

Borel Middle School

Model Program/Practice:

Professional Learning, Restorative Practices, and Academic Support

Description of the Model

Borel Middle School employs a unique approach to teaching and learning that includes three key components:

1. the use of a professional learning community structure to support ongoing internal training and coaching;
2. the development of multi-tiered supports for students performing below grade level; and
3. the implementation of restorative practices as a framework that sees relationships as central to learning, growth, and a healthy school climate for students and adults.

This approach has helped Borel make significant improvements in academic achievement and school climate for the benefit of all students.

Summary

Several years ago, it became increasingly clear to Borel staff that changes in teaching and other school-wide practices were required to meet the needs of the school's increasingly diverse student population. Borel staff also saw this as an opportunity to increase achievement for all students, create a school environment that successfully combines students from four different elementary schools into a cohesive whole, and develop students' life skills. It also became clear that providing both academic and behavior support would provide a framework for ongoing professional development. The result is Borel's Model Program that weaves together professional learning, academic support, and restorative practices.

Borel's multi-tiered academic supports, including after school intervention classes, such as Homework Club and All Stars, which provide support for English Learners, are representative of Goal 8 of the San Mateo Foster City School District's Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP), "Students will make progress toward meeting or exceeding grade level California Standards." The LCAP's Goal 5, "Students will engage in ongoing healthy lifestyles supporting social, emotional, and physical aspects," is reflected in Borel's restorative practices initiative, which supports student wellness. Finally, LCAP Goal 6, "Teachers, administrators and staff will participate in professional learning that is responsive to educational priorities and based on research of effective practices to support student learning," is the backbone of Borel's Model Program and Practices. The LCAP draws a clear line between professional development and progress for all students and focuses on strategies to support students performing below grade level.

As a result of Borel's focus on professional learning communities, restorative practices, and multi-tiered supports, students are more engaged in their coursework across all eight subject areas. They are learning to ask and answer inquiry questions and are developing a sense of what is going on in the world and how their learning is relevant to that. For

example, students shared their understanding of the Electoral College map while watching election night coverage, connected their study of tectonic plates to the recent earthquakes in Nepal and Japan, and think more about regions of the world that struggle to live on a dollar a day. Because of their new understanding of the importance of being connected and doing one's part to support the community, students demonstrate more empathy in their community service reflections and are more active in the Borel community.

Implementation and Monitoring

The following section provides more details about the efforts and progress in each of the three focus areas: professional learning communities, student supports, and restorative practices.

Professional Learning Communities

1. Restorative Management

Academic and discipline data show consistently that students of color, specifically Hispanic males, are more likely to fail classes and be sent out of class. To avoid this situation in their school, Borel teachers requested opportunities to learn how to motivate hard to reach students. As a result, the school developed a restorative management professional learning strand.

As part of this strand, teachers collaborate using research proven strategies to motivate students who might need an extra boost. Interdisciplinary teacher teams meet in a circle and learn restorative community building techniques they can use to work with students to ensure they have a voice in the classroom.

Borel also incorporates motivation techniques from *Master Teacher: Student Motivation and Achievement Series* into the opening circles. Teachers later break into common interest triads and discuss implementation of selected strategies from Doug LeMov's book, *Teach Like a Champion*. Each triad has instituted practices, such as peer observation, to support successful implementation of these strategies.

2. The Writing Revolution Method

During regular after school meetings, a group of Borel teachers collaborates in a professional learning community to examine and implement the writing instruction program presented in the book *The Writing Revolution: A Guide to Advancing Thinking Through Writing in All Subjects and Grades* by Judith C. Hochman and Natalie Wexler. The Hochman Method, as it is known, is as much about teaching content as it is about teaching writing. Teachers of all subjects adapt the method to pre-existing curriculum and content with the theory being, "when students write, they—and their teachers—figure out what they don't understand." The Hochman Method breaks the writing process down into manageable chunks that students practice repeatedly while learning content.

Teachers meet regularly after school to review the sequence of instruction, practice the activities as if they were students, and then use the framework and pacing guide provided to develop instructional units for their own classes, incorporating the activities outlined in the book.

As a result of this approach, students are learning to write with structure, clarity and coherence; uncover and address their own mistakes; boost their reading comprehension; improve their organizational and study skills; enhance their speaking abilities; and develop analytical capabilities.

3. Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID)

Teachers also collaborate in a professional learning community examining the core instructional strategies identified by the AVID Center. During the first semester, teachers learned about the five steps of the focused note-taking process. They then twice cycled through a process of creating, teaching, and collaboratively reflecting about a lesson that used the process. For students, the focused note-taking process promotes retention of course material and careful inquiry about key concepts. Use of the focused note-taking process has helped teachers to be more mindful of their craft, establish clear purposes, and provide multiple opportunities for meaningful student interaction with course content.

During the second semester, the learning community has chosen to divide into two groups to implement different AVID core strategies: math and science teachers are investigating the use of collaborative structures, while history and social studies teachers explore best practices regarding higher-order thinking. This work has helped to foster a spirit of collaboration among Borel teachers, enabling them to learn best practices from each other and align the use of these core strategies across grade levels and content areas.

4. Long Term English Learners (LTEL)

In order to raise the achievement of Borel's Long Term English Learners (LTEL), and to strengthen student understanding of strategic, collaborative learning, a cohort of self-selected teachers was established to learn, practice, and apply proven techniques and strategies around language acquisition. Teachers learned the A,B,C's of effective EL Instruction: A—assess, anticipate, activate; B—build background; C—check for understanding; D—deliver comprehensible input; and E—engage and empower. The LTEL faculty learning program consisted of summer professional development on instructional strategies, planning, integrated ELD, best practices for LTELs, student shadowing, collaborative planning, and coaching by Elizabeth Jimenez Salinas Gemas Consulting.

Academic Support

1. Academic Workshops

Beginning in the third quarter of the year, eighth grade students performing far below grade level have a weekly progress monitoring meeting with a counselor, the academic dean, and/or assistant principal. In addition, these students are required to participate in Academic Workshops.

The goal of the workshop series is to teach students the value of a formal education so they will be inspired to achieve academic success. Instead of focusing on remedial academic work, the workshops focus on “The Three O’s”: Opportunity, Obstacles, and Overcoming. First, students learn why education is an incredible opportunity. Next, they learn about obstacles that prevent them from learning. Finally, they learn how to

use strategies to overcome anything that might stop their progress and develop their own action plans to set them on a course for academic success. They share their action plans with their parents, reinforcing what they learned as well as their commitment to their education.

2. Homework Club

Students in seventh and eighth grade participate in a structured after school homework club. Three teachers provide structured homework support in English/Language Arts, math, social studies, and science twice a week. Six grade English Learner students participate in All Stars, which also meets twice a week after school. Similar to homework club, All Stars is staffed by three teachers who provide subject-specific targeted support that includes re-teaching and homework help. All students who participate in after school support have access to bus transportation.

Impact of Academic Supports on Student Achievement

School Year & Type of Academic Support Provided	Number of Eighth Grade Students Performing Below Grade Level at Beginning of School Year	Number of Eighth Grade Students Performing Below Grade Level at End of School Year
2017-2018 Academic Workshops & Friday Progress Monitoring Meetings	23	2
2016 – 2017 Parent & Friday Progress Monitoring Meetings	41	7
2015 – 2016 Regular Progress Report Check only	22	6

Restorative Practices

The aim of Restorative Practices is to develop community by building respectful and trusting relationships and to manage conflict by repairing harm and restoring peace. Restorative practices develop student responsibility and accountability for speaking and listening, include all voices equally, and build connections, empathy, insight, and collaborative problem-solving skills.

At Borel, restorative practices are used throughout the community in various ways. In the classroom, teachers build community and connections with community circles. This year the school has held three school-wide community circles on pertinent topics suggested by students.

Over the course of three years, 24 teachers have voluntarily worked with the restorative practices teacher leader to develop circle lesson plans and implement a circle practice in their classrooms. Teachers utilize the circles to teach curriculum, check in with students, and solve problems.

The other restorative practice that is consistently utilized at Borel is the restorative conference. The conferences are either restorative meetings between two students or a student and a teacher or traditional conferences with the students and their families, all facilitated by the Assistant Principal or the Academic Dean. The fundamental hypothesis behind restorative practices is that human beings are happier, more cooperative and productive, and more likely to make positive changes in their behavior when those in positions of authority do things with them rather than to them or for them.

According to recent data, approximately 63 students have participated in restorative meetings. In these meetings, students work together guided by scripted questions to repair harm and restore peace. Instead of being told what to do or to say sorry, students develop agreements they commit to following.

