

## **Montecito Union School Model Programs and Practices**

### **School Information**

CDS (County District School) Code: 42692526045728

County: Santa Barbara

District (Local Educational Agency): Montecito Union Elementary

School: Montecito Union School

### **Demographics**

Enrollment: 401 students

Location Description: Suburban

Title I Funded: Yes

Type of Program: Targeted Assistance

School Calendar: Traditional

Charter: No

### **Overview**

Montecito Union School, recertified as a California Distinguished School in 2014, is a one-school district serving the community of Montecito with transitional kindergarten through sixth grade. The District is comprised of a middle to upper socioeconomic population and has a current enrollment of approximately 400 students. It is governed by a five-member Board of Trustees and is administered by a Superintendent, Principal, Assistant Principal, and Chief Business Official. Montecito Union School District, a historic cornerstone of the community, is dedicated to providing a comprehensive educational foundation, cultivating a passion for learning, honoring the unique qualities and strengths of our children, and challenging them to attain their full potential.

The vision of MUS is to set a global standard of educational excellence. Our students will have the academic foundation to creatively solve complex problems, to apply interpersonal and collaborative skills, and to demonstrate a genuine sense of curiosity in a student-focused and supportive environment. MUS has worked diligently to ensure all

of our programs and initiatives integrate together in a synergistic way, and are thoughtfully implemented to complement one another. Though described in isolation below, they truly work together in harmony.

MUS has embarked on a journey with Project Zero from Harvard University over the last eight years. Visible Thinking is a flexible and systematic research-based approach to integrating the development of students' thinking with content learning across subject matters. Visible Thinking has a double goal: on the one hand, to cultivate students' thinking skills and dispositions, and on the other, to deepen content learning. By thinking dispositions, we mean curiosity, concern for truth and understanding, a creative mindset, not just being skilled, but also alert to thinking and learning opportunities and eager to take them on.

Another key component of our curriculum, and our Model Practice, is focused on the work of Lucy Calkins and the Reading and Writing Workshop Project. Readers Workshop focuses on the central role of curriculum development and planning in teaching reading, explicitly teaching comprehension strategies, the importance of assessment-based instruction, the role of the read-aloud book, methods of holding our students accountable for doing their best work.

Encompassing each academic area is our school-wide focus on implementing Costa and Kallick's 16 Habits of Mind. We were fortunate to be named one of five schools in the United States as an International Habits of Mind School of Excellence. Teachers weave instruction in the Habits of Mind throughout all areas, such as identifying traits of historical figures or literary characters, seeing connections between persistent or flexible animals in science, or noting the importance of striving for accuracy in mathematics.

## **Model Program and Practices**

Name of Model Program/Practice: Reading and Writing Workshop

Length of Model Program/Practice: 5–8 years

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

Target Population(s): American Indian, Asian, Black or African American, Filipino, Hispanic, Pacific Islander, White, Two or More Races, Socioeconomically Disadvantaged, English Learners, Students with Disabilities

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

## **Description**

The Reading and Writing Project is part of a comprehensive literacy program, which includes whole class instruction, small group work, and independent practice. Teachers are intentional when forming small groups and partnerships, knowing that the make-up of the group will directly influence the outcome. Data is analyzed and used to form groups so that the strengths and next steps of the students are documented and used to inform instruction. During this ninety minute block, students experience read alouds, shared reading, word study (phonics/spelling patterns), mini lessons, independent and partner reading, and interactive and independent writing. At times, emphasis is placed on whole group instruction, whereas other times, students can be found working at tables in small groups or as independent learners.

In the Workshop model, instruction begins with a mini-lesson where the teacher explicitly states the purpose of the lesson. Through discussion and demonstration, teachers guide students to apply essential questions or teaching points to their learning as they engage in the process of reading or writing. Developing engaged, self-motivated readers and writers requires providing students with a multitude of opportunities to access content. Teachers provide a short explanation, a demonstration, or create a chart, then "off they go" to utilize these skills during independent practice. Throughout the Workshop, children might be paired with partners having similar reading or writing abilities. During Readers Workshop, students have a shared experience, reading back-to-back from a bin of 'just right' books. For Writers Workshop, students are independently writing to a specific genre. At the same time, teachers work with small groups or individual students based on needs and goals derived from ongoing assessments. After that, partners share books or writing pieces and engage in dialogue focused on each other's work.

