Signature Practice II Narrative

1. **Rationale/Basis of the Practice**
   
   As a fundamental school, Green Oaks’ staff and students adhere to the practice of maintaining rigorous academic standards and high expectations, which are woven into its cultural fabric. Our mission statement expresses that high standards for the academic and social behavior of students is a means to high achievement, which we have demonstrated over time as evidenced through a consistently high API.

   Our need is a reflection of the desires of our school community. As a school of choice, in the San Juan Unified School District, parents select to come to Green Oaks, from throughout the east end of the district, because they want their students to experience a school where rigor and high expectations are the norm. They desire an environment where teachers are committed to working together to meet the needs of all students and parents are considered a critical partner in that work. The high expectations and trust our parents have in the Green Oaks staff challenges us everyday and we take their faith in us very seriously.

   On a regular basis our teachers meet both as an entire team to collaborate, or by grade level to analyze, reflect, view data, and to strategize on how to meet the academic and social needs of their students. Knowing that high academic expectation is an internal agreement, each teacher understands and shares out the indicators of their instructional practice with one another. Whereas this approach may leave an instructor feeling exposed to critiquing, the importance of the practice has demonstrated that each person also feels accountable to one another to adapt and improve instruction to meet the needs of all students. High expectations are woven into all areas, including the lunch cafeteria where kids are courteous, in the technology lab where cooperation is authentic, and during recess where foul language is discouraged not only by staff, but by many of the students themselves. Every minute of an instructional day is prioritized to minimize interruptions. During Site Council and PTA meetings, school API results are brought forth, discussed and all resources are then directed to support identified areas of need. The principal meets with the school’s lead team frequently to discuss how professional development can best be used to support our rigorous instruction and curricular need.

   Our community believes that focused instruction in mathematics and literacy, based on rigorous academic standards and challenging curriculum, builds a framework for success. *Elementary Makes the Grade* stresses the importance of creating such an environment to promote high levels of achievement and also includes a system that encourages parent involvement, a site administrator who acts as an instructional leader and professional learning that includes mentoring and coaching and continuously
improves educators’ knowledge and skills. All of which are critical components of our signature practice.

The target population is the entire school community. Our students thrive when they are encouraged and challenged to reach their potential. Parents are supportive of our philosophy, as they have internally agreed to accept high academic expectations prior to enrolling at Green Oaks. Teachers and support staff also understand that high expectations are a signature practice. This produces a highly effective learning environment.

By practicing continued high academic expectations, our goals are to maximize the curricular capabilities of each student. The expectation is that we are preparing all students for college. Each student will not only be ready to meet the rigor of study for the next grade level, but will meet the discourse of study in middle, high school, university levels, and continue on as lifelong learners. They will also develop habits of good citizenship, positive attitudes toward learning, and pride in accomplishment.

2. Description of the Practice

Our practice begins with every faculty member believing they have a strong moral purpose as educators. We think it is more than simply a responsibility to teach. It is more of a compulsion to duty or the need to provide the service of facilitating learning to help each student to raise their own expectation of themselves resulting in success and actualization of students’ dreams.

Our teachers begin the year using district and other standards based assessments to get a clear picture of each student’s current knowledge base. Teachers then continue to monitor data throughout the year to determine where students need to go and what they need to do to meet standards. Eight hours or more per month of grade level and school-wide collaboration are utilized to target standards, work on areas of professional development, and to determine how students are progressing in core subject areas. Feedback from data, teacher observations, parent and student communications are discussed daily among staff. The process is continued when teachers communicate and conference with families to make adjustments in learning, so all members are aware and accountable for desired results.

We use a Student Success Team process (SST) which serves to create an environment where team members and families meet to identify and progress through challenges which may interfere with student learning. The meetings are documented and action items resulting from the meeting are followed up on by the team, including the classroom teacher and family members. In addition to SST’s, students are provided remediation time as staff often spend before school, during lunch, and after school working with students to re-teach earlier lessons. During the school day, teachers work with students individually and in small, flexible groups as needed to reinforce areas of subject weakness. Teachers use varying instructional strategies to differentiate and scaffold instruction to help students keep up the rigorous expectations. Parents
regularly assist in classrooms, allowing more time for staff to address the needs of struggling learners.

