

Horace Mann Elementary Model Programs and Practices

School Information

CDS (County District School) Code: 19645686013767

County: Los Angeles

District (Local Educational Agency): Glendale Unified

School: Horace Mann Elementary

Demographics

Enrollment: 650 students

Location Description: Urban

Title I Funded: Yes

Type of Program: School-wide

School Calendar: Traditional

Charter: No

Overview

Horace Mann Elementary is committed to high quality teaching and learning for all its students. Our school motto is, "Set Goals. Do Our Best. Finish Strong," which is exemplified in our instructional leadership, our relentless effort to provide exceptional instruction, and the strong academic achievement of our students. We are one of 20 elementary schools in Glendale Unified School District, and have students from TK to grade 5. Under the outstanding instructional leadership of our principal Mrs. Alonso, our highly trained staff educates approximately 650 students. Students at Horace Mann feel both academically challenged and socially supported. We know that the key to the future success of our students is to ensure they get the highest quality education at Mann to prepare them for college and career, and to build a growth mindset so they know their effort is what will help them succeed.

We are proud of our diverse, multicultural community in which the majority of students speak another language in addition to English. Our largest ethnic groups are Hispanic

(44%) and Armenian (46%). About 64% of our students are English learners, and 90% qualify for free or reduced lunch.

Our main instructional focus is developing students' reading comprehension skills. We have an exemplary instructional program that has an explicit focus on helping students master state standards in English Language Arts and Math. A chief reason for the strength of our instructional program is our customized use of professional learning communities, PLC Plus. Our teachers collaborate at structured meetings every month to analyze student work and plan lessons to address specific student needs, as well as to enhance their collective expertise by participating in site-based training to learn research-based strategies, such as QAR, Reciprocal Teaching, engagement, feedback, and higher level questioning.

As a result of our excellent teaching, our students have been steadily and continuously improving their achievement levels since 2005. During this time, we moved from being the lowest performing elementary school in our district that attributed its low achievement to having the most students at-risk of school failure due to high poverty levels, low parent education levels, and limited English proficiency, to one of the highest performing. Our exemplary instructional program and school-wide improvement efforts have been successful in closing achievement gaps, and we have been honored with various awards, including the CA Title I Achieving School, CA Gold Ribbon Award, CSBA Golden Bell Award, CBEE Star Honor Roll School, and a two-time winner of the Gold Excellence in Urban Education Award from the National Center of Urban School Transformation. By working collaboratively to enhance our instruction, we are improving the academic achievement of all of our students to prepare them for a successful future.

Model Program and Practices

Name of Model Program/Practice: PLC Plus

Length of Model Program/Practice: 8+ years

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

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

Strategies Used: Data-Driven Decision Making, Professional Development

Description

Horace Mann's "PLC Plus" is the systematic, professional development approach that has been the driving force of our successful school improvement effort. The goal of our "PLC Plus" is to improve the learning and achievement of all of our students through 1) teacher collaboration which centers on improved teaching and assessment of the standards and which follows a professional learning communities' framework, and 2)

site-based, targeted training on our research-based best practices that support both strong core instructional delivery, and reading strategies instruction.

All teachers, support staff, and our principal formally meet for 1½ hours, twice a month, in our Resource Room during banked time on Wednesdays. The first half hour is dedicated to site-based training to strengthen the use of our school-wide, research-based practices that support our instructional focus of reading comprehension. We develop teacher expertise with a set of overarching best practices that include:

- 1) explicit direct instruction of the CA Common Core Standards with strong modeling and active engagement of students in order to check for understanding and provide effective feedback, and
- 2) key research-based strategies to improve reading comprehension, including Reciprocal Teaching and Question-Answer Relationship.

During the next hour of our meetings, teachers collaborate in grade level teams and address the essential questions:

- 1) What do we expect every student to learn?,
- 2) How will we know students have learned it?, and
- 3) What will we do if they don't learn it? (DuFour, DuFour & Eaker, 2008).

One meeting a month is dedicated to using our explicit direct instruction lesson design to collaboratively plan a lesson to address common areas of difficulty demonstrated by students who are not yet proficient. Then each team discusses how they will assess the standard. This helps reinforce common expectations and rigor throughout the grade level.

The second meeting each month is dedicated to reviewing students' open-ended responses on the focus standard assessment. Each teacher brings the work of five VIPs (i.e. Very Important Players) who represent students who are not yet proficient. We follow a site-developed protocol to review the assessment to identify what the student knows and what is still difficult. Then, teachers identify patterns of errors and determine re-teaching objectives, and discuss possible resources to use. This process allows us to focus on the impact of our teaching and maximize the use of the collective experience and expertise of each grade level team.

