

Union Street Charter Model Programs and Practices

School Information

CDS (County District School) Code: 12626790111708

County: Humboldt

District (Local Educational Agency): Arcata Elementary

School: Union Street Charter

Demographics

Enrollment: 101 students

Location Description: Rural

Title I Funded: No

School Calendar: Traditional

Charter: Yes

Overview

Union Street Charter (USC) is a unique K–5 school that balances arts and academics in a family atmosphere. The school began operation in August of 2006 and is housed on a rural campus that is an integral part of the surrounding community. It is within walking distance of Humboldt State University, the Arcata Community Center, a marsh and forest. We believe we are high performing in part because we attract highly qualified, dedicated and enthusiastic teachers, as well as invested parents and students from the surrounding communities. The teachers and principal collaboratively choose engaging research-based curriculum. USC is a highly sought after school for multiple reasons: small class size (17 students), parent involvement, engaging academic content, and twice weekly instruction in Spanish, art and music.

The initial school years are crucial to a child's educational attitudes and future success in learning. We are committed to providing a nurturing environment and fostering high self-esteem and confidence. The students are part of a learning community that emphasizes collaboration, critical thinking, and creativity. Student success at Union

Street Charter is based on academic growth, a well-developed sense of self worth, and a willingness to accept challenges.

At Union Street Charter, we believe in the unique value of each student, family, and teacher - both as individuals and as members of the school community. We work together to create an environment that minimizes the pressures of popular culture and the use of academic competition as motivation. Our ultimate aim is to turn a child's natural curiosity and desire to explore into a lifelong love of learning. We value the trust that families place in us, as we guide students toward a deeper understanding of themselves and the world around them.

Model Program and Practices

Name of Model Program/Practice: Visible Thinking and Acting Right

Length of Model Program/Practice: Less than 2 years

Target Area(s): Chronic Absenteeism and Dropout Prevention, Closing the Achievement Gap, Parent, Family, and Community Involvement, Visual and Performing Arts

Target Population(s): Socioeconomically Disadvantaged, Students with Disabilities

Strategies Used: 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

Teachers at Union Street Charter have participated in trainings and implemented strategies to address the need to sustain student focus and develop critical thinking skills. Two practices have proven effective: Visible Thinking, from Project Zero at Harvard University, and Acting Right: Drama as a Classroom Management Strategy, Focus Five, from the Kennedy Center. Visible Thinking and Acting Right routines support student focus and hold students accountable for their learning. Visible Thinking allows teachers to scaffold student thinking by providing specific routines that help students develop a deeper understanding of curriculum and make connections to the world around them and to express their thinking orally and in writing. Acting Right practices increase student awareness of each individual's role and responsibility as a member of a learning community during the daily morning meeting, where they make a commitment to themselves and to the entire class to control their bodies, voices, and imaginations, and to concentrate and cooperate throughout the day.

We began exploring and implementing Visible Thinking and Acting Right because of our desire to increase student engagement, participation and depth of understanding. Data shows a doubling of the special education population, an increase in Free and Reduced

Lunch from 5% to nearly 30%, and a rise in chronic absenteeism from 2% to 8%. While standardized state test scores have remained high, we felt that new strategies were needed to support this changing population.

Among a variety of resources that teachers and the principal chose to read and discuss for 2016 summer professional development, two books in particular spoke to the needs we identified in our classrooms: *Mindful Teaching and Teaching Mindfulness and Making Thinking Visible*. Additional professional development included "Acting Right, Drama as a Classroom Management Strategy" and "Visible Thinking," a 12 week online course offered through Harvard's Project Zero. We have also adopted instructional materials that challenge students to demonstrate their thinking, such as *Everyday Math*, *Seeds of Science - Roots of Reading*, *Lucy Calkins Units of Study: Writing*, and *Fountas and Pinnell Reading*.

We set goals to implement these practices, with the expected outcome that students would have better engagement and participation. In addition, it was our goal that students would utilize these strategies outside of the classroom. Staff uses the same language to engage and refocus all students. Students in special education and those with socioeconomic needs benefit from the consistency. The Visible Thinking and Acting Right routines match our social-emotional curriculum, Second Step. Students have met our LCAP goals by achieving high scores on the CAASPP. Teachers address every absence through regular communication with families keeping chronic absenteeism rates low.

Implementation and Monitoring

Our school program is distinguished from the district in many ways, but one of the most outstanding is our strong parent involvement. Teachers report that over 73% of our parents volunteer in the classroom, drive on field trips, or assist with class plays and productions. In addition, 98% of parents attend parent conferences and 91% attend community-building activities, such as the Spring Sing potluck, graduation picnic and class plays. Visible Thinking and Acting Right routines are shared with families during our Back-to-School night, parent conferences, Open House, student intake meetings, and weekly classroom newsletters. Families experience Visible Thinking and/or Acting Right activities in action during community events. When students present or perform their learning individually and cooperatively, they demonstrate control of body and voice with every production. Our parent volunteers have opportunities to observe and participate in Visible Thinking and/or Acting Right activities whenever they work in a classroom.

Union Street Charter is also distinguished from the district by our strong academics. Annual surveys show 100% of parents and students satisfied with school climate, academics, and student and parent engagement. These surveys are also used to gather feedback for the LCAP and to improve the academic programming. 100% of our students have access to Spanish and the arts including theater, art and music.

Another distinguishing feature of our school is our hard work and dedication to meet the needs of all students. We are a professional learning community (PLC) that consistently collaborates to implement strategies, gather resources, and share feedback with one another. This community includes our resource and speech teachers, as well as classroom aides, with whom we meet regularly. The principal is involved in this progressive PLC, through observations and coaching related to the Visible Thinking and Acting Right strategies and routines. The principal also observes teachers conducting formative assessment, which then informs practice. Formal assessment that identifies areas for re-teaching and intervention includes writing samples, DIBELS, Fountas & Pinnell running records, and unit assessments.

Results and Outcomes

Monitoring of student outcomes shows that the model practices are sustaining achievement levels, despite changes in the student population. Teachers report that students are currently at grade level: 85% in math and 86% in ELA, based on in-class assessments. 77% have achieved core reading levels based on DIBELS testing. The CAASPP three-year average of students who met or exceeded standards in Math is 85% and 84% in ELA, distinguishing us from other district schools. We provide intervention support for those students who do not meet benchmarks.

We identify students who need early intervention through regular monitoring and assessment. Last year, there were not enough students tested in the target sub-groups on the CAASPP to measure their performance. We use DIBELS and math unit assessments throughout the year to identify students who require intensive support. Students who qualify receive two or more days a week of intervention, using a combination of pullout and Fountas and Pinnell reading instruction and push-in math. Student study teams determine if further support or assessment is needed.

Monitoring of behavior is a school wide effort that extends beyond the classroom and includes parents and classroom aides. Teachers report that Visible Thinking and Acting Right routines have increased engagement in class and decreased behavior related issues. In addition, referrals to the office for behavioral incidents have declined 50% over last year.

We discuss testing results, intervention strategies, and behavioral concerns at bi-monthly staff meetings. Our PLC works collaboratively to share anecdotes that demonstrate student engagement, discuss ways to continue improving our program, and strategize solutions to common problems. Student engagement and personal responsibility for learning are at the center of the Visible Thinking and Acting Right routines.