

## TEACHER PREPARATION AND TRAINING AT SBCCS

The two most important elements of success for SBCCS scholars are teachers and the scholars themselves. Scholars are a given, chosen by random lottery, drawn from the most part from the poorest Congressional District in the United States. As for the teachers, an annual 25% average of whom are new each academic year, due to attrition and the need to recruit for a new grade each year, they come from a variety of sources: other public or private schools, including other charters, and new teachers, primarily drawn from the ranks of the excellent Teach for America (TFA) program.

In the school's annual recruitment efforts, the Executive Director always tries to hold two elements constant in making any initial decision to offer a teaching assignment: demonstrated excellence as a teacher, implied by reports of past performance and illustrated in one or more practice teaching sessions; and an apparent level of idealism, energy, urgency, and self-reflection that has been shown to drive good teachers to excellence, and, for the rest, to sustain all the efforts necessary simply to improve.

SBCCS assists those hired in two essential ways: during an initial intensive orientation over roughly three weeks just before the beginning of each academic year; and during the year, through a variety of means.

### 1. INITIAL ORIENTATION

This orientation provides a critical introduction into what is expected of a SBCCS teacher as well as a substantive introduction to the curriculum which each teacher will be expected to follow during the year, and exposure to the methods used, both generally and, to the extent time permits, in particulars. This latter is, of course, of greatest value to novice or less experienced teachers, but even those with wider experience elsewhere find inculcation into the SBCCS 'way of doing things' of considerable utility.

**Table 1** provides the overview schedule of a typical introductory training session.

<u>Week 1</u>	<u>Week 2</u>	<u>Week 3</u>
Mission/vision --- why we do this work, what we expect to achieve and how	English Language Learners support program Special Education populations	Data and accountability Curriculum
School culture --- rules and routines, practices and procedures	High-level direct-instruction Assessments	Literacy, Math, History and Science , Latin, Specials (Music, Fitness, Debate, Art, Technology)
Classroom expectations --- policies, configuration, and procedures	Discipline policies School-wide policies	Accountability and outcomes

As seen from the above, virtually every aspect of what is expected of an effective SBCCS teacher is at least touched on during this invaluable introduction, but clearly it would be the rare teacher who could be expected both to retain and apply all of the methodology and content reviewed. This makes the role of on-the-job evaluation, remediation, and further training critical to the success of most teachers—not only during their initial year, but for those who stay on, and themselves contribute increasingly to improving both the quality of the training given and to preserving, simply by their continued presence, the school’s burgeoning “culture,” every year thereafter.

## **2. ON-THE-JOB REMEDIATION AND TRAINING**

In addition to the considerable support provided by a newly-aligned curriculum and sample lesson plans, described in the companion piece entitled “Curriculum”, teachers receive continuous feedback about and input to their effective performance from three main sources: peers (other teachers); grade team leaders (experienced peers appointed to provide leadership to each of the respective grade levels); classroom recordings (a recent innovation); various forms of student data; and academically qualified administrators/supervisors, including the Executive Director, Principal (when that position is not subsumed under the ED’s), Learning Specialist(s); and Dean of Students.

### **a. Peer Support**

Feedback from peers is provided both informally, following mutual visits to observe classrooms, and in the weekly meetings where all teachers of the same grade meet to discuss current teaching/curricular issues and plan for the future. Good teachers only begin to be good after they’ve armed with preliminary theoretical and applied training; it is from others, both the more experienced and those at their same level, that they learn to improve. And, of course, from thinking over their own mistakes and triumphs.

### **b. Grade Team Leader Feedback**

This is simply a more stylized form of peer support, coming from a person whose position denotes experienced and authoritative, if not necessarily perfect, knowledge about what works best in the classroom. Grade Team Leader responsibilities formally include monitoring, to the extent possible, the teaching effectiveness of the other classroom teachers in their grade; thus, advice from this source becomes more dependable to a (particularly new) teacher both in frequency, availability, and, in general, qualitative reliability. Feedback is provided individually on an informal basis and/or during the weekly meetings cited above.

### **c. Classroom recordings**

The relatively recent addition of video recording has proven remarkably well-accepted by classroom teachers, for there is really nothing more effective in improving performance than self-observation, and

this can even be (and often is) improved by having peers share reviews and provide on-the-spot feedback themselves.

**d. Student performance data**

Frequent tests of various kinds are administered throughout the academic year, and their thorough, timely analysis permits teachers to maintain a daily, detailed understanding of each scholar's strengths and weaknesses in every academic area, and/or the common weaknesses, where relevant, of each classroom as a whole. This then permits the teacher to target his/her own scholar learning remediation efforts, with the help where necessary of the school's Learning Specialists.

**e. Administrators/Supervisors**

**i. Executive Director/Principal**

At SBCCS, this person's effectiveness is judged in large part by the amount time s/he spends, to good effect, in classrooms—observing teacher performance and scholar interactions, and providing helpful feedback as soon as possible following each successive observation. The fact that it is this over-all academic supervisor's responsibility to review every teacher's performance and compare its progress over time, as well as, necessarily, with that of other teachers, puts this form of critical review and feedback near the top in potential value to improving the quality of teaching at the school. At the same time, the person providing it not only has to have the capacity to provide good guidance in a variety of situations, but also enjoy total teacher confidence in his/her judgment in all aspects of teaching. Quite simply, this person must be dedicated to the classroom and to ensuring what goes on there is of the highest quality, every day.

**ii. Learning Specialist(s)**

The contribution of Learning Specialists is both to individual scholars, either in the classroom ("push in") or, alone or in small, focused groups, outside ("pull out"), and to teachers themselves. Learning Specialists provide focused remediation, both to scholars and, stemming from their observations of teacher/scholar interactions, feedback to the individual teachers themselves. Again, this is a critically important role but only works when the specialist really is authoritative and is perceived as such by the classroom teachers s/he seeks to assist.

**iii. Dean of Students**

At SBCCS, the Dean of Students' role in providing classroom remediation is focused on discipline or, as it is frequently (if somewhat misleadingly) termed, "classroom management." S/he is available to troubleshoot with individual scholars who are having a

bad enough day to warrant intervention from outside the classroom, either by being temporarily withdrawn for disciplining or dealt with by the Dean in the classroom itself. And, at a different time, teachers are provided valuable feedback on how to better deal with like issues themselves in the future. Maintaining effective classroom discipline, as has been detailed elsewhere, is really a *sine qua non* to effective teaching, but to state this begs the question without constant inputs being provided, to good effect, by all levels of school staff.