Experience at the school has shown that students, who participate in a restorative conference or meeting, do not report the same problem with the same people occurring again. Overall, restorative practices have helped the community develop and maintain positive relationships and address conflict through collaborative problem solving.

Discipline Referral Results

Referred Behavior	Number of Office Referrals 2015-2016	Number of Office Referrals 2017-2018
Defiance	50	25
Disrespect	81	53
Inciting Behavior	42	18
Fighting	7	3
Name Calling	28	15

Additional Model Program Results and Outcomes

In addition to the results highlighted in the above sections, Borel’s focus on teacher collaboration, academic support, and restorative practices has positively impacted students and staff, as evidenced by data from a number of sources, including the School Climate Index (SCI), Smarter Balanced results, and California Dashboard data.

Scores on the SCI, based on Healthy Kids Survey data, range from 100 to 500, with higher scores representing more positive school climates. As seen in the table below, SCI scores grew significantly between 2014 and 2018.

School Climate Index (SCI) Subscale Results

	SCI Scores 2014	SCI Scores 2018	SCI Score Change
Overall Supports and Engagement	283	288	+5
High Expectations and caring relationships	313	316	+3
School connectedness	277	285	+8
Overall Low Violence and Substance Use	199	332	+133
Low physical/emotional violence victimization	188	320	+132
Low harassment and bullying	144	303	+159

Selected Staff-Reported Indicators (California School Staff Survey)

Borel also reported high scores on the 2017-2018 California Healthy Kids Survey (CHKS). The following table provides a snapshot of those results.

96 percent reported high or moderate levels of high expectations from staff
94 percent reported high or moderate school connectedness
92 percent reported high or moderate levels of caring adults in school
98 percent of students reported they had not used any drug in the past 30 days
97 percent reported there's been zero days where they've seen "electronic cigarettes or other vaping device" on campus

Absenteeism and Engagement

According to the Chronic Absenteeism Analysis Report, there was a 0.74% decrease in the percentage of students chronically absent in 2017-2018 school year as compared to the 2016-2017 school year.

Students actively participate in over 25 sports teams (e.g., basketball, tennis, flag football, cross country, golf, soccer, and volleyball) each year, and many sports have several teams, giving all students who want to participate an opportunity. In addition, over 250 students participate in school drama productions as either cast or crew.

Student Achievement Results

Latino/Hispanic students (44 percent of all students) and Economically Disadvantaged students (38 percent of all students), the two student groups that were underperforming their peers when Borel decided to implement a new program model, experienced noticeable gains on the 2018 Smarter Balanced Summative Assessment. There was a 3.2 percentage point increase in students meeting or exceeding the English Language Arts standard and a 3.6 percentage point increase in students meeting or exceeding the Mathematics standard. Economically Disadvantaged students saw a 2.5 percentage point increase in English Language Arts and a 2.7 percentage point increase in Mathematics.

The 2018 California Dashboard academic performance data show growth in the percentage of students meeting grade-level standards on the English Language Arts and Mathematics assessments. This measure is based on student performance on the Smarter Balanced Summative Assessment, which is taken annually by Borel students in grades six through eight.

California Dashboard Data

Student Group	English Language Arts Increased Points	Mathematics Increased Points
All Students	+ 6.4	+ 13.1
Asian	+ 1.5	+ 15.7
Current English Learners	+ 18.8	+ 9.4
Reclassified English Learners	+ 24.9	+ 29.7
Hispanic	+13.4	+ 14.5
Socioeconomically Disadvantaged	+10.9	+ 10.4
Two or More Races	+ 7.9	+ 14.3
White	+ 3.5	+ 12

Conclusion

Borel's staff believes that the growth in academic achievement is attributable to the collaboration, professional learning, and interdisciplinary teaching and learning occurring in its classrooms as well as changes in school culture and environment. Students are thinking critically and applying skills across subject areas, and these skills are shared among student groups. Reflection and continuous improvement are central to the school's work. Borel uses State test results and evaluation feedback to identify improvements that need to be made and then creates strategies to implement them. The staff works together to ensure that teaching and learning are constantly evolving to meet the needs of the school's evolving student population. Staff and parents are proud of the growth students have made and the culture the school community has built; however, they realize that their work is ongoing as they strive to close the achievement gap and meet the needs of all learners at Borel.

