

Liberty Elementary School Model Programs and Practices

School Information

CDS (County District School) Code: 10621176109920

County: Fresno

District (Local Educational Agency): Clovis Unified

School: Liberty Elementary School

Demographics

Enrollment: 600 students

Location Description: Suburban

Title I Funded: No

School Calendar: Traditional

Charter: No

Overview

Every morning, Liberty students start off their day with an enthusiastic “Good morning Skyeeehawks!” from the principal on K-SKY News, which is recorded as a video file, edited with special effects, and delivered to each teacher through Google Classroom. Morning announcements and other videos created by the school are used to recognize students, from top AR point earners to History Day placers to sixth graders who read with first graders. Finding ways to celebrate all students helps bring Liberty’s diverse student population together. In the 2016/17 school year, Liberty serviced 621 students, who primarily come from a residential neighborhood of small as well as large homes, with homeowners as well as renters. Apartment complexes (one of which is section 8) and the Friant neighborhood, which is a low socio-economic community, are also within the school’s attendance area. Some families who rent struggle financially, having difficulty finding work, which often creates transiency. 28% of the school’s student body has been identified as SED, which is the school’s third largest targeted subgroup. The student population is made up of 38.6% White, which makes Liberty a majority minority school. 37.8% are identified as Hispanic which is the school’s second largest targeted subgroup. In addition, 5.6% are identified as English Learner and 8.1% have been

identified as RSP. Liberty also houses a Special Day Class (SDC), which is designed to meet the needs of students diagnosed with autism (mod to severe).

One of the most effective ways to bring this diverse population together into the “Liberty Family” is the school’s Parent-Teacher Club (PTC). Throughout the year, over 200 parent-volunteers team together with the school staff to provide fun social events, fundraisers, and assistance in the classroom. With a snack bar, Movie Night, parent-son/daughter dances, social media, and many other programs and events, the PTC provides multiple ways for school engagement. One of the PTC’s recent achievements is accomplishing and exceeding its technology goal, which was “One-to-One [laptop to student] in grades 3–6.” The generosity of community helped purchase class-sets of laptops with carts, which now support a rigorous curriculum, allowing more writing and research in the classroom. This also helped provide a computer lab for first and second graders.

Recently, Liberty has experienced a great deal of recognition: Obtaining some of the highest test scores in the district; receiving the Bonner Award which recognizes the school’s Excellence in Character Education; being recognized by Fresno Compact for the school’s partnership with a local business, Island Photography; and now having the opportunity of being recognized as a “State Distinguish School”. All this success is testament to what can happen when a community comes together to invest their time, talent, and treasure into educating children.

Model Program and Practices

Name of Model Program/Practice: Student Collaboration (Expressive Learning)

Length of Model Program/Practice: 2–4 years

Target Area(s): Closing the Achievement Gap, Professional Development

Target Population(s): Hispanic, White, Socioeconomically Disadvantaged

Strategies Used: Professional Development, Implementation of Academic Standards Basics (Teachers, Instructional Materials, Facilities)

Description

Liberty’s new “Instructional Environment” relied heavily on Student Collaboration. The improvement plan targeted three areas: Curriculum, Instruction, and Classroom Management. The primary focus of the curricular target was to get students to write more. Using online resources, teachers utilized frames and graphic organizers to aid students in writing tasks. Mnemonic aids, such as RACE and RAFTT, helped the staff to standardize written responses to text-dependent questions across grade levels. By implementing a “Learning Journal”, students were required to write daily about their learning. The staff also sought ways to integrated writing and math (see POW below). To ensure students would collaborate in the writing process, teachers developed units

of instruction called “Brief Writes”, a concept modeled from an IAB that the CAASP website provides. These units have students discussing, editing and revising peer work. This places student work at the center of the school’s curriculum, emphasizing the value for students helping students to learn.

The instructional target was primarily accomplished by implementing strategies that required students to verbally interact, or collaborate. Teachers began using pair-share and group discussions more often. In upper grades, the teachers used the “Exit Ticket” concept, which asks students to verbally describe what they learned before being allowed to leave class. The staff used POWs (Problem of the Week) to develop academic vocabulary through discussions and written responses. By the end of the week, the students wrote “how to solve” and “why” paragraphs. To help teachers create student discussions in math, the staff employed a “Two Proofs” lesson design. This lesson has students present orally to the class how to solve a problem using two different techniques. After the students write their solutions on the board, the class discusses elements of a solution and resolves issues of disagreement, guided by the teacher. Through student dialogue, confusion is addressed immediately, and the understanding of an academic concept is clarified before going home.

