

VISTA VIEW MIDDLE SCHOOL LEADERSHIP SITE PROFILE

Introduction

Vista View Middle School, located in the city of Fountain Valley, is in the Ocean View School District, a K-8 district of over 10,000 students in Orange County served by the West Orange County SELPA. Vista View's enrollment in 2005 was over 880 students in grades 6 through 8. Twelve percent of its student body is in special education; 19% are English Language Learners, and almost half are in the Free and Reduced Price Meal program. Vista View Middle School received a CalSTAT Leadership award in the area of literacy in 2005.

The Impetus for Change

Prior to implementing its literacy interventions, Vista View operated under a traditional special education model, in which speech and language was a pullout program. Occasionally, a student receiving resource support or enrolled in Special Day Classes might be included in a general education class, but inclusion was not systematic.

Collaboration began informally among the school's special education teachers, both special day and resource teachers, as they saw and considered the overlap in IEP goals and objectives between their many students, and made a decision to work together to help students reach those goals by coordinating services and sharing strategies.

From there, some teachers in general education became increasingly willing, again on an informal basis, to include additional special needs children in their classes. In an environment where teaching in the least restrictive environment, and providing access to the full curriculum for students with special needs were of prime importance, the school began to consider different models for inclusion. School staff received encouragement from a proactive district.

"...[T]he most important thing that came out of that was that we were meeting the needs of the classroom teacher who really didn't understand our special ed students at that time. So we were there to support them..."

--Interviewee, Vista View Middle School

The school developed its literacy program over a 7-year period beginning in 1999, though informal collaboration dates back 10 years prior to that.

Vista View's Model

The overall goal of the literacy program at Vista View is to eliminate the literacy gap between students and to bring students to proficiency.

With this in mind, the model is characterized by the following:

- Blended student populations

Children are placed in classes and interventions depending on assessed need rather than placement in special or general education. Special education instructional staff teaches literacy, core classes, language arts, and math to both students in both general and special education. General education teachers may also teach literacy interventions to blended classes.

- Leveled reading instruction based on assessment

Children are provided levels of literacy interventions based on assessed need, with a continuum of services available. Depending on their level, and type of skill development needed in reading, they receive different kinds of instruction.

Tier I is for students performing at benchmark and at more advanced levels in reading. This group uses the Holt program, with supplemental materials for advanced students.

Tier II is for students performing within two years of grade level in reading, called “strategic learners.” These students are placed in an individualized program designed to meet their specific reading needs consisting of one or more research-based reading interventions. They might have a mix of any of the following:

Rewards (for decoding) might be their elective for a trimester; Read Naturally (for fluency and comprehension), an after-school program with a 5:1 student to teacher ratio, which is not mandatory; Soar To Success (comprehension through active reading and reciprocal teaching), a small-group pull out program scheduled during classroom silent reading time so children do not miss any curriculum, and Skills for Success, another elective, which helps students with study skills.

Tier III is for those students needing intensive intervention; again, students are grouped by need and matched to the appropriate intervention. High Point is provided for English language acquisition; Language! and Read 180 for vocabulary, comprehension, and writing skills. Children in Tier III do not attend science or social studies classes until they are able to move into Tier II. The school made a decision that those children needed the extra hours of language instruction before they would be asked to master the curriculum.

Students are universally participating in the Six Minute Solution, which is a daily reading program during the class advisement/enrichment period, in which children of similar reading levels are paired up to read to one another and track their progress. This program, which requires labor-intensive kit assembly and recordkeeping, is supported by parents and instructional volunteers who collate the materials and update records.

Vista View benefited from the ERIA training provided by CalSTAT to select its reading interventions to match the skill development needs of students.

- Data use for placement and monitoring progress

Children are assessed each trimester to determine their progress in reading, writing, and math. A Monitor and Assessment Plan (MAP) is formulated for each student that outlines any support they may need, and progress attained. Title I and School Improvement Funds are used to provide substitutes to conduct the assessments so that teachers need not use classroom time to assess. Student's assessments are reviewed together with their cumulative record folder to ensure that each student is receiving the intervention that matches his or her needs.

