

## **Frank L. Huff Elementary School Model Programs and Practices**

### **School Information**

CDS (County District School) Code: 43695916047971

County: Santa Clara

District (Local Educational Agency): Mountain View Whisman

School: Frank L. Huff Elementary School

### **Demographics**

Enrollment: 601 students

Location Description: Suburban

Title I Funded: No

School Calendar: Traditional

Charter: No

### **Overview**

Huff Elementary School is one of eight elementary sites in the Mountain View Whisman School District. Our mission is to inspire, prepare, and empower every student.

In 1997, after years of housing Mountain View's Community School of Music and Art, the Huff site was reopened as a kindergarten through fifth grade elementary school to serve the growing student population in the surrounding neighborhood. Today, Huff is a bustling school of 602 students, 38% percent of whom are White, 35% are Asian, 11% are Hispanic, and 14% are of mixed heritage. Approximately 9% of our students receive free or reduced lunch benefits. Seventeen percent are English Learners and 3% have IEPs.

There are over thirty languages spoken at Huff. Our linguistic and cultural diversity affords us the opportunity to teach and model inclusion and respect for all cultures. Since many of our families are employed by the local technology industry or its affiliates, there is a natural, collective affinity for educational experiences that support the

development of 21st Century “soft skills”: creativity, collaboration, critical thinking, and communication.

Huff’s identity as a center of the local community revolves around the concept of “Huff Love,” a term used over the past twenty years to describe the caring and consideration of all of our staff and community members on a personal level. Many of our staff and families have built deep personal connections with each other, and the cornerstone of these relationships has been the school itself. Everyone in the school community has a deep sense of responsibility for the success of every child.

Our community’s active engagement has many benefits. Through our PTA, students experience a wide variety of enrichment opportunities and top notch learning resources. The PTA supports teachers generously through donations of classroom materials and volunteer hours. School leaders benefit from diverse, well-considered viewpoints on how to improve upon an already well-rounded, rich educational experience.

## **Model Program and Practices**

Name of Model Program/Practice: Project Based Learning

Length of Model Program/Practice: Less than 2 years

Target Area(s): Closing the Achievement Gap, Parent, Family, and Community Involvement, Professional Development, Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics, Use of Technology, Visual and Performing Arts

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: School Climate, Parent Engagement, Data-Driven Decision Making, Professional Development

## **Description**

Huff’s students have long had access to enrichment opportunities that, taken as a whole, aim to create a well-rounded experience for all students. However, with a few exceptions, our core instruction in ELA, Math, Science, and Social Studies, had largely utilized a fairly traditional approach. Project Based Learning aims to change the way students (and teachers) experience education. Students will emerge with the skills called for by our LCAP and Strategic Plan. In Winter and Spring 2017, Huff teachers and school leaders designed a model for the first year of a multi-year shift towards PBL.

Areas of Study and Scheduling

- For year one, we chose to center PBL around Science and Social Studies for their interdisciplinary nature. Additionally, because the vast majority of professional development over the past several years has focused on Math and ELA, Science and Social Studies were due for an implementation upgrade.
- Four total “periods” (50 min each) are set aside for Science or Social Studies each week (depending on the topic of the project).

### Staffing

- Two full-time teachers specialize in designing and facilitating PBL units. These experienced educators lead efforts to plan and implement PBL units that aligned with the Next Generation Science Standards, state Social Science standards, and ELA Common Core Standards.

### Planning

- Grade level teams are given release time to plan upcoming PBL units in collaboration with the PBL specialists. Together they identify the Science or Social Studies standards for the upcoming unit, as well as the related ELA standards, and design projects centered around Driving Questions such as “How can we, as engineers, slow or prevent wind or water from changing the land?” (2nd Science) and “How can we, as theatre troupes, perform historically accurate scenes from the daily life in the thirteen colonies?” (5th Social Studies).
- Unit plans are highly coordinated: classroom teachers and PBL teachers carefully pace lessons within each unit.

### Lesson Delivery

- PBL teachers push in twice each week to each classroom; classroom teachers lead the project the other two periods during the week. While there are two teachers in the classroom, groupings are more dynamic and small group facilitation is more fluid.

### Assessment and Reflection

- At the end of each PBL unit, students show off what they have learned through a public exhibition of learning. Parents are invited to view/listen to final products, ask questions about the products and process of learning.
- Students reflect on the content they’ve learned as well as the process with which they’ve learned it. Teachers collect student reflections across the year in a portfolio.

## Enrichment Support

- Two PTA-sponsored enrichment courses taught by contracted organizations (Imagineerz Design Thinking and Growth Mindset for 1–2 grades; Code for fun Computer Science for 3–5 grades) support the mindset and attitude needed for success on projects.

