

## **Chesterton Elementary Model Programs and Practices**

### **School Information**

CDS (County District School) Code: 37683386039374

County: San Diego

District (Local Educational Agency): San Diego Unified

School: Chesterton Elementary

### **Demographics**

Enrollment: 434 students

Location Description: Urban

Title I Funded: Yes

Type of Program: Targeted Assistance

School Calendar: Traditional

Charter: No

### **Overview**

Chesterton Elementary School is in the culturally diverse Linda Vista community within the City of San Diego. Average household income is 49 thousand a year, well below the San Diego average of 63 thousand. Enrollment averages 445 students ranging from transitional kindergarten (TK) through grade 5. The majority (56%) of the students live in Chesterton military housing. With the coordination of the San Diego Unified School District, Chesterton's administration accepts over 240 additional students who live outside the school's boundaries. The students come from a variety of family structures, such as living with an extended family member or from multiple families living in one dwelling. Additionally, 59% of the students qualify for the Free and Reduced Lunch Program.

Chesterton welcomes a diverse student body that consists of Asian, White, Hispanic, African American, Filipino, Pacific Islander, and American Indian. Currently, 23% of the students are English Language Learners, who speak approximately 15 different

languages. Over the last four school years, we have reclassified 79 students who have been enrolled at Chesterton and we are meeting the reclassification expectations.

Chesterton provides a program with high expectations in a multicultural setting where students learn to appreciate each other's differences. Chesterton also holds special events so families can gather and enjoy our work. Besides the back to school nights, there are holiday events, monthly movie nights, and a gardening program. The school involves all stakeholders by providing numerous opportunities to get involved, such as, PTA, School Site Council, and the Site Governance Team. Our main partnerships include American Legion Post 731 and Black belt USA.

We are fortunate to have a strong fully credentialed teaching staff that average 15 years of experience, with 80% having a master's degree. Our focus is on math and literacy with an emphasis on writing. All staff members plan collaboratively and strategically in Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) to continually improve instructional strengths and problem solve curricular challenges to meet the needs of all students. Additionally, we have increased the use of technology in all classrooms. For example, all students have tablets to do research and publish their work.

To serve Chesterton's 44 students with disabilities, there is a team of one full-time education specialist, part-time mild/moderate teacher, part-time district counselor, part-time speech and language pathologist, part-time school psychologist, nurse's assistant, occupational therapist, and four Special Education Assistants and Technicians. Chesterton's Special Education program implements the district's philosophy of inclusion and academic opportunity for all students. We accomplish this through early intervention, effective communication among all stakeholders, and ongoing appropriate supports.

## **Model Program and Practices**

Name of Model Program/Practice: Developing and strengthening strong Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)

Length of Model Program/Practice: 2–4 years

Target Area(s): Closing the Achievement Gap, Education Supports, Professional Development

Target Population(s): English Learners, Students with Disabilities

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

## Description

In 2012–2013, the San Diego Unified School District’s Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP) launched Vision 2020, a community-based school reform plan that included 12 indicators of a quality neighborhood school, which focused on student achievement and engaging all stakeholders (staff, students, parents, and community members). For the last 5 years, Chesterton’s staff focused on delivering a high-quality neighborhood school through a lens of continuous improvement by focusing on 4 of the 12 indicators in Vision 2020:

1. closing the achievement gap with high expectations for all
2. access to a broad and challenging curriculum,
3. quality teaching and
4. Professional learning for all staff.

If implemented correctly, we hoped to create a quality neighborhood school, which improved the rates of proficiency for all students and produce students who take an active stance in their own learning and become actively literate, contributing members of society who make a positive difference in the world. We knew we had to build a high cohesive team to achieve our goals and be distinguished among other schools. Hence, it was imperative to make a cultural shift where all teachers are capacity builders, problem solvers in a collaborative environment, and responsive to their students’ needs.

The essential resources needed were motivated grade-level lead teachers to become ILT members, funding to allow release time for staff, and administrative support. Initially, the lead teachers were selected by the principal but later, the teams were empowered to select their own grade-level leaders. The responsibility of the ILT sought ways to ensure we addressed the Vision 2020 four indicators within their individual PLCs to develop and maintain a sustained shared vision among all stakeholders to provide effective instruction to our students.

In 2015–2016 we analyzed multiple data points, including Smarter Balance Assessment Trend Data, Adequate Yearly Progress, and Academic Performance Indexes, and Common Formative Assessments. The data showed us:

1. An average of 68% of our students met or exceeded the standards in Mathematics.
2. An average of 69% of our students met or exceeded the standards in English Language Arts.
3. An average of 33% of our students had not or nearly met standards in English Language Arts.
4. An average of 31% our students were below basic or far below basic in Mathematics.

