

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

### **School Information**

CDS (County District School) Code: 30665976029482

County: Orange

District (Local Educational Agency): Newport-Mesa Unified

School: Sonora Elementary School

### **Demographics**

Enrollment: 472 students

Location Description: Suburban

Title I Funded: Yes

Type of Program: School-wide

School Calendar: Traditional

Charter: No

### **Overview**

Sonora Elementary School functions as a vibrant focal point in the community. Cheerfulness permeates the campus, and every person is involved in its programs, focused on active learning, collaboration, and a wide variety of enrichment opportunities. The philosophy is that all students can and will succeed, regardless of language proficiency level, socio-economic background, and/or special educational needs. THE SCHOOL'S GUIDING MISSION IS TO CREATE A SCHOOL THAT ACCEPTS NO LIMITS TO THE ACADEMIC SUCCESS OF ALL STUDENTS. The Sonora Creed, recited daily, encourages student responsibility and fosters pride. The creed states: "I pledge to be a person of character and trust; I will be respectful and responsible doing what I must! I will act with fairness and show that I care, be a good citizen, and do my share! Character counts at Sonora School! WE ARE COLLEGE BOUND!"

Sonora students are 71% Hispanic, 55% are English learners (77% speaking Spanish), 76% are eligible for free or reduced-price meals, and 13% are students with disabilities. Parents and community members are actively involved in the Parent-Teacher Association, the School Site Council, the English Learner Advisory Committee, and the Dad's Club. These organizations provide multiple enrichment opportunities, such as assemblies, family movie nights, after school enrichment classes, and school beautification projects. Parents also assist with family science and math nights, the drama club, and field trips. Sonora provides state-of-the-art technology, accelerated reading and math programs, and enrichment activities. The nearby Segerstrom Center for the Arts provides visual and performing arts experiences, and collaborates with teachers to integrate visual and performing arts into the school's curricula.

In 2010, Sonora was accepted into the No Excuses University (NEU) network, one of only four Orange County schools achieving this distinction. The NEU model is an ideal framework for Sonora's goals, emphasizing a culture of universal achievement, collaboration, aligned and assessed standards, managed data, and meaningful student interventions. Sonora was named a California Distinguished School in 2002 and 2008, a Title I Academic Achievement Award School in 2008 and 2016, and California Gold Ribbon and Exemplary Arts Education Program School in 2016. These awards all recognize Sonora's academic and artistic excellence. Sonora was the only elementary school in California selected to represent the state at the National Title I Awards Convention in 2009, and the only elementary school to receive special recognition at the California Title I Convention in 2009. Sonora students consistently acquire the knowledge, skills, habits, and attributes needed to be successful in middle school, high school, and beyond, and to live and work in a multicultural and multilingual society.

## **Model Program and Practices**

Name of Model Program/Practice: No Excuses University (NEU) School: "We Are College Bound!"

Length of Model Program/Practice: 5–8 years

Target Area(s): Closing the Achievement Gap, Education Supports

Target Population(s): American Indian, Asian, Black or African American, 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, Professional Development, Implementation of Academic Standards Basics (Teachers, Instructional Materials, Facilities)

## Description

**NEEDS:** Sonora believes that every student can succeed, and Sonora is determined to close the achievement gap for students in low-achieving groups. The school culture emphasizes, “We are college bound!” The No Excuses University (NEU) model aligns with this philosophy through its Six System Framework: Universal Achievement, Collaboration of All Stakeholders, State Standards Alignment, Assessment, Data Management, and Interventions. This framework sets Sonora’s students and their families, the majority lacking experience with and knowledge of higher education, on the path to academic achievement and college success at an early age. The entire NEU implementation, based on Sonora’s student needs, is unique in the district. The district’s college/career success model emphasizes college/career preparation in secondary grades.

**RESOURCES:** A school must apply for and be accepted into the NEU network. NEU trains teachers on how to implement the framework. The staff integrates college/career readiness activities into the district curriculum. Three part-time intervention teachers and three full-time Specialized Academic Instruction teachers work with the school’s large (55%) English learner population, using small groups based on language acquisition level and moving students to other groups as language levels change. A character education program, Positive Behavior Interventions and Support (PBIS), emphasizes behavior that supports academic achievement.

**GOALS AND OUTCOMES:** Goals include continually expanding, enhancing, and improving services and activities, including increasing the involvement of parents and all stakeholders in NEU goals, to increase the number of students well prepared for middle school, high school, college, and beyond. Outcomes include infusing college/career readiness activities throughout the school, and increasing the integration of technology, STEM lessons, and visual/performing arts into the classroom/curriculum to meet the needs of all learners. A goal for parents is participation in ongoing communication, with conferences at least twice a year.

**STUDENT BENEFITS:** Current assessments (SBAC, DIBELS, Wonder assessments, Bridges math) confirm that the NEU model is highly effective. Any student struggling to perform at grade level is supported by the school’s collaborative Response to Intervention program and/or before and after-school tutoring. Intervention teachers for English learners address their unique needs. PBIS aligns with the NEU “No Excuses” mantra and implements school-wide interventions to mitigate behavior. Students are consistently recognized and rewarded for making wise choices, demonstrating good character, and showing academic responsibility.

