

Santa Barbara Unified School District Model Programs and Practices

District Information

CD (County District) Code: 4276786

County: Santa Barbara

District (Local Educational Agency): Santa Barbara Unified School District

Demographics

Enrollment: 15,185

Location Description: Suburban

Overview

The mission of the Santa Barbara Unified School District (SBUSD) is to ensure the educational success of all students through high expectations and a commitment to excellence and to empower them to reach their full potential as responsible, ethical, and productive citizens in a diverse and changing world.

SBUSD serves an approximate enrollment of 15,185 students in grades preschool through 12. As of the 2017–2018 school year, SBUSD is comprised of the following schools:

- 10 elementary schools (TK–6)
- 4 junior high schools (7–8)
- 3 traditional high schools (9–12)
- 1 alternative high school (9–12)
- 1 continuation high school (11–12)
- 3 elementary charter schools authorized by the District (K–6)

The District provides various programs of choice in its elementary and secondary schools. Programs of choice in elementary include: Core Knowledge (Santa Barbara Community Academy), International Baccalaureate (Harding University Partnership School), Montessori (Adams Elementary School) and Open Alternative School. Secondary schools provide a wide range of pathways, including Career Technical Education (CTE), California Partnership Academies (CPA), International Baccalaureate (IB) and dual enrollment options.

Demographically, SBUSD is comprised of the following student groups:

- Hispanic/Latino: 60%
- Asian: 3%
- Black/African American: 1%
- White: 34%
- Low-income/Socioeconomically Disadvantaged (SED): 52%
- English Learners: 23%
- Students with Disabilities: 13%
- Homeless and Foster Youth: 10%
- Migrant Education: 0%

SBUSD is committed to the academic and socio-emotional success and well being of all its students. The District understands that in order to ensure equity and access it is critical to work in a purposeful and focused manner. As such, District staff has coalesced under three priorities: (1) equity, (2) improving our practices and (3) evaluating our work. The 2017–2020 LCAP is reflective of the District’s priorities and its actions and services organized under the following five (5) goals:

Goal 1: Through Organizational Transformation, Develop a Culturally Proficient District to Ensure Success for All Students

Goal 2: Engage Students, Families, and the Community in Effective Educational Partnerships

Goal 3: Prepare Students for Life, Learning and Work in the 21st Century

Goal 4: Create and Maintain 21st Century Learning Environments

Goal 5: Enhance Early Childhood Education Opportunities

Model Program/Practice

Name of Model Program/Practice

Category 1: Positive Culture and Climate

Family Engagement Practices: Language Access and Family Engagement Framework

Student Engagement Practices: Restorative Approaches

Summary

Length of Model Program/Practice: Family Engagement Framework: 2–4 years

Language Access: 5–8 years

Restorative Approaches: 5–8 years

Description

Family Engagement and Language Access: SBUSD employs a comprehensive, social-justice approach to family engagement as an important component of supporting equity in student learning. Two model practices are our Framework for Family Engagement coupled with parent programming, and linguistic access for families who are limited or non-English proficient through translation and interpretation services.

In an effort to describe the expectations and implementation strategies for integrated family engagement across schools, SBUSD developed a Framework for Family Engagement in 2014–15. Principals engaged their communities in developing site Parent Engagement Plans that addressed the Framework goals. As a result of the collaboration of parents, staff, principals and district administrators, parent engagement programming expanded district wide, including three Regional Family Centers at Title 1 schools that provide school-based strategies and activities aligned with health and safety, family support, and social services after school and in the evenings. Although more programs were offered, some schools were still unable to provide such offerings due to fiscal constraints. In response, SBUSD created a Family Engagement Unit (FEU) within the office of English Learner and Parent Engagement Programs. The FEU facilitates the development, implementation and delivery of parent programs to provide an equitable base of offerings at all school sites that directly align to the Framework objectives.

SBUSD first centralized translation and interpretation services in 2010, and in 2014, created the Language Access Unit (LAU) to ensure students and families are afforded equal access to information and services provided by the District. The LAU team engages in training and language support services to District staff and schools. Our four full-time LAU

Interpreter/Translators have in turn trained approximately 100 bilingual staff to strengthen the communication between home and school. Interpretation is provided daily at meetings and events, and translation of key documents is a normal practice across the district.

Restorative Approaches (RA): In K–12 education, restorative justice emphasizes the practical consequences of misbehavior rather than focusing on specific rules and punishments for infractions. It also aims to promote a positive school climate and build strong relationships among members of the school community. As an alternative approach to student discipline, SBUSD first piloted a Restorative Approach (RA) to justice in 2011–12 at one school, and is now districtwide. Nearly all student-facing staff have been trained in RA strategies, including restorative circles and conferencing. RA strategies seek to resolve conflict and repair harm by allowing offenders to take responsibility for their actions; they also emphasize dialogue and negotiation in order to allow all parties to be heard and involved in the process of repairing harm and mediating conflict.

