

Gage Elementary Model Programs and Practices

School Information

CDS (County District School) Code: 37683386039648

County: San Diego

District (Local Educational Agency): San Diego Unified

School: Gage Elementary

Demographics

Enrollment: 535 students

Location Description: Urban

Title I Funded: Yes

Type of Program: School-wide

School Calendar: Traditional

Charter: No

Overview

At Gage Elementary School our mission is to ignite the excitement for learning in all students. We are committed to providing an environment where students' curiosity and love for learning is nurtured to help prepare them for a successful future in a world of advancing technology and globalization.

We provide a rigorous and challenging instructional program that aims to strengthen student achievement through two parallel tracks: our STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) program and our Spanish Immersion program. Students in the STEM program participate in weekly exploration labs as well as daily Next Generation Science Standards based lessons within the classrooms. Students enrolled in Spanish Immersion receive 100% instruction in Spanish through second grade, then gradually transition to a 50%/50% model in the intermediate grades, with the ultimate goal of biliteracy. Both programs offer enrichment opportunities throughout the day and there are additional after school enrichment programs available.

Our teachers are experienced and dedicated professionals who work and study together regularly to refine curriculum and hone instructional practice in order to provide quality instruction that will meet our students' needs. Teachers work in Professional Learning Communities related to their content of STEM or Spanish Immersion, as well as working across the programs to unify Common Core State Standards based curriculum and instructional methods.

Our community includes parents, students, staff, and community partners. Our community works together in partnership to provide a supportive environment for our students. Parents actively participate in a wide range of school activities, from academic and cultural events to site-based decision making. Additionally, our school works in partnership with local businesses in the neighborhood, who provide relevant, community-based opportunities for our students as well as financial support for our school-wide activities.

Gage serves a rich culturally and economically diverse student population comprised of many different ethnicities and languages, which is unique for the surrounding area. The school consists of sizeable Hispanic, Asian, African American, Somali, and Russian populations. Additionally, when compared to other neighborhood schools, the Gage community includes a significantly higher population of high poverty and homeless students.

The Gage parents and staff foster a strong sense of community, putting students at the center. Many of our students have parents and grandparents who attended Gage and continue to be involved in our school activities. Our goal is to involve all members of the community in creating an environment that encourages critical thinking and cooperative learning.

Model Program and Practices

Name of Model Program/Practice: Parallel Track STEM and Spanish Immersion

Length of Model Program/Practice: 2–4 years

Target Area(s): Closing the Achievement Gap, Parent, Family, and Community Involvement, Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics

Target Population(s): Black or African American, Hispanic, 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

Gage is unique in that it offers a program with two parallel tracks: our STEM program and our Spanish Immersion program. Students in the STEM program participate in weekly exploration labs as well as daily Next Generation Science Standards based lessons within the classrooms. Students enrolled in Spanish Immersion receive 100% instruction in Spanish through second grade, then gradually transition to a 50%/50% model in the intermediate grades, with the goal of biliteracy. Both programs offer enrichment opportunities throughout the day and there are additional after school enrichment programs available.

Prior to adopting a Spanish Immersion/STEM program, Gage's enrollment during the 2012–2013 school year stood at approximately 350 students, placing the school in "small school status", and potentially creating a shared campus scenario with a charter school or face shut-down. The staff collaboratively decided to create an innovative program with hopes of attracting back neighborhood enrollment. With the onset of globalization and STEM-focused instruction, Gage Elementary opened its parallel track program. Due to the success of the programs, Gage has revived neighborhood enrollment as well as grown a significant "choice" population of families who choose to leave their neighborhood district or school to come to Gage. Currently, our enrollment stands at 535 students.

As our program continues to develop, administration and teachers in both tracks have the goal of sustained, ongoing professional development in their respective fields. In the STEM track, two of our lead teachers have been trained as Early Implementers for NGSS in California. Only a total of 700 teachers in the state have received this level of training. Three grade levels have participated in district mathematics coaching cycles. Administration also participates in SDSU-sponsored professional development. In the Spanish Immersion track, teachers participate in district professional development related to instructional practices in Immersion settings. Two lead Spanish Immersion teachers participate in extensive professional learning opportunities and return to provide training to their colleagues.

Students in the STEM track participate in rigorous NGSS-aligned classroom lessons and lab explorations. Students in Spanish Immersion have the goal of attaining the District's Seal of Biliteracy, indicating proficiency in two languages. The parents and community participate in parent education classes around STEM and language development and participate in the cluster STEM parent advocacy group.

The collaborative learning environments in both the Spanish Immersion and STEM classrooms has led to higher levels of engagement thereby lowering classroom behavioral issues. The inclusion model promotes acceptance of varied learning styles as well as increases student self-confidence. The schoolwide implementation of the site developed "Character Counts" has placed a focus on outstanding character.

