

Independent Elementary School Model Programs and Practices

School Information

CDS (County District School) Code: 01611506090393

County: Alameda

District (Local Educational Agency): Castro Valley Unified

School: Independent Elementary School

Demographics

Enrollment: 667 students

Location Description: Urban

Title I Funded: No

School Calendar: Traditional

Charter: No

Overview

Independent Elementary School, located in Castro Valley, serves students from diverse backgrounds, demonstrating an array of races, religions, languages, and socioeconomic statuses. Students come from families that range from multi-generational Castro Valley residents to recently arrived immigrants. This diversity requires teachers, staff, and administrators to respond with flexibility and grace, creating a warm and welcoming environment where parents/guardians feel comfortable providing input and donating time. The Independent community strives to create an environment that fosters the development of all students, allowing them to grow into their own unique and inspiring selves. Students leave school as emotionally literate, intellectually curious, academically capable, and socially conscious agents of change who have an appreciation and curiosity for difference and the skills necessary to create positive and long-lasting change in their community.

With collaboration as the backbone of Independent, same grade level classrooms mirror each other with high expectations in all content areas based on relevant standards, including the arts, health, social/emotional, and behavior education. The unique

personalities of each classroom shine through with the focus on creating opportunities for student agency and a highlight of student strengths. This universal level of instruction is done with high quality curriculum of both hard and digital formats, and is supported by the expertise of teachers on the Instructional Leadership Team (ILT). The ILT plays an active and important role on all key school decisions through data review and action planning. The ILT also leads the professional learning work of their respective grade levels during and outside of their dedicated six hours of professional development each month.

In addition to the robust curriculum and instruction provided during the school day, Independent offers a number of after school supports and experiences for students. Families can choose from activities ranging from language, drama, and meditation classes to intensive academic tutoring and extensions. These programs are due to the strong community partnerships that the Independent staff create and their creative solutions to barriers including transportation and finance.

When students do not meet expectations, Independent assists them through their model program, their Multi-Tiered Support System. This includes the following programs: Response to Intervention plan (RTI), Positive Behavior Intervention System (PBIS), and Student Support Team process (SST). Students who struggle in any area of education are discussed in collaborative spaces with concrete data, SMART goals, and intervention plans, which lead to the incredible results that Independent produces. These systems are regularly reviewed by the ILT and adjusted if necessary to ensure that with changing populations and resources, they continue to meet the needs of all students.

Model Program and Practices

Name of Model Program/Practice: Multi-Tiered Support Systems

Length of Model Program/Practice: 2–4 years

Target Area(s): Closing the Achievement Gap, Education Supports, Parent, Family, and Community Involvement

Target Population(s): Asian, Black or African American, Filipino, Hispanic, Pacific Islander, White, Two or More Races, Socioeconomically Disadvantaged, English Learners

Strategies Used: School Climate, Small Learning Communities, Parent Engagement, Data-Driven Decision Making, Social/Emotional/Behavioral Support, Professional Development, Implementation of Academic Standards Basics (Teachers, Instructional Materials, Facilities)

Description

Independent's model program is their Multi-Tiered Support Systems. This program was adopted to ensure data informed decisions around interventions, that all students master high leverage academic standards (LCAP goal 1), and to develop into emotionally literate adults (LCAP goal 4). Additional goals include ensuring that behavior incidents and suspensions remain on the decline or are maintained from year to year (LCAP goal 4) and that parents understand and can support academic and social goals, provide input on the processes, and act as regular partners in the processes (LCAP goal 3). It has also ensured that our attendance rates rise due to greater levels of engagement in school. Two budget lines, hours of professional development, 5 additional staff, and guidance from experts were and continue to be dedicated to the program, including two days of learning from the creator of our RTI model, Mike Mattos, and a dedicated district counselor for PBIS implementation and support. While the MTSS model benefits all students through a focus on quality Tier I instruction, it offers an additional level of support to the 15–20% of students who need Tier II and III supports. We pay special attention to historically marginalized groups, such as our Latino students, to ensure equitable education.

Independent's MTSS includes three components:

Response to Intervention: In addition to the Tier I support provided through differentiated instruction and highly effective instructional strategies, Independent provides Tier II support by trained instructional aides four times a week for thirty minutes. Independent also offers Tier III instruction for students in need of additional support, which is intensive small group instruction in both literacy and math.

Positive Behavior Intervention System: The Independent PBIS acts as their social/emotional instruction, reinforcement, and intervention branch. Universal supports at the Tier I level include TK–5 social/emotional curriculum, supplementary materials and activities such as peace circles, reinforces such as assemblies, student mentors, and restorative consequences. Tier II and III interventions include small focus groups and check-in/check-out systems.

