

Miramar Ranch Elementary Model Programs and Practices

School Information

CDS (County District School) Code: 37683386069116

County: San Diego

District (Local Educational Agency): San Diego Unified

School: Miramar Ranch Elementary

Demographics

Enrollment: 749 students

Location Description: Suburban

Title I Funded: No

School Calendar: Traditional

Charter: No

Overview

Miramar Ranch Elementary School is located in the city of San Diego, in the upper middle-class neighborhood of Scripps Ranch. Having been built in 1976, the neighborhood and community have grown up around Miramar Ranch. The Scripps Ranch community is now home to four elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school, all a part of the San Diego Unified School District. Miramar Ranch Elementary is located less than four miles from Marine Corps Air Station Miramar. Due to our recruiting efforts and outreach, many of the families stationed on base enroll their children at Miramar Ranch through the district's Choice program. Over 25 percent of our overall enrollment is made up of students whose families have chosen to transfer to our school.

Miramar Ranch currently has an enrollment of 750 students in grades transitional kindergarten through fifth grade. The school serves a diverse population of students 42% of whom are white, 17% Hispanic, 16% identify as two or more races, 14% Asian, and smaller subgroups of African-American, Filipino, and Indochinese students. Families at Miramar Ranch Elementary speak a total of 31 languages. 20% of our student body

is made up of children from military families and 12 percent of our students have IEP's or 504 plans.

Miramar Ranch has a highly experienced and dedicated teaching staff. Of the 29 classroom teachers, 90% have a minimum of 15 to 20 years teaching experience. Four Education Specialists support our students with IEP's, along with 13 fully trained paraprofessionals working part time. Support for these students takes place both in the General Education classroom and in separate settings.

Enrichment activities and support of our basic curriculum is provided by our Family Faculty Association (FFA) made up of parents and staff. Our foundation provides funding for schoolwide assemblies, an Art Corps program, a science lab, and numerous other activities at the school. The financial and volunteer support provided by our Family Faculty Association is critical in a school which receives no Title I funding.

The recruitment of military families to our school has provided unexpected resources. Because of the presence of these students, we have a full-time Military and Family Life Counselor on our campus daily to support military students and families. Additionally, we have received funding from the Department of Defense Educational Activity program. This grant has provided training to all teachers, support of special education classrooms, and has provided a collaborative partnership between local artists and teachers in order to integrate the arts into our daily curriculum.

Miramar Ranch Elementary School is a community of learners in which all children are encouraged to achieve academic and social success, to enjoy learning, to celebrate diversity, to develop analytical skills, and model exemplary behavior. We empower our students to take responsibility for their own learning.

Model Program and Practices

Name of Model Program/Practice: Work Hard and Be Nice: A Social-Emotional Model

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): Socioeconomically Disadvantaged, English Learners

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

Description

Work Hard and Be Nice: A Simple Slogan For a Complex System

Miramar Ranch Elementary School has long been proud of the academic achievement of the majority of our students. Staff and teachers work collaboratively to provide access to a broad and challenging curriculum and test scores show that we have been successful for the majority of our students. Test scores also showed, however, that another group of students were not successful academically; specifically English Language Learners and Socioeconomically Disadvantaged students. Many of our students who were not achieving academically were members of both of these subgroups. Additionally, we found that many of our students from military families belonged in one or the other of these subgroups. Despite the overall success of our school, we knew we were not reaching all of our students.

The challenges of military life are great for many of our students. Realizing that this was a new population of students and families for our school, we looked for training to inform us on how to best support these, and all of our children. Thanks to a grant from Department of Defense Educational Activity (DoDEA) program, the entire teaching staff was able to participate in Trauma-Informed Schools training (California Center of Excellence for Trauma-Informed Care) in August 2014. Our purpose was to become a compassionate school, specifically ensuring that policies affecting students, families and staff are both compassionate and effective and to weave compassion strategies into school improvement and planning.

Expanding upon training provided by the National Equity Project to our district, we embarked upon an inquiry to identify students both within and outside the academic “Sphere of Success”. The staff began a study of academically successful students, their habits, their traits, and their attitudes towards school. One noticing was that our most academically successful children were often socially and emotionally successful as well. Was it possible, we wondered, to teach our less successful students to be academically successful by focusing on social-emotional health?

As spiritual teacher AH Almass states, “Inquiry is basically a challenge to what we think we know.” This was indeed a challenging exercise for our staff. Through this practice we reflected on our own roles as educators. We agreed that our job is to take responsibility for our students’ learning and not to blame them, their families, or the school system for their failures. Inquiry allowed us to hold ourselves accountable for student success and failure.

