

West Palms Conservatory Model Programs and Practices

School Information

CDS (County District School) Code: 36679180113779

County: San Bernardino

District (Local Educational Agency): Victor Elementary

School: West Palms Conservatory

Demographics

Enrollment: 698 students

Location Description: Suburban

Title I Funded: Yes

Type of Program: Targeted Assistance

School Calendar: Traditional

Charter: No

Overview

West Palms Conservatory, a 2010 California Distinguished School and a 2016 Golden Ribbon School, was founded on a simple question: "What if the arts, rather than being considered a luxury or something "extra," served as the center of instruction?" With full support from both the District Board and the Cabinet, West Palms staff created the school's mission statement in 2007; "West Palms Conservatory is a visual and performing arts school with high academic and behavioral expectations dedicated to fostering creative thinking, goal-setting and achievement through the exploration of music, language and art. While arts-centered, West Palms operates from a well-defined strategic planning process that not only provides visual and performing arts education to a diverse student population, but also uses data from multiple sources to measure academic progress and drive instruction. In addition to being one of the top performing schools in the Victor Elementary School District, West Palms also boasts its own bluegrass band and award-winning Choir program.

The staff has fully implemented an award winning art program, Meet the Masters. This art program features historical, culturally diverse, standards-based art lessons to inspire young artists, including Picasso, Van Gogh, and Kahlo to name a few. Students are exposed to the historical background of each artist and then given a chance to emulate each master's signature style. All students K–6 grade receive instruction on 4 different artists each year.

Our music director works with all students K–6 grade twice a week. The director works with each grade level team to create a schedule that allows half of each class to attend music twice a week, while the teacher works with the second half of the class in small group instruction. The end result of our combined team efforts is musical productions from each grade level twice a year, and precious small group instruction time.

Our parent groups also support and partner with us. We have several groups including a national program, Watch DOGS, (Dads of Great Students) that encourages fathers and grandfathers to participate in their child's/grandchild's educational experience.

West Palms Conservatory's entire certificated and classified staff, as well as our community volunteers, believe in our mission of providing visual and performing arts to all our students, while maintaining high academic and behavioral expectations.

Model Program and Practices

Name of Model Program/Practice: Visual and Performing Arts throughout the day

Length of Model Program/Practice: 8+ years

Target Area(s): Chronic Absenteeism and Dropout Prevention, Closing the Achievement Gap, Parent, Family, and Community Involvement, Visual and Performing Arts

Target Population(s): Black or African American, Hispanic, Two or More Races, Socioeconomically Disadvantaged, English Learners, Students with Disabilities

Strategies Used: School Climate, Parent Engagement, Social/Emotional/Behavioral Support

Description

Before West Palms was first conceived in 2007, Victor Elementary School District officials surveyed local residents about opening an additional arts school. These surveys aligned closely to a May 2005 Harris Poll (<http://www.artusa.org>) about Americans' attitudes toward arts education and spoke powerfully about the desire and importance of arts education in the High Desert.

Before West Palms adopted Meet the Masters school-wide, the leadership team put together its own curriculum that focused on artists and composers using the California Standards for Visual and Performing Arts. Our LCAP goals, clearly defines how we will spend the funding to support the visual and performing arts. We provide all the materials needed to assure each students has what is necessary for every art project and each of our musical productions. The staff also made sure the school's instructional focus on reading, writing, and math instruction was well-defined, using research and evidence-based strategies and programs to further bolster student achievement, all the while maintaining the visual and performing arts as a non-negotiable.

In order to maintain our visual and performing arts program we understand that professional development is a key factor. Our music director attends the National Association for Music Education Conference. This conference encourages our director to improve on current teaching methods and practices. Our director's focus is to create musicals that inspire our students to image the possibilities that music allows. Our music director teaches all students including our students with special needs. Each student receives music production training twice a week, which results in two productions a year for each grade level.

The entire teaching staff receives formal art training four times a year using Meet the Masters art curriculum. This training equips the teacher to take the training back to their homeroom students. All of our students kinder–sixth grade, including two classes that service students with special needs, have the opportunity to learn about a well-known artists four times each year and create a piece of art that reflects their understanding of the artist time period and artistic methods. West Palms Conservatory is dedicated to fostering creative thinking, goal-setting, and achievement through the exploration of music, language and art, within our daily practices.

