

Accelerate Institute Case Study
Framework Objective #3 – Constructive Environment

HEATHERBRAE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

2014 RYAN AWARD WINNER:

EVA STEVENS

SCHOOL STATS
Phoenix, AZ

730 Students
Grades K-6

85% Hispanic
8% African-American
92% Low-Income
10% Special Education

The continuity from classroom to classroom is the result of **Eva Stevens** careful vigilance and the common elements that have been applied to each class.



Accelerate Institute®



HEATHERBRAE ELEMENTARY

At breakfast time, throughout the school, the children finish their meals and worksheets at their desks as quiet music plays in the background. The continuity from classroom to classroom is the result of Steven's careful vigilance and the common elements that have been applied to each class. Morning routines help students know what they should be doing and when.

The urgency that the staff feel toward the mission can be seen in ways small and large throughout the school. Signs remind teachers of the goal that 90 percent of kids will pass the state assessment. In Catherine Allmaras' kindergarten class, a girl arrives late to school, as the class is working on sentences. She fumbles with her backpack and papers in the back of the room. "Isabelle, let's do that later. I want you to do this with us," Allmaras says. Even this small 5-minute lesson should not be skipped by this student.

The 28 children know the procedures, as Allmaras directs them to the carpet for story time. As they put their books and pencil baskets in cubbies, some rush to the carpet, while waiting for the other kids taking their time. Allmaras says "Let's count to 10 to see if they'll be here by then." That statements adds a little push to their movements.

"If I'm walking down the hall and I hear a louder-than-usual voice I'll step in and say, 'Is there something wrong?'"



By providing activities like movie nights and parent cafes, as well as a library and classes for parents, Heatherbrae Elementary has become a bright spot in the community. Under Ms. Stevens leadership, the school shows what's possible with strong, engaged leadership.



When it's time for stations, they look to the color-coding groupings marked on a movable chart on the wall. As the other children cut out words and paste, or write words with markers, or listen to books being read to them, four students sit with the teacher and are drilled on capital letters.

The procedures help the kids feel safe and secure, because they know what to expect, says teacher Katherine Treasure. "I could leave without even a teacher being in there and they would still know what to do. It's like a well-oiled machine," she says. "If they get off track, the beauty of it is their peers say 'hey!'" Stevens is a visible presence, reminding students what's acceptable: "We don't run on the sidewalk at Heatherbrae," she says to two girls hurrying past her.

At one time, the classrooms were not so consistent, and students would be all over the place. "So we talked about what are some things that should be happening when kids come into the classroom in the morning," Stevens says. The staff worked on morning routines that would give each student a step-by-step guide of what they should be doing.

One of the things Stevens never lets slip are things that could detract from the classroom environment. "If I'm walking down the hall and I hear a louder-than-usual voice I'll step in and say, 'Is there something wrong?' That's really important. I believe we have great climate and culture, but it is so delicate," Stevens says. "It's so difficult to build and so easy to lose." Correcting it may entail just calmly asking a question that brings the teacher back into focus.

A worker brings around plastic baskets of pears to all the classrooms for the mid-morning snack, another important element to priming students to learn. One recent morning, a teacher hugs a crying girl at her desk as the rest of the class eats breakfast. Teacher Deborah Howard hardships from outside of school can flow into the school day. "The children here are really exceptional. They have a sense of responsibility, they look out for each other and the school, they see it as a community," she says. **"It's exceptional when I think of the environment in which we live, it could be so different."**

#3 CONSTRUCTIVE ENVIRONMENT

ACCELERATE FRAMEWORK OBJECTIVE 3

A highly constructive learning environment exists that supports academic productivity.

- 1. Expectations** and behavior management systems that support high levels of academic productivity are clear.
- 2. The entire staff** is brought into the behavior management system used to holding students accountable.
- 3. All classrooms** have established an environment that is conducive to learning.
- 4. Staff members are held accountable** to upholding the behavior management system and hold students accountable.
- 5. The behavior management system works** for most students.
- 6. Interventions are available** for students who do not respond to the school behavior management system.

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When students cause disruptions in class, teachers use the “Make Your Day” system. The first time the teacher has to correct a student, he or she is separated from the group to think about what happened. Teachers return and they discuss a more appropriate choice. Eventually students who continue to misbehave may get sent out of the room to another classroom if they are too disruptive. If they’re sent out of the room, a phone call home is made. But DeSantis says teachers try not to leave the children in the other classroom too long because they are missing instruction.

Celebrations are worked into the fabric of the day through daily announcements, which spotlight achievements on things such as the weekly assessments. Students sing the Heatherbrae song which is set to “It’s a Small World” and touches on each student being part of the important Heatherbrae community. The school hosts regular red carpet celebration assemblies to recognize students for academic achievement and for making progress.

The staff is also using “The Leader in Me,” which is a school-wide program that draws from “*7 Habits of Highly Effective People*” to help create a common language about successful habits, setting goals and meeting them, being responsible and showing initiative.

Through high expectation of staff and students, Eva Stevens was able to change the culture of the school and increase academic productivity in all of her classrooms. This increase in academically productive time on on task and high levels of students engagement is what set the stage for high levels of academic achievement at Heatherbrae Elementary.