Software programs such as My Skills Tutor are used as a supplemental tool to reinforce standards specific subject areas. Our resource teacher is an integral part of the process, as she serves all students who are identified as below proficient by monitoring students’ progress and communicating with teachers, parents and students to keep communication/feedback open.

All teachers adhere to a consistent homework practice which helps students keep pace with learning goals. Parents are also responsible for ensuring homework is current and timely and are accountable for ensuring it is attempted by signing off on it each evening. Teachers are committed to informing parents of problem areas and provide materials for support at home. They communicate readily with parents if an assignment is late or incomplete as part of our internal agreement on partnering to keep students on pace daily. By degree and grade, every student is accountable for their own homework. Staff also expects all students to be courteous in and out of the classroom and to be good listeners.

High academic expectations are carried out in all instructional areas, including technology. For children of this generation, computers and related technologies are everyday aspects of life. Digital use transcends into students social lives, recreational interests, and should be part of their educational pursuits. Teachers at Green Oaks use technology to enhance the core curriculum. Use of online information, presentation applications, related graphics, video, downloaded movies, and music all captures students’ imagination and engages them in the activity or instructional material. Teachers are expected to use technology to engage their students. The expectation is that once an instructor’s comfort level is reached, the objective will then be expanded to the next level. Setting an expectation that our instructional and support staff will continue to progress in their personal/professional skills and levels of technological proficiency ensures that we are constantly modeling the goal of being lifelong learners. Since students have a variety of levels of understanding and prior knowledge in curricular areas, the ability to supplement their knowledge or challenge their abilities with technology processes and applications, insures that each student has a high quality educational experience.

Peer feedback and collaboration are important concepts to the digital natives that we are teaching. Every effort is made to provide avenues to share and comment upon student work. When students discover they have a larger audience as their work becomes accessible via the Green Oaks Intranet or classroom websites, they are motivated to produce their best product for publication. When given the opportunity to provide and receive peer feedback they develop important communication skills.

The implementation of our practice involves a continuous cycle of using data to assist in determining the present status of every student’s core subject knowledge, including prior knowledge. It also means ensuring all students know what knowledge they are
expected to learn and continually discussing how to best strategize the learning process that produces mastery of standards. This process continues with feedback through the continued use of data, communication and reflection to help staff in monitoring students’ progress to produce an enriched learning environment. Finally we ask with a fresh view every year what areas of academic improvement exist and change according to an analysis of the question.

Setting high expectations improves student achievement as has been demonstrated through research. One article, entitled, *Setting Realistically High Academic Standards and Expectations* by Mehmet A. Ozturk and Charles Debelak state, “the linchpin of academic achievement is high expectations…without high academic expectations of themselves and/or of others for them, students would still not reach high levels of achievement. Our consistent high California Standards Test scores are direct evidence to the result of practicing high expectation.

3. **Results of the Practice**

We monitor high academic expectation by looking at our API results, California Standards Test results, and district benchmarks. Using the district’s data management system Data Director we are able to look at trend analysis data, item analysis, and student growth tables. We use this data as part of our monthly collaboration to determine student progress and to assist us in determining modifications to our instructional practices.

One result of our agreements is our community working together has produced an Academic Performance Index score of 943 in 2009 and has an average API of 931 over the past four years. Specifically, trend analysis, for the last three years, in English language arts and math shows continual growth. In the 06-07 school year 83.6% of students were proficient or advanced in ELA, and in 08-09 87% of students were proficient or advanced. In mathematics in 06-07 88.5% were proficient or advanced and in 08-09 90.3% were proficient or advanced. These results exceeded our expectations for student outcomes and continue to support that we are on the right path in the work that we do.

Continuous improvement is central to ensuring that we maintain high expectations of both students and staff. Data, as indicated, is reviewed regularly and used, as part of a continuous cycle to refine and monitor our instruction practices. This enables us to create an environment where we are able to precisely meet the needs of our students.