

## **Ethan B. Allen Elementary School Model Programs and Practices**

### **School Information**

CDS (County District School) Code: 30665226028369

County: Orange

District (Local Educational Agency): Garden Grove Unified

School: Ethan B. Allen Elementary School

### **Demographics**

Enrollment: 779 students

Location Description: Urban

Title I Funded: Yes

Type of Program: School-wide

School Calendar: Traditional

Charter: No

### **Overview**

Ethan Allen Elementary is one of 44 elementary schools in the Garden Grove Unified School District and serves grade K–6 from the cities of Garden Grove, Fountain Valley, Santa Ana, and Westminster, located in Orange County, California. The population at Ethan Allen is comprised of the following: 82.2% Asian American, 1.0% Filipino-American, 7.1% Hispanic, 0.1% Pacific Islander, and 4.9% White, 3.5% Two or more races and 1.3% not reported. Ethan Allen is a Title I school with 779 students, including 14 Gifted and Talented Education (GATE) classrooms and a Special Education program for full inclusion students.

The professional learning environment of Ethan Allen Elementary consists of a dedicated staff, outstanding students and active parents. Our mission is to foster teamwork, strong work ethics, and dedication towards excellence with the vision that all students will meet or exceed grade level standards. It is a place where all students have numerous opportunities to reach their potential. In order to meet these rigorous

standards, Ethan Allen Elementary has implemented research-based programs that ensure appropriate curriculum and instruction are provided to all students. Our standards-based program utilizes assessments on an ongoing basis to provide accountability for staff, teachers, and students.

At Ethan Allen, we strive to create a rigorous academic program that meets the diverse needs of the various learners who attend our school, including our GATE and Special Education students. In addition, we endeavor to enhance our academic program with opportunities for students in the arts and computer sciences. We participate in the Hour of Code so all students can learn the basics of computer science. We also have a theater program that originated through Disney Musicals in Schools which allows students to collaborate on the design and performance of a musical theater production. Finally, we have a music program that encompasses weekly music classes, chorus, and instrumental music. Providing opportunities for a rich, well rounded academic program ensures that our students can develop their learning in a diverse setting that meets their individual needs and interests.

In addition, we work hard to develop the students' personal skills necessary to help them achieve their goals. The first step in this endeavor is to motivate students with innovative teaching strategies and lessons, as well as a flexible learning environment. The second step is to foster socio-emotional well-being as well as a positive climate and culture at our school by modeling positive attitudes, stressing the importance of good citizenship, maintaining a high expectation of appropriate behavior, and supporting our students emotionally. Every single member of our staff knows the importance for recognizing all that is positive and possible in our students. Thus, we consider every single member of our school and community an essential part of every child's life.

## **Model Program and Practices**

Name of Model Program/Practice: Academic Discourse

Length of Model Program/Practice: 2–4 years

Target Area(s): Education Supports, Professional Development

Target Population(s): Two or More Races, Socioeconomically Disadvantaged, English Learners, Students with Disabilities

Strategies Used: Data-Driven Decision Making, Professional Development, Implementation of Academic Standards Basics (Teachers, Instructional Materials, Facilities)

## **Description**

Garden Grove Unified School District's primary goal is to provide the highest level of education for its students so that they may become successful and responsible citizens. One Model Program that Ethan Allen Elementary focuses on is Academic Discourse.

This program has been implemented in order to encourage high-level dialogue, language development, and communication in the classroom that fosters academic achievement

One of the ways in which Ethan Allen expands upon GGUSD's Academic Discourse program is by shifting the focus away from teacher-led discussions to more student-led discourse. The expectation at Ethan Allen is that students listen attentively and critically, develop their own ideas and questions, and make connections to text, to each other, and the world. There are several tools and practices Ethan Allen uses in order to create student-led Academic Discourse.

First, the students at Ethan Allen participate in Accountable Talk, which is a classroom structure that helps the students develop the skills necessary to conduct a meaningful conversation, reflect on their learning, and articulate their knowledge and understanding. Accountable Talk leads to rigorous thinking by the students as the teacher stimulates their curiosity and encourages them to listen critically to others. This framework also requires students to clarify their ideas and provide accurate information and evidence to support their opinions. Finally, Accountable Talk helps students go beyond their initial understanding as they are asked to interpret others' statements, consider alternate explanations, and make connections.

Ethan Allen also expands upon Academic Discourse through its Language Arts program and close reading practices with the base program and novel studies. On a daily basis, students are conducting high-level discussions, in which they share their insights on theme, character, and structural elements of a variety of texts. Teachers require students to prove ideas with textual evidence to strengthen their arguments. This type of exceptional discourse can also be observed during Math time when students participate in Math discourse with their peers. When faced with challenging problems, students work collaboratively to come up with and defend solutions, develop their own questions, and also discover the conceptual understanding of a Math concept.