Implementation and Monitoring

Both program tracks benefit from a dedicated and active parent, extended family, and business community. Parent groups, particularly the PTA, play a critical role in bringing families together at school for a wide variety of events such as assemblies, Family Nights, and cultural celebrations. One of the largest gatherings bringing together parents, staff, administration, and community partners is the Gage Fiesta, which is a fundraiser that provides financial support to both tracks.

Gage administration and staff employ a variety of methods to communicate with and recruit parents and community members. Back to School Night and a PTA informational session and member drive kick off the year. Administration, staff, and parents actively seek partnerships within the community. Some examples of this community engagement include partnering with the local hardware store for our school garden, a church to provide backpacks to underprivileged students, and Mission Federal Credit Union to both teach and promote financial literacy to students.

Throughout the course of the year, parents create and disseminate a monthly newsletter tailored to each classroom's needs. Each teacher on staff employs means of electronic communication to keep parents informed of events and student progress. Throughout the year, parents attend a variety of training sessions and family nights related to academics or community building.

To monitor the effectiveness of parent/community engagement, Gage tracks the number of volunteer and the number of parents and community members who join the PTA. In 2012 Gage had 46 daytime volunteers that assisted during school hours and in 2017, that number has grown to 76 volunteers. As a result of increased parent involvement, Gage's PTA membership has increased. Prior to the implementation of this program, the PTA consisted of 109 members. The current PTA has over 200 members. These members donate numerous hours supporting both in class activities, after school parent/community activities.

Professional learning is an ongoing contributor to the success of both tracks. Administration meets monthly with a Principal learning group as well as a PLC specifically for Principals. Gage staff has been involved in a Cluster P.D. with three other community schools with a focus on questioning and clear communicating, as well as grade level PLCs to maintain vertical alignment of student learning. Teachers also benefited from a coaching cycle that started with 2nd grade and has now expanded from 1st through 5th.

To evaluate the effectiveness of instructional learning activities, Gage administration and staff engage in bi-weekly Professional Learning Communities to evaluate student work samples and determine next steps for instruction based on student needs. Teachers track student reading levels and assess writing using a common grade-level rubric monthly. This data is also used to evaluate student learning and establish a progression of goals.

Results and Outcomes

Student progress is analyzed by grade level PLCs twice each month where next steps are planned and brought back for further analysis. Teachers in each grade level focus their PLC on strengthening the five math components. Both tracks maintain a monthly shared Google Doc where monthly updates are made to reading levels, writing, and math achievement. Students in the Spanish Immersion track are expected to meet the same DRA requirements as students in the STEM track. In each track's PLCs, STEM teachers focus on developing and implementing NGSS-based lessons and laboratory explorations. Spanish Immersion teachers focus on vertical alignment of language development across the program.

In 2011–12, before the program began, according to the ELA portion of CST one of the grade level gaps between Hispanic and white students was at 40%. According to 2016–17 data for the CAASP test and the whole school gap has been reduced to 12%. The same group made impressive improvements in math moving from a 43% achievement gap in 2011–12 to 6% in 2016–17.

Gage students have benefited academically from the STEM/Spanish Immersion program, as evidenced by the multiple measures of data employed by administration and staff. The most recent year end data indicates that 64% of students are reading at grade level, as measured by the DRA/EDL. Sixty-nine percent of students demonstrated improvement in writing, as evidenced by pre and post writing unit assessments.

In relation to the unique populations of Hispanic, LI and EL populations, Gage has closed the achievement gap. Prior to the program the grade level achievement gap for some of the Hispanic students were as high as 40%, for LI students it was 48%, and for EL's it was 23%. The current year-end data from 2017 shows the largest achievement gaps at 12% for Hispanic students, 12% for LI students, and 13% for EL's.

Based on this data analysis, the STEM/Spanish Immersion program represents a challenging program that produces globally literate critical thinkers. As evidenced by this shift in the achievement gap, students at Gage have equitable access to highly engaging curriculum that allows all students to make considerable progress toward grade level expectations.

Using these multiple measures of data in the PLC structure, teachers continually analyze academic growth and determine next steps for individual and small groups of students. Based on these analyses, teachers differentiate instruction to advance students from their current levels of performance. In STEM, modifications include open-ended tasks that are accessible to all learners, allowing for enrichment and additional practice to deepen scientific and mathematical understanding, and including scaffolded instruction to support struggling students. In Spanish Immersion, modifications include extensive use of scaffolded language instruction, appropriately leveling students' literacy tasks, and allowing for multiple learning modalities in content areas.