Arroyo Vista Elementary School
Model Programs and Practices

School Information

CDS (County District School) Code: 19650296022768

County: Los Angeles

District (Local Educational Agency): South Pasadena Unified

School: Arroyo Vista Elementary School

Demographics

Enrollment: 732 students

Location Description: Suburban

Title I Funded: No

School Calendar: Traditional

Charter: No

Overview

Arroyo Vista is an elementary school with a strong academic foundation, a parent community that is talented and actively involved, a faculty professionally skilled and personally committed to meeting the needs of all students, and a student body motivated to perform well. AV's administrators, teachers, students, and parents have embraced the Common Core State Standards and continually strive to excel. Our school community models the importance of educating the "whole" child. Our perseverance in academic excellence has been demonstrated by a steady increase in our standardized test scores, putting our school and district in the top 5 schools and districts in California.

AV's Mission is to provide a nurturing and stimulating learning environment for children of many backgrounds so that each child becomes a literate and productive citizen of our multicultural society. Our school is located in the City of South Pasadena, a community of approximately 25,619. The school and community are committed to supporting all students to be prepared for the world beyond our small town. The student population reflects the ethnic and cultural diversity of Southern California. Our goal is to inspire,

challenge, and empower all students to acquire the knowledge, skills, and values they need to become successful, responsible, and caring citizens in a diverse society, to become global citizens.

Our campus, like our city, maintains a small-town family-feeling. Through a strong partnership with our parents and community, we have been able to successfully develop a comprehensive educational program that celebrates and promotes ethnic and cultural diversity, individuality, and emotional, intellectual, and social growth. We are widely supported by our greater community, resulting in a dedicated team bound together by our core values of respect, integrity, and diversity. Our core values are integrated into our monthly awards program, lessons within the classroom, our school-wide core values reading program, and the blue slip program of positive incentives. Our staff is committed to building students who are caring and compassionate, but still resilient and strong. They need to be flexible, creative problem solvers who are proactive and can communicate effectively. We know that these are the skills 21st-century learners need in the workplace and in life. However, we know that these skills cannot just be taught, they need to be experienced. Our students need to learn by doing in engaging and meaningful ways.

At AV our staff has worked tirelessly to stay current with educational trends, to seek out best practices, and to be lifelong learners ourselves. Teachers, staff, and administrators act on the principle that students come first. The educational programs at the school are tailored to meet the needs of each student. Arroyo Vista Elementary School is dedicated to ensuring the academic success of every student and providing the most comprehensive educational experience.

Model Program and Practices

Name of Model Program/Practice: Project Based Learning

Length of Model Program/Practice: 2–4 years

Target Area(s): Closing the Achievement Gap, Professional Development, Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics

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: Data-Driven Decision Making, Professional Development

Description

AV implements the Buck Institute for Education’s Project Based Learning (PBL) model. It is a teaching method that engages students in learning through an inquiry process, structured around what the Buck Institute refers to as, “authentic questions and carefully designed products and learning tasks.” When SPUSD began its transition to the CCSS,

the staff was eager to find an effective method for teaching standards-based knowledge, understanding, and skills to students while integrating critical thinking. We discovered that PBL is an effective and enjoyable way to meet the need of engagement while ensuring mastery of the standards. In PBL the teacher plays the role of a facilitator, working with students to frame questions, structuring meaningful tasks, coaching both knowledge development and social skills, while assessing what students have learned through the experience.

We choose The Buck program as the perfect fit to model our practice after to make school-wide shifts in our instructional practices. The program focused on how to design, assess, and manage projects that engage and motivate students. The training brought coherence to our practices across grade levels. Teachers work collaboratively to design projects that embrace complex tasks that involve students in decision-making based on challenging questions or problems.

Our goal is to engage students in their learning while integrating communication, creativity, collaboration, and critical thinking skills into standards-based long-term plans. Teachers realized there was a need for students to be evaluated not only on their outcomes, but also on their collaborative, negotiating, planning, and organizational skills because, in the future, students would enter a workforce in which they will be judged on their performance. We anticipated that PBL would result in a higher level of student mastery, measured by project scores and standardized testing. This approach not only challenges students to see things from different angles but also teaches to the broad spectrum of learning styles within the classroom.

Parents and community members were excited by our commitment to PBL. As our Kindergarten students navigated their way through a PBL arachnid project grounded in a Next Generation Science based inquiry, parents appreciated the enthusiasm their of children and the rich vocabulary they were using.The community became involved when a local business provided a presenter who shared real-world expertise with the students.

