

## **Acacia Elementary School Model Programs and Practices**

### **School Information**

CDS (County District School) Code: 30665066028005

County: Orange

District (Local Educational Agency): Fullerton Elementary

School: Acacia Elementary School

### **Demographics**

Enrollment: 697 students

Location Description: Suburban

Title I Funded: No

School Calendar: Traditional

Charter: No

### **Overview**

“Nothing motivates a child more than when learning is valued by school, family, and community working together in partnership,” writes Michael Fullan, author of *Results*. Acacia Elementary School is the quintessential example of just such a partnership. Nestled in a beautiful neighborhood on the edge of east Fullerton, Acacia Elementary School has been a part of the Fullerton School District since 1957. Our school can be easily identified by the large Ficus tree, referred to as the “Acacia Tree,” that grows at the entrance of our campus. This tree stands as a welcome beacon and greets all who visit our school.

The Acacia Elementary School staff is committed to the belief that all students can learn and achieve at high levels. Through the alignment to rigorous academic standards, outstanding instruction of curriculum, and collaboration with family, staff, and community, our students have shown high levels of achievement. Our staff consists of twenty-two classroom teachers, one Cotsen Mentor, and four support staff. Altogether, Acacia’s highly qualified team hold nineteen Masters degrees, two administration credentials, eleven Gifted and Talented certificates, and one Nationally Board Certified

Teacher. Acacia is a Gifted and Talented Education (GATE) magnet school for the district.

A distinguishing trait of Acacia is that our teachers meet beyond the district required Professional Learning Communities (PLC) time to strategically collaborate, review data, discuss individual student needs, plan for specific interventions to continue providing rigorous academic instruction. By following an authentic PLC cycle, Acacia teachers uphold a student-centered approach to create engaging standards-based lessons that result in building lifelong learners who are successful in school and beyond.

We take great pride in being able to reach high level of academic success for our students as we prepare them for the demands of the future. We realize this is possible through the collective efforts of all involved in the education of a child. Parent involvement is a crucial component to the success of our students and staff. Through the support of our PTA and Acacia Education Foundation, our school is able to provide extra-curricular activities. The parent community at Acacia Elementary School is always willing to volunteer in classrooms, allowing for small group and individual instruction to occur, and serve on integral committees such as School Site Council. Parents are also a large part of planning and organizing our community-building events. The “Acacia tree” invites all to join the partnership to help our students achieve at high levels. Our school takes pride in creating a community of highly qualified teachers, parents, volunteers, community members, and students who work together to achieve success. Our mascot at Acacia Elementary School is the panda. Our students, staff, and community all have Panda Pride for the school they love and embrace.

## **Model Program and Practices**

Name of Model Program/Practice: Professional Learning Communities (PLC)

Length of Model Program/Practice: 2–4 years

Target Area(s): Closing the Achievement Gap, Education Supports, Parent, Family, and Community Involvement, 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, Parent Engagement, Data-Driven Decision Making, Social/Emotional/Behavioral Support, Professional Development, Implementation of Academic Standards Basics (Teachers, Instructional Materials, Facilities)

## Description

The Acacia PLC provides teachers with structured release time to collaborate interdependently so all students are learning. Teachers focus on the needs of all subsets of learners, analyze common assessments and data to drive best practices, design developmentally appropriate cross-curricular lessons, monitor student progress through Rtl, which leads to professional development for teachers. Using the PE program, teachers are given three structured release times per week. Wednesdays are early release for students allowing an additional 90 minutes of PD. Acacia adopted this model of PLC as a result of lackluster conversations about students, learning and flat-lining data. Utilizing the DuFour Four Essential Questions to guide PLC has led to radical change: teachers design lessons and assessments based on knowledge of the whole child, use data to drive instructional practices, and collaboratively strengthen one another's practice. For PLC to be effective, essential resources are needed: (1) Google Drive to house notes for accessibility and transparency and (2) funding for support staff to include a PE teacher, Rtl teacher, Resource specialist, and psychologist. The focus for whole staff PD stems from PLC conversations where teachers share their learning needs.

The anticipated outcomes of Acacia's PLC in relation to students, parents, and community is clearly stated in our mission statement: to provide an education of the highest quality, blending the resources of the home, school, and community. Acacia's model practice benefits all students, including unique student populations. This is because teachers have committed to referring to learners as "all of ours" and not designating by class. This commitment creates a collective approach to lesson design and data analysis so that no one student is left out and each child receives multiple layers of support. Subgroups of at-risk students, EL and gifted learners are supported by multiple specialists. Each grade level has a GATE certified teacher at PLC along with the Rtl teacher and Resource specialist to provide Tier 2 and 3 support. During the 2016–17 school year, EL students grew from 16% at grade level to 55% at grade level, a substantial increase of 39% points. This is an example of the benefits of Acacia's focused and multi-layered support PLC. The Acacia PLC naturally provides space to address the whole learner. Teachers bring social-emotional, behavioral, and personal concerns, including chronic absenteeism to the team. They discuss next steps that may include an appropriate behavior plan and/or school-wide support. Parents are communicated with and involved in behavior plans and any referral support services. Overall, the Acacia PLC model is aligned to the Fullerton District LCAP in that we designate this time to "promote authentic, timely assessment of student performance as a means to strengthen instruction and to identify students for additional interventions."

