

New Heights School 4003

Literacy Plan

Define how reading proficiency will be ensured for all students at each grade level kindergarten through third grade:

All elementary students at New Heights are afforded a wealth of academic support resources immediately upon enrollment. Each transferring student's comprehensive file/record of academic progress is thoroughly reviewed prior to establishing his or her academic plan. In addition to a full record review, additional literacy screening is conducted using FAST aReading and aMath. Naturally, teacher-based classroom assessments, both formative and summative, are also used and added to the data file on an ongoing basis, and there is additional testing that takes place throughout the spring; MCA and FAST.

In the early stages of each year the data team closely analyzes the data gathered for each student and then uses that data to configure the elementary reading groups the students will initially be placed in; which tend to be largely ability-based groups with flexibility for movement on an ongoing basis. Each student is carefully placed in the group that most closely corresponds with his or her current reading ability as indicated through performance data. As the weeks and months pass, frequent progress monitoring, as often as weekly or at least bi-weekly, is conducted by the teachers for further analysis by the data team. When appropriate, students may be moved from one group to another to maximize learning opportunities and to ensure that each student is getting the most appropriate instruction he or she can get.

Define proficiency:

At New Heights proficiency is defined as achieving an academic level demonstrating mastery or near mastery in various academic areas. Proficiency, for this purpose, is demonstrated by performing within a range of scores as compared to state-averaged learning targets for each age/grade level. Nationally normed tests and state tests are administered to all students in grades K-3 at various intervals each year to obtain and monitor each student's academic progress on an on-going basis. Services and interventions are put in place for all students to ensure progress toward proficiency, and additional support is available for those who do not demonstrate proficiency.

Statement of process to assess students' level of reading proficiency:

New Heights administers the FAST test to all K-3 students within the first few weeks of school each year, during the winter testing cycle, and again during the 4th quarter. FAST assessments are given to all students in K-3 in the fall, winter, and spring to measure and monitor reading fluency and comprehension. Students scoring below proficiency are progress-monitored either weekly or bi-weekly for fluency and comprehension. The FAST data is used to determine which interventions should be put in place to most appropriately address the needs of each student.

Parents are notified of student progress in a variety of ways. Teachers communicate about classroom activities either weekly or bi-weekly, including highlights of changes to each student's progress. Individual conferences occur just after the 9th week and 27th week of school each year. MCA official results are mailed

home by the state of Minnesota each year. In certain cases, ad hoc meetings may take place when there are concerns about performance, or for official purposes such as IEP meetings or evaluation meetings. Parents may also request a meeting at any time and for any purpose.

Benchmark assessments across the system:

New Heights School is a single school site. The leadership team, district assessment coordinator, academic review committee, and the administration all work closely together to ensure that there is fidelity and collaboration across all subjects and grade levels with respect to the alignment of the MN State benchmarks. By using the state benchmarks, there is assurance that there is cohesiveness and fluidity in the integration of the annual benchmark expectations for each student at each interval. Additionally, in order to add to the cohesiveness of the integration, elementary teachers of the K-5 teach to a common theme when possible, ensuring collaboration across each unit and overlap throughout the elementary.

Communication plan for sharing data with parents and families:

New Heights is a small school and prides itself on the level of communication it has with parents. Elementary teachers communicate home routinely, either on a weekly or bi-weekly basis. Some teachers like a *Friday Folder* system, while others may choose to write a blog or share through a weekly email letter. Information about upcoming events, tests, or other important aspects are communicated through these systems. In some cases, meetings are held and, occasionally, teachers provide parents with ideas about how to further promote academic gains at home. Special education staff often work closely with parents to assist them in learning about strategies that can further assist students in progressing toward learning targets. Particular elements of data and progress are routinely shared at conferences, meetings, or in mailings. Many parents have had students enrolled for multiple years at the school and are familiar with the teachers and staff, so that obtaining records of academic progress, either formally or informally, is not a difficult process to navigate through. The school is also beginning its fifth year of offering a parent portal so that parents are able to access various types of student data as frequently as they feel the need.

Statement about Core Instruction at New Heights:

All teachers are required to be versed in and incorporate the MN ELA standards into lessons where applicable. Each teacher must document how he or she is incorporating the standards by submitting evidence of this documentation to the Academic Review Committee each quarter. The teaching staff as a whole recognizes that every student may not be achieving at prescribed and expected levels, which is why the school created the system of ability-based reading groups for the elementary students. This system ensures that each student is receiving the instruction and support he or she needs in order to make progress toward proficiency. There is collaboration and overlap, as general education teachers work closely with special education and intervention teachers. These teachers share students, curriculum, and ideas about how to best approach the ever-changing needs of the student population.