Given the vast body of support from our School Board, our Cabinet, and our community, West Palms Conservatory is confident that our program will continue to eliminate academic achievement gaps by reinforcing high expectations and increasing student engagement by providing numerous art and music participation opportunities throughout the day. Each year, based on the State Dashboard we show increased attendance and significantly reduced behavior issues compared to both District and State findings.

Implementation and Monitoring

West Palms' parents are an integral part of our school's culture. Our parent support group is nearly 500 members strong and includes several groups that directly support classroom teachers and our visual and performing arts program. West Palms is also home to a chapter of Watch D.O.G.S. (Dads of Great Students), a national program that encourages fathers to be a part of their child/grandchildren educational experience.

West Palms' teacher, Maria Kajitani, regularly hosts family paint nights. These events give parents and families the opportunity to learn and socialize, helping reinforce the idea that learning can and should be fun. The paint nights are often an extension of our school's Meet the Master's program. Students study four artists a year and create

artwork in the style of that artist. Work from Meet the Masters – and from classrooms throughout the school – become the focus for our school's annual community Art Festival. The Art Festival houses artwork from West Palms' students and also showcases student musicians, multimedia displays, sculpture, and other artifacts created in classrooms.

West Palms surveys both parents and students twice a year. Results over the past five years came back with an average 99% positive feedback. The results help gauge the effectiveness of our program, and comments often shed light on new ways to serve our families.

Having a clear vision and mission statement helps focus our professional development efforts. West Palms staff routinely attend the CUE (Computer using Educators) Conference, Good Teaching Conference, NCTM (National Council of Teachers of Mathematics), always keeping an eye out for workshops that incorporate the visual and performing arts into the curriculum. West Palms Principal, Jackie Lester, attends the Arts in Curriculum training in Washington DC each summer. This specific training supports our goal of integrating the arts into our daily classroom curriculum. Our paraprofessional staff attends as many of the art integration trainings as possible. All our trainings allows the entire teaching staff to continue to keep our mission fresh and relevant.

The 2016–2017 school year saw West Palms score green in all areas – chronic absenteeism, suspension rate, English Learner progress, English language arts, and mathematics. West Palms continues to monitor progress through several District and State benchmarks including District-wide writing assessments and the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) test. We attribute a large portion of this success to providing constant access to music and art related activities. Looking at statewide data, there is a clear correlation between chronic absenteeism and struggling learners. We believe the arts – and a persistent focus on student engagement – significantly reduces chronic absenteeism and helps foster a love of learning.

Results and Outcomes

Each year we look back at what we did, the outcome, and what changes or improvements to our arts program we need to implement for the following year. Our art focus is constantly evolving; based on the feedback from our students, parents, staff and our community.

Last year 339 of our 484 families took our annual parent survey. The results were as follows: 99% stated they would recommend this school to others, 99% have a clear understanding of the school's vision/goals for their child/children and 100% of our families surveyed supported our focus on the arts. More importantly, more than 200 comments were received, many of which were a direct response to our arts focus confirming their belief in our program.

As a result of our full-time certificated music teacher and the arts-based elective program, all students receive a minimum of 2,800 minutes of music theory and music production instruction every year, including at least two music performances a year. By sixth grade our students have received 19,600 minutes of researched and evidence-based instruction. We take that experience to the next level and perform at the Forum Music Festival each year. We received a gold rating adjudication this year, performing at the top 10%, based on the national music standards. Included in these numbers are all our Special Education students.

Research tells us that instruction in the visual, musical, and performing arts increases academic performance, reduces the drop-out rate, promotes self-esteem, and creates a sense of belonging. One direct correlation, is our high attendance, both compared to our district and the state. Our chronic absentee rate of 4.9% is less than the district's 16.6%, and less than California's 10.8%. This is a clear indicator our parents want their children in school, and our students want to be here. In addition, our suspension rate of 1.4% is the lowest in the district.

West Palms continues to monitor academic progress through several benchmarks including the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) test. The California School Dashboard shows us in the GREEN in all five major categories. Each year of the SBAC, our scores have grown; from initial scores of 16.2 points below a level 3 in ELA and 45.3 points below in mathematics in 2015, to our current 4.7 pts. above a level 3 in ELA and 24.1 points below in math. Our English language learner's English proficiency progress rate of 76.1% is up from its 2015 rate of 72.5%.

Art experiences are effective laboratories for developing creative problem-solving skills and abilities that will serve students long after formal training ends. Our arts program at West Palms Conservatory plays a significant role in what our students accomplish today and into their future.