

Elevate Elementary Charter School  
2018 California Distinguished School Application  
Submitted March 12, 2018

**I. School Overview:** School Overview Narrative (*limit response to 3,000 characters*)

The mission of Elevate Elementary Charter School, a K-5 public school located in the Serra Mesa and Tierrasanta communities of San Diego, is to ***equip tomorrow's global innovators by inspiring students to be excellent in academics, exceptional in leadership, and extraordinary in creativity***. Currently in our fourth year, Elevate serves a diverse community of over 300 learners. Our student population is 48% Caucasian, 26% Hispanic, 12% Two or More Races, 8% African American, 3% Asian, 2% Filipino, and 1% "Other". 37% of students come from families with limited income (LI), and 9% are classified as English Learners (EL).

One reason Elevate was founded was to provide a high-quality, personalized educational alternative for students from military families. These students are three times more likely to move during their school years than their civilian peers and often attend multiple schools during their formative educational years. Our population typically consists of 40-50% of students with at least one parent in active military service.

Student learning throughout the year is organized into five thematic, interdisciplinary, project-based learning (PBL) units: Community, Character, Service, Justice/Diversity, and Discovery. Elevate's approach to PBL balances the imperative of being rigorous and standards-based, while providing opportunities for student creativity, voice, and choice as they apply their learning in meaningful ways. During each unit, students work toward answering an essential question with their culminating project, which they share with a public audience comprised of peers, parents, and/or community members at bi-annual Student Exhibition Nights and in other settings. Capping all class sizes at twenty-five students provides the opportunity for each classroom teacher to continually assess and monitor the learning levels of each student.

A core belief of our school is that every child is a leader. As a Leader in Me school ([www.leaderinme.org](http://www.leaderinme.org)), Stephen Covey's timeless leadership principles, the 7 Habits, are integrated into the fabric of our school. The 7 Habits provide a common whole-school language and are woven throughout each unit. Students practice leadership in the classroom and by serving on Peace Patrol, Safety Team, and Student Lighthouse Team. In addition, every classroom leads two whole-school assemblies where even our youngest students get the invaluable experience of speaking before over 250 students and adults.

Elevate actively partners with our families to co-create a vibrant school community where the needs of students are put first. Coffee with the Principal and family events are held throughout the year, providing opportunity for genuine relationship building and dialogue, and parents are invited and encouraged to play an active role on our school campus. On any given day, parents can be found working in classrooms, helping out with a PE lesson, serving on our board, and organizing special events and projects.

## **II. Model Program Reference: Assessment-Based Personalized Learning Cycle (ABPLC)**

In order to equip and inspire each Elevate student to be excellent in academics, exceptional in leadership, and extraordinary in creativity, it is imperative that our school has a comprehensive approach to ensure that every student has opportunity to master each grade-level Common Core standard. To this end, the Elevate team has established an Assessment-Based Personalized Learning Cycle (ABPLC) that provides both teachers and students the ability to clearly monitor and track student learning and standards mastery throughout the school-year.

This cycle is directly aligned with key elements of Elevate's first two LCAP (Local Control and Accountability Plan) goals:

**Goal #1:** Continue to develop an infrastructure for ongoing analysis of student achievement data to measure program efficacy and ensure maximization of physical, human, and financial resources in order to tailor intervention programs for all subgroups.

**Goal #2:** Provide all students with high-quality instruction through a rigorous, Common Core (ELA/ELD, Math, NGSS) aligned curriculum in a STEAM Project-Based Learning environment that includes writing across the curriculum.

These goals align with State and Local Priorities 1 (Conditions of Learning), 4 (Pupil Achievement), and 8 (Other Pupil Outcomes). Specific services that were provided to implement this learning cycle and achieve progress on these goals included properly staffing the school team (certificated classroom teachers, administrative staff, and instructional assistants), continuing our Illuminate (formerly known as OARS/Online Assessment Reporting System) software license in order to create and administer standards-based academic benchmarks, and providing high-quality professional development to teachers before and during the school year.

This cycle also supports Elevate's third LCAP goal, which is: Engage parents as partners through education, communication, and collaboration to provide students with a safe, welcoming and inclusive, positive learning environment to ensure students are in class ready to learn.

A natural byproduct of engaging in this cycle is that teachers gain a deep, detailed understanding of the learning levels, progress, and challenges for each of their students. Parent confidence and engagement rises when this deep care for and knowledge about their child is articulated by their child's teacher and other school staff. This is one of the reasons for the strong partnership between parents and staff at Elevate. Students know when the adults in their lives are on the same page, and this makes a positive difference in their school experience each day.

## **Model Program Description: Assessment-Based Personalized Learning Cycle (ABPLC)**

The impetus for our Assessment-Based Personalized Learning Cycle (ABPLC) is the core belief that in order for each student to succeed, they must have access to a rigorous, standards-based curriculum and their learning must consistently be assessed and monitored. Teachers must also be trained and knowledgeable about how to analyze and effectively use assessment data to differentiate and personalize instruction.

Because our goal is for *every* child to be successful, we do not target specific subgroups at the outset. As teachers and staff follow this process, assessment data from common assessments determines which students receive additional support in whole-class, small-group, and individual contexts.

Two critical resources for this program's success are highly-trained teachers and Illuminate assessment software that enables the development, assessment, and analysis of standards-based benchmarks. To this end, Elevate teachers participate in thirteen days of professional development (PD) before school begins, covering a wide range of topics that includes training on how to use Illuminate. Because teachers design and build grade-level PBL units, Elevate funds this extensive PD with monies that would have otherwise been allocated for purchased curriculum.

