

Julia B. Morrison Elementary School Model Programs and Practices

School Information

CDS (County District School) Code: 19648406021026

County: Los Angeles

District (Local Educational Agency): Norwalk-La Mirada Unified

School: Julia B. Morrison Elementary School

Demographics

Enrollment: 757 students

Location Description: Suburban

Title I Funded: Yes

Type of Program: School-wide

School Calendar: Traditional

Charter: No

Overview

Morrison Elementary School pledges to provide each child with a caring, positive, and safe learning environment while developing the academic, and social emotional skills to reach their maximum learning potential. Students are also encouraged to make safe, responsible, and respectful choices. An eagerness for learning is evidenced by increased student achievement and our commitment to Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) by our progressive staff. Our committed educators exhibit a shared vision, led by a respected principal, whose belief in distributed leadership promotes creative instruction and draws on the strengths of staff members.

Nestled in a neighborhood of small, well-kept homes on one side and industrial boulevards lined with motel housing on the other, Morrison, a TK–5 school, is situated south east of Los Angeles with a population of 757 students. It is a predominately Hispanic/Latino community, with a few other ethnicities represented in small percentages. Approximately 79% of our students receive free or reduced-price meals;

31% of our students are English language learners; and 28% of our students live in transitional housing. At Morrison, we embrace our diverse culture by ensuring educational equity through collaborative, creative, and innovative means.

At the core of Morrison's success lies teachers working in PLCs. We learn together--using research-based practices around responsive teaching and flexible grouping, sharing common learning goals, identifying essential standards and common assessment practices, and making data-based decisions together--strengthening collective teacher efficacy. We believe that through our collective actions, we can tend to all students' needs to lead the way in increasing student achievement.

At Morrison, we believe in providing an equitable education for all students. Based on the needs of our community, we pioneered a dynamic visual and performing arts program that has been sustained for over a decade. Early on, we piloted the 21st Century Learning program that is now used district-wide which has provided all students equal access to technology.

We understand that children develop and learn best in the context of a collaborative community where safety, health and well-being, and emotional security take priority. Our staff partners with the community through English Learner Advisory Council, parent education classes, and nutrition classes. We also provide health and food services to our families. Our two high quality after-school programs, After School Education and Safety Program and Academic Recreational Child Care serve over 100 students. We work in tandem with these services to remove barriers to learning, increase academic success, and help close the achievement gap.

Through all of our efforts, we are broadening students' worlds. As Joseph Renzulli says, "A rising tide lifts all ships." The Morrison tide continues to rise which enables all students to flourish!

Model Program and Practices

Name of Model Program/Practice: Morrison Elementary Professional Learning Communities

Length of Model Program/Practice: 8+ years

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

Target Population(s): American Indian, 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, Data-Driven Decision Making, Professional Development, Implementation of Academic Standards Basics (Teachers, Instructional Materials, Facilities)

Description

Morrison's PLCs amplify the NLMUSD's vision of using research-based practices as well as high quality teaching and learning to foster student academic achievement. While ninety minutes of collaboration time per month is allocated by the district, our staff has devoted approximately two additional hours per month to meet with our PLC groups.

Our PLC work at Morrison is guided by the work of Richard and Rebecca DuFour. A PLC Cycle lasts approximately 6–8 weeks. Upon conclusion of a cycle, students are given a common summative assessment. Results are reviewed and compared with the pre-assessment to determine student growth, areas of continued need, and next steps.

The following questions are used to ensure educational equity for all of our students:

What do we want students to know and be able to do?

Areas of focus for PLC cycles are determined by each grade level based on student needs as evidenced by test data.

Through our PLC work, we have found that standardized test data alone does not tell the true story of a student's needs. In all of our grade level PLCs, teams begin the PLC Cycle of Inquiry by looking at essential standards, analyzing student data, and creating SMART goals. Our analysis also factors in our students' social and emotional needs.

How will we know when they have learned it?

Teams work collaboratively to create common assessments. Rubrics are also created to determine mastery of the standards being taught during the cycle.

For example, our fourth grade team created rubrics to analyze students' answers to constructed response questions. Teachers wrote sample exemplar answers and used a 3-point scale to determine what was required of students to answer all parts of the question.

What will we do when they haven't learned it?

Interventions are created based on best teaching practices. Teachers share successful instructional strategies that their colleagues can replicate in their own classrooms. They also immerse themselves in professional reading, and research best practices to inform their teaching.

For example, our fifth grade team engaged in a recent cycle of inquiry regarding metacognitive reading strategies. Teachers used the Reader's Workshop model to gain

insight on best practices for whole group, small group, and one-on-one instruction. Teachers purchased and researched *A Guide to the Reading Workshop* by Lucy Calkins in order to acquire a deeper understanding of teaching reading through a workshop model.

What will we do when they already know it?

