

English Language Arts (Core Subject)

The ELA curriculum is based on California Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts, along with the Reading / Language Arts Framework; A Look at Kindergarten Through Grade Six in California Public Schools. The English Language Arts (ELA) standards for public schools in California -- including the new Common Core Standards -- establish high expectations for all students, with the goal that all students “become effective language users so that they can succeed academically, pursue higher education, find challenging and rewarding work, participate in our democracy as informed citizens, appreciate and contribute to our culture, and pursue their own goals and interests throughout their lives.” The integrated curriculum at Metro provides daily occasion for teachers to “take every opportunity to link reading and writing to other core curricula, including history, social science, mathematics, science, and the visual and performing arts, to help students achieve success in all areas.” To support teaching the standards, teachers use the Reading / Language Arts Framework for planning and guidance. The framework is also used as a reference guide during the selection of instructional materials and for professional development activities.

Based on the acclaimed Readers’ and Writers’ Workshop Programs from Teachers College in New York, Metro’s English Language Arts program is designed to ensure that on a daily basis, all students engage in reading, writing, speaking and listening activities to become fluent readers who comprehend and value literature, and are competent writers, articulate speakers and thoughtful listeners who can communicate effectively.

Reading: Reading instruction incorporates four main components:

Shared Reading
Guided Reading
Letter and Word Study and
Independent Reading

Shared Reading: Focusing on comprehension, teachers choose text for a particular purpose, then demonstrate using and applying a particular comprehension strategy. In the early grades, shared reading may focus heavily on applying decoding strategies, in addition to those used to construct meaning. Texts used may include big books, trade books, decodable texts, magazines and newspapers, anthologies, poems, and selections from social studies and science texts. During shared reading, teachers model the appropriate use of strategies by employing “think alouds” to allow students the chance to explicitly learn what is generally a more implicit process. Students are given the appropriate vocabulary to identify the strategies they are learning and using, and teachers reinforce and encourage students to share their thinking processes and articulate what strategies they are using.

Guided Reading: Teachers target instruction based on the individual needs of students through guided reading. As a whole class, reading instruction might be focused on the reading strategy of asking questions. During guided reading time, the teacher chooses texts that provide opportunities to guide students in the use of this strategy based on the appropriate instructional levels of individual students. Students are all working on the same objective, but using different texts. At other times, reading groups might be working on different strategies, again based on need. In the upper grades, in addition to guided reading, teachers employ literature circles and discussion groups. Both of these activities encourage student exploration of complex themes in text, enhance oral language and higher-level cognition, provide a chance for students to freely explore ideas, deepen students’ understanding of what they read, while creating more enthusiastic and engaged readers. The cooperative and heterogeneous grouping practices used in these activities are also beneficial to English Learners who

may be less hesitant to practice and perform in smaller groups where peer interaction is more natural and comfortable.

Letter and Word Study: Major research studies have shown that systematic, explicit phonics instruction is the most effective type of instruction, especially for those students who are considered “at risk” for academic failure (Report of the National Reading Panel, 2000). Therefore, Letter and Word Study in the primary grades (TK-2) – including on-line learning -- focuses primarily on phonics instruction in which sounds/spellings are introduced systematically and sequentially, taught in isolation, blended into whole words, and practiced in decodable texts. Further, spelling instruction and word-work activities allow students to practice sound/spelling patterns by building, manipulating, and sorting words to reinforce decoding and word attack skills. Dictation activities connect the process of encoding to decoding, as students learn that their sound /spelling knowledge allows them to read as well as communicate through writing. Primary grades also include high frequency word instruction to help students become fluent readers. By the end of 2nd grade students are expected to have mastered 400 high frequency words taken from the Dolch Basic Sight Vocabulary and Fry’s Instant Words. Students chant, spell-out, visualize, hunt for and highlight these words in texts in addition to practicing them at home. Classroom word walls contribute to a print-rich environment, and word wall games and activities reinforce learning.