**STANDARDS:** NEU aligns with state academic and performance standards, and fosters continuity from one grade level to the next. NEU’s universal achievement culture leads teachers to collaborate and holds the entire school community accountable for meeting standards.

## Implementation and Monitoring

**STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT:** Parents receive frequent communications about their child's progress in person or via phone or email. Some upper grade students are included in student-led conferences to involve all stakeholders in achieving the academic plan. Classrooms adopt a university; students see college names and logos throughout the school and hear college chants at a weekly school-wide event. Teachers meet to discuss student progress, analyze data, and plan lessons, including changing student groupings.

**COMMUNICATION:** Annually all parents and students review NEU expectations and commit to classroom and school goals. Parents participate in special programs, such as an opportunity to attend class with their child to learn about the new math program, followed by a Q&A session led by district math specialists and Sonora teachers. Teachers provide families with opportunities to volunteer in the classroom and create special events such as Science Night. Parent communications include the school website, social media accounts, classroom communication apps such as Remind and Bloomz, class newsletters, and presentations at School Site Council, PTA, and English Learners Advisory Committee meetings. An on-site bilingual Community Facilitator assists non-English speaking parents.

**PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT:** Teachers are trained in the six exceptional systems in the NEU framework. The district provides training in the newly adopted language arts and math curricula, the use of iPads and Chromebooks in the classroom, and software such as Google Docs and Illuminate. Teachers attend monthly math seminars, collaborate with district colleagues, and attend an NEU Institute at least once and an NEU convention every other year. All staff members receive ongoing training in implementing the NEU and PBIS principles.

**LEARNING ACTIVITIES:** English learners participate daily in 30–45-minute small group instruction using SIPPS (phonics and foundational reading skills), REWARDS, pre-teaching of Wonders and Bridges reading and math programs, fluency drill-downs, and other research-based curricula. Examples of integrating technology use, arts, and college activities into curricula include:

- Third graders filming a book review commercial.
- Sixth graders researching colleges and inviting parents to hear each student's presentation.

Teachers use informal and summative assessments to evaluate the effectiveness of learning activities. Students may be moved to other groups based on progress monitoring assessments and informal dialogue among classroom and intervention teachers and support staff. Differentiated groups include those for students working above grade level who need to be challenged. Informal assessment includes dialogue with special education staff to provide instructional support in general education and small group settings.

## Results and Outcomes

**PROGRAM MONITORING AND ASSESSMENTS:** NEU is a research-based framework that provides guidance on data collection and analysis to help schools evaluate the need for program adjustments. Current diagnostic, formative, and summative assessments (DIBELS, Wonders Phonics Assessment, SIPPS, Accelerated Reader, STAR Assessment) confirm that Sonora's NEU model continues to be highly effective. Sonora's annual Single Plan for Student Achievement, available to all stakeholders, summarizes data and evaluation findings.

**STUDENT DATA:** Grades 3–6 SBAC scores show that Sonora students, including English learners and economically disadvantaged students, continually exceed district, county, and state averages for meeting or exceeding standards. The 2017 ELA SBAC score was 60.14%, an increase of 33.6% from 2015; the math score was 48.0%, an increase of 54.8% from 2015. Sonora's scores exceeded state averages by 23.85% in ELA and 27.8% in math.

The 2017 ELA SBAC score for English learners was 26.32%, an increase of 5.3% from 2015; the math score was 20.20%, an increase of 18.8% from 2015. Sonora's English learner scores exceeded state averages for English learners by 117.7% in ELA and 63.96% in math.

The 2017 ELA SBAC score for economically disadvantaged students was 53.51%, an increase of 48.64% from 2015; the math score was 41.38%, an increase of 88.09% from 2015. Sonora's scores exceeded state averages for economically disadvantaged students by 50.65% in ELA and 68.42% in math.

Sonora scored blue (highest rating) on the California School Dashboard for the progress of its English learners. In 2016–17, 87.8% of English learners increased one or more California English Language Development Test (CELDT) levels or maintained English proficiency, an increase of 13.3% from 2015–16. In 2015–16, 29 students reclassified and three long-term English learners increased their overall CELDT level.

STAR reading assessments for second graders from fall 2016 to fall 2017 showed a 16% increase of students at the benchmark level. Third graders showed a 15% increase.

**PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT:** Program evaluation results are reviewed during monthly staff meetings, School Site Council, and English Learners Advisory Committee meetings. This process ensures all voices are heard and program modifications are timely. For example, the Sonora staff identified the need to modify and update the NEU school-wide behavior management system. At the time, teachers were independently utilizing various NEU rewards and consequences. The staff strongly believed that unification of one school-wide system would benefit student achievement. A selected group of teachers were trained on the PBIS system and a new NEU school plan was developed and implemented for the 2017–18 school year. Now, the entire staff uses

common language, expectations, rewards, and consequences to support student success.