

## **Atwater Elementary School District Model Programs and Practices**

### **District Information**

CD (County District) Code: 2465631

County: Merced

District (Local Educational Agency): Atwater Elementary School District

### **Demographics**

Enrollment: 5,073

Location Description: Suburban

### **Overview**

Passion for improving our students' achievement has been ignited in the Atwater Elementary School District (AESD.) Progress is evident in the all-student group and, while we celebrate these results in an evolving assessment and accountability system, we recognize that our progress is the result of exemplary practices including development of a common language regarding high quality instruction, consistent measurement of progress, and open communication that keeps us all motivated to engage in the work to overcome barriers to student proficiency and mastery of the standards. As an organization working to engage in continuous improvement, our focus on instructional improvement at the classroom level and our system-wide improvement strategies are having an impact.

The Atwater Elementary School District community is proud of its many accomplishments and excels because our parents, teachers, staff, and community do a remarkable job of supporting our students and setting high expectations. Atwater Elementary School District continues to excel in student achievement, Merced County writing, speech, Academic Pentathlon, STEM Fair competitions and in athletics contests. It is our goal to develop the whole child through strong and challenging academic studies, fine arts enrichment, physical education and health, character education, and 21st Century technology skills.

AESD is a Transitional Kindergarten/Kindergarten–8th grade district serving 5,073 students at the last count. The district is located in the community of Atwater, just off Highway 99, in the agriculturally rich Central Valley of California. Census information for 2015 show population estimates for Atwater are 29,237 and the median household

income is \$41,414 with 72.5% of individuals 25 years and older having achieved a high school diploma or higher, and of those 13.3% have a bachelor's degree or higher.

The student population of AESD is made up of 70.7% Hispanic, 19.5% White, 4.0% Asian, 2.2% African-American, 2.0% declaring more than one race, and 1.3% Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, American Indian or Alaska Native, and Unknown. More than 83% of students are considered socioeconomically disadvantaged, 29.1% of students are English Language Learners, and 9.8% of students receive services through special education. With a high percentage of our students learning English as a second Language, developing academic language through early literacy and reading fluency are high priorities in the instructional program. High standards for teaching and learning and the expectation that all learners will be successful are district hallmarks expressed in the district's motto, "A Tradition of Excellence."

## **Model Program/Practice**

### **Name of Model Program/Practice**

Common Language for Effective Instruction, Student Engagement, Achieving Depth of Knowledge, Professional Development to Solidify Model Practices

Exceptional Strides in Student Achievement with an emphasis on the Implementation of State Academic Standards and/or Access to a Broad Course of Study (Priorities 2, 4, 7, and 8)

### **Summary**

Length of Model Program/Practice: 2–4 years

### **Description**

Atwater Elementary School District's model program responds to the district-wide Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP) goals of ensuring early literacy, closing of the achievement gap, campus safety and positive climate, and building staff capacity. Our model program practices have evolved from several bodies of work that include WestEd instructional practices, Response to Instruction and Intervention (RTI) practices, Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports

(PBIS) based practices, and Strategic Schooling strategies.

Our model program approach is three-prong:

1. Strategic planning informed by formative, interim, and summative data;
2. Targeted intervention and enrichment; and
3. Ongoing professional development.

The pinnacle of the AESD model program is high quality instruction developed through common language and the establishment of three core instructional practices that include daily learning objectives in both English Language Arts (ELA) and math, student engagement for all, and achieving a depth of knowledge equal or greater than level two within daily lessons (all staff are challenged to “live in the world of Depth of Knowledge 2–3”). Built on resiliency research and tenets of youth development adapted from the works of Charlotte Knox and Michelle Karns, the academic conference, a key feature of our model, is a prevention activity that acknowledges the potential for all students to self-correct, their need for caring nurturing adults, and the validity of collegial collaboration.

Academic conferences address the needs of individual students and focus everyone’s combined efforts on the students’ learning. These are trimester meetings, the principal is the facilitator, and all grade level teachers participate. The classroom teacher presents the background information and academic record of students who have been targeted for academic intervention. The group reflects on student learning and analyzes student data. Possible classroom solutions are discussed, commitments are made in a plan unique to each student for progress on a specific timeline. Progress is monitored and reported to teachers and parents each trimester or as needed.

Professional development has been strategically planned and provided in order to solidify these elements across district classrooms with the specific purpose of enhancing the learning of ALL students.

