

2014 TERREL H. BELL RECIPIENT

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In 2011, when student performance on the California State Standardized Tests yielded disappointing results, Alicia Aceves, Andrews School's new principal, took the results "very personally." She analyzed the performance of every student and noted trends. Fundamental, systemic changes were in order. That summer she convened the whole staff—half of them veteran teachers of 25 years or more—to examine the data, and together they understood that instructional practices needed to change in order to individualize instruction and learning for every student. Through a Professional Learning Community, staff developed new norms for collaboration, specifically in analyzing student work both formatively and summatively, planning lessons, and sharing instructional strategies. A

leadership team recruited teacher leaders at every grade for monthly instructional planning meetings.

One conclusion staff reached was that students needed support in the development of writing skills. From her background with the Teacher's College, advanced training, and years as the district's Reading Coordinator, Mrs. Aceves understood that writing proficiency is central to literacy and, with her encouragement and inspiration, the staff committed to becoming outstanding teachers of reading and writing. Mrs. Aceves supported teachers in the Writer's Workshop model and provided focused professional development in methodology and content; she also tapped local resources to bring in consultants. A daily 2 ½ hour language arts block engages students in Reader's and Writer's Workshop experiences, a differentiated reading program, and teacher-led small group study. Students have choices in texts, topics on which to write, and opportunities for collaboration with peers. Students take care with and pride in their writing. Regular formal and informal classroom observations create a culture of mutual accountability.

From the beginning, Aceves has worked closely with her leadership team to provide collaborative skills and knowledge, established clear expectations for teams, provided training in data analysis and lesson design, and tapped local consultants to help staff transform their teaching to reach all students in all aspects of their lives. The result of their proficient collaboration is that Andrews has the highest proficiency levels in both English language arts and mathematics in the district. Deeply aware of vast inequities in public education, Mrs. Aceves also worked with the district and local businesses to design and fund 21st century learning that includes an updated lab, a focused technology curriculum, and a 1:1 tablet program for upper grades students, giving them immediate access to new information, internal social media applications, and collaboration tools.

Students study the work of various artists and different mediums in the art program and display their work at an annual Fine Arts Festival. Students participate in music education and study composers in history, learn how to read music, and apply music skills in a violin program. All teachers use the CATCH curriculum to teach physical education, nutrition, and promote a healthy lifestyle in students. English Learners receive targeted, small group instruction based on their English proficiency levels. Andrews also hosts a K-2 Special Day Class for students with severe disabilities.

A "generation" school where former students volunteer as parents and grandparents, Andrews involves parents through a School Site Council, English Learner Advisory Committee, PTA, and Dad's Club. All parents are kept informed of student progress towards meeting end of year standards. They attend information sessions to review state assessment results and student goals for the year and discuss strategies to support at home. Mrs. Aceves has also formed partnerships that link families to community services such as counseling. Despite a demanding schedule, she knows most students by name, as well as their academic strengths and weaknesses. She seeks out children who are having problems to check in and talk. Teachers describe her as someone who clearly enjoys working with all of the children and who is quick to kneel beside a student's desk and ask about their work.