Grouping into tiers, and within tier, is flexible and students can move depending on the outcome of their assessments. All teachers have access to individual student-level data on literacy assessments.

- Collaboration for planning and individual student review and placement

Teaching staff hold monthly "roundtable" collaborative meetings to develop and review MAPS and to discuss all aspects of a student's performance. A rubric is used to determine student progress. If for some reason the student is not progressing in accord with the rubric, he or she can be referred to the SST and perhaps into the formal special education assessment and planning process.

"[T]he beauty for me especially is [that] a lot of my children with IEP's are in Read 180 and Language!. So I can cover my IEP's...within that classroom...because these programs cover many of the unique needs that are on the IEP: semantics, syntax morphology, listening comprehension, phonology."

--Interviewee, Vista View Middle School

- Administrative support

The school, the district and SELPA provide administrative support to the literacy program. The master schedule is created to meet students' needs based on previous year-end assessment data, and is refined after STAR results become available. In the first ten days of school, after any additional screening and diagnostic tests are completed, the schedule is finalized.

Release time is provided by the district for planning and professional development; the SELPA has provided teacher training districtwide on the Language! reading program.

The school has provided for late buses so that children who attend after-school interventions have access to transportation.

- Parent participation

The school has made an effort to include parents in the school community by conducting family literacy events and providing parenting classes on site. The school recently conducted an 8-week institute for parents, in three languages, on how to support the middle school student in moving toward academic success. Translators are always available at parent-teacher conferences to help overcome language barriers.

How They Did It

Vista View has effectively reallocated resources such as teaching staff, instructional time and discretionary resources such as Title I to implement a unique collaborative intervention program for serving all students who are not succeeding academically.

Planning

The impetus for the school's blended services model was largely the result of a district-led initiative begun in 1999. Over the next seven years the district played an active role in helping to shape the school's model. While the district sent a team to visit the Elk Grove Unified School District to observe its collaboration approach, much of the planning and development work was conducted in-house. The school's literacy intervention program evolved from its blended services model of instruction and from its involvement in the Effective Reading Interventions Academy (ERIA) program sponsored by CalSTAT.

Ongoing

The school's blended model for literacy and mathematics instruction does not necessarily require additional resources, but instead a reconfiguration of the school's current resources of staff, time and discretionary funds.

"Money is always helpful... [B]ut, many of the things that make a program like this work can be done without money, just using current resources."

--Interviewee, Vista View Middle School

Staff

The service delivery model for the school's special education program was changed from pull-out and Special Day Classes to teaching leveled intervention classes in blended classrooms serving both special and general education students. Through a strategy of multiple intervention tiers, general education teachers may work with higher-performing intervention students while the school's four special education teachers work with those students furthest below grade level. For example, a typical school day for a Resource Specialist Program (RSP) teacher at Vista View consists of:

- One period for planning and preparation;
- Four periods of intervention reading and language arts classes;
- Two periods of math intervention classes; and
- One period of "strategic intervention," or individualized intervention for students performing within two years of grade level.

Students with or without an IEP who require intensive level reading intervention are served through an extended literacy block (144 minutes daily).

Time

Instructional Time. Through creative use of a 4-period rotating block schedule the school was able to carve out extended learning time for daily literacy intervention classes to serve all struggling students - with or without IEPs. Within the most intensive intervention level, students are further leveled and grouped to ensure their identified needs are appropriately met. Students with the greatest level of need, those more than two grade levels behind, receive interventions through instructional blocks of up to 144 minutes for language arts and 72 minutes for mathematics. To accommodate this extended learning time, these students do not take science or social studies classes. Students with IEPs who do not require reading or math intervention are mainstreamed in general education classes. At a minimum, all special education students are mainstreamed for at least physical education and elective classes

Collaboration Time. Due to the complexity of the school's schedule for incorporating time for varying levels of intervention classes, only a few of the school's teachers, other than the RSP teachers, have common preparation time. However, given the culture of the school, teachers are open to working outside of their regular contract time. The school, with support from the district and the teaching staff, has found other ways to provide time for collaboration.

