

## **Wade Thomas Elementary Model Programs and Practices**

### **School Information**

CDS (County District School) Code: 21750026024731

County: Marin

District (Local Educational Agency): Ross Valley Elementary

School: Wade Thomas Elementary

### **Demographics**

Enrollment: 376 students

Location Description: Suburban

Title I Funded: No

School Calendar: Traditional

Charter: No

### **Overview**

Wade Thomas is one of four K–5 elementary schools in the Ross Valley School District. It is located in San Anselmo, a small town within commuting distance of San Francisco. Our student population draws from a community of professionals and artisans and from a nearby theological seminary. The community puts a particularly strong emphasis on performing and visual arts in addition to academic excellence.

Wade Thomas is a highly regarded school, with a history of high academic achievement and community involvement. The learning environment is positive; students are expected to be safe, respectful, responsible, and kind. Behavior expectations are clearly communicated and reinforced through weekly rewards and monthly assemblies. Teachers have a culture of collaboration, continued professional growth, and high expectations.

Wade Thomas envisions a program that cultivates compassionate, inquisitive, and reflective learners who are prepared to actively participate in a democratic society. We believe all children can learn, be successful, and contribute to a changing world. Our

mission is to provide comprehensive learning experiences based on best practices and creative teaching where students will:

- develop confidence in their ability to think for themselves, analyze a variety of situations, find creative solutions, and develop a love of learning,
- approach the world beyond their immediate community with a sense of respect, wonder and responsibility,
- be challenged to reach their highest learning potential within a rigorous academic context enriched by access to the arts, and
- become self-motivated, life-long learners.

Approximately 94% of our 376 students are primary English speakers. About 78% are Caucasian, 11% Hispanic, 8% multi-ethnicity, and 3% of Asian, African-American, and Filipino ethnicity. Families from all over the world come to study at the nearby seminary. Consequently, we have children from diverse cultures who speak languages other than English, mainly Korean and Spanish. This enriches our children's cultural experiences and gives greater depth to our multi-cultural studies. We prepare all year long to celebrate World Culture Month and International Day in the Spring to honor our multi-cultural backgrounds.

The curriculum is aligned with the California Common Core State Standards in ELA and Math and is transitioning to the Next Generation Science Standards. Instructional practices reflect current research on teaching and learning. Staff is continually engaged in analyzing assessment data and the effectiveness of the educational program.

Wade Thomas has consistently performed well on State assessments, receiving an overall API of 938 in both 2011–2012 and 2012–2013. In 2016–2017, eighty-four percent (84%) of our students met or exceeded standards on the CAASPP in English Language Arts; 81% met or exceeded standards on the CAASPP for Math. Wade Thomas has received the California Distinguished School Award, in 1989, 1997, and 2014.

## **Model Program and Practices**

Name of Model Program/Practice: Reader's and Writer's Workshop

Length of Model Program/Practice: 2–4 years

Target Area(s): Chronic Absenteeism and Dropout Prevention, Closing the Achievement Gap, Education Supports, Professional Development

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

In 2014–2015, Wade Thomas implemented Reader’s and Writer’s Workshop. This model of teaching and learning constitutes a substantive shift from the way ELA had previously been taught. The workshop model is student-centered, providing choice, differentiation, and active involvement of students as agents of their own learning. Workshop promotes student independence, critical thinking, academic discourse, and achievement in written and oral communication.

The Workshop model consists of mini-lessons, explicit teaching points, interactive read-alouds which engage students in strategic listening, thinking, and speaking about text, extended time for independent reading and writing, and a final debrief. During Workshop, students self-select writing topics and reading material based on their reading level and interests. They independently practice the reading and writing standards while teachers confer with them individually or in small groups to determine what they know and what they need to continue working on. Through checklists, reflection, and self-assessment, students actively direct their own learning.

At Wade Thomas, workshop is inclusive for all levels of learners; it is tailored for class and individual student needs. Teachers know each student as a reader and writer through frequent formative assessments and conferring and have created systems for collecting data and notes on students. Assessment guides whole class instruction and strategic, differentiated small-group instruction; notes ensure continuity when conferring with individual students. In order to address the needs of every student, grade level teams meet regularly to review data and plan instruction and interventions.

Grade level teams at Wade Thomas have developed CCSS-aligned Reader’s & Writer’s Workshop units integrated across different content areas. For example, students may read about an historical figure and write a first-person narrative from that person’s point of view, or they may select informational text on different animals while learning about habitats and adaptations.

Workshop minimizes teacher talk and maximizes the amount of time for practice and for conferring and coaching. This shift in teaching and learning has also expanded across the curriculum. For example, in math, teachers begin class with a brief number talk or demonstration followed by extended time for partner or group work on rich, open tasks and a final debrief in which students share strategies and reflect on what they learned. Teachers are able to tailor instruction based on their interactions with students, providing additional challenges or support as needed.

