

Toler Elementary Model Programs and Practices

School Information

CDS (County District School) Code: 37683386040224

County: San Diego

District (Local Educational Agency): San Diego Unified

School: Toler Elementary

Demographics

Enrollment: 250 students

Location Description: Urban

Title I Funded: Yes

Type of Program: School-wide

School Calendar: Traditional

Charter: No

Overview

Toler Elementary, named after San Diego's first school teacher, William P. Toler, is a Pre/K–Grade 5 elementary school. We have approximately 250 students with 13 classrooms (TK–5), 1 Pre-School class and 1 Library/Media classroom. Our school is situated in the southwest corner of Clairemont, a hardworking, eclectic community of San Diego. Our school population reflects the cultural diversity of our beautiful city.

Toler sits on a multi-terraced lot with the highest point overlooking the bay. PTA, SSC, ELAC and SGT are active parent groups at Toler. Parent volunteers run our Book Fairs, Garden Days, Parent/Student Sports Days, and work in our library, gardens, Running Club and classrooms. Our parents are involved in and care deeply about the learning and achievement of their students.

We are a Title 1 school with 57% of our students qualifying for supplemental services and resources. Additional subgroups include: English Language Learners 30%,

Hispanic 47%, and 36% White. Most Toler students live within the school boundaries and approximately 33% voluntarily choice to Toler from surrounding neighborhoods.

Here at Toler we are actively closing the Achievement Gap by ensuring that our practice includes a guaranteed and viable curriculum, consistent student assessment and monitoring, collaboration, exquisite instruction based on student need and an emphasis on the social, emotional, and behavioral needs of our students.

At Toler, every decision we make and every practice and structure we have in place is designed with our students in mind. Our staff believes that if we create a learning environment worthy of our students, they will develop the skills they need to flourish and become proficient, kind, leaders. We believe that collaboration and relationship building are crucial to improving achievement.

For three years we have focused on fostering kindness in and amongst our school community. This year our theme “I Choose Kindness” has permeated the site with timely attention on connecting our students to the needs of our city, country, and world. Restorative Practices are the cornerstone of our discipline system. Every staff member establishes positive, nurturing, relationships with the students and our students know that we care about them. One parent was recently heard to say, “I can’t get over how every adult at Toler speaks so kindly to every student.”

Toler Elementary offers a curriculum that is rigorous, student centered and aligned with Common Core State Standards. Teachers are provided ongoing opportunities to learn, collaborate, analyze student data, and plan and implement explicit instruction in order to maximize student achievement according to individual needs.

When one visits Toler, it is evident that our school reflects not only a culture of achievement but a kind, joyful, student centered learning environment where positive relationships and collaboration are unmistakable.

Model Program and Practices

Name of Model Program/Practice: Proficiency in Literacy through Strategic Questioning and Prompts

Length of Model Program/Practice: 2–4 years

Target Area(s): Closing the Achievement Gap, Education Supports, Parent, Family, and Community Involvement, Professional Development

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

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

In 2015 (SBAC) 48% of our students were proficient in ELA. This was a huge change from the previous year (CST) when our students were 73% proficient in ELA. We had work to do.

The data showed that our students were struggling in the area of reading comprehension. From earlier studies, we knew the power that questioning and purposeful talk have on reading comprehension. Many of our students were able to talk about text at the literal level but not able to take their ideas and questionings into deeper thinking. We needed to develop our students as critical thinkers, readers and writers. We launched an inquiry around this need. Our inquiry became our Model Practice (MP). We focused on both reading and writing.

Our Title1 group (57%) who scored 42 % Proficient in ELA became our target group. We believed that by targeting this group and focusing our inquiry on all classrooms, we would improve school wide achievement for all of our students including our subgroups.

We used a district grant and site funds to pay for release time for our teachers to engage in PLCs. During the first year of implementation, we worked with two district Common Core Resource teachers. Supplemental resources included: Academic Conversations by Jeff Zwiers and Marie Coward; Fountas and Pinnell's, The Continuum of Literacy Learning and our district adopted curriculum: Lucy Calkins Reading and Writing Units of Study.

That year, our district launched The Four Learning Cycles; an initiative intended to help our students become participants in their own learning and literate members of society. Toler distinguished itself from this model by launching an inquiry (MP) that aligned all of our PDs, teacher learning, and PLCs to those Learning Cycles. Our MP took the LC model into everything we did over the next three years.

The intended goals and outcomes of the MP were: every student would engage in meaningful talk through questioning and prompts. Their talk would be strategic and develop into deeper levels of thinking thus improving comprehension. Our teachers would plan for talking points in each lesson and utilize open ended questions and questioning strategies to increase rigor and reading comprehension. Our parents would be brought into this work through meetings, conferences, and modeling in order for them to support their child's learning.

Our target group was identified with their social/emotional and behavioral needs in mind. We would commit to building emotionally and relationally healthy learning communities. Our MP encouraged every child to take an active role in talk, fostering a sense of inclusion to produce caring, literate students.

Through our MP we would increase interest in learning and daily attendance.

Our students would know that learning takes place when we are in school collaborating and talking and engaging.

