

Ardenwood Elementary School Model Programs and Practices

School Information

CDS (County District School) Code: 01611766104723

County: Alameda

District (Local Educational Agency): Fremont Unified

School: Ardenwood Elementary School

Demographics

Enrollment: 962 students

Location Description: Suburban

Title I Funded: No

School Calendar: Traditional

Charter: No

Overview

Nestled in a neighborhood near Ardenwood Historic Farm, a regional park, and a National Wildlife Refuge, Ardenwood School is a kindergarten through sixth grade public school with 951 students. Known for its educational leadership, academic excellence and curricular rigor, the school attracts strong parent and community participation. Ardenwood's students scored among the top in the district and well above the state average on the CAASPP with 84% of our students exceeding Standards in ELA and 87% in Math for 2017. Ardenwood School was recognized as a California Distinguished School in 2010 and 2014.

Ardenwood School and the connected park are the gathering place for the Ardenwood neighborhood. Back-to-School Night and Open House boast near-perfect attendance, and other school events such as choir and band performances, and Cultural Week Celebrations are popular and well attended. Grade-level and classroom-based activities celebrate the diverse cultural traditions and ethnic backgrounds of our students. The community rents our facility and grounds after school and on weekends for extra-

curricular programs, language schools, and meetings. The adjacent park hosts local sports activities like basketball, soccer, baseball, and cricket.

The ethnic make-up of Ardenwood's student population includes 76% Asian, 7% White, 6% Filipino, 5% multiple races, 4% Hispanic, 2% African-American, >1% Pacific Islander, and >1% American Indian/Alaska Native. Seven percent are designated as Socio-Economically Disadvantaged. Twenty-one percent are designated as English Language (EL) Learners. Over 24 languages are spoken by our families including: Mandarin, Hindi, Tamil, Cantonese, Spanish and Vietnamese. English is a second language for more than 50% of our students.

Ardenwood School has a history of strong community involvement. The PTA coordinates school assemblies, family nights, and other community building events. The PTA funds field trips, assemblies, and classroom supplies, and provides other support for the classroom. The PTA enthusiastically organized the Dragon Dash, a jog-a-thon fundraiser that collected almost \$30,000 to improve communications with a new electronic marquee. Local stores and businesses donated several thousands of dollars in prizes to support the fundraiser.

Ardenwood is unique and successful due to excellent community involvement, the expertise of the staff and the high expectations and support for all students. Ardenwood students have internalized the Eight Great Traits through our Character Education program which has created a positive school culture. Our students consistently show respect, make good decisions and solve problems!

Model Program and Practices

Name of Model Program/Practice: Ardenwood Dragon Readers

Length of Model Program/Practice: 8+ years

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

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

Strategies Used: School Climate, Parent Engagement, Implementation of Academic Standards Basics (Teachers, Instructional Materials, Facilities)

Description

Reading is an integral part of all Ardenwood students' lives. From rigorous, relevant lessons in the classroom, spending recess time reading with friends at a picnic table, and/or reading daily at home, Ardenwood students are avid readers due to our Model

Program – Ardenwood’s Dragon Readers. Due to the fact that there is no district model for a program like this, the Dragon Readers Program is solely unique to our school.

Parents, along with the Ardenwood principal and staff, had recognized the lack of excitement regarding reading of literature outside the classroom setting. In an effort to improve reading scores, the PTA and staff developed our Read-At-Home program over two decades ago. Initially, the program ran for only two weeks during the school year. Students would read at home and record their reading material and the minutes read. The PTA provided funding for materials and awards and coordinated volunteers to support the program. Over time, this program matured into what is now known as our “Ardenwood Dragon Readers.”

Essential to this program was that student input had not been considered – students needed to be able to choose literature based on their individual interests and reading levels. Teachers had rigorously taught the reading skills; however, student interest had been ignored and a passion for reading had not been cultivated. Student choice of literature is critical in fostering literary excitement and personally engaging each and every child. The principal and the staff believed that all students could improve reading proficiency resulting in increased confidence and academic gains. Teachers are provided professional development on how to implement the program, how to count minutes or books read, and how to motivate students to participate. All of our students, in particular our at-risk students, benefit from reading at their level. Because our students feel successful, school is a more positive experience which has attributed to few behavior incidences and a high attendance rate (currently averaging 97.3%).

Each September, a committee, comprised of a variety of stakeholders (parents, PTA, staff, and principal), creates and develops the theme of the Dragon Readers. Members of the committee present an amusing skit to announce the Dragon Reader’s theme for the year and conclude with a challenge to our students to read a target number of books for the year. Our current theme is “Let’s Go, Super Heroes” and students have been asked to help the super eight great trait heroes teach the villain BC (short for Bad Choice) to appreciate reading and return the books stolen from the classrooms and library. Each of the Super Heroes is named after one of our Eight Great Traits: Caring, Honesty, Responsibility, Integrity, etc. The students are asked to read 10,000 books a month with a focus on the 8 Great Traits to help the Super Heroes find BC and return the stolen books.

