

Brainard Elementary School Model Programs and Practices

School Information

CDS (County District School) Code: 19647336016067

County: Los Angeles

District (Local Educational Agency): Los Angeles Unified

School: Brainard Elementary School

Demographics

Enrollment: 168 students

Location Description: Suburban

Title I Funded: Yes

Type of Program: School-wide

School Calendar: Traditional

Charter: No

Overview

Brainard Elementary students demonstrate a multitude of unique and multi-faceted needs that differ considerably from other elementary schools in the Los Angeles Unified School District. The percentage of students' living below the poverty level (84%) is more than twice the national average, and the number of students with special needs is one third of the school's student population (36%). Meanwhile, only 3% of Brainard students are identified as gifted. As a result of the unique and exceptional diversity of our students, Brainard's teaching staff realized a "one size fits all" cookie-cutter instructional program would not produce the levels of student success that the staff collectively strives to achieve.

With such diversity, small group instruction has been a feature of Brainard's program for the past several years. Teachers refine their practice regularly by attending curricular classes and workshops offered by LAUSD and outside organizations. Teachers attend

ongoing Arts and Technology workshops and trainings to better integrate daily opportunities for students to develop creativity, express individuality, and think critically.

When teachers were informed that Brainard was underserving gifted or talented students, they attended depth and complexity pedagogy training at USC to strengthen school-wide identification systems and to develop differentiated instructional supports. Last year, a general education teacher noticed some special abilities in a student with autism who spent part of his day in her class. As a result, his mainstreaming time continued to increase and he eventually moved from his special day class into general education. His new teacher partnered him with students with similar interests, noted his critical thinking skills and unique method of approaching problems, and referred him for GATE testing. The student was found eligible for GATE and now receives services and supports and is thriving.

Brainard emphasizes the development of students' social and emotional awareness. Teachers have found lessons on mind-body connection, breathing exercises, gratitude, and kindness lead to improved academic performance and expands student thinking across the disciplines. Brainard's student and leadership councils plan activities that emphasize community building and positive relationships.

For Valentine's Day, fifth graders visited war veterans and the elderly at a local convalescent hospital to sing songs, play games, and deliver cards made by the student body.

Brainard's model practice is a product of the collaboration and the dedication of our outstanding staff who establish high expectations for all and work as a team to tailor learning to each student's diverse needs.

Model Program and Practices

Name of Model Program/Practice: Responding and Adapting to Student Needs

Length of Model Program/Practice: 2–4 years

Target Area(s): Closing the Achievement Gap, Education Supports, Parent, Family, and Community Involvement, Professional Development

Target Population(s): Black or African American, Hispanic, White, Two or More Races, Socioeconomically Disadvantaged, English Learners, Students with Disabilities

Strategies Used: School Climate, 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

At Brainard Elementary, we believe that “Reaching all students depends on reaching each one.” (DiMartino, 2001). Our model practice encompasses research-based, specially designed differentiated instruction supported by professional development designed to nurture the whole child. Brainard’s commitment to providing general and special education students with personalized education is reflected in the innovative instruction that our teachers develop, our parents’ high rating on our School Experience Survey in the area of “creating a welcoming environment,” and in the everyday success we witness in students such as Nigel, a former student with ADHD. His need to move around prompted his teacher to try strategies including a simple wooden stool. He loved the stool and responded to the boundaries she formed with blue tape. Nigel completed more work than ever, and a Section 504 plan that included these strategies was written for him to support his success in middle school.

The model practice, responding and adapting to meet student needs, begins with teachers analyzing student data to guide planning and create differentiated instruction. Teachers incorporate critical thinking skills, Depth of Knowledge questions, and cognitively guided instruction into their lessons. They reflect upon each child’s learning style and proficiency level. Our teachers, trained in literacy instruction, value small group time. They search out standards-aligned materials that are matched with student interests, then assess for understanding, adjust instruction, and begin the cycle again.

Professional development, delivered by staff, LAUSD experts and outside groups, focuses on academic, social, and behavioral needs. Teachers collaborate during professional development and often during break time to discuss best practices that meet LCAP-aligned goals. One spirited discussion about how early literacy instruction links to future (SBAC) success prompted primary teachers to seek additional PD opportunities.

Leadership councils review behavior and attendance data to plan activities intended to raise attendance and cultural awareness such as Black History Day or I Like You Just the Way You Are Week.

Brainard’s limited funding has forced difficult budget decisions. This year, Title 1 funds supported paraprofessionals for small group instruction and a community representative for community relations and parent education. General funds were used to send teachers to depth and complexity training aligned to the Common Core, to provide a psychiatric social worker to counsel students, and to hire an attendance counselor to assist with chronic absences. Funds were also used to restore curricular trips to give students the opportunity to apply classroom learning to real-world experiences.

