

## **Sequoia Academy GATE Magnet Elementary School Model Programs and Practices**

### **School Information**

CDS (County District School) Code: 30667466030886

County: Orange

District (Local Educational Agency): Westminster

School: Sequoia Academy GATE Magnet Elementary School

### **Demographics**

Enrollment: 508 students

Location Description: Suburban

Title I Funded: Yes

Type of Program: Targeted Assistance

School Calendar: Traditional

Charter: No

### **Overview**

Sequoia's firm roots run deep throughout the Sequoia GATE Magnet Academy. Parents are proud to say that their children are the 2nd and 3rd generation to attend Sequoia. Our academically rigorous program focuses on STEA3M Academy rotations: Computer Science, STEM, Music, Art History, Videography, and Performing Arts. Scholars master AVID and GATE strategies, while developing higher-order thinking skills in a demanding academic program.

The interwoven connections between the Sequoia staff, students, families and community exemplify our commitment to a collaborative environment. PTA helps to encourage community involvement by providing family and community outreach with events such as Family Fun Nights, Red Ribbon Week, Lunch on the Lawn, the Carnival, STEM Night, assemblies, and many more. Our 21st Century Community and Connections program invites community professionals to share their expertise with our students and families.

We are a community that embraces diversity. Our Sequoia scholars are represented by forty-seven percent Hispanic, twenty-three percent Asian, twenty-three percent white, and seven percent additional ethnicities. Sixty-two percent of our students are socio-economically disadvantaged, twenty-six percent are English Learners, twenty-two percent receive Special Education services, and twenty percent have been identified for the Gifted and Talented Education (GATE) program. Our uniquely diverse and blended learning environment helps build positive peer relationships where students find support and acceptance in others. Amongst our scholars, we have one of the largest autism and GATE populations in the district. This extends our roots even further and allows for inclusion among all students.

Sequoia values character development, while encouraging a culture focused on a growth mindset. Our Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports is Scholarly PRIDE which stands for Prepared, Perseverance, Posture, Respect, Responsibility, Integrity, Investigation, Inquiry, Determination, Dedication, Engagement, Encouragement, Empathy. At our award ceremonies, we honor students that display strength in academics, in a specific discipline, or character traits. Students work hard to show PRIDE each day and earn Eagle Bucks to spend at the student store. This PBIS model has helped our students to, “Soar high with eagle PRIDE!”

Sequoia has high expectations for all of our students whom we refer to as “scholars”. We challenge our scholars with rigor, depth, and complexity through implementation of our signature practices. We differentiate the curriculum so all students have the opportunity to attain their maximum potential. As a collaborative and cohesive staff, we are committed to integrating best teaching practices supported by professional development in STEA3M. This in turn strengthens our community of academic scholars and ensures that every student becomes a responsible, lifelong learner through the achievement of academic and personal success.

## **Model Program and Practices**

Name of Model Program/Practice: STEA3M (Science, Technology, Engineering, Academics, AVID, the Arts, and Mathematics)

Length of Model Program/Practice: 2–4 years

Target Area(s): Closing the Achievement Gap, Education Supports, Parent, Family, and Community Involvement, Professional Development, Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics, Use of Technology

Target Population(s): Hispanic, White, 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

Sequoia Academy GATE Magnet's model of academic excellence is STEA3M. Our journey began in 2010 when the district introduced Thinking Maps. The Sequoia staff were trained on Thinking Maps and Thinking Maps-Path to Proficiency which supports English learners (EL). The demands of the CCSS increased the need for college and career readiness and 21st century skills. It became clear that the pedagogy necessary to prepare students with these skills would require a new approach. Innovation, collaboration, problem solving, and critical thinking to promote deeper levels of understanding would need to be emphasized. Our district adopted a new vision statement: "Building Tomorrow's Leaders Today". This vision captured the need for us to prepare our students to be future leaders. All of our work would now center around this district vision. We also realized that the diverse needs of our students, specifically our ELs and SED, would require a shift toward personalized learning and student voice and choice.

Staff began to look at current practices and successes. They were trained in GATE and realized that we could infuse the Thinking Maps strategies with the implementation of the Depth & Complexity Icons. Staff began to see the increase in rigor using these combined strategies and realized that this was a better approach to differentiating instruction.

To enhance 21st century learning, the district provided a 1:1 Chromebook initiative for all students 3rd–8th. At Sequoia, we added them in TK–2nd grade. Chromebooks are a daily vital part of student learning that allow teachers to differentiate instruction and meet the needs of all students. Students are embracing this technology in the classroom to collaborate, research, design, create, and reinforce their skills through the use of innovative strategies such as blended learning.