In all grades, letter and word study includes spelling instruction and targeted vocabulary development. Spelling instruction are based on a student’s developmental stage, as determined by administration of Words Their Way Qualitative Spelling Inventory. Spelling requires a higher level of precision than reading, so when teachers consider the developmental reading and spelling stages of a child, instructional strategies can be implemented which foster overall literacy development. Spelling lists are be grouped by pattern (sound, visual, or meaning) and presented in a systematic sequence. Teachers then engage students in activities such as making words, word sorting (closed, blind, and speed), and word hunts which allow them to actively analyze and categorize words, thereby discovering spelling rules and generalizations. Again, this approach allows for multi-level instruction as students learn and participate in similar activities, but at their own level. Targeted vocabulary development at all levels is aimed at making sure students acquire new word knowledge and increase their depth of knowledge over time. Instruction in specific words and concepts occur through explicit teaching and modeling when words are conceptually difficult. For example, teachers pre-teach vocabulary that is important to student understanding of the content or due to its usefulness or general utility.

Teachers use a variety of techniques to help students make connections between unfamiliar words with their own background knowledge. Explicit instruction in word-learning strategies allows students to determine meanings of unfamiliar words encountered while reading. These strategies include teaching students to use dictionaries, online sources and other resource aids to deepen understanding of words, instruction in word structure as it relates to meaning (morphemes, affixes, roots) and directly teaching students to identify and use external clues to determine word meaning from context. Starting in the primary grades, teachers model these learning strategies as they read aloud, using picture and text clues to help students learn simple ways of applying context clues. As students get older, they learn and apply more sophisticated strategies such as identifying examples, restatements, and comparisons in order to clarify word meanings. Upper grade students apply knowledge of word origins and Greek and Latin roots, especially in content-area texts.

Independent Reading: During the Language Arts block, as well as during other times throughout the day, students have time to choose and enjoy reading books that are of interest to them, an integral part

of our curriculum at all levels. Classroom libraries are stocked with high-interest books of various genres at a variety of levels. Online reading through programs such as Raz-Kids and Pebble Go allow for a variety of genres and levels as well. To motivate students to read, to give students more opportunities to apply new learning, and to help instill a love of literature, students are given opportunities to talk about or respond to the books they read. Kindergarteners may draw a picture of their favorite part of a favorite story and tell why they liked it, while 3rd grade students complete reflection forms to evaluate books read. In addition, students at all grade levels are required to read nightly and keep a reading log that is signed by their parents.

Writing: Hand in hand with the school's reading program is a structured daily writing program. The chief component of the writing program is the acclaimed Writer's Workshop, based on the Lucy Calkins'/Teachers College Writer's Workshop model. Writer's Workshop, which is based on the constructivist principle that learning to write is as much about the process as the product, is used to teach students in all grade levels how to enjoy writing and at the same time reach the goal of becoming competent writers.

The Writer's Workshop design consists of three components that occur daily: the Mini-lesson or direct instruction, independent writing time and share time. Mini-lessons can relate to craft (applications, content, or strategies), skills (conventions and editing) or procedures relating to workshop. These short, focused lessons are based on standards or elements of a particular genre and on the observed needs of the students. Mini-lessons follow the same basic structure school-wide: teachers provide a connection to previous learning; explicitly teach a strategy using modeling techniques, published literature and teacher and student writing; provide active engagement (often in the form of partner talk); and provide a link which sets the intention for students to apply the new strategy in their own work. During independent writing time, students choose writing topics, a strategy that helps develop personal investment in the writing process. They apply learning from mini-lessons, move themselves through the writing process and may engage in partner talk to help focus and develop ideas. Students understand the rituals and procedures of the workshop including how to access materials and information from around the room (charts, posters, model authors) and to organize their writers' notebooks and folders. The teacher uses this time to take quick inventories of the class, confer formally and informally with students and track student progress on conference logs. The sharing component of workshop occurs at the end of workshop and provides another opportunity for teaching and reinforcing the content of the mini-lesson. Sharing takes a variety of forms, including Author's Chair, pair-share, or popcorn around the room. During this time the teacher can also address listening and speaking standards, as students are expected to engage in "accountable talk" (see Resnick's Principles of Learning, above). Teachers model the process that teaches students to use the language of the genre and the standards, to refer to the author's text to support comments and to provide specific feedback to help peers move forward.