AV is a diverse and high performing school. With high expectations for all, instructional content, process, and products are differentiated to meet individual needs, interests, and strengths to accelerate learning for every student. PBL allows students of varying abilities to work together and share strengths. Students are empowered to make choices in their learning. Projects provide students with opportunities to make a difference, by solving real problems and issues.

Implementation and Monitoring

We believe that the outcome of PBL is that our students will be more engaged in the learning process, leading to a greater understanding of the content, deeper learning, and increased motivation to learn. It challenges students to reach their academic potential through in-depth investigations while accessing their multiple intelligences. We use PBL units as a key strategy for creating engaged, independent thinkers, and learners. Parents are provided with rubrics, access to information online through

classroom websites, and shared Google Docs. Parents and community members have also been invited into classrooms to share their expertise when applicable to a project. Parent feedback has reported that PBL has helped their child to gain valuable skills and collaborative experiences that will build a strong foundation for their future.

We have monitored the program through a variety of means. Grade level teams of teachers met to design PBL opportunities that allow students to solve real-world problems by designing their own questions, planning their learning, and organizing their research, as well as creating a product. As teachers facilitated the projects with their students, they would reflect on the process and share during meetings. The staff agreed that students flourished under this child-driven, motivating approach to learning. The principal monitored the program through classroom visits, during which she would interact with the students to gain insight into how their projects were going and the direction they were taking. As the grade level teams developed PBL units, they utilized a web-based file sharing resource to share content. Using informal and formal assessment data collected from students, teachers were able to evaluate their projects using the Buck Institute's project design rubric. Teachers saw the need to find or develop a different PBL experience for their students that addressed the NGSS. Through a collaborative process, the teachers agreed that they wanted to implement Launch units from Project Lead The Way. To date, all teachers have gone through readiness training and specific core training and are ready to implement their PLTW Launch units.Teachers will continue to receive training throughout the implementation.

The process of receiving PBL training from the Buck Institute, sharing knowledge during meetings and the developing and sharing of resources has built capacity within our staff. Our teachers worked collaboratively to design projects that embrace complex tasks that involve students in decision-making based on the challenging questions or problems presented to them.In addition to the aforementioned monitoring practices, the effectiveness of instructional learning activities in the model is evaluated through student performance in formative, summative and standardized assessments. Students are given opportunities to build on prior knowledge and see connections between various subjects and contexts.

Results and Outcomes

According to a research review by The Autodesk Foundation, studies have shown that project-based learning is linked to "significant" improvements in student test scores, attendance, and classroom engagement. While monitoring and assessing our program, we are continuously focusing on student outcomes. We analyze assessment data at the beginning of the year to develop the appropriate curriculum. Our teachers have collaboratively created rubrics for each project's major product. The rubrics are written to help teachers assess specific standards and acknowledge when students demonstrate mastery and meet standards. PBL has helped students understand content more deeply and remember what they learn in a more meaningful way. Because of this, we have discovered that students who gain content knowledge through PBL are better able to apply what they know and can do in new situations. Students develop skills through PBL that will aid them in becoming productive members of a

global society. We have found that students showed proficiency at generating plans and carrying out procedures using PBL. However, we also discovered our students had difficulty generating meaningful questions and managing time.

Positive results for student outcomes are demonstrated by quantitative data such as multi-year CAASPP results, interim assessment results, classroom summative assessments, portfolios, and projects. Our data has been mostly qualitative in nature. We collected data based on teachers' interactions with students, reflective conversations during collaborative staff meetings, and informal observations. Our quantitative data is reflected in multiple year results of our CAASPP data. In 2016–2017 CAASPP, 85% of our students met or exceeded standards in ELA and Math. On the CST 84% of our fifth graders scored proficient/advanced. This validates that all our students are mastering their grade level content and in turn closing our achievement gap. After analyzing our students' science scores, our school has determined the need to incorporate the NGSS into new PBL projects to ensure our students science scores continue to accelerate. While analyzing student data, we also realize, many of the skills gained through PBL are not measurable through standardized tests. With each project, students acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to tackle new areas of learning with confidence. Although we measure student performance via rubrics, a critical aspect of the PBL model includes self-evaluation and reflection. As part of the assessment, students reflect on how well they worked in a collaborative group and how well they contributed, negotiated, listened, and welcomed other group members' ideas. Students also self-evaluate their own projects, efforts, motivations, interests, and productivity levels. They are becoming critical friends by giving constructive feedback, which helps them become aware of their own strengths and improve on their interactions with others.