

Tustumena Elementary is Recognized as a 2019 National ESEA Distinguished School #ESEADistinguishedSchool

Principal Doug Hayman offers these thoughts about Tustumena Elementary



What evidence-based instruction strategies support achievement of high standards (including use of data to make instructional decisions)?

Tustumena offers a variety of instructional strategies to promote the growth of our students. These are some specific examples that our teachers have implemented during the 2017-2018 and 2018-2019 school years:

At the primary level, our teachers have clear expectations and rules, a visual daily schedule, and hands-on activities to support the curriculum. Teachers place great emphasis on measuring oral reading fluency skills, comprehension, phonics, and vocabulary, as well as building and mastering a strong foundation of math fact skills. Instructional programs that are used at the primary level are Reading Eggs, Read Naturally, Lexia Core 5, and IXL.

At the intermediate level, our teachers focus on small group instruction within reading and mathematics and fostering a positive atmosphere between students and staff. Teachers incorporate the use of literature circles that pave the road for students to become strong, independent readers. At the 6th grade level, high-performing students have the opportunity to complete 7th grade mathematics. This propels them forward in math, and creates a “domino effect” for future success due to being a year advanced. Finally, our principal periodically hosts a “Thinker’s Club” with the 4th, 5th, and 6th graders. He implements a variety of activities in Thinker’s Club that are scientifically based, utilize problem-solving skills, and facilitate higher-level thinking strategies.

Over the past two years, Tustumena Elementary School has prioritized high-fidelity academic interventions for students needing Tier 2 and Tier 3 academic supports in both reading and math. While Tier 3 interventions were always done in the small group setting, Tier 2 interventions were also done in small groups, where student engagement could be maximized. During the 2018-2019 school year, Tustumena had a full time Title 1 teacher, 1.5 interventionists, and a 0.25 Gifted/Talented position. Part of the intervention time was used to support a large first grade class to ensure a strong foundation for beginning readers. Half of the Title 1 position was used to support pre-academic skills in preschool children

while the other half was used to support reading skills in Kindergarten through 2nd grades for those students with benchmark scores below the 25th percentile nationally. The Gifted/Talented teacher provided enrichment interventions to help push high-achieving students. Most teachers provided additional challenges to students in the classroom, using programs such as IXL and differentiated reading lists with more challenging literature to compliment interventions done by the G/T teacher. In summary, Tustumena Elementary School was able to achieve exceptional levels of growth because it prioritized targeted interventions for students on both ends of the achievement spectrum.

Another integral component of Tustumena's growth is to personalize learning for each individual student. During the 2017-2018 and 2018-2019 school years, Tustumena focused on two different components of the Personalized Learning "Core Four": Data Driven Decision Making, and Student Reflection and Ownership. This greatly affected our ability to serve our students by providing a clear picture of where the student was at based on benchmark and classroom performance data, and this helped create a guide for teacher instruction based on students' needs. By offering more time for students to reflect on their progress and incorporating goal-setting meetings with students, they are able to connect to the content more and take ownership of their learning, which encourages greater interest and performance.

In addition to all of our teachers' efforts, the most important factor is the diligence of all staff to provide constant and consistent data that we can use to make decisions in the best way to help each student. Teachers also credit our dedicated principal who leads both the staff and students in a positive direction.

What opportunities for all children to achieve are provided?

The goal of the RTI model is to assure that all students achieve success. To that end, we apply all of our varied resources and staff to ensure we meet this goal. All students are screened periodically throughout the year during the fall, winter, and spring benchmark periods. We meet with the "I-Team" which consists of the classroom teacher, intervention teacher, special education resource teacher, speech language pathologist, gifted-talented teacher, school psychologist, and principal.

At this time we discuss the progression of each student's learning based on classroom performance and benchmark testing data. Students performing at or above level and students in Tier I are served by the classroom teacher, but may also receive help from an instructional aide that is working with other students in the room. A Tier II or III student may receive additional services in or outside of

the classroom from our Title I teacher, Intervention Teacher, Special Education teacher, available aides, or other classroom teachers using a varied schedule. This is all part of our belief that we are a community of educators and each student is the responsibility of all staff members.

On a school wide basis, we were able to make significant gains, but one particular group made exceptional gains. The current 2nd graders have made strong progress on their reading scores. In the fall of their first grade year, approximately half of these students scored below the 25th percentile nationally in reading. These students were reconfigured into smaller class sizes and received intensive, small group reading instruction for their first grade year from the classroom teachers, the Title 1 teacher, and the school Interventionist. There was particular emphasis on phonetic instruction while in small group settings with a balanced use of literature. In addition, these students benefited from a Pre-school Program that has been capped at 10 students. Small class size certainly played a role in their success.

Throughout the grade levels at Tustumena, small group instruction is a priority in all academic areas. Success in particularly math and reading have benefited from instruction being more personalized.

How does Title I coordinate with other school programs?

The Title I program at Tustumena is working diligently to meet the needs of our school and our community. Tustumena Elementary provides a half-day Title I preschool program that prepares students to be successful in kindergarten. Students in this program learn social skills, phonemic awareness, and fine and gross motor skills. Our preschool has received a very positive response from our community, which previously had no local preschool options available.

Tustumena's Title I Reading Intervention Program provides assistance to kindergarten through second grade students performing below the 25th percentile in reading. Part of the assistance is provided in the classroom through co-teaching or additional small group instruction. Most of the reading instruction is through small group targeted instruction.

