

Gabriella Charter School Model Programs and Practices

School Information

CDS (County District School) Code: 19647330108886

County: Los Angeles

District (Local Educational Agency): Los Angeles Unified

School: Gabriella Charter School

Demographics

Enrollment: 329 students

Location Description: Urban

Title I Funded: Yes

Type of Program: School-wide

School Calendar: Traditional

Charter: Yes

Overview

Gabriella Charter School is a high-performing K–8 public charter that serves 435 low-income students in the Echo Park community (with 329 students in TK–6). GCS was founded in 2005 as a sister organization of the Gabriella Foundation, whose program everybody dance! provided low- or no-cost, high-quality dance classes in the Pico Union neighborhood of Los Angeles. Gabriella Charter intended to amplify the positive impacts seen on the school performance of everybody dance! participants by offering daily dance instruction in a structured academic setting. Unlike schools offering a few arts classes a week, or offering arts as an elective to a select group of students, GCS commits to providing all students with an hour of daily high-level dance instruction. Uniquely, academic content is also reinforced through the mediums of dance and movement both in the dance studio and in academic classrooms.

Approximately 85% of GCS's elementary students fall below federal poverty guidelines. The elementary student population is approximately 89% Latino, 3% Asian, 3% African-

American, 3% White, and 2% Filipino. Almost 70% of students speak a language other than English at home.

Our students have achieved academic results that expand their opportunities and demonstrate the power of combining rigorous academics with arts education. From 2006–2013, GCS's test scores each year exceeded the State's former 800 API target, making GCS one of Los Angeles' top-performing schools. In 2012, GCS was also named Charter School of the Year by the California Charter Schools Association and in 2013, our school was ranked #2 among all California elementary and middle charter schools by USC's prestigious School Performance Dashboard. In 2016, GCS was awarded the California Gold Ribbon Award - along with the California Title 1 Academic Achievement Award and Exemplary Arts Program Award. GCS was also named to the California Honor Roll for our work in closing the achievement gap that same year. Since 2015, GCS has exceeded District and State averages in both English language arts and mathematics on the Smarter Balanced assessment, demonstrating the power of our arts-infused instructional model.

A structured environment, a highly-qualified and committed staff, an engaging curriculum, and a partnership with parents have contributed to a positive school culture with a minimum of behavioral issues. This strong student culture and high level of engagement for both students and parents are indicated by an ADA rate of approximately 97% (17–18 year-to-date), over 8,000 parent engagement hours completed by parents during the last school year, a low rate of suspensions and expulsions (0.4% in 16–17), and a high English learner reclassification rate (over 25% in 16–17).

Model Program and Practices

Name of Model Program/Practice: Literacy Response to Intervention and Instruction

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

Description

Over the past 2.5 years, GCS has designed and implemented a unique literacy response to intervention and instruction model that combines direct service to students

with teacher coaching and professional development to achieve successful implementation of Common Core-based instruction in English language arts. The goals of this program are:

- Ensure that all students - especially those in tiers 2 and 3 for ELA - demonstrate proficiency and/or growth in literacy achievement, as measured by nationally benchmarked assessments (e.g. Fountas and Pinnell), and the ELA SBAC exam
- Narrow of the ELA achievement gap between subgroups and the general population, as measured by increases in the number of these students meeting proficiency and/or growth goals in literacy

In 2013, faced with the challenge of implementing and integrating Common Core while maintaining high levels of student achievement and teacher development, the Gabriella Charter community created a literacy response to intervention and instruction support model centered around additional direct services to lower-achieving readers, as well as teacher coaching and professional development led by a literacy specialist. Although the components of the program have been revised slightly based on data and teacher feedback, the two key elements of the model are:

Tier 3 Direct Literacy Services to Students

Although literacy instruction had transitioned somewhat to Common Core standards by the spring of 2015, student data (both SBAC and internal) indicated that students' literacy proficiency was not meeting our charter goal. Teachers and administrators also felt that an additional support was needed to provide our lowest-achieving readers with direct supports to help them make literacy gains.

In the 2015–2016, GCS created the Literacy and Intervention Specialist (LIS) position, whose role would serve 4th through 8th grade readers during the school day to help close literacy gaps in our student population. In 2016–2017, GCS added an additional Primary Literacy Aide to help tier 2/3 primary students make literacy gains. Together, the literacy specialists analyze reading data (i.e., Fountas and Pinnell) and plan data-aligned interventions to help move tier 3 (and select tier 2) readers to the next level of reading development.