In 2016, Sequoia became the first WSD AVID (Achievement Via Individual Determination) elementary school. The AVID strategies enhanced the strong school instructional initiatives by supporting a college and career ready focus, where students set goals and achieve their personal best and a growth mindset. To complete our model program, an Arts academy with a STEAM focus was created to provide students an additional opportunity within the school day to develop their passions. Two dedicated spaces were created, an innovation and music lab to support our STEAM academy. With this new addition the school's model program was complete: Science, Technology, Engineering, Academics, AVID, Arts, Math - STEA3M. STEA3M aligns with our district's LCAP goals 1 and 2: student achievement and professional development. STEA3M increases rigor across the disciplines by integrating the Depth & Complexity icons, AVID-WICOR strategies, and Thinking Maps into daily practice, while encouraging creativity through STEAM units and blended learning. Students are empowered through opportunities daily that allow them to shine while showing scholarly PRIDE.

## Implementation and Monitoring

The systematic implementation and monitoring of STEA3M with a vision for improvement has reinforced our purpose and inspired our Sequoia community. In 2010 our site Thinking Map coaches attended five days of training. Through the use of a peer-coaching model, our site coaches trained our staff and parents on how to use the thinking tools. Staff received Thinking Maps resources to begin a seamless implementation. Teachers became more comfortable and more adept at using all eight Thinking Maps, and students grew in their ability to generate their own Thinking Maps. By years two and three, Thinking Maps could be found in every classroom and increased student achievement was evident with our ELs.

We layered the two powerful thinking tools of Thinking Maps and the Depth and Complexity Icons, and we began to see additional growth in all student groups, in particularly our ELs, students with disabilities (SD) and SED students. Staff members were recertified in the use of the Depth and Complexity Icons and how to implement these combined strategies across the disciplines, aligned with our district vision. Student artifacts and parent feedback displayed significant growth, along with increased scores in student groups in the Dashboard.

As we maximized rigorous learning to meet the needs of all students, this necessitated addressing the need to close the achievement gap in our target populations of ELs, SD, as well as our SED students. Data indicated a need to address deficits by implementing high quality teaching practices and innovative technologies. Staff were trained in AVID - WICOR strategies and STEAM. Extensive and ongoing training created purposeful collaboration. Teachers analyze student generated samples of our STEA3M model which includes WICOR strategies, projects or lessons with the icons, and STEAM units in our PLCs to peer evaluate the rigor across the disciplines. Teachers focus on implementing strategies that promote student achievement by analyzing data and designing lessons to meet the needs of all learners, while embedding 21st century skills.

Our signature practices are effective strategies for our ELs and all students, as they are a means by which students can visually organize their thoughts and make sense of what is being learned. Administrators meet with teachers during PLCs to closely monitor results, share model lessons, and discuss strategies to close the achievement gap, while ensuring that STEA3M is being implemented consistently. A collaborative environment provides staff time to focus on best practices to ensure that there is continuity and progression.

Sequoia recognizes that embedding our signature practice, STEA3M across curricular areas, contributes to a universal language of accessing information and empowers students to succeed. As they collaborate and approach new learning in a visually meaningful way, Sequoia scholars build skill sets that empower them to be successful leaders prepared to compete in a global economy.

## Results and Outcomes

The evidence that STEA3M has made a positive impact at Sequoia can be seen everywhere. We see tremendous results in student STEA3M projects, writing samples, parent surveys and feedback, blended learning, student engagement, confidence, and rigor for the targeted and non-targeted student groups. All students are effectively using the infused Thinking Maps, Depth & Complexity Icons, and AVID, while utilizing technology. Through the STEAM academy classes, we are teaching students how to explore their interests through the lens of the Disciplinarian, supporting real world application and preparing future career pathways.

We have seen an increase in overall student engagement and depth of knowledge from our consistent implementation of STEA3M. At its foundation the CCSS demands students dive deeper into focused content. Our signature model provides concrete tools for students to synthesize and build understanding. Students feel ownership in their learning and are connected to school because they have voice and choice. Parent involvement has increased greatly since implementation because the parents see the enthusiasm that the children have for their school.

In 2016, the state assessment scores showed a significant increase in students meeting or exceeding standards. In ELA, the increases were 15% overall, 20% Hispanic, 5% ELs, 13% SED, and 11% SPED. The math results increased by 10% overall, 13% Hispanics, 8% ELS, 5% SED and 14% SPED. In 2017, the math results increased again by 4% overall and the Hispanic students showed growth in ELA and Math.

The 2017 California Dashboard results continued to show improvement. As a school, the academic status is high. The gap between the highest scoring student group and the lowest group is only 83 points. In ELA, we maintained our high scale scores overall and in math we increased our scale scores by 10 points. Our goal to close the achievement gap of our EL students is recognizable through the evidence provided by our CELDT scores and the number of students who are reclassified each year. Our reclassification rates for our EL students have more than doubled over the past four years from 22.8% to 52.7% of our eligible students.

Sequoia GATE Magnet Academy stands out as a distinguished school not for one practice, but for the integration of a wide range of evidence-based practices. Our school is a cohesive family-friendly environment focused on rigorous expectations. Quantitative and qualitative indicators show high levels of community, staff, and student engagement. Students and families are having fun, finding relevance, and challenging themselves to show progress toward college and career readiness. Albert Einstein said it well, "Education is not the learning of facts, but the training of the mind to think." At Sequoia, we strive daily to provide students with successful strategies that will help them to become successful citizens and lifelong learners.