

## **POTRERO HEIGHTS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL Model Programs and Practices**

### **School Information**

CDS (County District School) Code: 19648086020630

County: Los Angeles

District (Local Educational Agency): Montebello Unified

School: POTRERO HEIGHTS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

### **Demographics**

Enrollment: 379 students

Location Description: Urban

Title I Funded: Yes

Type of Program: School-wide

School Calendar: Modified

Charter: No

### **Overview**

Potrero Heights Elementary (PHE) has a history of academic excellence. In 2006, we were named a California Distinguished School; in 2007 we were named an Achieving School. We received the California Honor Roll Award in 2009, 2010, 2015, and 2016. We strive to empower our students with the skills and values, both academic and personal, to succeed in college and career. We are dedicated to providing each student with a safe, organized learning environment and a curriculum that is challenging and developmentally appropriate.

Located in the southeastern region of South San Gabriel, PHE serves students from Transitional Kindergarten to Fifth Grade, including a special day class. South San Gabriel is an unincorporated area of Rosemead with a total population of approximately 8,885 people and a median annual household income of \$64,474. South San Gabriel is quite diverse in its cultural make-up. PHE is a unique learning environment that is reflective of the community, servicing students from families with more than 15 different

dialects. The ethnic composition at PHE is Hispanic (67.7%), Asian (21.4%), Multi-Racial (5.5%), Caucasian (3.6%), and African-American (1%).

As of October 4, 2017, 384 students were enrolled with approximately 67% qualifying for free or reduced price meals. PHE has 12% of students who are receiving special education services and 25% who qualify for English Language Learner (ELL) support. Gifted and talented students comprise less than 1% of the student population. Parents support our efforts and generously volunteer their time in excess of 3,000 hours per year. The Parent Teacher Association (PTA) works tirelessly to raise funds for much needed computer programs, field trips, supplies, and assemblies. Annual events offered bring families together to support their children's socio-emotional and academic growth.

Our CAASPP test score results for the 2016–2017 school year were as follows:

English Language Arts (ELA; overall for grades 3–5):

- 35.59% Standard Exceeded
- 27.03% Standard Met
- 19.37% Standard Nearly Met
- 18.02% Standard Not Met

Math (overall for grades 3–5):

- 30.32% Standard Exceeded
- 26.24% Standard Met
- 29.41% Standard Nearly Met
- 14.03% Standard Not Met

The California English Language Development Test (CELDT) results for the 2016–2017 school year are as follows:

- 12.9% Advanced
- 26.7% Early Advanced
- 38.6% Intermediate
- 16.8% Early Intermediate
- 5% Beginning

Our CAASPP scores were the highest in the district. We attribute that success to our outstanding teachers who collaborate frequently and use effective strategies for instruction. The Excellence in Writing Program and the Reading Incentive Program are part of daily instruction and have motivated our students to excel.

Our school community works together to inspire and instill the love for learning in all students, with an attitude of continuous improvement, high expectations, and a positive, nurturing school climate.

## Model Program and Practices

Name of Model Program/Practice: Excellence in Writing Program

Length of Model Program/Practice: 2–4 years

Target Area(s): Chronic Absenteeism and Dropout Prevention, Closing the Achievement Gap, Parent, Family, and Community Involvement, Professional Development, Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics, Use of Technology

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, Small Learning Communities, Parent Engagement, Data-Driven Decision Making, Health Support, Social/Emotional/Behavioral Support, Professional Development, Implementation of Academic Standards Basics (Teachers, Instructional Materials, Facilities)

### Description

The Excellence in Writing Program was designed in 2015 to move students toward proficiency in writing, raise overall student achievement, and increase teachers' proficiency for writing instruction. This program was developed in response to assessment data showing numerous students at PHE scoring at the Standard Nearly Met level in ELA on the CAASPP and at the Intermediate level on the CELDT. Our goal was to raise student achievement and test scores. Funding for professional development and materials was allocated in 2016 and 2018.

The District's current ELA/ELD program has writing that is presented in a series of mini lessons. Writing instruction is taught but lacks depth and is given in small doses. A distinguishing characteristic of the PHE model, when compared to the District model, is the in-depth, explicit teaching of writing. Key components of the plan include writing prompts that tie into the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and the new ELA/ELD adoption. Multiple opportunities for writing practice in preparation for the CAASPP are given.

Teachers submit several class sets of writing samples through the year to the principal, who selects students for recognition at an assembly. Parents are invited to support their child's achievement and in so doing, become involved in their child's education.

Our program continues to evolve. As the year progresses, teachers meet to evaluate the effectiveness of writing instruction and determine adjustments to be made along the way. Data is collected to determine results with the goal of increased student performance. As teachers continue with writing instruction, they provide small group and individualized instruction and feedback on student work. They scaffold the learning for

ELLs and provide enriching vocabulary lessons. Upper grade teachers, trained in AVID strategies, are incorporating note-taking, annotating, and summarizing in their writing lessons. Kindergarten and first grade teachers begin instruction with sentence frames.

