

## **James Monroe Elementary Model Programs and Practices**

### **School Information**

CDS (County District School) Code: 33670586109045

County: Riverside

District (Local Educational Agency): Desert Sands Unified

School: James Monroe Elementary

### **Demographics**

Enrollment: 675 students

Location Description: Suburban

Title I Funded: Yes

Type of Program: School-wide

School Calendar: Traditional

Charter: No

### **Overview**

Our mission at James Monroe Elementary School is to promote 21st Century Learning by helping students to think critically, have a creative mindset, communicate effectively, and collaborate to enhance learning. We do this through academic, emotional, social, and behavioral accountability among students with support of teachers, staff, parents and community members in order to meet the highest academic expectations within a nurturing learning community. We are fortunate at James Monroe Elementary School to have a diverse population. At Monroe, 54% of our students are socioeconomically disadvantaged, and 14% are English Learners. Our school culture is a tightly-woven tapestry comprised of individuals from vastly different cultures, ethnicities, communities and parental educational backgrounds that chose our school because of the programs we offer and our reputation that we are a dynamic and caring staff. In fact, our student population has increased 14% over the past two years, more than any other elementary school in our district! 40% of our student population has transferred from other schools either within or outside our district.

Our students represent the challenges that all children face today. We have students with limited English proficiency, gaps and voids in their life experiences, issues of poverty, obesity, and poor nutrition, and emotional and social needs. Over half of our students qualify for free or reduced-priced lunch. While issues of poverty can impact student learning, we have found that these families are strong supporters of their child's education. We operate under the belief that ALL students can perform at high levels, although not always in the same timeframe or with the same strategies. We believe that ALL students can learn. This philosophy has allowed us to develop a culture within our school to reach the whole child. "Whatever it takes!" is our mantra. We know it is crucial to give our students opportunities to be successful in many different areas of their educational experience. Though we are focused on student achievement and our students demonstrate proficiency with state standards, we also provide our students a whole and comprehensive educational experience. We realize that to prepare our students for continued education and life, our curriculum needs to encompass more than the teaching and learning of the standards. We believe in educating the whole child by equipping them with the tools necessary for a full and successful life.

At Monroe, we embody an extraordinary enthusiasm and willingness to analyze, plan together, and strategize to provide a comprehensive school program of the highest quality. Our school is the collaborative product of what can be accomplished when a dedicated community works together through a shared vision, clear mission, and a well-defined plan with the purpose of raising student achievement to the highest possible level and closing the achievement gaps among all student groups.

## **Model Program and Practices**

Name of Model Program/Practice: "Collaboration is the Heart" of a Distinguished School: Vertical Alignment to Support Team Teaching

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): Two or More Races, 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

Our school is distinguished in our district by our cohesive and eager staff working to vertically align and articulate best instructional practices in grades K–5, which supports the unique “team-teaching model” of our 3rd–5th grade classrooms. In grades 3–5, all teachers have a tight content of focus. Each teaches an 80-minute block of time. One teacher teaches math with the integration of STEM, the second teacher teaches content writing with the integration of social studies, and the third teaches reading with the integration of science to cohorts of students who rotate among classrooms. Our unique “team teaching model” meets the need for equity and access to first best instruction for ALL students, who benefit from the strengths of all teachers. ALL students gain access, for example, to the best math teachers at each grade level. It also streamlines our best practices. For example, teachers meet vertically to determine close reading strategies across the school. Our model allows instruction to rise to the rigor of common core, freeing time to plan lessons in depth and to bump up the rigor. To achieve this, we intentionally position staff members to teach the specific content area that matches their instructional strengths in grades 3–5.

The goals of our “team teaching model” and K–5 vertical alignment create continuity for students with strategies that build upon each other from one year to the next and streamline parents’ understanding of expectations. Our model supports parent engagement in a unique way because it unifies academic expectations, such as strategies students apply inside class and while working at home, so parents understand the expectations shared within a grade level and across grade levels. The goal of professional development is to align content, such as teaching the writing process, wherein we have backward-mapped the alignment of rubrics, strategies, and graphic organizers from fifth grade down to kindergarten.

Our model benefits unique student populations. We have vertically-aligned the use of Kagan Cooperative Learning Structures through professional development to build positive interdependence, use of academic language, and student engagement in an emotionally safe environment. We are unique in our district both for training all staff in Kagan structures and intentionally modeling and practicing them at monthly staff meetings. Students with social-emotional and behavior needs and English Learners highly benefit because ALL classrooms use Kagan teambuilding and cooperative learning to build language capacities through social interaction with academic language, and building an emotionally safe and accepting environment to support the the SAI (Specialized Academic Instruction) model at our school, wherein ALL our special education students integrate into the general education classroom for instruction, receiving small-group instruction when needed from the special education teacher.

