

Benchley-Weinberger Elementary School Model Programs and Practices

School Information

CDS (County District School) Code: 37683386040299

County: San Diego

District (Local Educational Agency): San Diego Unified

School: Benchley-Weinberger Elementary School

Demographics

Enrollment: 565 students

Location Description: Urban

Title I Funded: No

School Calendar: Traditional

Charter: No

Overview

Our Vision is to motivate and empower every child to be a successful lifelong learner by providing challenging curriculum and teaching high-level communication skills in a supportive learning environment with the inclusion and collaboration of the entire home/school community.

When perspective families tour Benchley-Weinberger Elementary School (B-W) inevitably we hear, "Your scores are so high...you are a 10 rated school." While acknowledging the hard work and effort of an entire community to earn those marks, we remind parents that our goal is that children are running up the stairs each morning in anticipation and that at the end of the day, they do not want to go home. Our community of staff and families wraps itself around our kindergarten through fifth graders and gives new significance to the African proverb, "It takes a village to raise a child." We call ourselves, "A School with Heart. " (c2012 Patton)

Our "School with Heart" contract and philosophy infiltrate the school day at every level. From the front office, the custodian, and the "Lunch Lady" to the classroom teacher, the

student, the reading volunteer, or PE Coach, we believe that gratitude, hard work, and service are at the “heart” of learning. The B-W community put our hearts into all we do. It is through our connection to each other, that we develop our growth mindset, persevere, and succeed.

As an “Achievement through Communication” Magnet school, all of our efforts work toward cultivating communication skills to inspire 21st century imaginations. With an emphasis on the three directed themes of Interpersonal, Global/Media, and Artistic/Alternative communication strategies, we provide a challenging curriculum and teach high level communication skills in a supportive learning environment. This concentrated focus on communication fuels our academic accomplishments and is indeed the core academic strength of our students as a whole. Through the ongoing development of these skills across the content areas, our students are able to access, understand, analyze and evaluate all the powerful words, images, ideas, sounds, and practices that make up the climate and culture of learning at school and therefore, the world around them.

The B-W culture is a distinguishable collaboration between home and school and a group of children who are empowered to be successful. The Benchley-Weinberger “Pandas with Heart” are proud of the unique school culture we have created; one that offers a challenging curriculum with access for all students in a supportive environment. Our students develop and augment their skills daily, reflecting their educational growth and development. We benefit from the wonderful collaboration between home and school and we delight in the intriguing blend of communicators and listeners, intellectuals and comedians, and performers and dreamers who put their “hearts” into our learning community.

Model Program and Practices

Name of Model Program/Practice: "School with Heart"-Promoting Student Achievement and Agency

Length of Model Program/Practice: 5–8 years

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

Target Population(s): Students with Disabilities

Strategies Used: School Climate, Small Learning Communities, Parent Engagement, Data-Driven Decision Making, Social/Emotional/Behavioral Support, Professional Development

Description

“The most important thing we can teach kids is to love people, thus love school.”

Emily Rubin

Our “School with Heart” (SwH) tenets include-perseverance, self-advocacy, respect, responsibility, taking a stance, and effort. Each is embedded in all we say and do and in our results; sincerely simple, yet profoundly ingrained in the culture of our school.

“SwH” is beyond a program, it is a mindset, a way of life. Its ideas are centered on high expectations for ALL students. No longer do students with challenges stand out in the crowd, have a different set of expectations, or are held to a different standards.

Early on students learn to look through another's eyes; share their experience, strength, and hope; and trust that the peers and adults beside them are called to do the same. The "reliable and viable" curriculum, becomes just that much more accessible to ALL students. "School with Heart" helps minimize the anxiety that accompanies risk-taking in the school setting.

The model is sincerely simple, yet profoundly ingrained in the culture of the school. The "SwH" contract launches the expectations and empowerment for collective and individual success and achievement: emotional, social, and academic.

- I will treat everyone kindly, even if they are not exactly like me.

This means that I use common courtesy. I include people and surround myself with positive friends. If a student is not being positive, I will use my skills to solve the problem. If I need assistance, I will ask for help from an adult.

- I will practice respect-using words and actions that make our school a better place.

I will pay attention to the things I say and do. I will look people in the eye when I speak and I will answer adults on campus in complete sentences. I will let others go first and I will help to keep my classroom, the playground, and the entire campus clean and safe.

- I will be of service.

I will ask my teachers, fellow students, and other people if there is anything I can do to help. I will ask students, who might be alone, to join in a game, or to play with me. I will encourage a classmate to keep trying and I will say “good job” when they persevere.

- I will report bullying or anything else that is not good for me, or for our school, to an adult.

If I see someone being hurt, or hear unkind words being used, I will use my words, I will remind the other students that we are a School with Heart. If I need help, I will ask an adult.