The Excellence in Writing Program benefits students from all groups including ELLs, GATE students, and students receiving special education services, by providing differentiated instruction in writing. The EWP enhances students' social-emotional and behavioral needs by fostering a sense of confidence in their abilities to write well and a sense of pride for their achievements. High academic achievement has become part of the PHE culture and is recognized as such by our parents and community. An unexpected outcome of the writing program is that students are taking pride in their work and are putting forth more effort in hopes of being recognized.

We believe, and our CAASPP test results have shown, that an emphasis on writing instruction improves overall student comprehension of pertinent subject matter and raises academic achievement, as writing is the power of thinking.

### **Implementation and Monitoring**

At PHE, our aim is to educate the whole child in academics, social interactions, attendance and behavior. Our school culture has a strong emphasis on high academic achievements and high standards. However, we recognize that there are other factors that influence student achievement.

PHE established a school wide discipline system, which includes levels of support built in to assist students' behavioral needs. Three behavioral expectations for students to follow are explicitly taught through lessons formulated by teachers, administrators and non-instructional staff: being respectful, responsible, and ready to learn. We focus on the positive and reward students for demonstrating desired conduct at school. We strive for a positive, safe school climate where communication with families is vital. Parents are notified with letters from the principal and announcements at parent meetings: School Site Council, PTA, and Title 1 meetings.

Integrated with the school wide discipline plan is the focus on school attendance. The establishment of a school wide attendance contest has motivated students to arrive on time daily and to be present in school, thus showing that students are responsible and ready to learn. Weekly updates on each classroom's attendance are shared with students during an assembly. Winning classes that spell out "Perfect Attendance" receive various incentives. Monthly Saturday School sessions held allow students to recover absences. Chronic absenteeism issues are addressed with meetings with parents and a representative from the District Attorney's office (ACT and SART) held a few times every year. Regular monitoring and communication with parents help to improve attendance and offer support to parents.

The Excellence in Writing Program has been successful with the assistance and cooperation of families. Daily attendance and good behavior at school is a prerequisite to our program. Teachers communicate regularly with parents via email, telephone

calls, messages, and conferences to engage parents to participate in and support our efforts at school and to be actively involved in each child's learning. Teachers hold conferences with parents to explain student achievement data and share strategies to support learning at home. Capacity building activities for parents include literacy events that educate parents on strategies and goals.

Capacity building activities for teachers include training in writing instruction from a consultant, classroom walk-throughs to observe colleagues, and designated teacher-planning time to review student data. Meaningful, timely feedback is provided to teachers from the principal based on the submitted class sets of writings and classroom observations. Monitoring and assessment methods being used to evaluate the effectiveness of instructional learning activities include classroom observation tools, principal feedback, rubrics to assess writing and CAASPP scores.

## **Results and Outcomes**

Data is being used during teacher collaboration meetings to examine students' strengths and weaknesses in writing. The goal is to develop strong writing skills in order to better prepare students for success in college and career. Teachers address deficits in writing when they meet in grade level teams. Assessment results from monthly writing submissions, the CAASPP, and the CELDT (now ELPAC) are used to evaluate the effectiveness of the program in relation to student outcomes. Writing rubrics and class grading sheets are regularly collected by the principal to monitor whole class progress. The purpose for this data collection is to ensure positive student progress and to determine the adjustments that need to be made to accommodate student needs.

An integral part of this data collection is to celebrate successes with students and their families. Awards are given to students who demonstrate excellence in writing. New this year is the award for "Most Improved Writer." This award is to recognize English Language Learners as they increase their knowledge of the English language. Several times per year, assemblies are held to recognize students for their writing abilities. As the school year progresses, more students per class are awarded for their written work. The number of awards in 2017–2018 school year has increased by 20% when compared to the 2016–2017 school year. The purpose of these assemblies is to provide motivation and encouragement to our students and their families. This leads to a sense of connectedness and parents feel welcomed to volunteer as evidenced by the excess of 3,000 hours of volunteer service each year.

English Language Learners in particular are targeted in order to advance their levels of English proficiency. Based on the Reclassification Rate and CELDT test results, we see a trend of more ELL students moving toward English proficiency. We have noticed that our ELLs are learning to communicate better and with clarity.

Reclassification rates from 2014–2017 have increased from 8, 3, 8, and 16 students, respectively. In 2014–15, the results indicated a great need to support the ELLs as 49% were in the Beginning and Early Intermediate levels and only 22% at the Early Advanced and Advanced levels. Since the Excellence in Writing Program began, PHE

has decreased the Beginning and Early Intermediate score levels to 22% and increased the Early Advanced and Advanced to 39.60%. CELDT results continue to show positive growth towards the levels of Early Advanced and Advanced.

The Excellence in Writing Program continues to progress to meet all student needs. We are proud of the overall progress our students have made.