Student Services Team Process: The SST process plays a critical role in Independent's MTSS by tying both branches of MTSS together and ensuring lines of communication are open and all stakeholders are making decisions together. It begins with the teacher-parent level when students first show signs of struggle, and escalates to the Coordination of Services Team when primary interventions are not showing signs of success. This team brings mental health, special education, intervention, and instructional experts together to brainstorm with the teachers for better ways to support their students. If progress continues to be minimal, the team brings the parents and more experts to the table. The Student Services Team meets again to discuss and brainstorm further supports.

Implementation and Monitoring

Implementation of Independent's MTSS program begins prior to student arrival, when Independent staff undergo a data and program review to plan and adjust for the upcoming school year. During staff meetings, with the leadership from the ILT, they dissect the available academic data such as SBAC, BAS, DIBELs, ESGI, and classroom summative assessments, etc., review their essential standards to see if the current remain priority, and adjust plans if necessary. The PBIS team reviews behavior data and creates a discussion plan for the full staff. Special attention is paid to historically marginalized populations to determine if an environmental factor or implicit bias is influencing results. The Special Services Staff who make up the COST team review the data from students who required Tier II and Tier III supports in the previous year to create plans to ensure they begin the year strongly. This process is repeated throughout the year at the prior to the start of a new trimester to ensure effectiveness.

Parent understanding of and involvement in the MTSS program is key to effective implementation. Baseline communication happens at beginning of the year events when parents are informed of the system as a whole and general ways of how they can support/participate. Additional general communications about updates and monthly themes occur in our bi-monthly gazette, as well as classroom newsletters. The reciprocal partnership becomes more clear when the Tier II and Tier III levels of support are necessary. Parents are asked to attend intervention meetings where we brainstorm supports that include home components. If parents are unable to attend, we encourage virtual participation or get their input prior to the meeting. Parents have the opportunity to participate on the PBIS team and help direct its path, and also are able to attend (in person or virtually) School Site Council (SSC) meetings to give feedback on this schoolwide program. Each year a survey is sent to the parents to gauge their level of understanding and support for the program, which is then used during our review periods.

Any program that is determined a priority must be supported with resources (time, money, expertise, etc..). At Independent, they dedicate a minimum of 6 hour a month of their 12 hours of full staff professional development time to RTI where they execute aspects of the program with real-time expert support. This year 2 extra full days were spent with the creator of the program model, ensuring clarity and efficiency. Additionally, a minimum of 1 hour per month is dedicated to PBIS staff support in which part is dedicated to reflection on the program implementation. A district PBIS expert attends a majority of the PBIS meetings for guidance. Curriculum and supplies are provided with two dedicated budget-lines as well as support from our PTA, and when needed, teachers are supported to attend outside professional development sessions for advanced skill or intensive support.

Results and Outcomes

When outcomes are analyzed, we see two main, positive trends in behavior. As a whole, incidents are on the decline with an average of 9.8 incidents less per month from last year to the current. Second, we see an evening out of incident percentages in

comparison to demographic percentages, specifically with our Latino students, which means that race is playing less and less of a role in behavior as our MTSS program matures. It's also clear that students see these trends and feel the positive culture. According to the Healthy Schools Survey, 87% of 5th graders feel that students are always or mostly "treated with respect" and 98% report that they "are nice to other students" always or most of the time.

Independent's Response to Intervention, the academic branch of their program, is also seeing a similar positive trend from year to year. They consistently see rising achievement levels with last year ending with an average of 84% of students mastering grade level expectations. Kindergarten establishes a solid foundation, producing 89–90% of students mastering grade level standards due to these intensive interventions. Teachers consistently express positivity towards the program, with statements such as, "I feel supported with strategies for reaching my toughest students."

These behavior and academic outcomes drive programming decisions in three main ways: First, after formative assessments and data shares from the PBIS team, teachers make decisions for reteaching moments. Second, the formative academic assessments determine the students that are in the intervention groups. These groups are flexible and can change up to every two weeks. Finally, PBIS monthly themes are determined by the behavior outcomes we are witnessing around the school.

Independent is currently using these outcomes to develop plans for continued and greater success of the program. To further the positive trends in PBIS, they will provide more structured activities for all spaces to act as reinforcers and extensions of the current social/emotional curriculum. This is based off on staff and parent surveys which indicated this as a top priority for school improvements. Independent is also hoping to shift a greater percentage of behavior consequences to restorative options so student mistakes can be used as learning experiences to reduce potential repetitions. Also, while they are seeing a leveling of behavior incident percentages to student demographics, minimal change is being seen with African-American students. Therefore, Independent is forming a task-force to develop plans to specifically target this population of students. To enhance the RTI program it will be moving to a clustering model in which grade levels arrange groups by ability during intervention time. The interventions will then be implemented by the certificated teachers. The instructional aides will support the reinforcement and extension activities for students not receiving intervention.