In addition to the work produced during workshop, writing prompts are used to prepare students to construct a coherent essay within a designated time period. Starting in grade 2, students complete writing prompts each trimester. Additionally, whenever possible, teachers provide chances for students to incorporate authentic writing within the content areas. In response to a weekly math problem, second graders write a step-by-step summary of how they came to a solution. Fifth graders might write letters to the custodial staff to inform them of changes in the recycling program. Fourth grade students write summaries of current events they read about in the news in order to share interesting stories with their peers. Students learn that writing takes many forms and serves a variety of purposes.

The framework for teaching English Language conventions focuses on thinking processes rather than rote learning tasks. Mini-lessons target these standards within the context of Writer’s Workshop in order to present the often-abstract concepts in a more meaningful context. For example, a teacher might present a mini-lesson on parts of speech, focusing on adjectives after studying the works of Kevin Henkes, an author celebrated for his use of descriptive language. Students might reread passages from his texts in order to identify adjectives used, perform an adjective “scavenger hunt” around the room, add to a running list of “juicy” words posted in the classroom, while focusing on revising their personal narratives to include more descriptive words. Houghton-Mifflin Reading provides additional resources for teachers in the area of grammar and conventions.

Speaking: Speaking is very important to vocabulary and language development and contributes to social development. In all classrooms, teachers provide students with multiple opportunities to explore oral communication in the classroom. For example, students develop active and responsive listening skills through class and small group discussions. Classes take turns presenting and performing at morning assemblies. Each teacher uses scaffolding strategies to help English Learners build confidence in communicating information and ideas. One way this is done is by giving students “scripts” using sentence frames that provide students with appropriate language structures. Additional structured speaking activities in class include Author’s Chair and literature circles where students discuss and analyze elements of books as well as relate reading experiences to their own lives. Students practice speaking clearly and using complete sentences during formal oral reports and presentations. Teachers develop specific rubrics based on ELA and ELD standards that they share with students in order to communicate expectations. These rubrics provide students with an understanding of the components of effective speaking enabling them to reflect on their own performance and from the presentations of their peers.

Listening: Based on the ELA and ELD standards for listening, students are taught that active, effective listening is a habit to develop and the foundation of effective communication. Students are taught how to focus their attention, avoid distractions, use body position to signal their interest, express appreciation and appropriately pose questions. Some of the ways in which active listening skills are practiced include: following oral directions, answering questions after read-aloud, critiquing shared pieces in Writer’s Workshop, writing dictated sentences and repeating rhythms through movement and clapping. In second grade, to address the standard that requires students to give and follow multi-step directions, teachers create projects that require partners to listen to each other’s directions in order to correctly complete a task. Partner A learns how to complete part of the task and gives directions to Partner B, then they switch roles. Success depends on careful listening on the part of both students.

English Language Development (Core Subject)

Metro’s English Learner (EL) population includes students who predominantly come from Spanish-speaking families, but also those who speak a variety of other home languages. The ELD program implements both the California ELD Standards and the new English Language Arts/English Language Development Framework for California Public Schools (ELA/ELD Framework). Our ELD goals are directly aligned with the goals detailed in the ELD Standards and Framework to “ensure that ELs are fully supported as they:

- Read, analyze, interpret, and create a variety of literary and informational text types;
- Develop an understanding of how language is a complex, dynamic, and social resource for making meaning;
- Develop an understanding of how content is organized in different text types across disciplines using text organization and structure, language features, and vocabulary depending on purpose and audience;
- Become aware that different languages and varieties of English exist;

- Recognize their home languages and cultures as resources to value in their own right and to draw upon in order to build proficiency in English;
- Contribute actively to class and group discussions by asking questions, responding appropriately, and providing useful feedback;
- Demonstrate knowledge of content through oral presentations, writing, collaborative conversations, and multimedia; and
- Develop proficiency in shifting registers based on task, purpose, audience, and text type.” (ELA/ELD Framework p. 9-10).