Further expanding upon district practices, Ethan Allen students incorporate Academic Discourse within the use of the GATE Depth & Complexity Icons which are symbols used to trigger a deeper and more complex understanding of a subject. And finally, Ethan Allen enhances Academic Discourse through a Flexible Seating practice, which is a way to create a physical environment with a variety of seating options. This freedom to create their own space with the purpose to build proximity for collaboration motivates students to be innovative, build relationships, and ultimately improve Academic Discourse.

## **Implementation and Monitoring**

Garden Grove Unified School District has implemented Academic Discourse as a program in our schools, and the teachers at Ethan Allen have had opportunities to learn and practice their use of discourse strategies. Professional Development workshops have allowed teachers to learn about the strategy and to observe demonstrations of Academic Discourse in classrooms. In addition, Academic Discourse is an integral part

of our weekly staff collaborations. Teachers continuously practice a variety of questioning strategies to teach and encourage their scholars to explain their thinking in meaningful collaborative conversations.

Students develop rigorous thinking about subjects and learn how to communicate their ideas clearly to their peers. For example, students practice close reading within our base program and through novel studies. Teachers model high-level questioning and challenge students to develop their own ideas about the texts they are reading. Students are encouraged to share questions about the texts and challenge each other to understand different perspectives.

One of the ways the Ethan Allen Academic Discourse model is distinguished from the district model is by incorporating the tools of Depth and Complexity into our classroom conversations. Students across all grade levels are introduced to these tools and are encouraged to use them to enhance their learning on a daily basis. Often times, teachers use these icons as prompts to start discussions, for example, by encouraging students to look at the “author’s perspective” in an informational article or searching for “patterns” in solving mathematical problems. Or, a teacher may use an Ethics icon to stimulate an analysis of the conflicting morals a protagonist possesses in a narrative, prompting a debate about the various points of views the students might have regarding the ethics of the character. Students learn that these tools are always there for them to utilize independently within classroom discourse.

Another area that distinguishes Ethan Allen from the district model is the great progress we have made towards transforming our physical learning space into an environment that promotes high-level Academic Discourse. Our teachers have incorporated flexible seating into our classrooms, giving students the responsibility and independence to make choices that will best facilitate their learning. Flexible seating allows students to meet in close proximity in order to increase communication and enhance Academic Discourse. For example, a pair of students who are collaborating on a math problem may choose to sit close together at one small table so they can clearly see and hear each other’s ideas, while a group of six students who are discussing a piece of literature might choose to sit in a circle around a low table. Students can easily shift to working with different academic partners and groups across subject areas to ensure the best possible environment to enhance their learning.

## **Results and Outcomes**

The outcomes of implementing Academic Discourse among our students can be seen through the depth and quality of student discussions, and the responsibility students have taken towards ownership of their learning and ability to express their knowledge and understanding. Teachers at Ethan Allen Elementary School have observed the quality and depth of Academic Discourse has grown tremendously over time. In Language Arts, rigorous discussion is an expected part of student’s routines. Students regularly mark their texts with post its as they read so that evidence for their ideas is easily accessible within a discussion. Students show greater understanding of texts they encounter by posing their own challenging questions to their classmates, listening and

responding to each other's thinking, and frequently incorporating evidence for their ideas without being prompted. Math discussions have become richer as well, as students regularly look for various ways to approach problems and expand on each other's ideas to ensure understanding of mathematical concepts.

These tools have become increasingly ingrained into student's personal learning repertoires. Students have learned to take ownership of their own learning by increasing the levels of their Academic Discourse independently and by prompting each other within discussions to provide evidence, think more deeply, and clarify ideas when needed. As a result, the students have more pride in their ideas and have learned to be risk-takers. Beyond reading and math, scholars now naturally incorporate Academic Discourse in science and social studies as well as combine their discourse tools and natural curiosity to explore these subjects on deeper levels. In addition, their written responses have grown in sophistication, as learners begin to automatically support their ideas in writing with evidence and clear explanations. The results have been a richer academic environment that is evidenced by parent and student surveys, improvement on performance tasks, growth on district benchmark tests, and the increasing percentage of students "meeting standards" on the Smarter Balanced Assessments. Between 2015 and 2017 the percentage of students "meeting standards" increased from 87% to 91%. In mathematics the percentage grew from 87% to 90%.

Creating 21st Century environments using flexible seating, giving students choice and power in their education, and empowering them with tools such as Depth and Complexity to use within Academic Discourse, provides our students have multiple opportunities to take ownership of their learning on a daily basis. Students are able to learn and grow in environments that suit their individual needs and learning styles. They leave our school with the communication skills that are necessary to increase their understanding in all subject areas through rigorous discourse and the ability to defend their thinking with accurate evidence.