Implementation and Monitoring

SBUSD's implementation of our Family Engagement, Language Access, and Restorative Approaches (RA) practices is exemplary in that together they constitute a comprehensive and integrated approach to supporting student learning through home-school partnerships and development of healthy school communities. Each is guided by a sound framework, is grounded in evidence-based practice, is tailored to our local context, and will continue to be developed through the lens of cultural proficiency to ensure access and equity for all SBUSD families and students. The three model practices were implemented through an integrated systems approach rather than in isolation, have been evaluated using sound research methods to improve the implementation and effectiveness, and are monitored in a holistic way through district and site collaboration to ensure continuous improvement.

The locally-developed frameworks for each model practice provide guidance to educators, schools, families, and community as we develop, implement, evaluate, and monitor them. SBUSD's Framework for Family Engagement is adapted from CDE's Family Engagement Framework; at its center are our District Principles that describe expectations, standards, and beliefs on engaging with our families around their children's learning. With guidance and facilitation from the office of English Learner and Parent Engagement, each school has fine-tuned, implemented and is monitoring a parent engagement plan that aligns to the District's Framework and that outlines specific actions and activities to authentically engage families as equal partners in their children's education. SBUSD's Language Access Guidelines outline a comprehensive approach to district and site interpretation and translation services, professional learning pathways to increase bilingual staff capacity to provide such services, compensation for said staff, and standard processes by which needs are identified and met. A locally-developed rubric that emerged from an initial RA implementation evaluation guides further RA implementation and monitoring. The rubric helps site and district leaders "see" areas of strength and opportunity to self-assess where we are from 'Beginning' to 'Developing', 'Advancing', and 'Thriving' in three aspects of RA: Philosophy, Techniques, and Logistics. As a result, we developed a RA Focus Team that meets several times a year to improve practices and systems, and a dedicated Teacher on Special Assignment provides ongoing professional learning and individual coaching across the district.

Our three frameworks for Family Engagement, Language Access, and RA anchor our model practices in research, and simultaneously provide a means by which we monitor their implementation and effectiveness. District-led evaluation research identified areas of strength and improvement in each model practice. Work groups emerged to tackle key improvements, and professional learning continues to enhance staff effectiveness in these areas.

Results and Outcomes

Family Engagement and Language Access: SBUSD's comprehensive approach to family engagement and language access has yielded positive results and outcomes.

Implementation was successful in that the model practices brought much-needed, direct services to parents and families. There have been 20 school parent engagement plans developed and implemented, over 100 parent engagement programs, activities, offered annually for several years in Spanish and English, and hundreds of parents have developed skills aligned to the District Framework for Family Engagement. There is increased parent participation in school and district committees and board meetings, particularly by parents of English Learners, Latino and socioeconomically disadvantaged students. Bi-directional and simultaneous interpretation is common practice at site and district parent meetings and events, approximately 700 language access requests are completed annually by the district LAU team, and countless more by site-based bilingual staff. Parent engagement is measured and reported through the LCAP with the California School Parent Survey; results consistently show that around 90% of all parents agree that “This school allows input and welcomes parents’ contributions” and around 75% of all parents agree that “This school actively seeks the input of parents before making important decisions.” Results are high for parents of English Learner, Latino, and socioeconomically disadvantaged students, which we attribute to the successful implementation and continuous improvement of these practices.

Restorative Approaches (RA): The goal of RA is to improve school culture and climate, keep more students in class learning, decrease disproportionality in discipline, and decrease the number of suspensions and expulsions. Prior to implementing RA, SBUSD’s suspension rate was 4.6%, and reached its lowest at 2.5% in 2014–15. This decline of nearly 50% coincided with the district’s adoption of RA, and suspensions for defiance plummeted from 971 to 31 in 2016–17. Less serious harassment and physical altercations, which were formerly handled through suspension, are now addressed through the RA process. More serious incidents of physical violence, harassment, and bullying warranting suspension are coupled with RA for repair and reintegration. Although our suspension rate increased slightly from 2014–15, we have maintained a “Medium” status with improvements in proportionality, seeing a steeper decline in suspension rates for Latino compared to white students, and also for English Learners. Although expulsions increased, none have been solely for defiance the past four years, demographics are more proportional, and we continue to implement alternatives to expulsion when allowable by Education Code that incorporate RA practices to repair and restore relationships and community. Finally, our dropout rate declined by about 3% points to around 6%, affirming the positive impact of RA on student outcomes overall.