## Implementation and Monitoring

Parental support accelerates the student success. When best practices are vertically aligned, parent volunteers are familiar with school-wide instructional strategies. The nature of the “team-teaching model” facilitates parent communication. Every teacher owns the “learning” for all students in a grade, and every child has the benefit of the

entire team of teachers strategizing on that child's behalf, so parents can team with all teachers at the grade level. Student agendas, our communication tool, travel with each child to facilitate home-school communication as grade levels collaborate to unify weekly assignments.

When we first implemented our "team teaching model," we introduced it to our School Site Council, ELAC, and PTO. Every year, each grade level in this model collaborates to create and present a slideshow to parents at Back to School Night outlining the year's goals, strategies, and expectations. All grade levels present common strategies and expectations to parents. The effectiveness of parental engagement is evident as parents sign agendas and reading calendars for at-home intervention activities. The positive feedback heard at site council and at PTO meetings is also evident in our growing population and transfer requests.

We monitor the effectiveness of our model using classroom walkthroughs, observation and feedback, and analysis of formative assessment data at weekly PLCs. Monroe's unique monitoring tools include vertically aligned (K–5) standards-based rubrics for writing. Our district uses an online data system, IO Education, to create assessments, and we go a step further, using IO Education in upper grades to create our own standards-based formative assessments. Every grade defines and analyzes unique formative assessments at monthly grade-level meetings lead by the principal and coach to monitor grade-level goals.

To make our model an effective reality for students and parents, we intentionally plan capacity-building activities for professional learning. Our staff retreat every August distinguishes Monroe, building the cohesiveness that underscores our "vertical alignment" model and solidifying the "family feel" that community members report about Monroe. At our retreat, and again at monthly staff meetings, we model the same team building and cooperative learning structures used with students, and we analyze the previous year's data to align our instructional focuses. The effectiveness of our "team teaching model's" vertical alignment is evident by our 3–5 math teachers leading professional development for our district in an "After-school Academy," and our upper grade writing teachers leading district Summer Institute sessions to share best strategies at Monroe. Our principal creates a yearly personal goal-setting survey in order to intentionally provide capacity-building opportunities for individuals, including literacy, math, cooperative learning, technology, and PLC conferences.

## **Results and Outcomes**

Surpassing district expectations, we vertically analyze data at our August staff retreat. Grades K–2 meet vertically to analyze data from DIBELS, an early literacy skills screener. The data indicated a need to target phonological and decoding skills for incoming first and second graders, so we vertically aligned best practices, DIBELS progress monitoring assessments, skills-based small groups based on data, and our unique use of fluency binders in all K–2 classes. Data show an increase of "core" first graders from 23% to 44% in the "nonsense word fluency" measure from September to January. Second graders at "core" for accuracy in reading fluency doubled from 21% to

44%, September to January, as evidence of improved decoding skills to continue a trajectory of success in the upper grades!

In grades 3–5, teachers meet vertically to analyze CAASPP data and determine specific target students and claims for instructional focus. This year, we achieved the Highest Performance Level on the CA Dashboard for all students in ELA, showing an increase of 5.9, at 46.2 points above level 3! Performance in Math increased by 10.5 points, measuring 36.4 points above level 3 for all students! We are targeting all students, those who already reach success criteria as well as those who perform below level 3. Our “team-teaching model” provides rigor for students already performing at high levels, offering differentiated enrichment opportunities through Google Classroom. We proudly recognize an increase of 9.8 points in achievement for students with disabilities in ELA, and a significant increase of 26.3 points for students with disabilities in math! It is evident the “SAI” Model within our “team-teaching model” for special education has been effective as students with disabilities are included in the rigors of the general education classroom.

We celebrate the “High” performance level in “English Learner Progress” rising significantly by 10% to 78.8% as evidence that “Vertical alignment” supports our ELs with intentional use of cooperative learning structures to build academic language across all grade levels.

These exciting results drive us toward continuous program improvement. We focused last year on aligning K–5 writing instruction, while we focus this year on aligning our K–5 reading comprehension strategies. Next year’s focus will be math, aligning our data-proven best practices in grades 3–5, such as number talks, in all grades. Our strong data and positive feedback from students and parents drives us to expand our “team teaching model” to grades 1 and 2 next year. Our model has proven to create a rigorous learning environment, and we will expand critical thinking and organizational skills as we enter year 1 of AVID, Advancement Via Individual Determination, streamlining and refining our school-wide organizational and instructional practices to propel ALL our students to the next level of college, career, and life readiness!