

## **Alvarado Elementary Model Programs and Practices**

### **School Information**

CDS (County District School) Code: 19647256109292

County: Los Angeles

District (Local Educational Agency): Long Beach Unified

School: Alvarado Elementary

### **Demographics**

Enrollment: 410 students

Location Description: Urban

Title I Funded: Yes

Type of Program: School-wide

School Calendar: Traditional

Charter: No

### **Overview**

Named after Juan Bautista Alvarado, the progressive and independent Mexican governor of Alta California between 1836 and 1842, Alvarado Elementary School opened its doors in 1990. It has since become a model urban learning community that has successfully closed the achievement gap.

Like most contemporary urban schools in the Long Beach Unified School District, Alvarado serves a diverse body of students and families. Our largest populations consist of Latino, Asian (Cambodian) and/or English Language Learners. Seventy six percent of the current student population of 410 qualifies for free or reduced lunch and nearly 22% of our students are students with disabilities.

Alvarado operates with the conviction that all students need and deserve high quality learning experiences and instruction. It is a commitment to inclusiveness and equity for its highly diverse community. It is understood that when people feel respected, their hearts are light and minds are open to learning. For this reason, our classrooms

highlight how in this culture, students are allowed to thrive due to a rich, accessible curriculum, strong instructional practices, and supportive teams of adults. Alvarado is a learning community for students, staff, and families alike.

Our differentiated structures for professional learning and high-levels of self-reflection promote our commitment to Reading and Writing Workshop. Workshop teaching has been an Alvarado “Signature Practice” for the past 19 years; it has yielded many years of sustained growth and improvement in student achievement. As an instructional methodology, workshop teaching continues to be studied and refined to meet the needs of Alvarado’s student population.

This broad-based and inclusive approach to teaching and co-existing has been the seed for Alvarado’s sustained improvement. Alvarado understands and practices the ongoing commitment necessary for true and lasting success, and so, in every year since first implementing our signature practices, Alvarado’s Professional Learning Community has dedicated resources to providing professional development, creating inclusive classroom and school environments, aligning instruction to shifting standards, and training and supporting staff.

Alvarado has established itself as an ever more relevant model of a successful school.

## **Model Program and Practices**

Name of Model Program/Practice: Reading and Writing Workshop

Length of Model Program/Practice: 8+ years

Target Area(s): Closing the Achievement Gap

Target Population(s): 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, Data-Driven Decision Making, Professional Development

## **Description**

To close the achievement gap among ALL students, teachers need to have the structure of workshop teaching in place so that they can differentiate their instruction and gather authentic assessment data to guide their daily instruction. Students benefit from teaching that offers direct instruction, guided practice, and independent practice. Workshop teaching has key components, for Reading or Writing, which are: Mini-lesson, Conferring/Independent Work time, Mid-workshop Interruption and Share.

Reading and Writing workshop occur at two separate times of the instructional day but follow the same sequence:

Mini-lesson: During a 10 minute mini-lesson, students learn a (reading/writing) skill and strategy which is modeled by their teacher. Students then have an “active” go at the skill and strategy using their own book or writing piece. At the end of the mini-lesson, students are sent off to have independent work time where they practice the skills and strategies strong readers or writers use.

Conferring/Independent Work Time: During this independent work time, the teacher conferences with individual students, meeting them at their individualized level. The teacher teaches the student another skill and strategy, supports the work they are trying or acts as a coach to the student. More importantly, teacher takes anecdotal notes on what has been taught and next steps for each student, thus developing lines of growth/learning goals. These lines of growth are tracked and connect each conference over time and increase the targeted individualized instruction. This is the cornerstone to moving student’s proficiency in language arts.

Mid-workshop Interruption: While students are working independently, the teacher will “interrupt” the class to highlight, reinforce or remind students of skills/strategies used by strong readers and writers. Most often a student is highlighted as an exemplar Reader or Writer for their use of strategy or skill application.

Share: To conclude the workshop time, the class gathers on the rug to discuss and highlight the important work students engaged in that moves them towards becoming stronger readers and writers. During this crucial class gathering, a student is purposefully selected to highlight a need seen in the classroom based on observational and/or conference data. Achievement gaps among ALL students are narrowed because teachers have structured into their instructional day opportunities to research and study their students as readers and authors. They are then equipped to teach the reader and writer not the reading and writing.

