

Simonds Elementary Model Programs and Practices

School Information

CDS (County District School) Code: 43696666048706

County: Santa Clara

District (Local Educational Agency): San Jose Unified

School: Simonds Elementary

Demographics

Enrollment: 696 students

Location Description: Suburban

Title I Funded: No

School Calendar: Traditional

Charter: No

Overview

Simonds Elementary School brings to life our district's vision of "preparing today's students to be the thinkers, leaders, and creators of tomorrow" and our school's vision of "fostering high expectations, inspiring social responsibility, and embracing community connections." Situated in the residential neighborhood of Almaden, our campus is adjacent to a public library and community center, which compliments our rich educational environment. As a 2008 and 2012 California Distinguished School and a 2001 and 2013 National Blue Ribbon Award recipient, Simonds constantly strives for student success.

As one of 27 elementary schools in San José Unified School District, Simonds serves a large and culturally diverse population of 696 students from TK through 5th grade. Eight percent of our students are English Language Learners, and our families speak 19 different languages. 100% of our teachers are fully credentialed, and many hold advanced degrees. Our parent community is among the most engaged in our district, logging more than 13,600 volunteer hours each year.

Simonds offers a variety of programs that enhance our academic practices. Students at all grade levels have access to a fully-networked computer lab with state-of-the-art desktop computers. Students in grades 3–5 are also provided laptop computers for blended learning programs, research, and writing. In addition, students benefit from weekly music classes with a full-time music teacher and regular art classes with trained parent volunteers. We are able to fund these initiatives through long-standing partnerships with the Simonds Music and Technology Foundation and PTA.

Our school's instructional approach has closed the achievement gap for Hispanic, African American, and Socio-Economically Disadvantaged student subgroups. This year, Simonds scored at the highest performance level for all students in Suspension Rate, English Learner Progress, English Language Arts, and Mathematics. This success largely stems from our implementation of the district's instructional framework model.

Simonds seeks to empower students to be socially responsible individuals and to provide them opportunities to engage with the world around them. Each year, students organize service events to raise money and collect donations for people in need. Simonds' PTA offers extracurricular activities that engage our greater community.

Finally, we believe a healthy self-image and positive relationships are at the heart of being a productive student. The Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) system was introduced at Simonds in 2009 to establish and maintain behavior expectations. Simonds students follow the ABCs (Always Do Your Best, Be Safe, and Care for Others) and receive recognition for making safe and responsible choices. Parent volunteers reinforce the school's expectations with monthly Project Cornerstone lessons and discussions. Additionally, we offer free on-site individual and group counseling.

Model Program and Practices

Name of Model Program/Practice: Preparing today's students to be the thinkers, leaders, and creators of tomorrow.

Length of Model Program/Practice: Less than 2 years

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

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

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

Description

Simonds follows San José Unified's instructional framework, which holds that every student needs explicit, engaging instruction, accompanied by models and opportunities to practice skills in collaborative and independent settings in order to succeed.

Together with the support of the principal and the help of a site instructional coach, teachers have weekly opportunities to collaborate with colleagues and analyze student data. Three times a year, each grade level collaborates in a full-day professional development session. Working together, teachers are able to design lessons aligned to the differentiated needs of students and develop supplemental materials to address content gaps and the development of particular skills.

Teachers provide daily lesson objectives, orienting students to what they are learning and supporting English Learners with language objectives. They present material through an explicit model, metacognition, or think-aloud. Then, they gradually release responsibility of learning to students through highly-structured practice phases, guided work, and collaborative student groups. Empowered by preparation, students can successfully engage in independent learning opportunities.

Simonds students have a wide variety of abilities and needs. Students who are not yet proficient in grade level standards receive modified and supplemental instruction to aid them in reaching those standards. Students receive targeted interventions using instructional technology on a daily basis and also participate in guided practice groups with their classroom teachers. English Learners receive 90 minutes of blended learning technology per week. Additionally, our Intervention Specialist spends 80% of their time working with target populations (low socio-economic, English Learner, and foster youth) to implement appropriate interventions, working with classroom teachers and small groups of students to address gaps based on assessment results.

We strive for full implementation of Common Core State Standards in Math, Language Arts and English Language Development. Our school follows research-based Scope and Sequences at each grade level to provide an integrated approach, deconstruction of the standards, and resources that align to each unit. Teachers utilize Stepping Stones Modules for Math and provide enduring understandings and essential questions aligned to the content of each module. All teachers have had professional development and planning opportunities with these resources from both district and site level coaches.

