Mesa Robles School
Model Programs and Practices

School Information

CDS (County District School) Code: 19734456014294

County: Los Angeles

District (Local Educational Agency): Hacienda la Puente Unified

School: Mesa Robles School

Demographics

Enrollment: 1,082 students

Location Description: Urban

Title I Funded: Yes

Type of Program: School-wide

School Calendar: Traditional

Charter: No

Overview

Mesa Robles School is an exciting, unique, vibrant K–8 school nestled in the hills of Hacienda Heights, a suburban area of Los Angeles County. With students ranging from kindergarten to eighth grade, 1,080 pupils arrive each day to pursue knowledge, socialize, and grow.

The student population is demographically varied. Current demographic percentages are: Asian 45%, Hispanic 43%, Caucasian 3%, Other 9%. Our mission is to provide all students a positive learning environment with high expectations to reach academic goals and build character with an emphasis on respect, responsibility, and safety.

Our dedicated staff facilitate exemplary academic and enrichment programs that are provided during and beyond the school day. Mesa Robles offers outstanding programs in science, music and athletics. Our elementary Science Olympiad team earned a gold medal in Regionals in 2017 and a silver medal in Regionals in 2018. The Mesa Robles middle school Science Olympiad team finished first in Regionals and ninth in the state

of California in 2017. Mesa's robotics team has been recognized internationally and this year earned the teamwork award in Regional competition. Our full time music teacher provides regular music lessons for grades 4–8 culminating in musical productions showcased for our community. Our school wide music program builds a strong foundation in music appreciation and instrumental performance for Mesa Robles students. The middle school music program consists of three performing choirs which have earned numerous awards for talent and showmanship. There are four performing bands in middle school with over one hundred fifty students participating in local and state performances, often receiving superior ratings.

Our school-wide emphasis on physical education, has proven to be highly successful. In 2017, 81% of fifth and 93% of seventh grade students scored in the "healthy fitness zone" for state testing. For the twelfth straight year, Mesa Robles seventh graders have scored first or second place in the state of California.

High academic achievement is a hallmark for Mesa Robles. One model program which has contributed to our success is Thinking Maps (TM). Initially implemented in 2013 the focus has been on depth and breadth across all grade levels and content areas. TM are visual patterns. Each of the eight maps is aligned to a specific thinking process. The predictability of the TM structure and thought patterns support 21st century learners with critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication skills. TM are a common school-wide language at Mesa Robles, adding to the efficiency of instruction and learning. These tools allow students to individualize their thoughts in a unique personalized fashion to become independent critical thinkers. Teachers are able to focus on instructional content and cognition due to the consistent implementation of the visual representations that TM provide to all students.

Model Program and Practices

Name of Model Program/Practice: Thinking Maps

Length of Model Program/Practice: 5–8 years

Target Area(s): Closing the Achievement Gap, Professional Development

Target Population(s): Socioeconomically Disadvantaged, English Learners, Students with Disabilities

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

Description

Thinking Maps (TM) is a unique program with eight visual patterns based on a fundamental thinking process. The maps differ from graphic organizers in several

significant areas. TM are flexible but remain the same in format. Students create TM and customize them by quantity of content versus filling in a static predesigned graphic organizer. Thus, every student creates an individualized dynamic representation of various thinking processes. Once a student learns to create a map, the format remains the same for all future maps. Therefore, instructional time is maximized because students do not have to re-learn formats as they would with other graphic organizers.

TM are part of Mesa Robles' instructional program in all subject areas, at all grade levels, and by all teachers in grades K–8. For these reasons, TM build consistency and a common language throughout the school. Each map is connected to a particular thinking process. Students use critical thinking skills to identify the thinking process and then connect the process to a particular TM. The eight TM and thinking processes and are as follows: circle map for defining in context, bubble map for describing qualities, double bubble map for compare and contrast, tree map for classifying, brace map for part/whole, flow map for sequencing, multi flow for cause and effect, and bridge map for seeing.

TM were created based on scientific evidence-based research. TM are visual patterns consistent with brain research connecting information kinesthetically, auditorily, and visually. TM are intended to be used in combinations to build depth and complexity. For example, if a student is given the task to write a narrative he may begin with a brainstorming exercise using a circle map. From that information the student may develop a flow map to sequence events and add details before creating the first draft. Students can use multiple maps which will involve them in developing the various thinking processes used to generate a final product. Students using TM are regularly involved in critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication.

Real life application is added to TM with the inclusion of a frame of reference. The frame of reference is a metacognition frame that asks the learner to identify the source of their knowledge of a subject matter, identify what is influencing the information on their map, and articulate why is this information important. Using a frame of reference, students can cite evidence and justify rationale behind their thinking.

Teaching students to organize their thoughts in the form of graphic organizers is common practice among schools in HLPUSD. However, the expectation at Mesa Robles is for consistent implementation of a strategic, systematic process to develop critical thinking skills through the use of TM. Additionally, the frame of reference deepens students understanding and holds all students to high levels of academic achievement.