EL students, like their English-fluent counterparts, are expected to gain progress in each of the ELA strands -- Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing. The Principal monitors EL progress through formal and informal assessments including grades, standardized test scores, and ongoing communications with classroom teachers and the student’s parents/guardians.

Metro provides students with both integrated and designated support. Each classroom is rich with sentence frames, support students’ language development. Sentence frames provide students with examples on ways to enter a conversation, ways to explain their thinking or how to compare/contrast two items. Thinking maps are utilized for reading, writing and PBL. Teachers pull EL students before introducing new concepts to preview reading material or PBL material. As designated support, students have a targeted 30 minute block each day in which they are provided instruction for their ELD level. During this time, teachers use books, articles, charts, vocabulary cards and thinking maps to support the development of new language. Teachers utilize the same reading passage from the morning ELA block (such as an article from Ready Reading or a read aloud) and spend time reviewing vocabulary, grammar structure, and syntax. Metro believes that the designated ELD block is a time to support students so that they can access the complex text during the morning ELA block.

Mathematics (Core Subject)

Learning objectives and outcomes are aligned to the rigorous CA CCSS mathematics standards. Teachers use the Mathematics Frameworks for California Public Schools for planning and guidance. The goal of the math curriculum is to make students fluent with numbers, to build mathematical reasoning skills and to develop a strong math vocabulary. In order for students to acquire the ability to reason and to apply problem-solving skills, they need both declarative and procedural knowledge of mathematics. Therefore, the math program is designed to allow students to discover why formulas and proofs work rather than just how to memorize and follow them, shifting their thought process from gaining absolute knowledge to increasing mathematical reasoning skills.

Our balanced mathematics program enables students to become proficient basic computational and procedural skills, conceptual understanding, and problem solving. As detailed in the California Mathematics Framework, students have:

- Fluency in basic computational skills
- Ability to recognize and solve routine problems readily and to find ways to reach a solution or goal where no routine path is apparent
- Ability to communicate precisely about quantities, logical relationships, and unknown values through the use of signs, symbols, models, graphs, and mathematical terms
- Ability to reason mathematically by gathering data, analyzing evidence, and building arguments to support or refute hypotheses
- Ability to make connections among mathematical ideas and between mathematics and other disciplines.

Metro faculty have begun to study and implement Cognitively Guided Instruction (CGI) strategies. CGI does not rely on memorization of facts and equations; instead, it focuses on word problems to develop mathematical thinking. The sequence of math problems is introduced and taught in a specific order in order to help children develop specific mathematical skills and understandings. This helps students develop a deeper understanding of numbers and problem solving. In addition, CGI practices encourages students to explain their thinking and understanding. This is a critical component of the CCSS and standards for Mathematical Practices.

History/Social Studies

Metro uses project based learning approach to support the instruction of social studies standards. Metro Charter's History/Social Science curriculum is based on the California State Standards and incorporates the CCSS standards for English Language Arts to assist in developing literacy skills in reading, writing, listening, and speaking. For each unit, teachers utilize resources such as Buck Institute of Education to ensure that all state standards have been integrated. Each unit aligns social studies standards with current events that relate to the students' lives. Teachers use fiction and nonfiction texts to provide background knowledge, develop core and academic vocabulary, and build comprehension skills and strategies. In grades 2-5, the curriculum also begins to analyze primary resources and utilize online research as way to investigate current events. Field trips are incorporated to help link the classroom to the real world. For example, when fourth grade students read about the California gold rush, they also visited Riley Farm and actually panned for gold. These same fourth graders used their understanding of the gold rush to explain why people today may take the risk to immigrate to California. Thus, students incorporate their learning of history to explain or understand current events.