Our model increases teacher collaboration and supports for the social and emotional well-being of students, particularly those with significant needs. Behavioral expectations are explicitly taught, monitored, and feedback is regularly provided to students. The district has adopted Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports and is being implemented in cycles across the district. All teachers attend trainings throughout the school year and professional development at the sites to target specific site needs based on data.

## **Implementation and Monitoring**

Model program implementation and monitoring includes both the academic conferencing and grade level collaboration components. Academic Conferencing, as per the Strategic Schooling model, is conducted three times per school year in order to analyze the performance of each student and design interventions based on the data collected. These data points provide a uniform way to monitor progress with consistency. Data is maintained in the district’s student data information system and is accessible to all instructional staff.

Results are proving the district’s model development and implementation to be exemplary and replicable. District leaders were selected to present at the 2017 Association of California School Administrators (ACSA) Conference. The session, “Building Limitless Instructional Leadership Capacity: A Model from AESD,” was presented by the AESD—WestEd team in San Jose to state-wide educational leaders.

The team presented Atwater's process for development of a common language for effective instruction, the model AESD leadership uses for analysis of instruction, coaching, and support. Being selected to present is a testament of the exemplary model practices and excellent leadership of our school sites, principals, and educational services department.

Collaboration is a framework for us to tackle deeply entrenched and complex barriers to student success through open communication which generates motivation and positivism, growing transparency in our instructional practice, and mutual accountability. Our collaboration with WestEd has had impact to our development of common language for effective instruction throughout the district. This collaborative work has led to deeper analysis of student performance and the strategic planning of intervention and behavioral supports for students, and coaching for all levels of teaching and support staff. The external view from our collaborative partners has assisted us with our own self-review, with monitoring our model implementation and evaluation.

The core values of the district are rooted in the beliefs that students are the focus of public education; that each student is unique and that our staff and programs provide for multiple opportunities for success; the development of academically competent, confident, and considerate citizens; that learning occurs best in a safe and respectful environment; that our students' success depends upon a highly qualified staff who are valued and respected for their diverse backgrounds; that we serve students best through programs and practices that are responsive to changing needs; that our success depends upon the development of effective leaders, staff, and students who create a vision and translate that vision into reality. These core values are evident in our stated goals and actions in our LCAP which drive the implementation of our model resulting in significant increases in the progress of ALL students.

## **Results and Outcomes**

We are proud that every grade level continues to show improvement in either ELA or math, and in many cases, both areas on district benchmarks, interim assessments, and the CAASPP. Our model program practices implementation continues to prove successful in the quest for our students to meet and exceed the state average in all assessed areas within all student groups throughout the Atwater Elementary School District.

Quantitative data from our collaborative and data driven focus on instruction and targeted intervention at our schools clearly demonstrates that this model program practice is driving student success. Growth from the first CAASPP administration to the current results is significant and testimony to the effectiveness of our model.

The model program practices, including the collaboratively designed PBIS practices, have resulted in a continual decline in discipline incidents including suspension rates. Performance levels for all students per the state indicators of Suspension Rate, English Learners, ELA, and Math, as measured by the California School Dashboard placed within the 'Green' rating range (level four of five levels). Elmer Wood Elementary School

was the first AESD school to receive such ratings and the only school in Merced County eligible to apply for the California Distinguished School Award.

Conducted annually, 2016–17 parent survey results overwhelmingly demonstrated that AESD families feel that our schools promote academic success for all students, motivate students to learn, are safe places for students to learn, and have adults who really care about students!

Our LCAP goals and measured results further confirm the AESD exemplary model program practices. We share our success story regularly with parents, members of the community, and stakeholders through print, web sites, and in local media. Our community meetings and LCAP Town Hall meetings are avenues to receive input from our families and community members. Our data tells our story:

LCAP Goal 1: Ensure Early Literacy - 84% of students improved in their reading ability and/or reading accuracy 43% of 3rd graders met or exceeded standards on the CAASPP in ELA

(+4%) and 47% met or exceeded standards in math (+8%); 63.2% of English learners showed growth by one level as measured by the CELDT(+10.7%)

LCAP Goal 2: Increase Safety of Facilities - 75% fewer incidences on the playground; 86% fewer out of school suspensions; Improved daily attendance (96.28% avg ADA)

LCAP Goal 3: Build Human Capacity – the addition of employees or hours to support student learning, evidenced in Goals 1 & 4

LCAP Goal 4: Close the Achievement Gap - 27% more students improved their reading ability, and 4% more read at grade level; an average of 7.2% more 4th–8th grade students met or exceeded grade level standards for ELA on the CAASPP and 4.4% met or exceeded grade level standards in math.