- I will speak up for myself. I will say what I mean and not say it meanly.

I will tell the truth and I will not follow along if someone is making a poor choice. I will be a leader and practice doing the right things inside and out of the classroom.

- I will work hard, ask questions, and participate in my own learning.

I will track the speaker. I will work together with my teacher and other students. I will do my best on all my work and projects. I will stay curious and not give up!

Implementation and Monitoring

School with Heart is implemented and monitored daily. We hold ourselves to a higher standard and every member of the community makes the school better. At the beginning of each school year, the "School with Heart" contract is presented and signed by all students/families and staff. Restorative practices (classroom circles, collaborative conversation, parent/community forums, leadership roles for all, appreciative inquiry...) make up the SwH practices. The community "signs on" promising to put their best "heart" forward by maximizing opportunities for all students and being actively present.

Daily Running Club kicks off at 7:25 am, parents, students, staff, and families are already on campus. Students set up cones pocket charts that house lap tally cards. Older students run alongside the younger ones. If one is not a runner, he/she might join the Red, White, and Blue Club to practice with the choir before school. Parents and grandparents report for duty. All the while B-W students witness something great--a kinship in which their most basic needs are met even before the school day begins. We know that the feeling derived from this morning routine, inspires students to actively engage more fully in the learning process.

The above practices set the stage for a day filled with student voices, meaningful connectedness, integrated technology, and above all, "Heart!"

Along with the adults who remain on campus to participate in the day, the students themselves spring into action. They head up the morning meetings, check their own progress by way of technology or classroom data, set a daily goal, carry out classroom service, or "lean in" to engage in a lesson being delivered. Teachers with Heart check in with students by way of one on one conferences, small group instruction, purposeful assessment, or ongoing progress monitoring that drives support for focus students. Student Coaching Cycles and PLC work led by the principal and grade level teacher teams sustain the support systems we build around every individual.

"School with Heart" supports our communication magnet with complexity and compassion. Beyond our Media Lab, school newspaper, fine arts activities, TV news station, and film making, SwH inspires students to share their ideas, challenges,

questions, and their successes, however large or small, across all content areas. Students monitor/encourage themselves and others evidenced in the projects they take on, the service opportunities they seek, and the daily participation in their own learning. Self-reflection is modeled and purposefully taught.

The SwH language is ubiquitous. Embedded in lessons, parent bulletins, PTA discussions, playground negotiations, staff conversations, and beyond it is commonplace to hear the language of the "heart" in and outside the classroom.

"Ms. Patton, Caleb was being a "student with heart" today when he helped me with my Math," or, "Hannah was a friend with heart. She asked me to sit with her at lunch!"

Results and Outcomes

The results include increased test scores, consistently high percentage of daily student attendance (Cumulative Attendance Report 17/18 Month 4, 97.60%, +.19), and growth in the number of logged volunteer hours are some of the outcomes of our model. We include positive school climate and "customer satisfaction" among the benefits of putting our "heart" into all school matters.

Our innovative, support systems yield results beyond standardized scores and ones that are difficult to document in a chart or graph. The inclusive, community based culture that is evident from one's first step onto the Benchley-Weinberger campus can be summarized in the smiles, laughter, and hugs that linger long after one leaves our school at the end of the day. When one visits the campus for the first time, whether an itinerant staff member, guest teacher, visitors, new volunteer, or perspective family, comments such as, "...Everyone seems so happy here...the staff really likes working here...I can't wait to be assigned here again...it was great to be here, the kids are great..."

The 2016–2017 California Healthy Kids Survey (CHKS) corroborates the anecdotes. Ninety-six percent of 5th graders reported that "at school, teachers and other grown-ups care about them most or all of the time. When asked if they are "happy to be at this school," a resounding 99% said "Yes." When asked if the school "teaches students to care about each other and treat each other with respect," every student survey answered, "Yes." And finally, all the 5th graders surveyed reported that they feel "thankful to go to their school."

The parent portion of CHKS results yielded similar results. Ninety-eight percent of parents surveyed agreed or strongly agreed that the "school has a supportive learning environment"; 97% agreed or strongly agreed that the "school has adults that really care about students; and 95% stated that B-W "has high expectations for all students."

Finally, the CHKS staff data revealed that 100% of the participants agreed that the "learning environment is supportive and inviting" and that "high standards for academic performance for all students" is the norm. The staff went on to unanimously report that our school, "encourages parental involvement" as well.

“School with Heart” is a way of life for the B-W stakeholders. The model may very well hold the key to building collaborative partnerships within a community; fusing thoughtful practice with theory; and building powerful and effective communication skills, techniques, and strategies. Parents, families, students, teachers, staff, and community members are linked forever in a cycle of interconnectedness and empowerment.