Implementation and Monitoring

During the first year of implementation, administration and resource teachers planned, taught, and presented the teacher learning, PD and PLC work that was aligned to and directly supported the goals and outcomes of our MP. During the second year, a neighboring school joined the inquiry and we strengthened our work by having both schools engage in planning, learning, PD and PLC work together.

We learned how to facilitate academic discourse and how to deepen the level of talk by determining what questions needed to be asked in each lesson. We took a closer look at the Depth of Knowledge these questions were eliciting. We wanted to increase the Depth DOK from Level 1 to at least Level 3 to enable our students to improve their comprehension. We used DRA2 to monitor reading progress. Writing was monitored through the pre/post unit assessments from the Writing Units of Study.

Our staff met with parents several times each year. Parents were given information around classroom curriculum and goals, including those of the MP. Additionally, parents were asked to check the weekly communication sent out by all classroom teachers and the school site. Family Days were offered for parents to participate in classroom lessons in literacy and see our MP in action. These activities were monitored through sign in sheets.

Our staff engaged in multiple capacity building activities related to the MP. The following activities were conducted to build capacity for teachers, administrators and non-instructional staff and were monitored by self-reflection, evaluation sheets, and sign in sheets:

Admin PD: Writer's Workshoop:10/15; Learning Cycles:1/15,3/15,4/15;Leadership Practices:6/15, 9/15, 6/16, 6/17;Collaborative Conversations/Equity:11/15, Building Teacher Capacity: 12/1,2/16; Building Capacity/Equity: 2/16, Understanding and Designing the Literacy Block:5/16; Restorative Practices: 8/16; Establishing Effective PLCs: 11/16, 1/17, Meaningful Assessment: 2/17, 4/17; Widening the Sphere of Success, 8/17, 12/17

Teachers PD: Writing Units/Assessments: 9/15; Developing Agency Through Writing: 11/15; Learning Cycle 3: 4/16; Restorative Practices: 8/16; Writing/Questioning and Teaching Point: 10/16. 10/26/16; Reading Is Thinking: 11/16; Guided Reading and Questioning: 1/17; Writing/Inquiry/Anticipating Student Responses: 3/17; Next Steps for Inquiry: 5/17; Critical Concepts and Proficiency Scales: 10/17; Understanding and Strengthening Guided Reading: 12/17

Non-Instructional Staff PD: Learning Cycles: 9/16; Restorative Practices: 10/17; Scholarly Behaviors: 2/17; Quarterly Special Ed Trainings: 2015–17

PLCs: Talking Points in Lessons, Levels of Talk, Planning and Anticipating For Questioning 1/16–2/16; Unpacking Student Talk and Questioning in Writing Units: 9/23–10/16 ;Lesson Study in Guided Reading/Focusing on Questioning: 2/17–3/17 Aligning Lucy Calkins Reading/Writing Units: 4/17.

Results and Outcomes

We are now in Year 3 of implementation of our MP. Our data clearly indicates that we have made great gains not only with our Title 1 students but with All Students and our Hispanic and White subgroups.

Parent sign in sheets and surveys indicate that the attendance rate for academic events was at 75%. Parents felt that the school engaged them in their child's learning and were aware of the rigor and high expectations around the CCSS.

Teachers placed themselves on a Continuum (Emerging/Developing/Accomplishing) of where they felt they were in using questioning and prompts in their lessons. Most felt they were at the emerging level already using: structured talk, referring back to the lesson's purpose and simple prompts. By the end of the second year, teachers were asking students to: tell more, listening in on conversations and using multiple opportunities to reinforce the purpose of the lesson. Students are now asking each other, "Can you tell me more?" And engaging each other's thinking in strategic partnerships, justifying their thinking through examples and connections, building on and challenging each other's thinking. Teachers definitely rated themselves more towards the Accomplishing column by the second year.

At the end of the second year the California Dashboard data indicated a significant increase from the previous year in the academic performance of all students (ELA) falling in the Very High level at 28.6 points above a level 3 (4 being the highest) which was a + 37.5 point increase from the previous year. The data for our Title 1 students showed that group in the High Level with 5.9 points above level 3 a significant increase of + 27.1 points in ELA. Our Hispanic subgroup also fell in the Very High Level 6.3 points above level 3 with a significant increase +38.9 points in ELA. Finally, our White subgroup was in the Very High Level with 42.2 points above a level 3 and a significant gain of 42.3 points. Although our English Learner data indicates a Medium Level of overall performance they were up +37.2 points from the previous year, a significant increase.

Year 1 DRA2 data showed our students scoring 79% Proficient at the end of the year. Writing data indicated that our students were 56% Proficient at the end of the year. Also in Year 1, All Students scored 57% Proficient ELA (SBAC) (up 9% points) and our Title 1 students 46% (up 4 % pts).

Year 2 data for DRA2 showed All Students scoring 81% Proficient at the end of the year. Writing data indicated that our students were 63% Proficient at the end of the year. In Year 2 All Students scored 61% Proficient in ELA (SBAC) (up 4% points) and our Title 1 students 55% (up 4 % points).

Our data shows that we were able to raise the achievement level of our students and help them become critical thinkers and proficient readers.

Next steps for our MP include taking on Student Centered Cycles and CCSS Critical Concepts and Proficiency scales to support our students.