Parents contribute to goal setting during the Coffee with the Principal and leadership meetings. There are other forums for parents to voice ideas during an array of parent workshops.

Implementation and Monitoring

Brainard Elementary is unique because of its small general education population, large special education program, and significant number of students from socio-economically disadvantaged homes. While these factors may be considered challenges, our stakeholders believe they afford an opportunity for growth.

To implement our model practice, professional development and parent workshops provide staff and parents with the tools needed to move our students to success. Differentiation is key in meeting student needs. Assessment data guides small group literacy instruction as our early literacy program emphasizes the importance of phonological awareness to be successful readers throughout life. Teachers and paraprofessionals have received extensive training to provide targeted instruction.

Behavior support is another element of the model practice. Our students with autism are on the core curriculum. We give them skills to learn, grow, and eventually join general education classes. Positive behavior support is vital in ensuring students access the curriculum. District experts have provided training on behavior and social-emotional pedagogy so students develop positive peer relationships and learn to self-monitor.

Teachers design classroom spaces and individual behavior programs that create a positive and conducive learning environment. Many teachers use the online “Class Dojo,” program that motivates and monitors student behavior throughout the day and communicates the results with parents.

Our staff believes all students benefit from positive social-emotional learning. The MindUp program improves student engagement in learning and gives students strategies to destress and regain focus. Lessons teach students how to understand other perspectives, increase empathy, and drive positive and responsible decision making. Students learn the science of how their brains work and function in different situations, and how to calm their brains in stressful situations. Teachers and parents were trained by The Hawk Foundation so the program is implemented at school and home.

Partnering with parents is a cornerstone of the model practice. Our advisory councils offer parents opportunities to participate in school governance decisions, keep informed of school events, monitor school achievement, develop action plans, and collaborate in the budget process. We provide parents with opportunities to understand the curriculum and instruction that is happening in the classrooms and the tools for reinforcement at home.

Brainard’s stakeholder groups monitor student and school-wide achievement through the analysis of performance data, identification of strengths and needs, and modification of action plans to promote growth. During professional development, we take time to follow up and refine our past learning, share new learning with colleagues, and review data to analyze how our students are making progress toward our school goals.

Results and Outcomes

The implementation of our schoolwide model program has produced positive results in relation to student outcomes. In 2015, our overall SBAC scores indicated that 16% percent of our students met or exceeded grade level standards in ELA, while 15% of our students met or exceeded grade level standards in Mathematics. As a result of this data, teachers began a more in-depth study and analysis of the Common Core State Standards that allowed them to more effectively implement our model practice.

As a result of our reflection, instructional plan, and the greater alignment of supports to address individual student's learning gaps, Brainard has experienced significant growth in the percentage of students meeting/exceeding standards on the Smarter Balance Assessment Cumulative (SBAC) over a three-year period. The percentage of grade 3–5 students scoring met/exceeded in English on the SBAC increased 36 pts. between 2014–15 and 2016–17 while the percentage of students scoring “standard not met” decreased 39 pts. over the same period. Brainard's teachers are especially proud of the significant gains made by students eligible for special programs. Between 2014–15 and 2016–17, students with special needs demonstrated a 28-pt. growth in the percentage meeting/exceeding standards. Socio-economically disadvantaged students increased 39 pts. and English learner students demonstrated a gain of 22 pts.

The percentage of students scoring met/exceeded in Math on the SBAC increased 28 pts. between 2014–15 and 2016–17 compared to the LEA elementary average of a 6 pts. increase. Students with special needs demonstrated a 32 pt. gain in the percentage meeting/exceeding standards. Socio-economically disadvantaged students increased 31 pts. and English learner students demonstrated a gain of 22 pts.

The SBAC results have been shared with our stakeholders. Teachers have discussed how the implementation of our model practice has impacted all learners and what additional steps need to be taken in order to increase the number of students who are meeting or exceeding the standards. Throughout the school year, teachers meet regularly to discuss the results of ongoing district assessments, such as DIBELS and interim SBAC assessments. Professional developments are designed to target areas of concern.

At Brainard, we firmly embrace the words of Vicki Gibson, “The instructional purpose, content, method of delivery (teaching), and feedback must be student-focused in order to differentiate instruction.” Therefore, all teachers set aside a minimum of 30 minutes daily to ensure that students are getting targeted small group instruction. To facilitate this instruction, classroom teachers, the resource teacher, and paraprofessionals each oversee a small group's instruction.

Brainard teachers are committed to the success of each individual student. Continued implementation of our model practice should yield positive results for all learners.