The implementation of Workshop at Wade Thomas has shifted instruction so that students take center stage. Our teachers have become classroom researchers, learning from their interactions with students as they move through meaningful tasks, engage in academic discourse, and experience academic success and the joy of learning.

## **Implementation and Monitoring**

Over the past four years, teachers have received extensive support in the implementation of Reader's & Writer's Workshop with professional development far beyond the "sit and get" model. The District hired two trainers who have provided ongoing coaching. Each time an element of Workshop was introduced, teachers observed coaches implementing that element in one of the Wade Thomas classrooms. After debriefing the experience, teachers then tried the strategy with their coach and colleagues present. This "Introduce-Model-Practice" format asked our teachers to take risks with their teaching and helped shift the culture of Wade Thomas towards increased job-embedded training, collaboration, and continuity.

Wade Thomas teachers were given time following each coaching session to work in grade level teams on implementation. They developed a repertoire of mentor texts and teaching points for each unit and toolkits for use in conferring. In addition, they have supported one another's ongoing professional development through teacher-led staff development during staff meetings and common release time for training and collaboration with colleagues. Teachers have regularly scheduled times each month to meet for analyzing student data, lesson planning, and sharing resources.

A critical step in implementing Reader's Workshop was developing classroom libraries of leveled texts. The Library Specialist assisted the teachers in identifying, ordering, and labeling books for their classrooms and for a central library. The Library Specialist is familiar with and assists students in selecting appropriate books for their independent reading and enjoyment.

A defining feature of the Workshop Model is extended time for students to work independently while teachers confer with individuals or small groups. During this time, teachers assess students and/or provide scaffolded support to move them forward. On any day, one can step into any classroom and see Workshop in progress. District and site administrators visit classrooms to see evidence of teaching points, anchor charts, students absorbed in reading and writing, and conferring taking place.

At Wade Thomas, we have a common assessment calendar and benchmark assessments for each trimester in reading and writing. Student progress is recorded in a shared Google document. Wade Thomas Kindergarten teachers piloted an online assessment tool - ESGI - which is now being used throughout the District. This allows teachers to easily monitor their students' reading progress and identify areas for targeted intervention.

Two Wade Thomas teachers serve on a District Instructional Leadership Team in order to develop internal capacity and expertise for the purpose of creating site- and grade-

level based leaders/coaches. They and District administrators conduct Instructional Rounds to observe teaching practices and identify areas for growth. Wade Thomas teachers willingly invite observers into their classrooms and welcome feedback.

## **Results and Outcomes**

Student achievement in ELA has shown steady increase since the implementation of Reader's & Writer's Workshop. The 5th grade cohort in 2017 showed growth on the CAASPP over the three years they have been tested; 89% met or exceeded standards; 0% scored in the lowest band of not meeting standards. Eighty-four percent of all students met or exceeded standards in ELA. SED students and students of Hispanic ethnicity had a significant increase in both ELA and Math. Students with disabilities also increased in ELA. The CA School Dashboard indicated Very High or High status for nearly all areas scored. Suspension rate, while already low, improved.

We have seen impressive gains on benchmark assessments. A sample group of students increased Lexile reading level by 154 on average, more than a typical year's growth. Because Workshop provides opportunities for teachers to understand individual student needs and provide targeted instruction, they are able to quickly identify those in need of more intensive intervention and refer them for additional support outside the classroom. Those students also have shown tremendous growth, raising Lexiles by an average of 104 in less than 3 months and making significant progress towards closing the achievement gap.

Each Spring, Wade Thomas conducts a parent survey. From the 2017 survey; 97% of parents reported their children like school, 96% said their children are improving in reading and writing, 86% felt their children are being challenged to their ability, and 92% indicated their child's teacher has an accurate understanding of his/her academic ability and needs.

Our teachers and Library Specialist have observed students reading more and enjoying it more. We believe this is because they are reading books at the appropriate level of difficulty and of personal interest. Students become deeply engaged in their writing and proudly share their work during publication celebrations to which we invite the community. At Wade Thomas, the third grade classes host an annual Poetry Cafe; tables are set up where parents enjoy refreshments and select from a menu of student-written poems to be read aloud.

In his work, John Hattie ranked effects of various influences on learning and achievement; practices with effect sizes greater than 0.40 lead to more than one year's growth in one year's time. Students' feedback to teachers about what they are learning - an integral part of conferring in Reader's & Writer's Workshop - has an effect size of 0.73. Workshop also helps improve the efficacy of teacher-student relationships (0.72), provides multiple opportunities for formative evaluation (0.90) and problem-solving teaching (0.61). In short, the Workshop model is designed to maximize impact. As a result, Wade Thomas students are developing into strong readers and writers. The

student-centered nature of Workshop makes teaching and learning more meaningful with students achieving a greater measure of success and enjoyment of learning.