## Implementation and Monitoring

To prepare for PBL implementation, our staff engaged in extensive and ongoing professional learning.

- School visits: In Spring 2017, staff visited three successful local PBL schools to observe and consult with teachers and school leaders about our own upcoming implementation.
- Parent education: Parents were invited to learn about PBL and our implementation plans during PTA meetings, Principal's Coffees, and the weekly newsletter. They gave input and asked many good questions that helped us hone our plans.
- Formal Summer Training: In Summer 2017, Huff teachers attended one of two multi-day trainings for beginning PBL: (1) Buck Institute of Education's PBL World and (2) a specially-designed district PBL Professional Development Series.
- Ongoing Formal Training: Over the course of this school year, a cohort of Huff teachers representing various grade level teams has been participating in the Santa Clara County Office of Education STEAM-PBL Practicum at Bullis Charter School. They have, in turn, shared their learnings with their teaching teams.
- Ongoing Professional Learning Communities: Our two PBL teachers regularly join grade level collaboration time to discuss and plan upcoming Science and Social Studies projects

Extensive planning time has been dedicated to creating PBL units and/or adapting existing units from various sources.

- On average, teachers receive one staff meeting per month to plan projects. In the past, the vast majority of instructional planning was done during the contracted weekly grade level collaboration or on teachers' own time.
- After each project is completed, classroom teachers are additionally released from regular teaching duties to work with the PBL teachers on finalizing the next unit. By the end of the school year, this release time will total at least six additional hours of group planning that had not taken place during school hours in the past.

We assess and monitor the effectiveness of our PBL implementation through

- Principal classroom walkthroughs
- Teacher review of student products
- Public exhibition of student work
- Solicitation of feedback from the audience at our exhibitions (mainly families)
- Reflection and collaboration with grade level teams and instructional coach

Implementation this year has not been without its challenges:

- Due to ongoing construction, we have limited space on campus this year for students to spread out as they complete their project-related assignments.
- Coordination between the PBL teachers and three grade level teams simultaneously led to many early scheduling difficulties.

We made the following adjustments mid year based on observations and teacher feedback:

- A schedule of when certain classrooms are available, e.g. when the students are at PE, so that students and teachers can spread out to work.
- All grade level teams now strictly base their PBL pacing on the district ELA pacing calendar to ensure a more manageable and consistent schedule for everyone.

## **Results and Outcomes**

A critical component of PBL is its emphasis on public displays of learning. At Huff, projects are designed so that students must create products that can demonstrate their learning to a broader audience than their teachers or peers. Ideally, their learning outcomes contribute (in some way) to the sum of human knowledge on the topic. An expected public product that will be critiqued by an audience is also a strong incentive for producing quality work!

- In 2017–18, every student in grades 1–5 participated in at least one PBL Exhibition, showing off their learning to invited parents and guests. During these exhibitions, students demonstrated their communication skills by presenting their work to a live audience. Students interacted with their audience, answered questions, and received feedback.
- Projects that did not end with an official exhibition still resulted in tangible outcomes in the form of multimedia presentations, class-authored custom books, and reports.

- Staff collected feedback from our audience: parents and family members were asked to comment on the learning process, and on the exhibition experience itself.
- This feedback has already taught us quite a bit and produced adjustments to the way we run exhibitions, logistically and pedagogically.

Student engagement with Science and Social Studies has increased.

- From a staff survey this winter, 83% of teachers have observed an increase in engagement during Science and Social Studies time as compared to 2016–17.

Sixty two percent also say that PBL has increased the rigor of Science and Social Studies this year.

- School leaders have observed that students are able to identify and discuss topics in Science and Social Studies in greater detail and clarity than before.

Since 2017–18 is the first year of PBL implementation at Huff, the amount of quantitative data is limited. Looking ahead to the next several years, we are planning the following (some of which is already rolling out in a limited fashion this year):

- Traditional end-of-unit tests that assess subject-specific content in Science and Social Studies, designed to pair with exhibitions as an additional data point to measure the extent of student learning.
- Portfolios of student work that include measurements of how students are able to speak or write about what they have learned about the content and about doing projects.
- Including assessments of “Profile of a Graduate” traits as part of public exhibitions of learning.
- A blueprint for the next three years of implementation. According to our Strategic Plan, 5th grade students must complete a yet-to-be-defined “Capstone” project that demonstrates the “Profile of a Graduate.” Huff plans to be at the forefront of district efforts to define the target and the preparation necessary to help students successfully complete that effort.