

Jim Thorpe Fundamental Elementary School Model Programs and Practices

School Information

CDS (County District School) Code: 30666706116917

County: Orange

District (Local Educational Agency): Santa Ana Unified

School: Jim Thorpe Fundamental Elementary School

Demographics

Enrollment: 996 students

Location Description: Urban

Title I Funded: Yes

Type of Program: School-wide

School Calendar: Traditional

Charter: No

Overview

Jim Thorpe Fundamental Elementary (Thorpe Fundamental), opened in August 1999, is home to 996 students: 88% Hispanic, 75% designated as low income and a substantial number of English learners (25% EL, 27% RFEP, 3.5% IFEP). Thorpe Fundamental is a school of choice; students residing in Santa Ana Unified District's (SAUSD) attendance boundaries are eligible for enrollment through a lottery system. As a fundamental school, the emphasis is on establishing an atmosphere of fair, firm, consistent discipline and support that promotes academic achievement, patriotism, and the development of student pride and responsibility. Upon enrollment and at the beginning of each school year, parents and students sign the Fundamental School Agreement to support school policies and procedures, including high expectations for attendance, appropriate behavior, parent involvement in homework supervision, and regular communication between home and school. Thorpe's staff and parents are committed to a TK–5 instructional program that provides all students with the opportunity to acquire the knowledge and skills needed to be college and career ready and become productive

citizens in the 21st century. This includes becoming lifelong learners, developing problem-solving and critical thinking skills, and gaining cultural understanding and civic values necessary for participation in a democratic society.

The site team collaboratively revised the school's mission to say: "The mission of the school staff and parents is to work together to establish an excellent foundation for lifelong learning, a strong sense of responsibility, and a respect for self and others by nurturing, guiding, and challenging all of our students to aim high, take pride in their achievements, believe in themselves and to reach their maximum potential. Dedicated to student success." To support this mission, Thorpe's Pathway to Rigor (PTR) was initiated. To support PTR, Thorpe adopted Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID). Working with Dr. David Conley and the Educational Policy Improvement Center, a small group of schools chose AVID Elementary as a pathway to rigor. Eight elementary schools agreed to implement AVID Elementary in 2015, most focusing on the exiting grade for implementation. Like the other elementary schools, Thorpe sent a small group to the initial AVID Summer Institute Training. However, unlike the other seven schools in the initial cohort, Thorpe's teachers were so enthusiastic about AVID that another 21 teachers were trained later that year. Rather than just a support for one or two grade levels, AVID was seen as the primary vehicle to move PTR forward, AVID Elementary has become the schoolwide model of practice at Thorpe.

Model Program and Practices

Name of Model Program/Practice: Pathway to Rigor (PTR)

Length of Model Program/Practice: 2–4 years

Target Area(s): Closing the Achievement Gap, Education Supports, Parent, Family, and Community Involvement, Professional Development

Target Population(s): Asian, Hispanic, Socioeconomically Disadvantaged, English Learners

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

Description

When parents enroll their children at Thorpe, they are opening the door to a world of opportunities including rigorous curriculum that leads to college and career readiness as they become productive contributors to our global society. With a focus on nurturing and cultivating the whole child, beginning as early as Pre-K through 5th grade, Thorpe's PTR offers an exemplary academic program, strengthened by implementing AVID Elementary as a model practice over the past three years. AVID Elementary is embedded and threaded into the daily life in all elementary classrooms focusing on

areas to ensure all students achieve academic success: Instruction, Culture, Leadership, and Systems.

The challenge for any school is continual improvement and growth. Thorpe has been honored in the past with various academic awards (Title 1 Academic Achievement, Excellence in Urban Education Award, National Blue Ribbon School, California Distinguished School), but there was still a need to support students as they left elementary and moved on to higher education. Students need transferable skills and tools for organization and critical thinking in order to access rigorous content curriculum on their path to higher education. Thorpe staff believes that growth mindset can be taught to students, and through growth mindset students can achieve their dreams and fulfill their aspirations. In order to tackle redesigned state and local assessments, students need to delve deeper into curriculum and display higher levels of understanding than in the past. Traditional instructional models did not provide the support teachers needed for student success. AVID incorporates the “best teaching practices” and research findings of Marzano, Gaddy, and Dean, identifying those instructional strategies with the highest probability of enhancing student achievement for all students, in all subjects, at all grade levels.

