

## **Martin Van Buren Elementary Model Programs and Practices**

### **School Information**

CDS (County District School) Code: 33670586031983

County: Riverside

District (Local Educational Agency): Desert Sands Unified

School: Martin Van Buren Elementary

### **Demographics**

Enrollment: 630 students

Location Description: Suburban

Title I Funded: Yes

Type of Program: School-wide

School Calendar: Traditional

Charter: No

### **Overview**

Martin Van Buren Elementary School was built in 1958 and is located in an impoverished neighborhood across the street from a homeless shelter and is surrounded on three sides by a farm labor camp. Many of Van Buren's 630 students live in the surrounding neighborhood and nearby single family homes. Yet, as you enter our gates, the collective focus is on our mission "All Students Learning...Whatever It Takes!"

The Pre-Kindergarten to fifth grade student body at Martin Van Buren is comprised of 95% Hispanic descent, 3% White, and .5% African American, Asian or Multiracial. This year, 93% of our students are eligible for free and reduced lunch. Spanish is the home language of the 66% of our students who are classified as English Learners, and 15% of our students are classified as Migrant.

Van Buren's success is due to a team of passionate educators. Currently, of the 24 general education teachers on staff, three are brand new to the teaching profession.

Eleven staff members have 2–5 years of teaching experience, four staff members have been teaching 6–10 years, and nine have been a teacher for 11 or more years. The three special education teachers include one intern, and two teachers each with 15 years of experience. Supporting our site is a full-time instructional coach, counselor, and two guest teachers who serve as reading interventionists dedicated to helping our students meet the high expectations and performance goals set by our certificated staff.

Van Buren Elementary has defined its purpose as building a strong instructional program that emphasizes high academic standards in partnership with building teacher capacity. Staff work as a Professional Learning Community continuously learning and implementing research-based instructional strategies as they collaboratively analyze formative assessments and develop highly detailed instructional plans.

A bridge between home and school is recognized at Van Buren Elementary as an important component of student success. We provide several programs, such as Literacy Night and Family Night, that aim to support parents and their efforts to promote student achievement at home.

Most of all, the staff at Van Buren Elementary believe that building teacher capacity, school improvement and student learning is the result of highly effective collaboration, professional development and perseverance.

We invite you visit Martin Van Buren Elementary in Indio, California. You can find us by driving East on Interstate I-10 toward Indio. At Exit 144 Golf Center Parkway. Turn right onto Golf Center Parkway. Continue on Golf Center Parkway to Highway 111 (.6 miles). Turn left onto Highway 111. Continue on Highway 111 to Indio Blvd (.2 miles). Turn right onto Indio Blvd. Continue on Indio Blvd to Van Buren Street (.8 miles). Turn right onto Van Buren Street.

Continue on Van Buren Street. Martin Van Buren Elementary School is on the right (.2 miles).

## **Model Program and Practices**

Name of Model Program/Practice: Collaboration: Improving Student Achievement and Building Teacher Capacity

Length of Model Program/Practice: 5–8 years

Target Area(s): Closing the Achievement Gap

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

Strategies Used: Small Learning Communities, Professional Development

## **Description**

Martin Van Buren Elementary has defined its purpose as building a strong instructional program that emphasizes high academic standards for all students. Staff work as a Professional Learning Community (PLC) as they support each other while learning and implementing research-based instructional strategies, collaboratively plan lessons, and analyze formative assessments.

Van Buren Elementary regularly experiences changes to its teaching staff through attrition and transfers. Each year new staff members come to Van Buren, with several members brand new to the teaching profession. The need for a systematic approach to lesson delivery has become necessary in order to build teacher capacity and provide all students with a predictable learning environment that ensures equal access to high quality instruction. As a result, Professional Learning Communities within each grade level focuses on collaborative lesson planning and analysis of student work to inform instruction. PLCs at Van Buren Elementary operate under the common understanding that collaborative lesson planning, collective inquiry and review of student data lead to results-oriented instructional practices that benefit all students.

Strategic focused professional development is used as a way to build constants among variables. In addition to district trainings in the areas of English Language Development (ELD) and for the new K–5 ELA/ELD adopted materials, Van Buren Elementary provides on-site professional development in Direct Interactive Instruction (DII) and PLCs. Van Buren staff now share a common language and use the DII lesson delivery method and lesson plan format as they collaboratively plan lessons. The goal of designated PLC time is to capitalize on the school wide belief that collaborative planning sessions are critical to ensuring that teachers, regardless of years of experience, are developing and teaching rigorous lessons, and that all students are learning.

