

## **John Gomes Elementary Model Programs and Practices**

### **School Information**

CDS (County District School) Code: 01611766066468

County: Alameda

District (Local Educational Agency): Fremont Unified

School: John Gomes Elementary

### **Demographics**

Enrollment: 773 students

Location Description: Suburban

Title I Funded: No

School Calendar: Traditional

Charter: No

### **Overview**

Welcome to John Gomes Elementary School, where we work together to create an academically rich and challenging environment while encouraging our children to be compassionate and caring citizens of the world. Our skilled and dedicated staff have high expectations for every student. We emphasize basic skill development through an enriching and engaging curriculum as well as build student self-esteem and model respect for all. Our mission is to provide equitable opportunities that educate, challenge, and inspire students of all ages, talents and ability levels while preparing each with the skills required to adapt and succeed in an ever-changing world.

Gomes elementary school is named for John Gomes, a Portuguese rancher in the area. We currently have a population of 773 students. It is a Transitional Kindergarten to sixth grade, traditional year school. Gomes Elementary has two Special Day classes, TK–3 Inclusion classes, a Resource and Speech Pathologist Program. The teachers are well prepared with teaching strategies for all types of learners, from English learners to gifted students in need of a challenge. In every classroom, instruction is differentiated to meet these different needs as teachers work together and “lean in” to help address our varied

population. We are located in the San Francisco Bay Area and share some of the same diversity. We have a student population that represents many cultures.

We work tirelessly to make each Gomes student a well-rounded individual, as high academic marks aren't our only noteworthy distinctions. Students have also brought honor to the school through Math League, Science Bowl, Chess Club tournaments, PTA Reflections, art competitions, and musical recognitions. Our students participate in a variety of after school activities, from basketball, Speak Debate, and robotics, to Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, and science programs.

We have many ways for parents to be part of our learning community. Parents can join our School Site Council which works with the administration to help make financial decisions, or help with our Safety Patrol that maintains the safety of drop-off and pickup of students before and after school. We also have parent run activities such as Fine Arts Mini Experience (FAME) and Music for Minors that bring hands on art and music into the classroom. Room parents organize parent volunteers to help with special classroom projects, chaperone field trips, and beautify the campus.

Our theme this year at Gomes is "Let's Do This Together." We not only aim to align our curriculum with the Common Core standards, but strive to address the heart of every student, parent, and staff member of our community.

## **Model Program and Practices**

Name of Model Program/Practice: Inclusion Education Program

Length of Model Program/Practice: 2–4 years

Target Area(s): Closing the Achievement Gap, Education Supports

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

Strategies Used: School Climate, Social/Emotional/Behavioral Support, Implementation of Academic Standards Basics (Teachers, Instructional Materials, Facilities)

## **Description**

Fremont Unified School District has a continuum of services that serve children with special needs, ranging from Resource Programs to Moderate-Severe Special Day Classes and Intensive Instruction classrooms. Gomes has had special day classrooms in grades K–3. In 2015, instead of following a traditional segregated model, the Special Day Class idea was fully included with the General Education by two teachers (General Ed. and Special Ed.) to form a Transitional Kindergarten Inclusion Class. This is how Inclusion started at Gomes.

In the beginning, there was resistance from many stakeholders to fully include children with special needs in the general education classroom. Many were apprehensive about how this would affect the education of typically developing children. The program was based on the premise that support services required by students with special needs be provided in the context of the general education environment, rather than moving the students to receiving these services in segregated settings.

So, in 2015–2016, Gomes started a fully inclusive Transitional Kindergarten Class and then in 2016–2017, Gomes started the Kindergarten Inclusion Class. Both of these models were based utilizing co teaching practices. The whole inclusion team received and continues to receive professional development training in Universal Design for Learning. Each of these programs have a special education teacher with a case load of up to 12 students and a general education counterpart with a caseload of 24 students.

In 2017–2018, Gomes started an Inclusion Learning Center Model for 1st–3rd grade. The students who were part of the Learning Center model were fully included to the maximum extent appropriate in their respective grade levels for their instruction. Each classroom that participates in the program had an assigned para educator to assist the teacher with the students. A special education teacher provides specialized academic instruction along with the general education teacher, using co-teaching. In the first year of the Learning Center Model, the First Grade Inclusion Class has been the most successful with things learned and changes to be made for coming year for Second and Third Grade.

## **Implementation and Monitoring**

In the TK and K Inclusion Classes, the student with special needs are included for all activities, the team establish a baseline, understand their strengths and areas of needs and design the environment to meet their needs. The TK and K co-teaching model offers the services of a trained special education teacher and general education teacher. This is designed because data (from the first elementary school Hirsch pilot) explicitly showed that intensive support was needed in these younger grades to ensure optimal learning and social outcomes for all students. A deliberate effort to “catch students before they fail” is made early on.

Each grade level team plans together every week. This allows the general education teacher to utilize her expertise in the content areas to design the instruction and for her special education counterpart (learning strategist) to think through each lesson to ensure that they are planned using the principles of UDL.

The students who are part of the Learning Center model are fully included in their respective grade levels for all of their instruction. The classroom has an assigned paraeducator to assist the teacher with all the students. A special education teacher provides specialized instruction along with the general education teacher using the models of co teaching. The co-teaching model followed in first grade is the alternative teaching and one teach one assist model. The education specialist works with a small group that is comprised of students with disabilities and typically developing students.

Additionally, the para educator provides support to any students in the classroom that needs it.

In addition to the individual team at each grade level, the inclusion team engages in Community of Practice Meetings with each other and with colleagues at other schools who engage in similar inclusion models. Also, parents have been part of a parent panel at the beginning of the year and invited to give input during a seminar at the end of the year. This allows for the exchange of ideas and information, sharing of expertise and knowledge and creates a common understanding the shared vision that the district has for moving inclusive education forward.

## **Results and Outcomes**

When developing these programs, care was taken to ensure that a continuum could be developed. This would ensure that students with disabilities are not moved around the district and they can develop meaningful relationships with their peers and trusted adults.

We measure outcomes for students in the program with the mindset that each of these students has a right to be included and do not need to perform in any particular way in order to be included. This is their civil right. So, our perspective on outcomes is related to social validity. We measure social validity on three levels: goals, procedures and outcomes. Are the goals meaningful to all the stakeholders? Are the procedures utilized to implement the various programs and interventions appropriate in the eyes of the stakeholders? Are the outcomes meaningful for everyone involved? At the end of year one of the implementation of the LC model, all stakeholders (parents, teachers, para educators and administrators) to come together and engage in a semi structured group discussion. The goal was twofold; to evaluate the program and to build a community of practice in which all stakeholders felt invested, engaged in collaborative problem solving and create a common vision for the implementation of the program in the future. The entire discussion was transcribed and we looked for themes that emerged from the analysis. The themes from the analysis are shared before and speak to the extent to which each member was invested in the success of the model. Over the past three years of Inclusion we have been able to exit two students from special education, promote five students to to mild/moderate special day class and identify eight general education students who ended up qualifying for special education services.

### **Stakeholders Perspectives**

- Growth in social skills for students with disabilities and typically developing peers. This was reported by the teachers (GE and sped) and parents of typically developing kids.
- Academic gains were seen with both students with disabilities and typically developing peers.

- Teachers reported being able to plan more effectively because they had the support of an education specialist with in depth knowledge about learning strategies.
- The ability to conduct social skill groups was beneficial to both sets of students.
- Parent reported that he saw that students develop empathy and are much more accepting and understanding of differences. Parents reported that this was one of the most important advantages of inclusive education.