Math was the area of greatest need, and when analyzing the data at a micro level, we determined our English Learners and Students with disabilities were performing at much lower rates of proficiency. Therefore, if we focused on lifting our students in the equity gap, we would certainly lift ALL students through strategically implementing the necessary systems and structures in place to ensure that ALL students are supported academically, socially, and emotionally.

### **Implementation and Monitoring**

To support the LCAP goals, and meet the 12 indicators in Vision 2020, our model program of Developing and Strengthening strong PLCs, focused on incorporating the district's Four Learning Cycles:

1. How do we develop an academic, social, and physical environment worthy of our children?
2. What are the conditions we need to create classrooms that are alive with collaborative conversations?
3. How do we create the learning conditions that maximize the potential that lies within the variability of all learners?
4. How do we develop students who take an active stance in their own learning and the learning of others?

If the 4 learning cycles are effectively established, student will take an active stance in their own learning and become actively literate, contributing members of society who make a positive difference in the world.

To meet the indicators of a quality neighborhood school that propels academic achievement for ALL students, it was necessary for the ILT to create the conditions for the staff to set high expectations among themselves, build confidence, engage in critical thinking, and plan strategic lessons based on multiple sources of data that met the academic needs for ALL students.

To create the conditions for a collaborative risk-free environment necessary to do the work, the ILT created common agreements that assisted in creating a professional learning environment and their commitment to continuous improvement. We knew we had to create a culture that distinguished ourselves from all other schools to successfully increase student achievement. To have a common language among the ILT, we streamlined our curricular foci on "Critical Concepts" with enduring understandings. We utilized common formative assessments, standards-based proficiency scales, and bodies of evidence to analyze students' progress towards grade level standards, stated objectives, developed strategies and tiers of intervention to support students not yet at grade level, and differentiated instruction in terms of content, process, and product for students. From these results, the ILT created a data picture of our school that created the rationale for school wide professional development. ILT members also facilitated the cultural transference to grade level PLCs.

PLCs focused on streamlining grade level curriculum that emphasized critical concepts, continuing and extending professional knowledge of best practices for English learners, students with disabilities, and students not yet at grade level. They administered formative assessments for English Language Arts and Math to benchmark and analyze students' progress towards proficiency with grade level critical concepts. They also used informal assessments, exit slips, and collaborative efforts that focused on DuFour's Guiding Questions: teacher leadership, use of a common core curriculum, and curriculum-based assessments. These specific functions allowed Chesterton to distinguish themselves among other schools.

## **Results and Outcomes**

Besides the formal assessments, the PLCs used informal assessments and exit slips to provide immediate feedback on student progress. Students were given multiple opportunities to demonstrate proficiency, such as on-demand assignments, cooperative group work, projects, and journals. Our collaborative efforts based upon DuFour's Guiding Questions, teacher leadership, use of a common core curriculum, and curriculum-based assessments, yielded impressive gains in 2016 and 2017 school year. Results such as those shared below affirmed the importance of creating a culture of collaboration with a laser focus on improving student achievement for ALL students.

Regarding assessment and monitoring:

1. 80% of our students have met or exceeded grade-level Math standards in 2017 (a 13% gain from 2016).
2. 68% of our students are Proficient or Advanced in ELA.
3. 32% of our students had not or nearly met standards in English Language Arts.
4. 20% our students were below basic or far below basic in Mathematics.

In addition, the district's ELA score was 56% and math was 44% the Common Core State Standards. Students are Chesterton students scored 12.4% and 33.9% higher respectively. Our English Language Learners scored higher than the district scores by 40% in both ELA and Math. The percentage of our students with disabilities who met or exceeded standards were higher than the district by 6% in English Language Arts and 14% in Math.

Overall, the model practice built resilient staff members who promoted a shared vision and genuinely engaged in collaborative conversations using a common language in a very supportive professional learning community (PLC). Instructional practices have become public in teacher share outs in ILT, PLCs, and staff developments, classroom visits, and photos. In 2016–2017, Chesterton was awarded the District's Quality Schools in Every Neighborhood (QSIEN) Award for LCAP: Goal 1, Closing the Achievement Gap with High Expectations for ALL. Additionally, Chesterton has been selected by the Area Superintendent to host principal learning walkthroughs. Furthermore, artifacts, anecdotes, photos and videos from our Professional Learning Communities and

classrooms have provided models for district professional development around Developing and strengthening strong Professional Learning Communities (PLCs).