In addition to collaborative lesson planning, PLCs at Van Buren Elementary are also focused on the goal of improving teaching practices. PLCs provide an opportunity for teachers with varied levels of expertise to collaboratively rehearse what and how they are going to teach when they find themselves alone in the classroom. A uniform lesson delivery format developed within the PLC contributes to providing teachers with a sense of community and builds their level of confidence. Overall, the PLC process at Van Buren Elementary enables teachers to work with and support each other in developing an effective instructional program that provides quality instruction to all students.

## **Implementation and Monitoring**

The Martin Van Buren Elementary staff began creating a PLC structure for working and learning together by defining their shared commitment to a common purpose: building a strong instructional program that emphasizes academic standards for all students. The sharing of beliefs and values led to the agreement of meeting norms. These norms became the guide by which meetings operate and are reviewed at least twice a year. Understanding that collaboration requires time, Martin Van Buren Elementary has adopted a schedule that includes one day each week when students are dismissed

early. This early dismissal day is set aside strictly for collaboration, be it as grade level PLCs or coming together as a school wide PLC. In addition, the principal in developing the prep schedule has included common prep times for teachers at the same grade level to make common meeting times more convenient. There are a variety of stakeholders directly affected as a result of common preps and early dismissal. Prep teachers understand and concur that such a schedule may result in doubling up of classrooms during prep time in order to be sure that all grade level teachers are able to meet at the same time. Equally important, parents have been supportive of the early dismissal day and understand that PLCs and teacher collaboration ultimately benefit their children. Teachers communicate the purpose of PLCs during Back to School Nights, School Site Council meetings, and parent conferences. In addition, the Instructional Coach supports teachers by ensuring they have needed resources, attends district trainings, and accompanies teachers as they observe colleagues. During PLCs, the Instructional Coach and Principal can be seen providing support, clarification and direction. Facilitation of the PLC meetings rotates among members of the grade level. Meeting agendas and minutes are distributed to each member, the Principal and Instructional Coach at least 24 hours in advance of the meetings. Throughout the PLC meetings, Van Buren staff engage in collaborative conversations centered around what to teach and how to teach it. Research based instructional strategies are explored and appropriate formative assessments that measure students' level of mastery are agreed upon and administered within a prearranged time frame. Teacher teams develop rubrics for student assignments and formative assessments in order to ensure that common criteria is used consistently. In addition, time for cross-grade level articulation is provided for staff to have the opportunity to share insights and results with colleagues teaching the grade level above and below. Cross-grade level collaboration is an added way to build teacher capacity and ensure fidelity to the agreed upon research based instructional program. Overall, the PLC process at Van Buren enables all teachers to work and support each other in developing an effective instructional program that provides quality instruction to all students.

## **Results and Outcomes**

At Van Buren Elementary, grade level PLCs analyze formative assessments to inform their instruction and allow for data driven decision making. Summative test results are presented at the end of the year on the California Dashboard. Over the past two school years, Van Buren has been able to raise student achievement for all targeted student groups and increase in performance level (green to blue) while there was no such movement at the district level.

According to the Spring 2017 Dashboard, which reflects the performance levels of the 2015–2016 school year, the status level for ALL students, English Learners (ELs), socioeconomically disadvantaged students, and students of Hispanic descent in the area of ELA was Medium (green) and the change level from the previous school year increased significantly. The change level was 31.3 points for ALL students, 31.5 points for English Learners, 29.9 points for socioeconomically disadvantaged students, and 26.3 points for students of Hispanic descent.

In the area of Math in 2015–2016, the status level for ALL students and students of Hispanic descent was medium (green) and the change level also increased significantly. The change level for ALL students was 34.6 points and 32.4 points for Hispanic students. However, the status level for ELs and socioeconomically disadvantaged students was low (yellow) while the change level increased significantly. The change level of 33 points for ELs and 31.7 points for socioeconomically disadvantaged students represented significant growth,

The Fall 2017 Dashboard, which reflects the performance levels of the 2016–2017 school year, presented the status level in ELA for ALL students, ELs, socioeconomically disadvantaged students, and Hispanic students as high (blue) and the change level increasing significantly. The change level for ALL students was 21.2 points, 18 points for ELs, 22.5 points for socioeconomically disadvantaged students, and 22.5 points for Hispanic students.

Significant growth is also evident in math according to the Fall 2017 Dashboard data. In 2016–2017, the status level for ALL students and Hispanic students was high (blue) and the change level increased significantly from the previous school year. The change level was 24.5 points for ALL students, and 24.1 points for Hispanic students. The status level for ELs and socioeconomically disadvantaged students was medium (green) and the change level from the previous year increased significantly. The change level was 24.5 points for ELs and 26.6 points for socioeconomically disadvantaged students.

Overall, the data reflects similar patterns of growth for all of the targeted student groups at Martin Van Buren Elementary since the 2015–2016 school year. Growth is expected to continue with the refinement of PLCs and increasing teacher capacity.