



Fontana Unified School District

Every Student Successful, Engaging Schools, Empowered Communities

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NEWS RELEASE

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Fontana Unified Elementary School Celebrated as National Success Story for Innovative Teaching Practices

FONTANA, CA – Fontana Unified’s Beech Avenue Elementary School has earned national recognition from the [National Center on Education and the Economy \(NCEE\)](#) for its effective implementation of the Teaching for Effective Learning (TEL) program, highlighting the school’s success in enhancing teaching practices and fostering collaboration among educators to advance student academic growth.

Principal Michele Mower launched TEL, a research-based program that equips teachers with tools and strategies rooted in the science of learning, at Beech Avenue Elementary in 2021 to help mitigate learning loss caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and bridge achievement gaps, with positive impacts found among all student groups.

“Our students are thriving because of this shift—not just in their performance, but in their overall experience,” said Mower, who has served as principal since the school’s founding in 2007. “Seeing them excited to step into class, actively engage, and make connections in their own learning is nothing short of incredible.”

TEL is designed to ensure instructional methods continuously evolve to best meet student needs by encouraging teachers to observe each other’s practices, engage in collaborative lesson planning, and focus on continuous improvement.

Since implementing TEL, Beech Avenue Elementary has witnessed significant gains across its entire student population through a range of assessments. In the most recent California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP) state test results from 2023-24, the school saw the percentage of its students meeting or exceeding state standards grow by 3.5 points in English Language Arts and 5.17 in math compared to the data from 2021-22.

“TEL has really made a huge impact and has been universally successful,” Mower said. “Whether a child is in special education services or in the Gifted and Talented Education (GATE) program, they have been able to grow according to their own goals.”

Through TEL, Beech Avenue teachers studied their own personal teaching practices in both individual and group settings. School administration embedded TEL programming into the school day, with teachers meeting every other week to collaborate and focus on professional development while aligning instructional strategies and sharing best practices to ensure the best possible outcomes for students, Mower said.

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“It has been truly inspiring to witness our educators unite to create a meaningful and lasting transformation in our school’s culture and academic performance,” Mower said.

In the first two years of TEL implementation, Beech Avenue focused on active, cognitive engagement and small group differentiated instruction to help students who began their academic journey during COVID-19 accelerate their learning and catch up to grade-level expectations.

When assessed during the height of the pandemic, 80% of the school’s kindergarten students scored in the bottom 20% in both reading and math. After being reassessed as third graders in 2024, that percentage of students scoring in the lowest quintile reduced drastically to 33%, Mower said.

In 2023-24, Beech Avenue instituted a schoolwide focus on writing – a crucial, foundational skill in early education, Mower said. Students maintained writing portfolios throughout the school year, allowing them to observe their own progress and reflect on ways they could further improve as the year went along.

“The whole idea was helping create assessment-capable learners, and those writing portfolios were really instrumental in that work,” Mower said.

In 2024, nearly 80% of Beech Avenue students met or exceeded their reading growth goals on the STAR Reading assessment test. Sixty-three percent of students also achieved their i-Ready Diagnostic reading targets – a significant increase from the 47% who met the benchmark in 2023, said Mower, while adding students with disabilities also made double-digit gains toward proficiencies for the second year in a row.

"Beech Avenue Elementary’s recognition by the NCEE is a testament to the dedication and hard work of our educators, students, and the entire school community,” Superintendent Miki R. Inbody said. “The success of the Teaching for Effective Learning program reflects our commitment to providing every student with the tools and support they need to succeed. This achievement is a proud moment for Beech Avenue, and we look forward to building on this momentum districtwide."

PHOTO CAPTIONS:

FUSD_BEECH1: Beech Avenue Elementary School teacher Jamie Heyes leads one of her third-grade students through a lesson. Beech Avenue has earned national recognition from the NCEE for its effective implementation of the Teaching for Effective Learning program.

FUSD_BEECH2: Beech Avenue Elementary School students have performed better on the CAASPP testing since the school introduced the TEL program, which is designed to ensure instructional methods continuously evolve to best meet student needs.

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