## **Implementation and Monitoring**

Life-long learning and professionalism have been a prevalent characteristic of the teaching staff at Alvarado. It has established an Instructional Leadership Team that is responsive to the needs of the staff and collaborated on professional development. The entire staff engaging in collaborative learning activities such as peer coaching around practices that solidify the implementation of Reading and Writing workshop. The study of one component of workshop impacts how the students’ needs will be individually met.

Using the structures of Professional Learning Communities to support Alvarado’s focus on Reading and Writing workshop, the planning for professional development had to evolve. Different structures for staff learning were developed to meet their collective and individual professional growth needs. These included: Whole Staff PD, Grade Level work, Sub-release (In depth work), Lesson Study, Mentor/Coaching and Collaborative Inquiry (across school sites). These structures for how the staff met was drastically different from the past practice of 4 staff meetings a month to meet in a whole group or in grade level teams. The missing component to push instructional practice was individual professional development opportunities. In response to the absence of

individualized learning opportunities, the staff welcomed the formation of Focus Partners, Mentoring and Coaching and participating in Lesson Study teams. In each of these structures, there was embedded time to reflect, create and collaborate around the teaching of Reading and Writing Workshop.

In order to maintain the high levels of professional learning, a model of sustainability of has been devised at Alvarado. Over the last decade, Alvarado has built a professional partnership with Cotsen Foundation- The Art of Teaching and has been designated as a demonstration school for Reading and Writing Workshop. The partnership has created an atmosphere at Alvarado Elementary where “teaching is a public act”. 9 times a year, outside eyes visit classroom to participate and learn methodology aligned with workshop teaching. As a demonstration school, Alvarado’s advanced teaching staff design and present Reading and Writing Institutes. These Institutes serve as staff development to novice and experienced teachers and principals in Long Beach Unified and outside of the district. We have maintained our status as a teaching school and continue to be “leading practitioners” of the workshop methods from Teacher’s College and prepared for the coming shifts of ELA Common Core. To continue our professional development needs, Alvarado has created an Instructional Leadership Team composed of 4 teachers. These teachers have committed to collaborating, studying, and creating content to support our site professional development needs and continued presentations as a demonstration school.

## **Results and Outcomes**

Alvarado is doing an excellent job of improving student achievement in English Language Arts. SBAC results show there are essentially no achievement gaps among ALL students and significant subgroups. The data for All students on SBAC indicate that 63% of students met or exceeded the standards compared to 57% of Hispanic students; the largest subgroup at Alvarado. While this represents an eleven percent increase for all students, the hispanic subgroup demonstrated a higher increase at fourteen percent. Additionally, Alvarado tracks student growth over time by progress monitoring reading levels for each student. The common assessments are unique to the site and are used not only as a means to inform needs, but are used as a formative assessment strategy to inform instruction.

The results from Alvarado’s summative and formative assessments are consistent with the efforts that have been coordinated to elevate teacher practices in Reading and Writing Workshop. In each of the K–5 classes, students are taught various ways to find topics they wish to write about and ways to structure their writing to fulfill a genre and elaborate using a range of techniques, including using literary language. In addition, students use the conventions of written language, taught both within Writing Workshop and outside of the workshop time. They learn to make purposeful decisions about their reading and writing and begin to set an agenda for themselves in conjunction with their teacher. Alvarado’s strong writing instruction has created AUTHORS. The Alvarado Authors are found across grade levels. Students celebrate published pieces during “Author Celebrations”. Students within a grade level meet together and read each other’s pieces and give specific feedback verbally or on post its. Celebrations include

students, teachers, family/parents, students from other grade levels, and community members. Writing and reading are joined processes, and students learn best when writing and reading instruction are coordinated. By matching the genres of reading and writing, informational reading with informational writing, instruction is more cohesive for students and teachers. Students studying “informational reading text features” during reading workshop will then apply those same text features in their own informational writing.

Alvarado students have built up their stamina, in reading and writing. They are moving beyond the basics and are experiencing the “4 C’s”, the power skills necessary as a 21 century learner through the use of Reading and Writing Workshop: Communication, Collaboration, Critical Thinking and Creativity.