

Study: Elementary science education in California dismal

By Diana Lambert, Sacramento Bee

Few local educators are surprised by a recent UC Berkeley study that says most California children aren't getting a decent science education.

Gretchen Bly, a first-grade teacher at Rancho Cordova Elementary School, generally teaches about 90 minutes of science a week, integrating it into the curriculum as much as possible.

"If I had my druthers, we'd do it three or four hours a week," said Bly, who coordinates the school's annual Science Night and other science programs.

"With 32 students and less help in the classroom, our focus has to be on reading and writing," she said. "It's harder to address things like science."

The Berkeley research blames the pressure to score well on standardized tests in English and math for the little time spent teaching science. Forty percent of the California elementary teachers surveyed for the study say they spend 60 minutes or less teaching science each week.

Sixty-six percent of elementary teachers surveyed said they feel unprepared to teach science and 85 percent say they haven't received any training in the subject in the last three years.

The result: Only about 10 percent of elementary school classes are offering high-quality science instruction, according to the report.

“The entire landscape is looking relatively bleak,” said Rena Dorph, director of research evaluation and assessment at the Lawrence Hall of Science at UC Berkeley.

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