A major tenet of balanced literacy at MUS is that children have choice in what they read and write. Teachers understand that if the child has ownership, there will be greater motivation. Despite individual diversity in abilities, we believe the enthusiasm and delight for reading can be equal. Motivated students can become lifelong readers and writers. We strive to create a program where each child is met at their developmental level and then challenge them to move beyond it. A key component to this model's success is deliberate and ongoing professional development. In addition to 10–15 days per year of professional development from an outside trainer, teachers are provided with collaboration time on a regular basis, both through weekly grade level PLCs and weekly whole-staff PLCs. To further support implementation, MUS implemented a coaching cycle in which grade level spans (K–2, 3/4, and 5/6) worked in focused groups with the principal to continue deepening their understanding and implementation of the model.

## **Implementation and Monitoring**

This year is our eighth year implementing the Reading and Writing Workshop Model. After initially sending six teachers to the summer workshop institute in New York, we began the first year by creating unique learning environments in our classrooms with

round tables, leveled books, and reading areas to support the workshop style. Since this first year, we have solidified our commitment to this practice by partnering with a senior trainer associated the workshop. Each year she has spent up to fifteen days on-site providing professional development to our staff. While she is on campus, we work as grade level teams to refine our practice, observing lessons modeled in our classrooms, as well as teaching the lessons ourselves and receiving constructive feedback. Through our PLC model, the reading specialist works with teams to plan instruction supporting the literacy work for struggling learners. Teachers have weekly opportunities to share successes, challenges, and discuss Reading and Writing Workshop curriculum based on the needs of the current students.

In addition to utilizing outside expertise to support our implementation, we also have internal systems in place to monitor our implementation and student progress. Our principal meets weekly with grade level teams during PLC meetings to discuss curriculum and student outcomes. Staff shares writing samples, discusses student reading progress, and analyzes data in order to make strong decisions about curriculum, student interventions, and assessments. In addition to grade level PLCs, our whole teaching staff meets approximately three times per month to talk about student learning and achievement. Furthermore, the school developed a "coaching cycle" in which grade level spans meet regularly to further a specific practice. The school implemented a literacy cycle this year in which grade level teachers worked in partnership with neighboring grades to deepen their understanding of the workshop model and refine implementation. MUS also employs a school literacy committee which meets monthly and makes decisions and recommendations both proactively and reactively in regards to literacy instruction and student learning. Finally, the school has explored multiple student assessment and data systems and has recently begun utilizing the software Illuminate to record benchmark assessment data that can be monitored for both individual and group trends.

One unique aspect of a workshop model is that the curriculum is constantly being updated based on feedback from classroom teachers around the world. Teachers are supported in improving student achievement through these curricular updates, grade level and school-wide PLCs, and ongoing professional development. Although we are provided with a continuum of ideas, it is not a set curriculum. Therefore, providing teachers with continued opportunities for collaboration and professional development is essential.

## **Results and Outcomes**

Montecito Union continues to achieve in the top 1% of Districts in California. Our focus on a rigorous curriculum yielded exceptional results on the CAASP Assessment. Montecito Union students in grades 3–6 received the second highest score in the state on the English Language Arts Testing. As a school that is committed to continuous improvement and growth, we will continue to focus on a relevant, rigorous and integrated curriculum. Our students continue to regularly meet our expectations on benchmark assessments, with English Learners performing at levels similar to their

grade level peers. On any given assessment, typically 80–90% of our students are meeting benchmark expectations.

Assessments for both reading and writing are embedded in the program and are directly linked to the workshop model. Classroom teachers use assessments both to support higher-level thinking skills as well as guide instruction. When looking at assessments, material mastered by students and skills that need extra support become visible. With both Reading and Writing Workshop, assessment practices also occur on a daily basis in the context of students' writing and reading.

In reading, our primary instrument is the Running Record. It is a monitoring assessment used to analyze what skills readers need to improve in order to have continued success in their reading ability. These assessments are administered on a regular basis. At the conclusion of an assessment, teachers sit with individual students and discuss what they now know about them as readers. Students data is evaluated and those not meeting criteria are referred to reading intervention. Teachers regularly use this data to plan for instruction that further differentiates to meet the needs of students inside the classroom.

In writing, teachers administer formative assessments for each genre detailed in the CCSS. Rubrics and checklists are used to evaluate work from kindergarten through sixth grade. Teachers can quickly differentiate instruction for students when looking at their checklists and/or rubrics. They are concise and make the goals clear for both students and parents. In addition, rubrics highlight the skills that have been mastered, as well as identify areas for growth.

An unexpected outcome of this practice has been the growth of collaboration as a staff. The workshop model embraces not just student collaboration as they learn and grow as readers and writers, but also teachers co-constructing meaning as they study and analyze student work. As a group, committed to becoming role models for learning, we have become better at making our own thinking visible for students as we teach explicitly. We talk, think, and plan together to create units "just right" for students. Through studying student work we have honed in on best practices for teaching literacy and, though the work is never finished, we are proud of the strong MUS balanced literacy program.