families and the broader community. Parent volunteers regularly support classrooms, tutoring programs, and school events. While they may not always be experts in academic content, their encouragement and presence make a lasting difference.

Parents are treated as true partners in the learning process and are kept informed about the curriculum, expectations, and ways to support learning at home. That shared understanding strengthens student confidence, improves behavior, and builds trust between school and families.

The district also makes a point of sharing good news. Positive phone calls home, community celebrations, and public recognition help reinforce a culture of pride and ownership. When families gather for events such as the winter festival, achievements like the #1 ELA ranking are celebrated as a shared victory.

While the ranking is impressive, Otis is quick to emphasize that it reflects the collective efforts of students, staff, families, and leadership - past and present.

"This success did not happen because of one person," Otis said. "It happened because people here care deeply about students, about each other, and about this community."