Implementation and Monitoring

In 2013–14, our leadership team identified a need for common schoolwide Professional Development (PD). The Leadership Team expressed a desire for supporting student learning with the added challenge of Common Core Standards and developing 21st century thinkers. The adoption of Thinking Maps (TM) ensured all students at all subject areas and all grade levels developed a consistent language for learning while fostering

metacognition. The leadership team recognized that a key component of any new initiative is sustainability. We needed well trained teachers to become site-based experts. We invited teachers across grade levels and content areas to attend a five day training titled Thinking Maps Trainer of Trainers. Six teachers, one administrator, and our Teacher on Special Assignment (TOSA) attended the training. The training was set up in two parts, allowing participants to pilot in their classrooms, prior to training the whole staff.

In the 2014–15 school year, all teachers attended a one day training in TM's presented by Mesa Trainer of Trainers. This presentation provided an overview of the eight TM, Frame of Reference, and connections to classroom instructional lessons and materials. For depth of implementation and fidelity, follow up professional development was essential. Therefore, all staff meetings contained TM training and teachers were provided with a TM binder.

Mesa Robles systematically presented TM, piece by piece. During each staff meeting, trainers of trainers taught one map in detail. Trainers referenced their PD, introduced the map using a classroom activity, had the teachers practice using the map and provided examples of the map across all grade levels in all subject areas. Teachers were required to teach the map to students over the next two weeks and bring student samples to the following meeting. TM samples were shared at gallery walks which set expectations for teachers to implement this program. Mesa's implementation process created a collaborative environment where teachers shared a common experience and language for learning. In 2016, three additional staff members completed the TM training, creating 13 highly qualified trainer of trainers at Mesa Robles. Mesa's depth of implementation and goal of sustainability was honored with a Gold Ribbon Award in 2016 based on the TM model practice.

Full implementation deepened in 2016–17 with TM being used as evidence during informal and formal classroom observations. In an effort to provide support for depth of implementation, our TOSA support was embedded. The site based TOSA collaborated with district TOSA's to provide PD aligned with intentionally embedding TM within the context of questioning design. TOSAs provided PD related to implementation of differentiated questioning strategies. In addition, TOSAs facilitated lesson studies with teachers designed to develop skills to challenge student's comprehension skills and stimulate critical thinking.

Results and Outcomes

Mesa Robles students in third through eighth grade scored above the district and state expectations in both Language Arts and Math on the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP) from 2014–17. Overall, for 2014–15 to 2016–17 in English Language Arts (ELA) CAASPP for grades 3 through 8, there was a positive gain of 21% and in Math the gain was 36% overall of students meeting or exceeding standards. In 2016–17, Mesa Robles' 3rd through 8th grade CAASPP scores in ELA ranged from 50% to 79% of students meeting or exceeding the standards. During 2016–

17, our district scores ranged from 34% to 56% and the state score range was 43.9% to 49.4%.

In 2016–17, Mesa Robles' 3rd through 8th grade CAASPP scores in Math ranged from 51% to 69% of students meeting or exceeding standards. During 2016–17, our district score ranged from 34% to 49% and the state score range was 33.83% to 46.83%. Site based analysis of student cohorts for 7th graders in 2014–15 to 8th graders in 2015–16 showed an increase of 19% in ELA CAASPP scores. Additionally, for 7th graders in 2015–16 to 8th grade in 2016–17, the cohort of students showed an increase of 19% in ELA CAASPP scores.

CAASPP data in elementary school show similar increasing trends. 48% of third grade students in 2014–15 met or exceeded standards on the ELA CAASPP. The same cohort of students in fifth grade scored at 76% in 2016–17. 52% of third grade students in 2014–15 met or exceeded standards on the Math CAASPP. The same cohort of students in fifth grade scored at 64% in 2016–17. 58% of fourth grade students in 2014–15 met or exceeded standards on the Math CAASPP. The same cohort of students in sixth grade scored at 68% in 2016–17. 57% of sixth grade students in 2014–15 met or exceeded standards on the Math CAASPP. The same cohort of students in eighth grade scored 67% in 2016–17.

Thinking Maps (TM) implementation is monitored during formal and informal observations, walkthroughs, grade level meeting minutes, leadership agendas, teacher Individualized development plans (IDP), student work samples, and classroom environments. During formal observations and IDP development, it is an expectation that teachers include Thinking Maps as a critical thinking strategy. Finally, feedback from formal and informal observations/visitations by administrators, site Teacher On Special Assignment (TOSA) and district TOSAs, and Leadership team provide support schoolwide consistency and maximize student achievement.

Through continual data analysis of ELA and Math CAASSP scores, elementary and middle school teachers consistently attribute increased results to Thinking Maps. Thinking Maps have become a familiar tool for students to built critical thinking, deepened understanding, and created systematic organizers to comprehend complex text, word problems, and create a framework for student writing.