Intervention and supports:

Core reading instruction is provided to all students in flexible, ability-based groups every day. Select students receive additional reading instruction through special education or through targeted intervention services up to five times per week depending upon the individual needs of the students selected for interventions. Each level of support provides ongoing monitoring and documentation to provide accurate and up-to-date levels of support for each student.

Use of data to match student need to intervention program:

The school's data team, particularly elementary members in this case, make use of various sources of data to provide programming for the students in their care. Prior to placing students in reading groups, either in the fall or upon a mid-year enrollment, a comprehensive records review takes place looking at various data points from former schools or in-house data collected from prior years in cases where the student has been at New Heights. These data points include MAP test data; screeners such as FAST; progress monitoring data such as Aimsweb or FAST; classroom data; special education data such as evaluation summary reports; and prior MCA or other test data. The data team and elementary and special education staff review these records to determine the most appropriate course to take for each student prior to reading group placement.

Use of performance data to inform professional development plan:

The elementary team meets as a staff at least weekly, as well as 3 times per month in a PLC specifically focused on improving curriculum and teaching strategies so they can most appropriately meet the needs of the students. Depending on areas the team identifies as "needs," they can make recommendations about PD topics to be emphasized during PD sessions throughout the year.

At New Heights, data is used to determine how best to schedule PD. The administration will not arbitrarily arrange for speakers or training sessions to occur if they are not congruent with the needs of the students as identified through data. PLCs are required for all teachers. PLCs are designed to have all teachers developing common teaching strengths for consistency throughout the school. PLCs provide PD, conversation and sharing, and opportunities for teachers to observe one another and learn about new concepts or strategies that are research-based and have a proven record of success.

Horizontal and vertical alignment:

New Heights is a particularly small K-12 charter school consisting of a single building. By virtue of proximity, it is not difficult to get teachers to work together and collaborate when necessary. In the case of standards for example, the teaching staff members warmly support one another in the integration and articulation of the MN content standards as they are applied to New Heights School. In some cases, all of the elementary teachers will work together to create a cohesive scope and sequence with respect to standards integration. Since the teachers are not uniquely hired to teach just one grade or to a specific ability level throughout his or her time at New Heights, each is expected to co-author the standards map, as each may teach to a variety of abilities and ages in a given year. Additionally, the secondary teachers work with the elementary

teachers to ensure a seamless transition from elementary to secondary. The teachers pride themselves in this element of collaboration, which also allows for both vertical and horizontal alignment.

Curriculum resources:

The bottom line is that all teachers begin lesson planning with data and state standards. As a small charter serving a diverse set of learners, taking a one-size-suits-all approach would not be appropriate. Teachers at New Heights are able to understand the needs of their students at a very high level. This awareness requires that teachers make use of a variety of resources to ensure that all students have opportunities to learn. This sometimes requires a cut-and-paste approach to lesson planning. The teachers have become expert at seeking out a variety of resources to use to most effectively plan for the students in his or her classes from year-to-year; all with standards at the center of the target. A few examples of this include selecting: trade paperbacks for book study; web-based resources such as IXL, Guided Readers and A to Z Reading for small group instruction and diagnostics; and picture books for interactive read-alouds in larger, whole group instruction.

Feedback from stakeholders:

New Heights prides itself in high levels of communication both to and from stakeholders. Stakeholders are afforded opportunities to share ideas and offer feedback in several forms, including: participating in focus groups; attending monthly board meetings and annual board meetings; attending conferences; completing surveys and questionnaires; and through informal communication that may take place routinely with teachers and administrators.

Training and support provided to ensure that the K-3 staff can meet the student's diverse needs in cross cultural settings:

New Heights is a small charter school that has a higher than average rate of student mobility. This mobility may alter the composition of the school's demographics quite substantially from one year to the next. Therefore, the elementary team in conjunction with the school's leadership team and administration will assess the staff's state of readiness to address the student population's needs on an ongoing basis. For example, in any particular year there may not be any EL students, but perhaps there may be a student who enrolls with a particular need such as "hard of hearing." The staff will call on resources to consult with or to assist the staff in gaining the skills needed to ensure that all students enrolled at the school will have his or her general and specific needs tended to. When staff feel or prove to be inadequate to the task, PD is put in place. As a small school, most teachers share in the need, and there is less red tape to cut through in order to bring authentic PD to the staff in a timely manner. In certain cases, existing teachers will enroll in certificate programs to become better suited to meet individual or group needs.