

Brushy Creek Content Area Policy Statements

INTRODUCTION

At Brushy Creek Elementary, teachers are continuously studying research-based instructional practices. We view ourselves as learners and actively seek the best methods for meeting individual student needs. We know the following practices are essential to all academic areas.

Students need to:

- Explore
- Take risks
- Work collaboratively
- Question one another
- Articulate their thinking process
- Set goals and monitor their progress toward reaching them

Teachers need to:

- Encourage exploration
- Build a risk-free environment
- Facilitate discussion
- Prompt students with higher-level questioning
- Hold high expectations; provide needed support for students to reach them

Technology is used in all content areas as a tool in our learning. Students access our computer lab or wireless laptops within the classroom to extend on reading, writing, math, science and social studies concepts through:

- Research – Internet searching, utilizing online databases, web-based learning
- Productivity – Share learning through word processing, slideshows, spreadsheets, diagramming software, etc.
- Creativity – Drawing with software tools or manipulating digital photos
- Instructional practice – Programs designed to practices previously taught skills.

READING

Reading is KEY to student success. Brushy Creek teachers provide quality instruction and opportunities for different levels of learners to excel. Our vision is to create life-long, independent readers. Students at Brushy experience reading instruction through ...

- **A well-balanced literacy program** comprised of read to's (teacher reads aloud), shared reading (teacher reads, modeling fluency and expression while students are encouraged to follow along and join in), guided reading (teacher guides small groups reading at the same instructional level), and independent reading.
- **Comprehension building strategies** requiring authentic responses to reading captured in reading response journals. Some of these strategies include making connections to self, world and other texts, visualizing, asking questions and making inferences about the text.
- **Literature circles** are small groups of students who meet to talk to together about a text they have all read or are reading together. This format is a focused discussion encouraging students to ask their own questions and help each other answer them to build comprehension.
- **Building early literacy concepts** includes distinguishing between print and pictures, understanding the concept of letters and words, learning print directionality, phonemic awareness (studying letters and sound relationships).

- **Literacy stations** provide opportunities for students to practice, enhance and extend the literacy experiences teachers have modeled and taught in class.
- **Reading rich environments** immerse students in reading by providing a variety of tools such as word walls, book baskets arranged by a variety of categories, class generated charts and labeled objects for language acquisition.
- **Students reading regularly for understanding and fluency in a variety of genres** (different types of literature). Some examples include historical fiction, fantasy, realistic fiction, informational text, poetry, biographies and more. Features of nonfiction and its structures are directly taught and explored to further enhance comprehension.

WRITING

At Brushy Creek Elementary we have a foundational belief that your child must write daily and across the content areas (writing in reading, math, science and social studies).

Students move through the writing process, which includes:

- Making a plan (webbing, brainstorming, charts and lists)
- Drafting (writing about your topic according to the plan)
- Editing/Conferencing (meeting with a peer or teacher to improve capitalization, punctuation, spelling)
- Revising (adding information or additional content, moving phrases or sentences around, deleting extra words)
- Publishing (creating the final product)

Students are taught elements of quality writing, known as the “traits” of writing. Compositions are assessed according to these traits:

- Ideas (make up the content of the writing piece)
- Sentence Fluency (the flow of the language)
- Organization (structure of the writing piece)
- Word Choice (use of rich, colorful and precise language)
- Voice (when your child’s feelings come out through words)
- Conventions (capitalizing, spelling, punctuation)

Instructional practices include:

- Modeling of writing and shared writing (class composing together)
- Students keep a draft book, in which first drafts are written
- Student-Teacher writing conferences with specific teaching points
- Focus on author’s purpose (persuade, inform or evaluate)
- Engaging students writing reports on nonfiction topics (research)

MATH

Math instruction at Brushy Creek Elementary focuses on teaching kids how to think. As students explore real-world problems, they learn to apply skills to new situations, use and share multiple strategies to solve the same problem, and work together in groups toward a common goal.

Instructional practices include:

- Whole group mini-lessons
- Investigations in small or whole group
- Work stations
- Independent practice and assessment

Students progress through the following stages when learning a new skill or concept:

- Manipulating concrete objects
- Drawing/working with a picture
- Interpreting the symbolic form of numbers

Students learn from one another and articulate their thinking both aloud and through reflective writing. Connections are made to other content areas and the level of questioning promotes higher-order thinking skills.

Instruction is based on the National Council for Mathematics' Standards:

- **Number Sense and Operations:** Understanding of numbers, ways of representing numbers, relationships among numbers, and number systems.
- **Algebra:** Understanding the relationships among quantities, the use of symbols, the modeling of phenomena, and the mathematical study of change. The word *algebra* is not commonly heard in primary classrooms, but the mathematical investigations and conversations of students frequently include elements of algebraic reasoning.
- **Geometry:** Geometry and spatial sense offer ways to interpret and reflect on our physical environment. Students analyze characteristics and properties of geometric shapes and the relationships between them.
- **Measurement:** Understanding measurable attributes of objects and the units, systems, and processes of measurement. Students apply appropriate techniques, tools, and formulas to determine measurements.
- **Data Analysis and Probability:** Students ask questions and then collect, organize, and display relevant data to answer them. Students make inferences and predictions that are based on data and understand and apply basic concepts of probability.
- **Problem Solving:** Problem solving is an integral part of all mathematics learning and must be applied over all the standards of mathematics and into other content areas. Students need to develop a range of strategies for solving problems, such as using diagrams, looking for patterns, or working backward.

SCIENCE

Students at Brushy Creek Elementary School experience science as teachers guide them through the “5E” model of instruction. By implementing the model across all grade levels, science knowledge is spiraled by continuously building and fostering concepts.

Students also take ownership of ideas as they reflect on what they learn in science journals. An inquiry-based format of teaching that focuses on student investigation, the 5E model has teachers lead students in a five-step process which includes the following:

- **Engage:** a starter lesson inspires and excites students to look further into the concept being taught.
- **Explore:** a hands-on activity provides students with the opportunity to explore the concept.
- **Explain:** questioning strategies are used to lead students in discussion and acquisition of scientific concepts.
- **Elaborate:** interactions between teacher and fellow students allow the learners to apply, extend, and enhance new concepts and related terms.
- **Evaluate:** a variety of assessments (i.e. performance tasks, rubrics, observations, tests, TAKS, etc.) demonstrate students’ understanding of the concept.

SOCIAL STUDIES

As a student at Brushy Creek, your child learns to embrace their place in the world and continuously make connections with relevant material at increasingly higher levels of reasoning through social studies explorations.

Instructional practices include:

- Independent and group inquiry
- Collaborative learning
- Hands-on activities
- Technology integrations (research, productivity, creativity)
- Creative dramatics
- School events
- Guest speakers

The following are examples of how social studies concepts are developed:

Building communities inside and outside of the classroom:

- Teaching and reinforcing community building concepts and ideas.
- Learning about our own communities (geographic locations, populations, functions).
- Helping others within our school community (buddy classes).

Developing responsible citizens:

- Reinforcing SOAR agreements (community agreements that provide a foundation for a positive school culture and expectations for behavior).
- Reciting the Pledge of Allegiance, the Star Spangled Banner, and the Texas Pledge of Allegiance daily.
- Learning about American history and government.
- Celebrating and recognizing the importance of national holidays.

Celebrating diversity and honoring historical achievements:

- Exploring contributions of all cultures to American society.
- Celebrating diversity in our school and community during International Children's Day.
- Discovering diverse contributions to society during Career Week.
- Recognizing presidents, historical heroes, inventors, diplomats, and other important figures who helped shape our nation.