Elevate's Director of Instruction creates English Language Arts (ELA) benchmark assessments that align with teacher-created grade-level standards maps. At present, benchmarks are administered at the end of the first four units. After benchmarks are administered, teachers meet with in grade level teams to analyze data and determine which students need reteaching on specific standards. Teachers strategically place students into Universal Access (UA) groups based on this data, and students are provided additional scaffolds to learn and understand the standards. After several weeks of UA, teachers reassess those standards. If students are still struggling, a Response to Intervention (RTI) staff member begins working with the student.

Further, school-wide incorporation of the 7 Habits promotes students' ownership of their learning, effort, and perseverance. Particularly for students who have previously exhibited social-emotional and/or behavioral needs, this additional focus has proven beneficial and has helped many students experience learning success for the first time.

Elevate's implementation of this approach is distinguished because (a) benchmark assessments are directly aligned with the standards students have learned most recently, (b) teachers analyze data and identify next steps quickly, and (c) students who have not yet mastered key standards receive additional support promptly, ensuring academic growth, increased self-esteem, and motivation to attend school. With nine classroom teachers the last few years and thirteen this year, high teacher buy-in and adherence to this school-wide system ensures consistent implementation for optimal student benefit.

## **Model Program Implementation and Monitoring**

Elevate first purchased Illuminate software during the spring of our first year (2014-15) and piloted standards-based benchmark assessments in one classroom that spring. During our second year (2015-16), we administered benchmark assessments at all grade levels and started to devote considerable time and resources to training teachers on how to administer and analyze benchmark assessments. In 2016-17, grade-level benchmarks were tailored to align even more closely with the standards for each unit.

Teachers engage in ongoing, data-based PD throughout the school year, in addition to the thirteen days of professional learning that takes place prior to the start of school. PD is determined by CAASPP and benchmark data and has included training on data analysis and RTI. As part of our professional development, all teachers participate in two Safe Practice Observation Cycles per year when teachers and administrators observe them in a PD focus area, such as small group instruction or UA. Observers provide positive, constructive feedback, which host teachers use to fine-tune their teaching skills. This provides opportunities for professional growth and increased collaboration. Teachers also collaborate with their teaching teams on a weekly basis, and in PLC's several times a month to plan, look at data, and receive input from vertical and horizontal teams. RTI and support team members also receive training in the implementation of supports and scaffolds to increase academic growth in strategic areas.

At regular intervals, teachers enter Lexile levels, Fountas and Pinnell levels, and all benchmark results, onto a data sheet tool that has been created to monitor each student's learning levels. Administrators and our Academic Task Force (ATF) monitor benchmark data to determine academic needs and how best to support teachers and students. Teachers are encouraged to share assessment data with students for the purpose of goal setting, and while not required by the school, most teachers share student benchmark and reteach assessment data with parents using the Illuminate Student Reports. Parents also receive updates on their child's progress at our two student led parent-teacher conferences, and parents receive strategies to assist their child at home in specific areas as determined by benchmark monitoring.

Elevate also hosts an annual Common Core Night for parents to learn more about the rigor of the standards and receive strategies to help their children. A monthly Coffee With the Principal gathering provides opportunity for the principal to highlight elements of the learning cycle and share what teachers are working on in PD. Keeping parents informed of their child's learning ensures parent involvement in the learning cycle.

## **Model Program Results and Outcomes**

As a result our Assessment-Based Personalized Learning Cycle and the exceptional efforts of our students and teachers, Elevate students have shined on the CAASPP ELA since our inception. During these three years, the number of students who met or exceeded standards has increased from 80% to 89%, nearly doubling the state average. Further, the number of students from families with limited income (LI) who met or exceeded standards has increased at a slightly better rate during this period (from 74% to 84%). In 2016-17, 46% of students with disabilities met or exceeded the ELA standards, more than tripling the performance of their state level peers. By establishing a pathway to closely monitor student learning and identify struggling learners early, Elevate has minimized the achievement gap at our school for all students.

In 2016-17, 8.3% of all students received RTI support, and 13.6% of those students were referred for special education assessment. All of them qualified and began receiving special education services. Of the students who received RTI support for the 2016-17 school year and for whom we have CAASPP data, 75% met or exceeded the ELA standards.

After analysis of the learning cycle and the three year CAASPP growth trend, Elevate increased the amount of students receiving UA and RTI during the current school year to 34% of all students (from 8.3% last year). By recognizing the success of the learning cycle for struggling students, grade level teams are more strategically and collaboratively monitoring benchmark data for reteaching purposes, UA has been more strategically implemented in all classes, and increased funding has been allocated to hire additional support staff for the current school year to ensure that more students are receiving RTI to support them with the rigors of Common Core State Standards.

Teachers and support staff are consistently motivated when they see their students grow in academics and confidence as a result of this cycle, creating buy-in. One teacher said, "Reteaching and review times in a small group setting make all of the difference in the world for my students in their mastery of standards."

Parents have reported that they appreciate how their children are cared for and supported, making them successful. One said, "The caring and dedicated staff at Elevate has provided such a stable foundation for students to flourish academically, relationally, and emotionally." Another parent shared, "Elevate's leadership opportunities and friendship groups have helped nurture confidence in my child and foster supportive relationships among her classmates. I've seen my daughter really come out of her shell and embrace what she's learning."

The result is that many of our students are experiencing academic success for the first time, resulting in increased self-esteem, ownership of their learning, and a more positive outlook towards school - all of which are critical in their development as leaders.