But how were we to teach all of our children to be socially, emotionally and academically successful?

Implementation and Monitoring

Once Miramar Ranch Elementary had an identified focus on the social and emotional well-being of our children, all decisions were made through a compassionate lens focusing on culture and climate in the school and in the community. We realized that mentally healthy and emotionally stable children had a far greater chance of academic success in school.

While all schools within the district were part of the National Equity Project training, only a small number participated in the Trauma-Informed Schools workshops. The staff at Miramar Ranch Elementary chose to use this training as a jumping off point for our own study of how to best support students.

We began by asking teachers to identify a student in their classroom with challenging behaviors. This student became the focus of our year-long inquiry. At bimonthly professional learning community meetings (PLCs), teachers discussed needs, supports, and progress of these identified students. One discovery of our inquiry was that we needed to develop a common language and expectations around behavior.

We chose to study the Zones of Regulation curriculum and introduced it to staff and students in September 2015. According to their website, it “is a curriculum geared toward helping students gain skills in consciously regulating their actions, which in turn leads to increased control and problem solving abilities.” This study not only helped us to formalize staff expectations around behavior, but also taught self-regulation strategies to students at all grade levels. Having a common language, common visuals, and clear expectations about and reactions to student behavior, helped us move toward our goal of a compassionate school with socially and emotionally healthy students and staff. Students knew and understood the expectations of behavior and were given the tools to regulate that behavior on their own. Being able to regulate their own behaviors gave students a sense of confidence and accountability.

The successful implementation of the Zones of Regulation program encouraged the staff to look for other ways to build self-regulation and learning skills. In September 2016, thanks to funding support from our foundation, the school purchased the Second Steps Program for each classroom in the school. Once a week students are presented with a Second Steps lesson taught in their classroom by their teacher. “The Second Step Program promotes school success, school connectedness, and a safe and respectable school climate by directly teaching students the skills that strengthen their ability to learn, manage emotions, have empathy, (and) solve problems.” (Second Step Principal Toolkit, 2015). This program assists students and staff in building upon the skills taught with the Zones of Regulation curriculum. In addition to learning self-regulation skills, Second Steps also focuses on school success and skills for learning.

Results and Outcomes

The focus at Miramar Ranch on the social and emotional health of our children has created changes in the climate and culture at the school. In the past four years since we began this journey, the number of children suspended from school has decreased, the number of students given discipline referrals has decreased, and the focus of the school counselor has evolved from dealing with discipline issues to proactively working with students to improve self-discipline and to build confidence.

The California Healthy Kids Survey (WestEd,2016) reported key indicators of school climate and student well-being as reported by students. 85% of students reported that most or all of the time they felt proud to belong to Miramar Ranch, 87% of the time they

felt that adults at school had caring relationships with the students, 85% of the time students reported feeling safe at school and an amazing 96% of students reported that most or all of the time the adults at school believed in them and believed they could do a good job. Our work in building a compassionate school focused on the social and emotional welfare of our students showed impressive results.

Most importantly, the focus on climate and culture did not detract from academic achievement and we believe improved achievement levels for identified subgroups. In the spring 2017 California School Dashboard Report for Miramar Ranch Elementary, the current year status for all students in both English Language Arts and Mathematics is Very High and both showed an increase over the previous year. More importantly, the focus subgroups identified showed a status of High (Socioeconomically Disadvantaged) and Very High (English Language Learners). Although we had not chosen to focus on other sub groups such as Students with Disabilities and African-American students, while both have low scores, both subgroups increased or increase significantly in English Language Arts and Mathematics. Eight out of ten subgroups increased or increased significantly over the previous year in English Language Arts and seven out of ten subgroups increased or increase significantly in Mathematics.

In other indicators, attendance remains high, with monthly average of 97.7% this school year, and the recent suspension rate remains low. Parent involvement is at an all-time high with an average of 50 parent volunteers and visitors in classrooms daily.

We believe of all the LCAP goals mentioned earlier, Goal Four: Positive School Environment, Climate, and Culture – With Equity at the Core and Support for the Whole Child is most reflected in the work done over the past four years at Miramar Ranch. We are convinced we are on the right path to continue to develop the social and emotional well-being of our students which will lead to greater academic achievement for all.

As a recent second grader wrote after a Mindfulness session in her classroom, “I am grateful for (the principal) and her minfolnische.” We are on our way!