Teacher Coaching and Support for Tier 1/2 Reading Instruction

Although the LIS was charged with providing direct interventions to our highest-need readers, both SBAC and internal data indicated that our teaching team had room to grow to provide a first best instruction to all students and differentiate instruction for struggling readers.

The LIS spends approximately 30% of her time analyzing literacy data, coaching teachers both in groups and individually, and providing professional development in ensuring tier 1 instruction (including related small group differentiation for students) targets the needed standards and skills our readers need to gain in proficiency.

Implementation and Monitoring

Implementation of our direct service and coaching/professional development model began in the fall of 2015, and the program continues to develop today. Each year has seen both planned expansions of the program and adjustments based on monitoring student data - including input from teachers.

In 2015–2016, GCS hired a Literacy and Intervention Specialist (LIS), who tiered each K–8 reader on a reading “tieramid” based on their Fountas and Pinnell reading level. Those students who were two or more grade levels behind were considered tier 3 readers, and tier 3 students in 4th–8th grade were provided with in-school targeted literacy interventions in multiple sessions each week. The LIS both designed interventions to meet the needed reading skill, as well as implemented literacy interventions from the Leveled Literacy Intervention (LLI) kits that are aligned to Fountas and Pinnell data.

The LIS assessed students’ Fountas and Pinnell levels a minimum of every six weeks to ensure literacy growth. Data also informed next steps for instruction (e.g., focusing on decoding versus a comprehension skill to move to the next level). The LIS also coached the classroom steps on next steps for tier 2/3 students during tier 1 instruction.

In addition to working directly with tier 3 (and some tier 2) students, the LIS designed and implemented professional development and coaching cycles to support tier 1 instruction for 3rd through 8th grade teachers. Professional development and coaching centered around using assessment - particularly how to analyze conference data to create literacy strategy groups to grow literacy skills.

In 2016–2017, GCS continued with the literacy response to intervention and instruction program and hired an additional Primary Literacy Aide, who worked with the LIS to provide direct services to primary students who were not meeting literacy targets. In addition to monitoring Fountas and Pinnell targets, the literacy specialist team also considered CORE phonics assessment results to support phonics development with our younger students.

Professional development and coaching continued and was focused on curriculum rollout for Readers’ Workshop in 3rd–5th grades to ensure that tier 1 instruction supported rigorous learning goals - as well as how teachers could support tier 2 students through small group instruction daily in the classroom.

The ELD instructor and RSPs additionally collaborated with the LIS and classroom teachers on ensuring the language supports and learning accommodations were aligned to Fountas and Pinnell reading target goals.

In 2017–2018, the LIS has continued in the established literacy support model, but has pivoted to providing new teacher supports to K–3 in tier 1 instruction to close the achievement gap in students’ earliest years of instruction.

Results and Outcomes

Data from the Smarter Balanced assessments indicate our 3rd–8th grade students' performance from 2014–2015 school year (when we did not have the literacy response to intervention and instruction program) through the 2016–2017 school year (having had two years of our literacy response to intervention and instruction program) has risen substantially, which Gabriella Charter attributes to the literacy response to intervention and instruction model.

In the first year of adding our literacy intervention program, our our literacy achievement rose from 55% meeting and exceeding standards to 69% meeting and exceeding standards. In our second year, 67% of students met and exceed standards in literacy.

Performance on our internal assessment (i.e., Fountas and Pinnell) complements SBAC data indicating the success of the school's instructional program in ELA. Both the number of students on grade level and the number of students making accelerated growth have increased since we established a literacy response to intervention and instruction model. In 2014–2015, for example, approximately 53% of our students were on grade level on our internal Fountas and Pinnell assessment; in 2016–2017, approximately 63% of our students were on grade level on the exam, with results attributed to our literacy response to intervention and instruction model.

The school's implementation of the literacy response to intervention and instruction program in 2015–2016 boosted performance in ELA, and the number of students significantly below grade level in reading (more than 1.5 years below grade level) decreased significantly as a result. In 2014–2015, for example, 8.9% of K–8 students were considered tier 3 readers by Fountas and Pinnell data; in 2016–2017, only 2.5% of students were in the tier 3 reading category.

Our literacy response to intervention and instruction model was designed based on student data - both qualitative and quantitative - as well as teacher input, which makes our program uniquely responsive to the needs of our school environment.