

Schools Transforming Learning Application

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Canyon Ranch Elementary, Coppell ISD

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Overview and Background:

In August of 2019, Canyon Ranch Elementary opened the doors to learners. We are one of eleven elementary schools in Coppell ISD, serving around 750 kindergarten through 5th grade learners. We have a large population of Emergent Bilinguals, and many languages are spoken by our learners, including Telugu, Tamil, Nepali, Hindi, and Malayalam. We have a wonderful community that is involved and values education.

Our school is organized into a House system. These six Houses are groups of classrooms that span several grade-levels with open, flexible space in each House for learners to collaborate and work in small groups. Three of our Houses are made up of Kindergarten through 2nd grade classes, and three are made up of 3rd through 5th grade classes. What makes our House system unique, is that learners are in their Houses throughout the duration of the school day, attending recess, lunch, and Specials as a House. Our multi-grade-level House system creates daily opportunities for vertical alignment, multi-age collaboration, leadership, and community-building. Educators meet weekly for House Meetings, which is a time for them to address learner needs and plan for House morning meetings centered around community-building, character education, and social-emotional learning.

Both the physical and virtual environments around our building also support these flexible learning opportunities. Our spaces include furniture designed to be moved and utilized based on instructional needs and preferences of learners. Spaces such as our courtyard, garden, and even large corridors are used consistently as learning spaces. Learners and all staff have 1:1 access to technology, which encourages working together, creativity, and communication.

Our master schedule allows for protected time for educators to work together as well as a school-wide intervention and enrichment time called Den Time. The lines are blurred between grade-levels and Houses at CRE, and learners frequently spend time with more than just their own classroom educator. Being known by many educators provides an amazing support system for learners to reach their full potential.

Focus Areas: Organizational Change, Assessment, and New Learning Standards

As Article V of *Creating a New Vision for Public Education in Texas* states, we believe that we, as a learning organization, "can create the conditions and capacities most conducive for leaders, teachers, and students to perform at high levels and meet the expectations of new learning standards." The campus culture we have created around collaboration, and the ways we operate as a professional learning community (PLC), have made this possible.

A couple of years ago, we charged our educators with dreaming about our "compelling vision". What would it look like, sound like, and feel like in our building if we truly operated as a professional learning community? While we will always continue to have work to do, we believe that we have established campus systems that have set a true foundation for our collaborative culture. When educators truly work together, the possibilities for learners are endless.

Through this culture, educators and staff in our building assess learners continuously and in various ways, looking at data as a grade-level, vertically, and as a campus in team meetings and through our Multi-Tiered System of Supports (Article III: Assessments for Learning). We work together to target the needs of all learners. We look at what learners need and aim to use our vertical House system to not be bound by grade-level or age. Educators can then design engaging learning experiences and small group instruction based on standards (Article II: The New Learning Standards).

The Work:

If you step inside CRE at 8:05 each morning, you will hear a bell ring. You will see learners buzzing about, walking around the House spaces, and even across the campus, to go to their designated places

for Den Time. Each educator in the House, as well as Specialists, administrators, and support staff, lead small groups. Learners spend time working on what they need. They set goals and are aware of their progress each week. We celebrate growth, and the groups are fluid and flexible as needed. Another thing you would observe during this time is learners being leaders. Our "Den Time Buddies" from our upper grade Houses have developed mentorships and help lead small groups in our younger grade Houses during Den Time. Every single member of our building is working together during this time, and it is a beautiful picture of collaboration.

We intentionally use our Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) process, as well as Solution Tree's four questions of a PLC, to identify areas to target in intervention and extension with learners. Our MTSS team is composed of educators, Administrators, our Instructional Coach, our GT Specialist, Language Acquisition Specialists, and our Counselor as needed. Intervention and enrichment are provided on a consistent basis, and weekly progress is reviewed as a collaborative team. Learner growth is an ongoing, constant conversation. If you join a team meeting and overhear a discussion about a child, you might have a hard time determining who the classroom teacher is. To us, that is a sign of success! Many educators can speak to the growth and progress of that child.

Our educators do not only work together, but they also learn from each other and alongside each other. Co-teaching is encouraged, as well as observing in each other's classrooms. Our administration team frequently covers classes to make this happen, as we are committed to allowing educators to see each other in action, the best form of professional learning. We have created more formal opportunities for them to visit each other's classrooms through Praise Walks and targeted Learning Walks, as well. At our PLC showcase each semester, each grade-level team shares what their team goal was, how they learned and grew as educators, what new resources they used, and what growth they saw with learners as a result. We often then see other teams try that new resource or be inspired to try something new because they saw their peers were successful with it. Another big aspect of our PLC showcase is celebrating learner growth together and giving each other feedback to continue learning. This growth mindset in our educators is an integral part of our culture, as well.

From the beginning, we sought to establish a culture where educators and staff work together for the success of all learners. We say often that "all kids are our kids", and we truly try to live out that belief. You simply cannot work on an island in our building. We work hard to avoid saying we "do" PLC, because we believe we "are" a PLC, and we know that it is a mindset that produces transformational change and learning on our campus.

Results:

Because we believe "all kids are our kids", we share our successes, and we put our heads together to get curious when we encounter a problem. We have seen learners who needed intervention close the gaps and not need intervention anymore. We have seen leaders emerge. We have seen learners connect with adults they may not have otherwise worked with if it were not for Den Time or sharing learners across the House. We have seen educators supporting educators, doing more than they could on their own and being inspired to try new things. We know that when educators feel supported and make growth, our learners do, too. We believe "when competent, caring teachers provide properly designed learning experiences in inspiring social environments, all students will engage and can meet or exceed a reasonable variance to the standards.", a premise from *Creating a New Vision for Public Education in Texas* lived out through who we are as a professional learning community at Canyon Ranch Elementary.