The AVID Elementary components support PTR in all classrooms to benefit all students. Thorpe students develop skills essential to academic success and social-emotional well-being. These skills include (1) Student Success Skills which encompass communication skills (e.g. listening, speaking, reading, writing), self-advocacy skills, note-taking strategies, critical thinking, and study skills (2) Organizational Skills, both mental and physical, in which students learn to use organizational tools, as well as learn and practice skills around time management and goal-setting (3) WICOR Lessons emphasizing instruction on Writing to learn, Inquiry, Collaboration, Organization, and Reading to learn in all content areas, and (4) Developing Partnerships among students, classrooms, grade levels, schools, feeder patterns, families, and communities. These skills open doors to a rigorous college preparatory curriculum and prepare all students for lifelong opportunities.

Implementation and Monitoring

PTR is the model program and practice at Thorpe, acting as an umbrella of strategies under which all instruction is based. In 2015, AVID was integrated into PTR with a group of 3 teachers and 1 administrator attending an AVID training to see how these best practices could propel students to higher level thinking and deeper understanding. Another 21 teachers were AVID trained in December 2015. By the end of the first year, AVID strategies were embedded throughout the school and plans were made for the rest to be trained. As more teachers became AVID trained, common language and WICOR strategies permeated the school. In addition to large scale learning opportunities, precious staff meeting time is dedicated to ongoing training and articulation of AVID strategies. Teachers strategically share instructional strategies and map out a continuum of AVID practices TK–5. Ongoing teacher reflection and articulation enable PTR practices to become automatic and independent as students progress through the grades.

AVID implementation also requires a strong partnership between school and district. District office supports an AVID District Director, providing just-in-time support with professional development and quality assurance through yearly certification. Membership fees are also paid with district level funds, as are substitutes for regional workshops. Site LCFF and Title 1 funding then supports professional development training at AVID Summer Institute or similar opportunities.

Each year, Thorpe hosts an AVID Elementary Showcase, demonstrating strong school-wide implementation of all aspects of AVID Elementary. Visitors from throughout California view how Thorpe staff embodies the AVID mission and embeds AVID strategies. This public display validates the dedication to AVID implementation. This year, family outreach has expanded with two different AVID trainings. AVID philosophy, its effectiveness K–12, and common practices were shared with families. They learned “look fors” in AVID classrooms and then over 80 parents engaged in classroom walkthroughs. Parents saw rigor and structures leading to success at the secondary level.

Developing further partnerships to open doors for lifelong opportunities, all 4th grade students visit a local university. Students experience a tour, a college student panel discussion and visit classes. An extension of this experience allows all interested Thorpe parents to visit the same university two days later for a similar experience. Developing these family connections with higher education reinforces student preparation for college and career pathways in their further education. These partnerships make the future “real” for students and parents alike.

Results and Outcomes

PTR has provided the structure and support for rigorous classroom instruction along with the student success skills that are not always evident in large scale standardized tests. Since AVID’s implementation, growth in student achievement is evident across the board. A comparison of SBAC data shows an increase in the number of students who met or exceeded grade level academic indicators after beginning schoolwide AVID in the Fall of 2015. English Language Arts saw an increase 43% to 62%, in math; 47% to 53%. Our focus group, students in poverty, grew from 43% who meet or exceed grade level expectations in ELA prior to AVID to 62% two years later. In math the same focus group students moved from 47% to 50% who met or exceeded grade level academic indicators. Thorpe’s staff is proud that the growth results far outperform the average across the district. Teachers report that this year they are using AVID strategies to support mathematics on an increased basis, incorporating a new adoption, focused on mathematical practices, and utilize writing to explain their thinking. With the new math adoption, teachers have applied AVID practices to have students support their math thinking with evidence, a math model and an algorithm to explain a concept.

Aligned with the concept of growth mindset, students in SAUSD participate in the NWEA Measure of Academic Progress (MAP) assessments three times each year. The percent of students who met their growth target at Thorpe in ELA improved between from 58% to 68% for grade 3; 61% to 64% for grade 4 and 55% to 59%. Likewise, the

Math gains were 57% to 69% in grade 3, 67% to 69% in grade 4 and 49% to 64% in grade 5. Using a growth model in both reading and math allows for easy monitoring of student progress, but also provides students with an opportunity for individual goal setting, and core AVID practice.

In addition to test score outcomes, qualitative data reported by Thorpe parents indicate that students are referring to and using AVID strategies at home. Students are seen checking binders, revisiting notes taken in class, using varied organizers prior to writing and actively engaging in conversations about their own future's matriculation in a university along with their current choices for studies. Teachers too see a difference in their approach to instruction, adding layers of rigor to daily classroom practices coupled with leveled questions that augment instruction.

The success of Thorpe's PTR is based on an articulated continuum of learning experiences addressing the special academic, social, and physical needs of all students; access of all staff members to staff development opportunities to expand the knowledge and skills required to meet the identified needs of students; and a strong, collaborative school partnership with parents and community.