Tustumena Elementary understands the importance for all educators in our school to work together as a team to provide a quality education for all students. An important element of our success is collaboration, which is ongoing and focused on instructional options, evaluating student progress, and changing instruction, or extra support as needed. Our Title I and interventionist teachers coordinate their schedules with those of other teachers to maximize the effectiveness of the time

and instruction for each student served. These services are also coordinated with the services of our district's Homeless Liaison, who strives to help students in transition receive a consistent education. Our staff has a genuine commitment to each student. The classroom teachers, special education teachers, intervention teachers, Title I teacher, migrant tutor and our principal to work as a team that is focused on the success of each student.

What evidence-based professional development (PD) is happening?

Tustumena has had the opportunity to implement Personalized Learning, and this has guided most of our professional development for the last two years. We have had the privilege of working with EdElements, a company with expertise in Personalized Learning. They were able to host trainings to district staff and teachers about the importance of the "Core-Four look fors" as well as provide teaching and feedback opportunities by coming into the schools and observing teachers and interacting with students. Tustumena teachers have also been focusing on a new testing program, MAPs, and have been broadening their knowledge base through trainings held by the district. New teachers at Tustumena also have the pleasure of working with a wonderful mentor teacher who offers advice, curriculum and classroom management support, and opportunities to observe veteran teachers.

Partnerships between the school and parents, families and community

Tustumena encourages parents and community members to be involved in our school goals, activities and classrooms. Our school site council makes decisions about important school issues. The Parent-Teacher Organization holds fundraisers, hosts community events, purchases classroom resources, and pays for field trips and bussing. We also have a Boys and Girls Club housed in our building that helps families in our community by providing students with after school tutoring, homework help, and a hot meal. Finally, our school library is also a community library, which locals can utilize.

Parent involvement is also an integral part of the Title 1 program. In the fall, our Title I committee creates a Building Level Parent Involvement Action Plan to outline activities for the coming year and decide what goals will be focused on. Once each semester all teachers schedule individual conferences with each family to discuss student progress. Title 1 teachers use this time to discuss student Personal Education Plans and to outline goals, expectations, and individual progress for each student.

At least two times each year, our Title I Program hosts a Family Activity Night to improve parent involvement. During these activities, parents are provided with tools and educational games to work with their children on specific skills, as well as time to practice together in a supportive atmosphere.

Our school also organizes and hosts several annual activities for our families and the local community. In September, we have a 5K Community Fun-Run. We provide a Fall Carnival for the local community each year, which involves all our staff and many community volunteers, and all proceeds go to the PTO which directly benefits the students. In November, we host a Bingo for Turkey's night where the parents play bingo to win Turkeys and pies, and children play "Lynx-o" to win free books. Angel tree is a Christmas charity event to provide gifts for families in need. In February, we host the district wide forensics competition. Finally, on Easter weekend we provide a community Easter Egg Hunt.

Some additional details!

Over the last two years, Tustumena has seen considerable increases in student test scores. In the previous school year alone, the number of students from Kindergarten to fifth grade scoring below the 25th percentile on AIMS Web dropped an average of 15% from fall to spring. The 2nd grade class mentioned above saw a drop of 26% in the number of students scoring below the 25th percentile on AIMS Web (this data includes a combination of Language and Math scores).

In addition to the academic focus at Tustumena, we recently were able to move to having Physical Education every day, as opposed to the students going every other day, as in previous years. The principal has also been able to alter the lunch schedule. As students finish their lunch, he has been taking them to the gym for games and activities involving a lot of movement. Teachers report that the additional physical exercise has improved the academic focus of the students.

Several other programs have increased achievement, student interest, and involvement. These include Tustumena's Gifted and Talented program which has kids involved in competitions such as Mind-A-Mazes, Tri-Mathlon, and Future Problem Solvers. The school Battle of the Books teams scored 1st and 4th in the District last year. We also offer a school Geography Bee, Spelling Bee, and Forensics Competition. Tustumena certainly has opportunities for all of its students.

Leadership at Tustumena Elementary

Although Tustumena has a typical leadership model of having building principal, the leadership of Tustumena is far from typical. The principal role is to help develop the vision and mission and support all staff in a way that makes these become reality. The principal personifies an adaptation of Hiam Ginott's famous statement around "making the weather." The principal also reviews data with teachers in order to establish trends and check effectiveness of current practice.

But, leadership goes far beyond the principal chair. Nearly all teachers take on a leadership role in some aspect of Tustumena, all of which contribute to the student success. Two examples are "I-Team" leadership, where our Interventionist reviews data with each individual teacher about each individual student in order to determine the most effective education plan or intervention. A second example is our Title One teacher who attends all I-Team meetings, organizes events, celebrations, and presentations for our students and community served by our Title I programming. In addition to these two examples are countless project opportunities that teachers lead including Special Education, field trips, community projects, and more. Teachers have community partners with Boys and Girls Club, Community Church, EMS, Fish and Game, DOT, hospital, and several other agencies. Our staff use data to determine need and they take on the responsibilities necessary to make things happen for our students.

About Tustumena Elementary

Tustumena has always provided the best education possible. In order to do this, we have worked to keep class sizes down, meet the needs of all students, and draw the best teachers available. The test scores in recent years have shown that all of these factors and more have helped Tustumena become an extremely successful school. Data driven decision- making has been an important part of our overall school planning. Regular Benchmark testing fuels our Intervention process. Beginning with the first I-Team Day and ending with the last day of school, the Intervention and Special Education programs are key to assuring that all students are getting their individual instructional needs met. Tustumena Elementary has always been the heart of the community. Kasilof is a small rural area, and the locals consider the school as the place where people come together. The Fall Carnivals, the Christmas Programs, the Spring Concerts, Bingo for Books, and the Boys and Girls Club are all School programs that have been part of the community for many years. The relationship between the teachers and the parents at Tustumena is very strong, and by working together to promote this strong bond, we have developed an atmosphere that leads to success