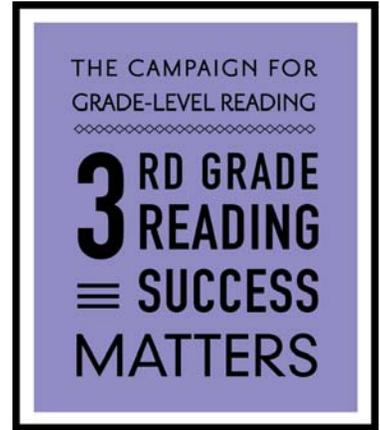


BRIGHT SPOTS

High Opportunity Schools



Loma Park Elementary, San Antonio, TX

The students at Loma Park Elementary get excellent scores on the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills, but they learn much more at school than the answers to test questions. “I want my students academically prepared for their careers in school and beyond,” says Principal Alicia Garcia. She and Loma Park teachers want all students to be self-directed learners, to read critically for meaning, and simply to love reading literature.

Literacy initiative: Let’s Read!

Loma Park teachers and district personnel created an innovative program designed to instill in their students a passion for reading. This balanced literacy approach places students in environments rich with reading material and bases instruction on the premise that their reading ability will advance when each one has appropriate materials and support. Teachers guide students in reading authentic literature, emphasizing comprehension and word study and increasing the difficulty of tasks as students’ skills improve

Thanks to Title 1 funds and a \$15,000 grant from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the school has a special Guided Reading Room, where teachers can check out leveled books in English and Spanish to match the needs of their students.

The literacy plan supports continuous improvement through instructional coaching provided by a trained campus literacy team. The coaches model lessons, conduct classroom observations, and provide feedback to teachers.

Loma Park also makes after-school programs fun yet educationally sound. Students participate in a weekly afterschool “Club House,” which embeds literacy instruction in the context of novel settings. In the Cooking Club, for example, students must read and interpret recipes and convert measurements. During “Saturday Adventures,” students can apply literacy strategies gleaned from the Club House in community-based locations.

WHO THEY ARE

780 students, Pre-K–5th

99% Hispanic

98% FARM

\$8,805/district pupil (\$7,733 state average)

13 years teaching experience on average Source: 2010 AEIS Report section 2, page 3

20 average class size

WHAT THEY ACHIEVE

2010 TAKS (Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills) Reading:

3rd grade 86%

4th grade 76%

CONTACT

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Alicia Garcia, Principal

Additionally, Loma Park uses a variety of grade-level instructional strategies to build reading fluency and comprehension:

- Online reading incentive programs like [Accelerated Reader](#) and [Ticket to Read](#) to motivate students.
- Frequent formative, developmentally appropriate assessments to monitor progress.
- A parent component to create a bridge between instruction at school and home.

Sustainable best practices

The district-wide Universal Review System — Garcia calls it a “tracking device” — makes it possible to evaluate each child’s progress every nine weeks. The System also matches each child with appropriate interventions and tracks progress for each intervention. With support through the Casey Foundation’s Making Connections program, Foundations, Inc. provides additional assistance in staff development and needs assessments.

Loma Park is doing everything it can to develop community-based strategies that reinforce reading progress. With encouragement from her “visionary superintendent,” Garcia works with local civic and nonprofit organizations, churches, universities, and other allies to ensure that every child has access to individualized reading support:

- Three staff interventionists work with children reading significantly below grade level, either in or outside of the classroom. These interventionists also participate in the school’s Literacy Committee.
- The Archdiocese of San Antonio provides mentors who read with children at school.

Looking at the whole child

“We’re very good at academics,” says Garcia, “but we’re also beginning to look systematically at child development issues that can prevent a student’s success.”

Using a program still in the experimental stages, Loma Park is leading the district in preemptive, early developmental screening of all incoming students — looking at social and emotional issues, health issues such as diabetes and asthma, fine and gross motor coordination, speech problems, and any other difficulties that might interfere with reading and overall academic success. Teachers trained in evaluation and data interpretation by a health professional administer the screening in January, after they’ve developed a relationship with each child. Parents trained as advocates, called “Promotoras,” play a crucial role by reaching out to individual families in the community and communicating results.

“Through this approach,” says Garcia, “we are able to identify and address developmental issues as early as possible to ensure that each child has the best possible chance to reach his or her academic potential.”

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

- **Fountas & Pinnell leveled reading approach**
- **Accelerated Reader and Ticket to Read for shared accountability**
- **Individualized instruction with interventionists, mentors, and after-school tutors**
- **Literacy coaching and reflective conversations**
- **Strong focus on word study**
- **Authentic acts of reading and writing**