

## **Richardson D. White Elementary Model Programs and Practices**

### **School Information**

CDS (County District School) Code: 19645686013841

County: Los Angeles

District (Local Educational Agency): Glendale Unified

School: Richardson D. White Elementary

### **Demographics**

Enrollment: 939 students

Location Description: Suburban

Title I Funded: Yes

Type of Program: School-wide

School Calendar: Traditional

Charter: No

### **Overview**

Richardson D. White Elementary School (RD White) in Glendale, California, is dedicated to high academic achievement and cultivates pride within its students, staff, parents, and community. RD White has a rich history of strong instruction, a caring staff, and spectacular students.

RD White is the second largest elementary school in the Glendale Unified School District. Of the 939 students, 77.3% are White, 14.3% are Hispanic, 43% are limited English proficient. Including students in the Armenian Dual Immersion Program, 18% are redesignated as fluent English proficient, and 39% are native English speakers. The students at RD White come from varying socioeconomic backgrounds. Currently, 64.9% of students qualify for free or reduced meals.

The school's mascot, the mustang, symbolizes pride, respect, and school spirit for students. RD White students love their school and refer to themselves as the "Mustangs." The "Maximus Proclamation" was instituted and is read at every

Flag/Student of the Month ceremony. The Proclamation highlights the school's rich history, while encouraging students to achieve their best. Upon hearing the first few notes of classic rock band Van Halen's "Right Now," students know that Maximus will be making his grand entrance as the Proclamation is read by the principal. This moment signifies the spirit of RD White and our great school community.

When families enter the campus, a banner with the school's theme, "Carpe Diem, Seize the Day," welcomes all. Fridays are considered "Spirit Day," and the administration distributes raffle tickets to students who wear purple, the school color. Morning announcements are delivered on the loudspeaker to inform the school of upcoming events, safety reminders, and challenging students to think critically with the daily question of the day.

In order to encourage students to be at school on time to learn, the "Yoda Best" campaign was launched. Each week, a class is recognized with the best attendance with a visit from a two-foot tall Master Yoda doll, which remains in the classroom for the entire week. The phrase, "Yoda Best" is a play on the statement, "you are the best." Since the inception of the program, we have noticed an increase in student attendance

At the end of the month, families are invited to attend the Flag/Student of the Month Ceremony where a designated grade level honors the "Character Trait of the Month" through song and oratory, while honoring students from each classroom that exemplify this trait. Teachers and administration are available on the front lawn during dismissal to connect with students and their families. This interaction gives parents and guardians the opportunity to visit and establish a mutually strong relationship with the principal and staff. The school and staff strive for maintaining a productive partnership with the parents and community to ensure students can achieve their highest potential.

## **Model Program and Practices**

Name of Model Program/Practice: Collaboration & Professional Learning Communities

Length of Model Program/Practice: 2–4 years

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

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, Small Learning Communities, Data-Driven Decision Making, Professional Development, Implementation of Academic Standards Basics (Teachers, Instructional Materials, Facilities)

## Description

RD White staff has been committed to collaborating within grade levels to ensure that students' academic needs are met. Our collaboration has intensified and has been reinforced with the implementation of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). The driving force behind RD White's collaborative culture has been centered around the four critical questions of PLCs: what do we expect our students to learn, how do we know they are learning it, what do we do when they do not learn it, what do we do when they have already learned it. Through this common focus, RD White staff has become more effective as a team.

RD White has focused on PLCs' foundation that builds upon a clear mission, vision, collective commitments, and shared goals. PLCs create a spirit of camaraderie in which teachers realize they are stronger, as a whole. This philosophy transcends all barriers by reaching all subgroups including the socioeconomically disadvantaged, English Learners, foster and homeless youth, and special education students. It creates a learning community of teachers where, regardless of grade level or program taught, we share the common vision of reaching all students at all grade levels efficiently and effectively.

The three Big Ideas of a Professional Learning Community are a focus on learning, a collaborative culture, and a focus on results. At RD White, we believe that all students can learn at high levels by providing them with the essential skills and knowledge. RD White staff members work interdependently, but are mutually accountable for all students. Grade level teams focus on collecting and sharing data in order to improve their teaching practices and determine which students need intervention or enrichment.

RD White teachers practice collective inquiry and action research to inform instruction through the use of teacher created Common Formative Assessments (CFAs). These CFAs illuminate best teaching practices and determine whether the guaranteed viable curriculum is being taught and learned. They also provide an opportunity for immediate targeted feedback that gauges the performance level of students at a given moment in comparison to standards mastery. CFAs are centered around essential standards making it easier to break down the data by student for each individual standard being assessed.