## Implementation and Monitoring

Acacia parents are included in the monitoring and implementation effects of the PLC. Teachers engage in conversations that include the parent community in the progress of their children and school wide programs and practices. Each meeting begins by setting an agenda then proceeds through the DuFour Four Essential Questions for the PLC process. Teachers discuss (1) what they expect students to learn, (2) how they know

they are learning, (3) how they respond when they don't learn and (4) how they respond if they already know it. PLC notes are web based allowing for collaboration by the administrator and team members.

An important focus of PLC is to find ways to cohesively communicate student data and growth to parents. Methods teachers use to communicate progress and current learning is through classroom newsletters, progress reports, conferences, and assessment reports. Another focus of PLC is to discuss intervention needs. These discussions lead to the formation of Tier 3 groups where the Rtl teacher provides highly strategic support. Parents are notified of their child's participation and at the end of each intervention cycle they receive a progress report on their child's growth. Classroom teachers create reports to share district and other formal assessment data. During PLC meetings, teachers design lessons and note ways to include parents in small group activities and one-on-one conferencing within the classroom. They also plan celebrations highlighting student growth. Parents are invited to the celebrations which help promote a strong home to school connection.

Along with reviewing student data and needs, Acacia PLC concentrate on the needs of teachers. In PLC, teachers plan Professional Learning and Development (PD) with consultants. This model of capacity building activities include an intensive study of a particular approach or method, observing demo lessons led by consultants and colleagues, and reflecting on how the work transfers to classrooms. For example, through PLC the first grade team honored their growth in implementing a new literacy practice and stated their next steps. Administration responded by offering PD for these teachers and others interested. Acacia values parent input as a means to determine the effectiveness of our practice.

Communication between parents and teachers is reciprocal through PTA meetings, School Site Council, Acacia Foundation meetings, Connect Ed messages, teacher communication, parent conferences and a monthly newsletter. During the December Foundation meeting, teachers reported the benefits of a recent PD with consultants. Parents discussed the transfer of teacher learning to their own children and voted to continue providing financial support. Teachers monitor the effectiveness of PLC through three ways. First, they create and adhere to PLC norms. Next, they reflect on the productivity of each meeting based on the agenda set. Finally, teachers monitor data to ensure all students are learning.

## **Results and Outcomes**

Since the implementation of PLC, our students have shown excellence in academic progress. Acacia's CAASPP scores have increased from 75% to 82% in ELA which is 27% above district results and from 75% to 80% in Math which is 31% above district results. All target student groups are growing and improving at a rate that effectively narrows the achievement gap. During PLC teachers monitor and review quantitative formative data and intentionally target at-risk groups resulting in positive student growth. One of the quantitative formative district assessments is iReady. In the 2016–2017 school year all students in grades K–6th grew substantially. For example in ELA, 2nd

grade grew from 43% to 95% and 6th grade from 59% to 82% proficiency. In Math, 1st grade increased from 11% to 91% and 4th grade from 46% to 91% proficiency. In writing, 1st grade increased from 58% to 93% and 5th grade grew from 38% to 90% of students meeting standards. Qualitative data collection via anecdotal notes, progress monitoring and checklists allow teachers to immediately respond. Teachers use this data to center their conversations around learning trends then tailor instruction for strategy groups or plan modifications to accelerate for student success. Students in significant subgroups also receive personalized learning plans, including interventions and small group instruction. As a result of focused data driven collaboration, Acacia has exceeded district English Learner (EL) reclassification rates in 2015–2016 with 37% compared to 5% for district and in 2016–2017 18% compared to 10% for district. Dashboard results show 93.2% of EL made progress toward English Proficiency.

The growth in student outcomes directly correlates to the priority placed on PLC as teachers collaborate to provide our students with rigorous and aligned instruction with opportunities to utilize higher level thinking skills. Grade levels collectively monitor the learning of students by name to ensure individualized instruction. Through the use of data and considering individual students, teachers co-create and modify lesson plans reflecting a critically conscious purpose for teaching. As a result of this differentiation, reviewing multiple sources of data, personalized learning, and placement in class intervention groupings, student achievement has risen to place Acacia in the top 5% of schools in California. With a focused approach to PLC, teachers enhance teaching strategies, align rigor and standards and grow as professionals. The positive gains in student results fosters a contagious level of teacher excitement, passion and belief in the PLC process. In conclusion, our students are not only celebrating academic achievement, but also relishing in a new found excitement for learning. We are proud of our student success in assessment outcomes, but we are relentless in doing better until there is no achievement gap at Acacia.