The classroom management piece was mainly addressed through what the Liberty staff calls “Teach-To’s”. Teach-Tos are explicit directions for student expectations, followed by a time of training until the students get it right. The teachers designed Teach-To’s for student collaboration, specifically for how to listen and disagree respectfully, and how to express appreciation for peer input. Frames for verbal responses were developed, providing a script for those students who struggle with verbal interaction. Fun mantras were created for public celebrations when a student took a risk or contributed to the discussion. Since struggling learners tend to disengage from the collaborative process due to fear of public failure, teachers used Teach-To’s to provide a more supportive environment for risk.

Implementation and Monitoring

The implementation for this instructional shift was an organic process and occurred over several years, each teacher and grade level evolving at their own pace. Three important supports were vital to the implementation of this instructional shift: Staff-designed materials, Peer and Collaborative Observations, and time for the staff to understand, implement and revise.

Because the school’s adopted textbook series did not support expressive learning, the staff requested release time to research and design materials that did. Working with a local business, Island Photography, a team of teachers submitted designs for the creation of instructional materials such as editing folders, anchor posters, student planners, and learning journals. Island Photography produced these materials at no cost to the school. These materials helped improve writing instruction and the integration of writing with math. These materials helped articulate curricular goals across grade levels, promoting a schoolwide vision for instruction.

The administration discarded the school's traditional observation model, which they had been using for years, and replaced it with Peer and Collaborative observation models. Teachers were given coverage to watch their peers conduct lessons that utilized Student Collaboration. The Two-Proofs lesson (see above) was selected as one of the instructional strategies that all staff members were expected to implement. Those teachers who were considered "good at it" were made available for staff to observe. School administrators made themselves available for a collaborative process where teachers sat down with the administration, designed a lesson, and presented it to the class. After the lesson, a reflective discussion took place. Throughout the week, the teacher and the administrator would take turns teaching the lesson. This collaborative model was used to implement the POW lesson (see above).

School leadership provided a series of site-based staff development days that focused heavily on the research and the strategies behind Student Collaboration. Teachers learned the effective use of graphic organizers, frames, concept mapping, vocabulary building, etc. They were also introduced to instructional movements such as Growth Mindset and Kagan. The administration helped with lesson design during early-release Wednesdays, a designated time for weekly grade level meetings (known to the staff as PLTs, Professional Learning Teams). This created additional support during the implementation phase, allowing administration to celebrate successes, respond to frustrations immediately, and provide resources for support. Another way the staff monitored instructional effectiveness was through analysis of data from the district's mandatory assessments in ELA and Math. Reflective dialogue for this was done during PLT time as well. PAC also provided the administration with feedback from the staff on how the implementation process was progressing.

Results and Outcomes

Liberty's staff has been very excited with the results of their hard work. In ELA, Liberty had 67% of students in grades 3–6 meet or exceed standards on the 2015 state test. In 2017, they had 81%, which is a 14-point growth in ELA in three years. This result placed Liberty 3rd in Clovis Unified for overall performance and posted one of the largest growths in the district. In Math, Liberty had 58% meet or exceed standards on the 2015 state test. In 2017, 70% reached grade level, obtaining a 12-point growth in Math. This placed Liberty as the 5th school overall in CUSD. The two of its largest subgroups, SED and Hispanic, experienced success as well. On the 2015 ELA test, 61% of Hispanic students reached grade level, and in 2017, 74% were on grade level, a 13-point jump. In Math, Hispanic students went from 52% to 62%. With SED students, Liberty went from 50% to 62% on grade level in ELA, a 12-point improvement. Unfortunately, this subgroup remained at 43% from 2015 to 2017. This data point caused the staff to place math instruction as their primary goal for the 2017–18 school year.

The staff's hard work also paid off with their community's perception of classroom instruction. On the annual SART Survey in 2015, 69% of the parents responded to the statement "My child is improving in writing" with either "Strongly Agree" or "Agree", and in 2017, it was 94%, a 25-point increase. On the same question in Math, it went from 71% to 89%.

Liberty's administration meets with teachers towards the end of the school year and the week before school begins to discuss SBAC results. At the end of last year, the staff mentioned how they believed that the changes to their instruction had a positive impact on student scores, and requested additional training in Student Collaboration, which resulted in two full-days of Kagan training. At the beginning of this school year, the staff volunteered to be one of the first schools in the district to receive new student furniture, which was delivered to the school during the Thanksgiving break. This demonstrated an even greater commitment by the staff to Student Collaboration. The new furniture is an outgrowth of an initiative called Flexible Seating. The new student desks have rollers, allowing the teachers to move desks into collaborative groups, and the legs of the desk can be adjusted to allow for a variety of learning positions. When introducing the purpose of the new furniture, the staff taught the students that we all have different learning styles, and this doesn't make one student better or worse—we can all learn from each other. If a person walks through the classrooms at Liberty, she might see students sitting on the floor with lap desks, discussing an assignment. She might see some students standing and working together, or some students sitting on a couch, having a discussion, and some bouncing on a large ball. Regardless of their individuality, students are struggling and learning together.