At RD White, we firmly believe that all students are able to learn at high levels. Although there is flexibility in how we teach, what remains consistent across grade levels is teaching the essential standards, implementing grade level created common formative assessments, and analyzing data-driven instruction. What distinguishes RD White from other schools within our District is our commitment to student achievement through the ongoing use of collaboration. Through a collaborative culture, staff is open to each other's teaching styles, suggestions, and sharing of best practices to improve our teaching and increase student achievement.

## Implementation and Monitoring

While collaboration has always been evident at RD White, it became systematic and school wide practice in the 2014–2015 school year, with the implementation of school wide writing assessments, this practice was reinforced in 2016 with the application of PLCs.

In 2014, school wide writing assessments were created and implemented three times a year. Grade level teams created writing prompts that addressed various genres. To ensure validity in all classes, teachers administer the writing prompt with the same directions and classroom resources. Once students complete the writing assessment, teachers are provided with grade level release time to norm and score student work in order to ensure that students are assessed using the same rubric and same expectations. After analyzing the results, grade level teams then work together to determine next steps and how to utilize data to inform instruction.

Implementation of PLCs began in 2016, when teams created norms and a norm protocol. The norms keep members of the team on track and ensure that meetings are productive and efficient. The agendas are guided by the four essential questions. This shift in our collaboration practice ensures that our time is spent efficiently and responsive to student needs.

As part of the implementation process, our staff has analyzed and categorized all standards into “Must Know Standards” and “Good To Know Standards.” The “Must Know Essential Standards” are those that students must know before they leave their current grade level. Grade level teams have agreed that if their students do not know these standards, then they will struggle in the future. Whereas, the “Good to Know Standards” are those that if students do not master in the grade level, they will still be successful next year.

The PLC model urges school leaders to restructure the established system in order to build commitment for collaboration. At RD White, we restructured the contractual day to include weekly collaboration time. During this time, teachers engage in a shared discussion of school-wide student learning, viewing of grade-level artifacts, sharing teaching strategies, and understanding how their grade level work prepares students for future instruction. This collaborative time guarantees that our colleagues shift from teaching in isolation and gives colleagues the opportunity to share ideas and learn from one another.

This practice is very unique to RD White. Our focus on a collaborative culture distinguishes us from the District. We are one of the only elementary schools that facilitates school wide writing assessments three times a year followed by release time for teachers to norm and score. While many of the elementary schools in our District have integrated PLC type strategies, RD White staff has fully adopted it as a part of our school. We do not consider PLCs a “program,” rather we believe that it is an excellent practice and a part of our school.

## Results and Outcomes

Since the implementation of a collaborative culture and PLC's, the results have been positive and empowering, demonstrating a tripartite body of evidence: deeper learning, a shared commitment, and student achievement. The RD White staff has embraced both the collaborative culture and the PLC model as the impact on student achievement has been visible.

As a school, we understand that all students do not learn the same way, all students do not learn at the same speed, some students lack prior skills and knowledge, and some students lack essential academic behaviors. Therefore, our staff is committed to the continual monitoring of student achievement to better support our students.

As grade level teams review CFAs, with a focus on the four essential questions, team members plan for a day to exchange students to reteach or enrich. We call this time "no new teaching time" or "buffer time." It gives teachers an opportunity to work with other students in fluid groups based on ability level and to ensure that all students understand and master the standard. Members of the administrative team have been included in this process as the involvement of additional educators reduces the number of students for each group. This process provides our students an opportunity for deeper learning. CFA scores demonstrate student achievement in the targeted essential standards. According to the third grade CFA data, 82% percent of students met the Operations and Algebraic Thinking standard C.7.

Since the implementation of PLC's, teachers have a clear purpose when they gather in their grade level teams. Much of the discussion during collaborative time centers around what to do when students do not learn. Teaching strategies are shared, debated, and prioritized in order to help meet the needs of the students. As a result, we have gradually moved from a culture of compliance to one of commitment. This commitment is not only an individual commitment, but also a shared commitment within the grade level team. Team members work together for the betterment of our students.

One of the tenets of a PLC is to form "powerful collaborative teams," which is evident at RD White. RD White teachers feel safe to take risks in a nonjudgmental environment. Our educators have become transparent in their results, as evidenced by the 3rd grade CFA data separated by teacher, while their colleagues serve as coaches to each other.

Our students' success and academic growth at RD White is our greatest distinguishing factor from District. The lens through which we look at students has shifted over the years. We see students as a whole population, rather than students designated to a specific class/teacher. Our teachers are more aware of how students in their grade level team's classes are performing and the success of each student is not only influenced by just their teacher but by the collaborative efforts of the grade level team.