- Roundtable Meetings. Once per month the school's instructional staff meet after school, but within the teachers' contact day, to discuss individual students' performance and make adjustments to their interventions. The school has also implemented a day-long Roundtable release day at the beginning of school year to evaluate and plan interventions for all incoming students.
- The district provides for 4 late-start days during the year for content area planning, during which teachers review data and make curriculum decisions in language arts and mathematics.
- The school offers stipends to teachers during the summer for additional program planning. It hopes to make stipends available for some Saturday planning time during the school year as well.

Discretionary Funding

With 45% of its students eligible for free and reduced lunch, Vista View does have additional discretionary funds through the federal Title I program to provide several important augmentations to their literacy intervention program. The school uses its Title I, School Improvement Program (SIP), and other discretionary funds to support interventions in the following ways.

Afterschool Program. Title I funds are used to pay for an afterschool program for students who need additional intervention time. The program runs four days per week from 2:10-3:30 p.m. and offers a Read Naturally lab, an academic vocabulary development program and three sections of Homework Club for sixth, seventh and eighth graders, and English language learners. The costs of the afterschool program consist of stipends for supervising staff, additional work hours for paraprofessionals, and supplies and materials. The program also utilizes volunteer tutors provided by the Volunteers of America program.

Intervention Programs. The school used funding from various sources to purchase several intervention programs, including Language! (3rd Edition), Read 180, High Point, Read Naturally, Rewards, and Six Minute Solution. The school receives staff development assistance for Language! from its local SELPA.

Assessment. The school pays for a team of substitute teachers to help administer assessments in reading decoding and fluency over a period of 3-4 days each trimester. These assessments are used to track the progress of individual students and the performance of the school's intervention programs.

Staff Development. The school targets its staff development resources in two areas. The first provides training in the school's intervention programs to all staff who teach intervention classes. The second focuses on identifying and implementing research-based instructional strategies for raising the overall performance of the school.

In addition to local Title I and SIP funds, the school received its CalSTAT Leadership award in 2005. The school uses these funds to supplement materials and supplies for its intervention programs as well as for Leadership Site activities such as conducting tours and demonstrations for visiting school sites and attending regional and state Leadership Institutes.

Results

In 2004-5, the school exceeded the state target and increased its API by 32 points, and exceeded all the requirements for Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP).

"[W]hen we became willing as teachers to take off our hats as special educators, we saw the labels start to fall off the kids."

--Interviewee, Vista View Middle School

Students are moving out of special education.

"I've just noticed something lately...we're dismissing a lot of students from [special education]...at our IEP meetings...[T]hey come to us from the K-5 [schools] and we've got them in our intervention programs and our team approach, and we're dismissing students right and left...[T]hey are ready to be...integrated into the regular classroom."

--Interviewee, Vista View Middle School

Reasons for Success

Much of the success of Vista View's literacy program may be attributed to the following factors:

- Strong leadership and support from the district. Many of the components of the school's model would not be feasible without the support and understanding of district leadership.
- A committed staff and special educators dedicated to the success of all children.
- A thoughtful and deliberate planning process.
- The additional discretionary funds provided through the school's Title I program

Challenges

Finding time to meet collaboratively is an ongoing challenge for teachers.

The information technology that is supposed to support assessments and interventions has sometimes been a barrier to easy implementation. The school has found that bugs in an instruction program or incompatibility with the school's server, for example, have made some programs difficult or inconvenient to use in the classroom.

Next Steps and Scaling Up

The school is exploring research-based intervention programs for mathematics. In particular, the school is looking to the state to adopt several state-approved mathematics interventions that are proven to support students struggling in math. The school also continues to examine its general education program and instructional practices to ensure program efficacy and meet student needs so that fewer students will require intervention services.

The school's intervention strategies are beginning to be integrated across subject areas. For example, the school's science teacher has been using the literacy assessment data to level groups in his class and provide support to them.

The school does not currently have plans to expand or scale up its literacy programs.

"These students belong to all of us... [E]very teacher...has made that commitment."

--Interviewee, Vista View Middle School