The integration of technology programs such as DreamBox, Lexia, and Achieve 3000 into daily instruction provides reinforcement for objectives taught in the classroom. Student Study Teams comprised of staff and parents respond to the needs of struggling students with intervention support, PBIS strategies, and social-emotional counseling. This process lowers our absenteeism and suspension rates and increases student success.

Implementation and Monitoring

At Simonds, we believe in fostering a culture of shared leadership and continuous improvement. Our principal has built upon the work of previous school leaders to ensure that all Simonds stakeholders are part of decision-making processes that affect the school. The Continuous Improvement Leadership Team, consisting of the principal and a teacher representative from each grade level, along with the School Site Council (SSC), annually update our Single Plan for Student Achievement (SPSA) and coordinate within and across grade levels.

Our staff has a shared pedagogical belief that the use of effective assessments to guide data-driven instruction is at the core of ensuring academic proficiency and improvement for all students. Student achievement is assessed with formative and summative assessments using Houghton Mifflin Theme Tests, Math Unit Assessments, District Writing Performance Assessments, and teacher-created assessments.

Student and parent participation are key components of our data analysis process. Students receive valuable feedback on a regular basis through the use of rubrics, peer- and self-evaluations, and one-on-one conferences with teachers. Parent-teacher conferences occur bi-annually to address student growth and areas of concern. Standards-based report cards inform families about progress toward grade level proficiency. Student Study Teams comprised of teachers, specialists, parents, and the principal function as support structures for students who are struggling.

The principal works closely with staff to share information and discuss progress towards goals at staff, district, and site committee meetings. The principal leads discussions about new initiatives to enhance student learning and encourages staff input at every turn. Staff meetings are a place where teachers reflect on practices, share strategies, and monitor SPSA implementation.

District and community leaders provide input through the Simonds Music and Technology Foundation and other established partnerships. Parents provide leadership through the PTA, Foundation, SSC, and School English Learner Advisory Committee (SELAC). Student leaders are engaged through Student Council and open classroom forums. Back to School Night, Open House, monthly Principal's Coffees and weekly "Simonds Says" parent newsletters provide additional opportunities to connect with parents, students, and community members and share information.

Our high level of engagement with our community is part of what makes Simonds stand out from other schools. Our principal leads by informing, setting a course, and motivating the school community so that every stakeholder is working towards the same set of goals. Our staff understands the importance of their role to motivate and inspire others through committee work and professional development opportunities. And parents are active partners, serving as classroom volunteers, tutors, and consultants, and providing support and reinforcement at home.

Results and Outcomes

Simonds believes all students, regardless of their subgroup, can achieve high levels of academic excellence. Our instructional framework leverages modeling, scaffolding, small group activities, collaboration, and differentiation (grouping students by skill levels for targeted instruction and practice), as interventions for students who are struggling academically. We have implemented a systematic procedure to identify and respond to the needs of struggling students with the goal of seeing each student meet and exceed standards.

Student assessment data is shared with teachers through Illuminate, a districtwide platform that allows us to aggregate school data in one interface. It also houses our report cards, standards, demographics, attendance, and grade-level, class and individual student progress. Additionally, our Instructional Specialist shares growth reports and summarized data to support teachers with information that is easy to retrieve and analyze. This allows teachers to spend less time looking for data and more time collaborating and planning targeted instruction.

The California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP) administered each spring is the state's academic achievement benchmark. At the elementary school level, the exam assesses students' proficiency in English-Language Arts (3rd through 5th grade), Mathematics (3rd through 5th grade), and Science (5th grade only). Student performance is disaggregated into levels of academic progress: Standard Exceeded, Standards Met, Standards Nearly Met, and Standards Not Met. Simonds staff work hard to ensure that all students reach and maintain Standards Met and Exceeded achievement levels. This standard of success permeates school decision-making, teaching, and interaction with students.

The California Department of Education uses Smarter Balanced Assessments (SBAC) scores to calculate an annual Dashboard and Equity Report, which shows how schools are performing on test scores and other measures of student success. Our district's strategic plan calls for all students and subgroups to score either green or blue (the two highest performance levels) in ELA, Math, and English Language Development Progress. Simonds' 2017 Dashboard results indicated that all students scored in the blue, or highest level. One group, Two or More Races, scored in the yellow as of Spring 2017 but has since moved to blue in Fall 2017. All other numerically significant subgroups were blue or green.

We are proud of the growth our student subgroups have made. We closed the achievement gap for our English Learner students, and our ELL subgroup has performed higher than all other subgroups in ELA. All numerically significant subgroups score blue in Mathematics, and all of our students outperform similar groups in the district and state. We believe this success validates our faithful implementation of the district's instructional framework model and data-driven monitoring of student performance.