

Classroom Characteristics

I have 26 students in my first grade class at _____ Elementary. Their ages range from 6 years old to 7 years old. Most of the students start at the age of 6 and turn 7 sometime throughout the year. There are 16 girls and 10 boys. Twenty-two out of the 26 students speak a language different from English in their home. Two of the 26 students came from developmental kindergarten and receive 30 minutes of resource room education per day. One of the 2 students from developmental kindergarten has very specific social needs that are described in his Individualized Education Plan. Aside from academics, he needs additional help with learning how to socialize and function around his peers and other people. Three of the students in my class receive additional speech therapy 2 times a week and 2 of the students receive occupational/physical therapy while at school. All of these students have very particular needs that the students are required to work on while in class with my support.

The ability level of the students range from students who are working below grade level to students who are working at somewhat higher than grade level. There are students who are learning their letter sounds, and then there are students who know their letter sounds and are working on learning word chunks, memorizing sight words, and reading fluently. Finally, the higher groups of students are working on fluency and comprehension. It is a challenge to address all ability levels, especially when there are many different languages spoken and many different learning styles and special needs for these students.

I have the desks are arranged in groups in the classroom. I try to arrange the groups so there is a range of ability levels in each group. I have the students do a lot of work either as a whole group or in partners, therefore, I make sure that there are people in the group who know what to do and can help the others. I know there are some students who have trouble understanding directions and this is why I put them with students who do understand and can help them. A common routine I have the students do when I ask a question is to tell a partner what the answer is first before raising their hand. This helps those students who aren't sure about the answer or are too shy and not confident to feel like they can answer to the whole class. I also have the students do a lot of talking to each other and then sharing to the whole class before they work independently. This helps to avoid the problem of those students who just sit and talk when they are supposed to be working and it helps me gauge who understands and who needs some extra help. Because there are many students who are just learning the English language, I try to focus on vocabulary with everything we do. I use many GLAD strategies in all of my teaching to help include the ELL students and the students who are academically lower. One of the strategies I use is drawing pictorials of science concepts with labels and leaving those pictorials on the wall for students to reference. I also use chants and songs to teach sight words, classroom rules, and science concepts. I have found that no matter what language or ability level, the GLAD strategies help to engage all students.

Characteristics of School and District

The school district I work for has 4 high schools, 5 middle schools, and 15 elementary schools. This district is very diverse. It encompasses communities that are economically very high and also communities that have large immigrant populations and subsidized

housing. The district has adopted a math curriculum that each school is required to use. The district also offers many professional development opportunities.

_____ Elementary is a Title 1 school. According to the October 2005 WASL report, at _____ 85% of the students qualify for free and reduced lunch, 53.3% are White, 24.9% are Hispanic, 8.3% are Asian, 7.5% are Black, and 2% are American Indian/Alaska Native. _____ comes from an area that houses many immigrant and low-income families. There are many students who are just entering the United States and do not speak English. _____ also takes all of the homeless students from the district. Many of the students stay at the school for a short period of time while their families are looking to move to better living situations.

This past year was the 2nd year the 4th grade students did not make adequate yearly progress on the WASL in math. This has caused many changes at _____. There is a lot of pressure for the students to pass the WASL this year and the principal has implemented some programs to help the students make more progress. There are intervention groups in reading, math, and writing every day for 30 minutes. The teachers are asked to attend weekly staff meetings and have weekly grade level meetings. Once a month the principal organizes either a half-day or a full day to meet and plan with grade level teams. These are called Professional Learning Teams. As a grade level team we write SMART goals to ensure that we are all on the same page and that we are working toward a common goal as a grade level. The principal of my school also brings in extra resources to help teachers. We have had a writing residency, we are implementing a computerized math program, and a math residency will be coming to work with the 4th grade teachers. All these programs are to help the teachers at _____ teach so that students can achieve to their highest potentials.

Characteristics of the Community

The community of people that make up _____ are mainly immigrant families or families that are considered low income. The parents of the ELL students have expressed to me how difficult it is for them to help their children with homework and academics. I have had parents who come to see me before and after school to ask for help on homework and reading handouts that come home. I have even had parents ask me to help them read medical information because they couldn't understand what the forms said. _____ also has many families who do speak English at home, but have very low income and do not have the resources to help their children. I have observed that some of the community from _____ is very close knit. Many of the students from my room go home with other students' families or babysitters. The parents seem to help each other with child care and the students come to school with many stories of playing at the community park with their classmates.

The PTA at _____ so far has been very small. I think this is because either the parents work full time or the parents don't feel comfortable enough coming to the meetings because they do not speak English. There is a church that has adopted _____ and helps with the school carnival and other events that are designed to raise money and benefit not only the learning, but also the overall well being of the students.