Teachers provide standards-based (and updated Common Core) content around themes of social studies with multiple instructional strategies. Student assessments include preparing and delivering speeches, writing informational reports, creating three-dimensional representations and artwork, and teacher created rubrics. The curriculum is based on the following themes:

K – Living and Working Now and Long Ago

1 – A Child's Place in Time and Space

2 – People Who Make a Difference

3 – Continuity and Change

4 – California: A Changing State

5 – United States History and Geography: Making a New Nation

Science (Core Subject)

Our inquiry-based science curriculum emphasizes learning through exploration and experience, utilizing the acclaimed Full Option Science System (FOSS) kits, which provide hands-on investigations, laboratory experiences, and projects. Teachers utilize NGSS to plan hands-on units for project-based learning. Metro Charter's Science curriculum also incorporates the CCSS standards for English Language Arts to assist in developing literacy skills in reading, writing, listening, and speaking. For each unit, teachers utilize resources such as Buck Institute of Education to ensure that all state standards have been integrated. Each unit aligns science standards with current events that relate to the students' lives. Teachers integrate lessons from FOSS kits with fiction and nonfiction texts to provide background knowledge, develop core and academic vocabulary, and build comprehension skills and strategies. In grades 2-5, the curriculum also begins to analyze primary resources and utilize online research as way to investigate current events. Field trips are incorporated to help link the classroom to the real world. For example, when third grade students studied force and motion, they also visited various parks and actually identified the forces of motion within each play structure. These

same third graders used their understanding of force and motion to provide suggestions for improvements to the playground.

An integral part of the inquiry-based units are activities conducted around predicting and making hypotheses, recording observations, and using data to reach conclusions. Technology also is incorporated into science activities where appropriate. Microsoft Office (Word, Excel, PowerPoint) can facilitate data analysis, construction of graphs and tables, and interpretation of results. This software, along with online resources, is used to scaffold content for English Learners and create challenging assignments for advanced students.

Visual and Performing Arts (Non-Core)

The arts are an important part of learning for our young students at Metro. Throughout every grade and every classroom, art is taught explicitly through a standards-aligned curriculum that exposes students to a wide variety of arts education in visual and performing arts. Arts instruction is embedded throughout the core day by classroom teachers in each grade, as well as classes led by our Instructional Aides (co-planned with close supervision from our Principal) visual arts, media art, or drama. Students benefit from additional opportunities for targeted arts instruction offered in collaboration with our partner organizations and community volunteers (supervised by the credentialed classroom teachers).

Metro partners with Inner City Art and City Ballet of Los Angeles, both located in our community. Students receive instruction such as visual arts, ceramics, drama, and dance from these community partners. Inner-City Arts collaborates with Metro to ensure they support our specific learning goals, including offering teacher training and workshops for parents. Culminating events, including performances and exhibitions, mark the end of each session and provide an opportunity for students to share their accomplishments with parents and families.

Physical Education (Non-Core)

Our standards-based physical education and health curriculum cover the following strands: movement skills and knowledge, self-image and personal development, and social development. The physical education program emphasizes individual motor skills, fitness and good sportsmanship. Human development is also a central part of the health curriculum. All students receive 200 minutes of physical education instruction every 10 days, meeting or exceeding the minimum requirement stated in § 51210(g) of the Education Code. Our program not only focuses on children developing healthy exercise habits and discovering a physical activity that interests them, but also help them develop critical skills and habits in teamwork, cooperation, and sportsmanship. We also ensure that our yard supervisors and other staff who supervise children at recess and play time have appropriate training to ensure that students engage in organized, cooperative activities that help develop social skills and team work.

Technology (Non-Core)

Different forms of technology are integrated into core content areas to reach all types of learners, including online curriculum and assessments, online research, and multimedia creation. Metro teachers utilize iPads, computers and chrome books to support student learning. Students are able to use the ever-growing body of rich on-line curriculum to practice skills and engage in fun, game-like learning that adapts continuously to their individual needs. In addition to learning skills relating to keyboarding, word processing, digital editing, presentations, databases and more, students also will learn about responsible and ethical use of digital information and electronic communication.