Implementation and Monitoring

The strength of our implementation of "PLC Plus" is that it is a whole school effort that promotes high quality teaching of the standards through teacher collaboration and site-based customized training. While our district is encouraging other schools to begin to use PLCs with the help of presenters from Solution Tree, our "PLC Plus" is a homegrown effort based on the needs of our students and teachers. We recognize the importance of establishing practices that ensure accountability for effective implementation of our "PLC Plus," such as how we structure our time, how we design

our meetings, and how we follow-through to ensure what we discussed is applied in every classroom.

For example, we structure our time by banking minutes, which allows us to schedule all of our collaboration and training meetings within the work day. We provide teachers a schedule of all meeting dates at the start of the school year. All teachers, support staff, special education teachers, and our principal meet together in grade level teams during these meetings to deepen our common understanding of how to teach to the rigor of the standards, as well as learn to improve the use of our school-wide best practices.

Further accountability for implementation of our "PLC Plus" meetings is provided by our ILT grade level representatives. They lead our teams through a lesson planning or assessment protocol that helps us analyze how to teach the thinking processes needed by students to show mastery of selected focus standards. During the meeting, teachers record notes on a log kept in a grade level folder in Google Drive, which helps to facilitate sharing of materials and ideas.

Another strength of our implementation of "PLC Plus" is the use of site-based training on effective strategies that address the specific needs of our students, and that builds on the professional development provided in previous years. As a result, our teachers see the relevance and clear focus of our work. The principal and reading coach help plan the site-based training based on the suggestions of the ILT, and the classroom observations of our principal. Our principal provides individual and school-wide feedback related to the implementation of the strategies we learn during training, and the coach provides classroom support to further strengthen implementation.

At the end of each year, our ILT examines summative assessment data, such as CAASPP, CELDT, iReady, and monthly focus standards assessments, to determine specific areas of weakness related to students' reading comprehension, and select 1–2 additional strategies (i.e. "Bold Steps") to implement during the next year. For example, this year a Bold Step was teaching students how to support key ideas with textual evidence and elaboration. As a result of our ongoing examination of data to identify next steps, we have strengthened our school program and demonstrated consistent academic gains for more than 10 years.

Results and Outcomes

Without a doubt, our professional collaboration and site-based training have been a key reason for the strong academic achievement gains of our students. We know many of our students have various factors, such as limited English proficiency or low income, that often place them at-risk of school failure. Yet, we know our work is helping to beat the odds and helping our students have a better chance of lifelong success.

In 2005, only 26% of our English learners, 25% of our students from low SES homes; and 19% of our Hispanic students were proficient. With nearly 75% of our students not proficient, we were not effectively teaching state standards and thus not preparing our students for college or career. Rigor and expectations varied within grades, and across

the school. Our curriculum varied based on topics of teacher interest, and depended on commercial textbooks. With so many students facing basic survival needs at home and academic challenges at school, many staff members felt justified in making excuses for our poor academic performance.

Since we began our focus on standards in 2005, and implementation of "PLC Plus" in 2007, we have increased student proficiency every year on state measures in both ELA and Math. We increased achievement overall as well as for our major sub-groups, including low SES, English learners, and Hispanic students, to help close achievement gaps. Below is an example of the steady increase of our ELA proficiency rates on CST.

	2005	2007	2009	2011	2013
AYP	28.9%	47%	54.4%	60.1%	67.7%
Hispanic	19%	36.6%	51.1%	53.9%	63.2%
SES	25.3%	44.7%	51.5%	57.8%	67.3%
EL	26.1%	45.8%	53.3%	58.7%	64.8%

Similarly, on the CAASPP, we increased our overall proficiency from 51% in 2015 to 67% in 2017.

We know that the success of our students is dependent on providing a strong instructional program focused on meeting grade level expectations and fostering a growth mindset that matches our motto "Set Goals. Do Our Best. Finish Strong." We have been able to sustain Our "PLC Plus" because it is homegrown, and not dependent on outside consultants or one-time funding. Thanks to our use of "PLC Plus," we can ensure that each student will receive consistently high-quality teaching of grade level standards in every class, and across every grade level. We know the success of our school-wide collaborative effort to improve the achievement of our students, represents the promise that other schools also can break through the cycle of poverty and low literacy, to improve the achievement and future aspirations of all students.