Students who are already meeting grade-level standards are provided with opportunities for accelerated learning.

Currently, this can be seen in our classrooms through collaborative group work, technology/project-based learning, solving real world problems, construction of viable arguments, and critiquing the reasoning of others. Our efforts have allowed for our high achievers to reach their maximum learning potential.

Implementation and Monitoring

Morrison's PLC journey dates back to 2003, eleven years prior to the district's implementation. At that time, the staff worked with consultant Jan Leight from Focus on Results, collaborating around student work and achievement through the "Faces to Data" framework. Through data analysis, the staff determined that our areas of focus were vocabulary instruction and intervention through small group instruction. While engaging in this work, we were able to close the achievement gap between our English Only and English Learner students, as evidenced on our CST scores.

During the shift from the CA State Standards to the Common Core State Standards, our PLC work evolved to help facilitate the instructional adjustments called for by the new standards. At that time, our site made the decision to fund the registration fees for over half of the staff to attend the PLC conference presented by Richard and Rebecca DuFour, founders of Solution Tree. The information gleaned from the conference was taken back to the staff, and we adjusted our practice based on our new learning, new standards, and the new demands placed on our students. Our Dean of Students worked with our PLC teams for two years to facilitate the Cycle of Inquiry around writing instruction. During this time, teachers unpacked the standards, learned the new curriculum, created SMART goals, common assessments, and rubrics. Teachers also became more comfortable having open and honest conversations surrounding student data and their teaching practices. This proved to be a great time of growth in our PLC implementation, as it empowered teachers to focus on not only the student learning, but our own learning as well; and thus, our true collective efficacy began.

When the District began its initial implementation of PLCs in 2014, our previous PLC work enabled us to continue our journey to sustain and refine our implementation. Following the Gradual Release of Responsibility Model, teams have now been given the charge to facilitate their PLCs and determine areas of focus. Teams currently share and rotate the PLC roles and responsibilities during meeting times. Our Cycles of Inquiry are now focused around the areas of Language Arts and Mathematics.

Our PLC teams regularly monitor our effectiveness using the PLC Collaboration Rubrics, created by Richard and Rebecca DuFour. The District has provided us with two opportunities for our PLC groups to be observed and evaluated by Chris Bryan from Learning Forward. While the expectation from the District is that our PLC groups be rated at the "Initiating" phase, our PLC teams were rated at the "Refining" to "Sustaining" phases. We were praised by Bryan for all of our efforts that led to us being well beyond the district's expectations. She acknowledged that we are a model that other PLCs in the district can follow as they begin implementation at their sites.

Results and Outcomes

Through a continuous commitment to implementing and refining our practice, our PLC work at Morrison has resulted in gains for all students. Our SBAC data has shown that we have made gains in both ELA and Mathematics. Our greatest area of growth has been in Mathematics. Our math scores in grades three, four, and five have consistently grown over the past three years. This achievement is unique to Morrison, as we are the only site in the district that has demonstrated this growth. While the district has set a goal of 5% growth in math proficiency on the SBAC per year, our site demonstrated a growth in proficiency of 10.9% from 2015–2016 to 2016–2017.

Our results are also evidenced by feedback that we have received from our PLC Consultant, Chris Bryan. After observing our PLC teams in action, she praised us for our high level of implementation and effectiveness. Specifically, she stated our teams are, "very collaborative, and have a high level of trust...[They] have created a strong culture of interdependence and responsibility for student learning." (C. Bryan, Morrison Elementary PLC Summary, 2017). As next steps, she encouraged us to share our work as a model for the NLMUSD as well as other districts by, "inviting other schools to observe our PLCs, applying to present at a national conference, and videotaping our PLC meetings to share with other schools." (C. Bryan, Morrison Elementary PLC Summary, 2017).

As a staff, the data and feedback reinforce the growth that we have seen in ourselves as PLC teams and as individuals. PLC teams share the responsibility for the teaching and learning of all of our students at Morrison. Collaborative conversations around student work and achievement have increased as we have become more comfortable sharing our data, students, and strategies. Teachers have reached out for help from their colleagues and have observed one another through Lesson Study Cycles to learn new techniques and strategies to promote student success.

Through self-observation and feedback from our PLC consultant, we have determined next steps to continue our journey towards educational equity for all students. To support our high achievers, we will continue to work on researching and trying-on best practices for accelerating students who are achieving grade level standards. While PLCs exist within grade level teams, we see the value in aligning our work school-wide. Our goal is to expand our PLC work vertically across grade levels to allow for alignment of the curriculum, and to build an even greater capacity for reaching all of our learners. Through our never-ending commitment to student success, it is our hope that our PLC

work will fulfill the vision of Richard DuFour: "The fundamental purpose of school is learning, not teaching" (R. DuFour, Learning by Doing).