

# 2011 NATIONAL BLUE RIBBON SCHOOLS

U.S. Department of Education



**Sundance Elementary School  
Beaumont, California  
Beaumont United School District**

## ***Gateways to Excellence: Closing Gaps in Student Learning***

**Lauren Kinney, Principal:** You know, the whole key is, increase student engagement. So we talked about well, what does that look like? Teacher talks to student, student talks back to the teacher, teacher talks to whole class; whole class talks back to teacher. It's this model of communication. Then we say: student talks to student and student talks with the group and group talks back with the student. So—it's, mixing it up so that your communication is varied and it's not the same old approach where teacher is in front of the room speaking to the class and the class back to the teacher. We're adding the kinesthetic part because it is a more fun way to learn for sure. More active way, stimulates the brain. And it's is funny because you can see them kind of moving sometimes, when they're testing, 'cause they're thinking of those movements in their heads. Like a mnemonic device—just to help them remember the word.

**Jennifer Tillson, 4th Grade/ Gateways Teacher:** And you'll notice, as I'm teaching—movement. For instance, nouns: I will do my first finger, second finger, and third finger, because it's person, place thing, and then I'll go like that, touch my head, idea. So they know that's a noun. With a verb, I'll look like I'm running, because verbs, you can do it, it shows action.

**Lauren Kinney:** DII involves lesson planning to its fullest and anticipating what questions students might ask.

**Tracy Waters, 4th Grade Teacher:** Learning the concept is not regurgitating. We want the kids to go deeper and say "why—why do you think that's the answer? I want you to be able to me exactly why." And we always say, "all you can be is wrong. Big deal. You can learn when you are wrong, because if you are right, you already know it." It is about how can they take it out and use it in the real world.

AS STUDENTS MASTER CONCEPTS, THEY TEACH EACH OTHER.

**Lauren Kinney:** When you teach someone something, you internalize and learn it better. So that's the whole key behind that. Plus we're also teaching them to communicate effectively and properly with others. That's a life skill.

**Student:** Writing with purpose is my partner's big step that he needs help on. When I help him I say, "don't say 'more better' just say 'better' or 'more.' one of those two." Once we were arguing because I wanted him to describe a huge turtle. I was like what kind of turtle, a snapping turtle, a sea turtle? He was like "no, that's Okay!" and I was like "well, alright, like, end of discussion."

## GATEWAYS IS A STATEWIDE INTERVENTION PROGRAM TO HELP STUDENTS FILL GAPS IN THEIR LEARNING

**Jennifer Tillson:** There's three tiers, and there is your benchmark, which should be the majority of your school or your classes, and then there is the strategic, which my core teacher friends are taking care of those students in their classes by creating smaller groups and honing in on the strategies and the standards that they are really struggling with. And then there is the intensive group. So Gateways is the intensive intervention.

**Lauren Kinney:** We just say, "you know, it's okay. There are some gaps and holes in your learning. We are going to fill those gaps. You're showing us by test scores, and by your skills and study habits and things, that you need some extra help." The teachers talk about every single child in a collaboration meeting, 'cause we do meet every Wednesday and collaborate. And they discuss the child and they look at their scores and they decide is this intensive class the best for this child or should this child stay in the core room?

**Jennifer Tillson:** Once we fill those gaps in their education, they are going back to core and they are being successful. I have had kids that took the CSTs in third grade—they were below basic, or far below. They took them in fourth grade after being in Gateways for a year and now they're scoring proficient. So while I'm trying to fill in those gaps of that sort of elementary level of knowledge that they need, I also make sure that I try to use the higher level of Bloom's, so that we're not just on the low level with, "what is it?" you know, "how are you going to use that, and synthesize?" And so I think that's one of the ways that, yes I'm teaching them first and second grade standards, but you can also do it at a level that is still challenging their cognitive needs.

**Lauren Kinney:** If we feel that they have really made the adequate amount of progress, we move them out of the program. So some go in, some go out. For instance, Monday we are going to have a switchover. Some of our boys and girls, we're gonna say, "you've met your goal." At this school we talk about goals all of the time. So Monday we'll say, "okay, you've met your goals, here's why," and we show them their data. And say we expect you to go back to core and show how gateway students rule! This is how we answer questions in Gateways. We speak in complete sentences. We know on-the - surface information, we know about under-the-surface information. Our goal is for them to take the skills that they learned back into the core.