Implementation and Monitoring

The Dragon Reader program is implemented each year with a kick off assembly where the staff and parents perform a creative skit to “hook” the students and motivate them to read books. Letters are sent home to inform parents of the program and to explain the process. Classroom posters are created every year with the new theme and used for tracking monthly progress. Teachers and the librarian assist students by selecting appropriate leveled books for reading success. Each week the students check out books from the library or classrooms, read the books, record the books or minutes read in the Dragon Reader log, have their parents sign the reading log and submit the

information to the room parent. The parents on the Dragon Reader committee tally the totals using Google Docs. Classroom and school totals are updated monthly and posted for all to view and celebrate. Dragon Reader progress is also shared with parents through our school and teacher newsletters and website.

In the early spring, classrooms are invited to the Dragon Readers Library Week held in the library and hosted by the principal. At each of the grade level events, students have an opportunity to share a brief synopsis of their favorite book with peers. Students are enthralled with these presentations.

Concluding our Dragon Readers program is a fun-filled day of activities to celebrate the success of our students in reaching, usually exceeding, our annual reading goal. Children participate in field day activities related to our selected theme.

Parents are an integral part of the Dragon Readers. They provide funding for materials and awards. Room parents collect and tally the reading logs. They participate in the introductory skit and coordinate the classroom visits and library week. Finally, parents help set-up and run the field day activities. In short, we couldn't do the program without them.

The Dragon Readers program is monitored throughout the school year as student reading logs are tallied and monthly reading totals are determined and shared. Parents, teachers and the principal celebrate the progress made at various times throughout the year during classroom visits, assemblies, parent nights and through the school website and parent newsletters. The success of the program is measured by the level of student participation.

Improved reading comprehension has been a goal of our SPPA (Single Plan for Pupil Achievement) plan for several years. Professional Development has been provided for teachers with a focus on reading strategies: close reading, leveled readers, small group instruction, silent sustained reading, etc. Teachers use these strategies to differentiate instruction for students and to monitor progress. Our subgroups (EL) have shown marked improvement on our CAASPP scores.

Results and Outcomes

The Dragon Readers program is monitored quantitatively through the accounting of the Dragon Readers log forms submitted to the parents and recorded with Google Docs. It is clear that our Dragon Readers Program has led to growth in our API scores which increased from 856 in 2002 to 965 in 2013.

On the 2016 CAASPP, students meeting or exceeding state standards in ELA were much higher at Ardenwood (83%) than compared to Fremont Unified School District (74%) and the state (48%). On the 2017 CAASPP, Ardenwood continued to improve with 84% meeting or exceeding ELA standards. In fact, Ardenwood School was the only school in Fremont to be recognized for a huge increase (21%) in overall ELA scores for our English Language Learners.

Equitable outcomes for all students are recognized in regards to access, differentiation and engagement. Our Dragon Readers Program has assisted in closing the achievement gap by enabling all students to participate and improve in reading comprehension, vocabulary and fluency. Ardenwood School showed an increase in the percentage of students meeting or exceeding standards in reading on the CAASPP from 2016 to 2017 in almost all of our major subgroups and particularly at-risk groups including: Hispanic +1%, Socio-Economically Disadvantaged +7.6%, Disabilities +20.3%, EL +29.5%, and White +3%.

A qualitative outcome is the students' attitude and conversations about books around campus. Popular books are in great demand and students love reading during recess and lunch. A parent survey in the spring collects feedback on how often students read at home, how often the Dragon Readers Log is returned to school, how well students enjoy reading and how much students have increased their reading proficiency. Teachers use the logs along with assessments to gauge student progress. Students who consistently participate show greater improvement in reading scores than those who do not.

An unexpected outcome is the consistent recognition of the Ardenwood School Library for exceeding the state circulation per student standards. Since 2005, the Fremont Unified School District School Board has annually presented our school library with the Library Book Circulation Award. On average, Ardenwood students check out between eight and ten books per month. The Ardenwood Dragon Readers program has inspired students and contributed to a school climate where students are passionate about reading!

Based on the research, *The Growing Independence: Summary of Key Findings from the Competent Learners at 14 Project* (Rivers, 2006) found that students who love reading had higher scores on cognitive and social/attitudinal competencies; higher scores in math, reading, logical problem-solving and attitude; higher scores for engagement in school, positive communication and friendships; showed less risky behavior and higher levels of motivation towards school. Ardenwood's outcomes are consistent with the results of this research.