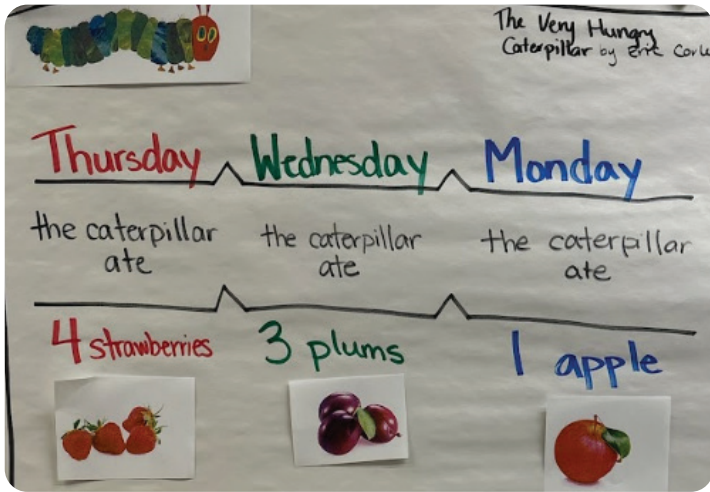




Victor Elementary School District, California



SNAPSHOT

District Snapshot

- 18 Schools
- 562 Teachers
- 12,400 Students
- PreK-6
- 87% Free/Reduced Lunch
- 16.4% English Learners
- 10% SPED

At Victor Elementary School District (VESD), the goal is for every teacher to be a reading specialist—and Thinking Maps and *Write from the Beginning...and Beyond* (WFB) are a key part of their reading certification program. A strong focus on critical thinking, comprehension, and response to text using Thinking Maps has helped drive gains in literacy and overall academic achievement.

A FOCUS ON LITERACY

VESD has a history with Thinking Maps spanning more than two decades. What keeps them coming back? Assistant Superintendent Fortune Barles says, “It’s good for our kids. It’s a core piece of our literacy initiative.”

Located on the edge of the Mojave Desert in San Bernardino County, the district serves a majority Hispanic and low-income population. Barles says, “There is a huge need for our kids when it comes to reading.” To meet that need, VESD places a strong emphasis on the science of reading and the five pillars of literacy.

A 2023 reading summit held by the state inspired them to start a new reading certification program, with the goal of having all their teachers certified as reading specialists. They knew that they wanted to make Thinking Maps, and specifically the *Response to Text* module from *Write from*

“Thinking Maps are aligned to core thinking processes. They’re visual tools that help students organize information and set them up for success, no matter what content you are teaching or curriculum you are using.”

- Michelle Dale, Support Specialist,
Victor Elementary School District

the Beginning...and Beyond, a core part of their reading certification program. The certification program, which spans 87 hours of professional development over a two-year period, also includes training in Orton-Gillingham, Heggerty and other programs aligned with the science of reading.

WFBB *Response to Text* is their primary reading comprehension component. *Response to Text* covers reading comprehension for both literary and informational text and strategies for responding to text in writing, including open-ended response and formal response. Michelle Dale, a Support Specialist for the district, says, “The power of Thinking Maps is the way it activates thinking around the content. We know if students can speak about their content, they can write about their content, and that’s really what the standards and the framework are calling our students to be able to do.”

A DISTRICT-WIDE COMMITMENT TO STUDENT AND TEACHER SUCCESS

“I love the Thinking Maps training because it supports our teachers and gives them confidence. They are building on their skill sets. Anytime we have any other initiative we are rolling out, we do our best to connect it with Thinking Maps.”

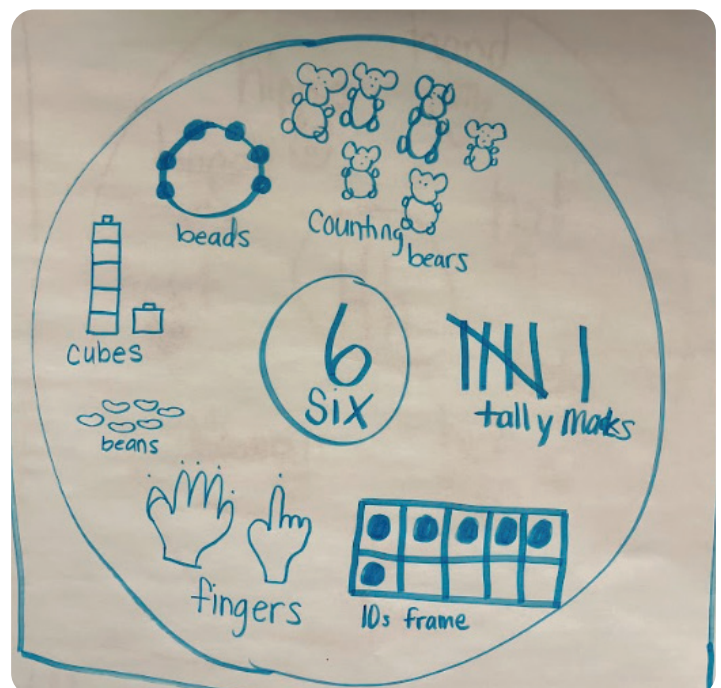
- Fortune Barles, Assistant
Superintendent of Educational Services,
Victor Elementary School District

The new reading certification program builds on many years of success with Thinking Maps. While most teachers had already been through training for Thinking Maps and at least the first module of *Write from the Beginning...and Beyond (Setting the Stage)*, the certification program asks teachers to deepen their understanding and use of Thinking Maps for reading comprehension and writing. It also ensures that new teachers coming into the district are brought up to speed on Thinking Maps and WFBB. Paraprofessionals in the district receive training in Thinking Maps as well.

Thinking Maps extends far beyond the reading program in VESD. Fortune says, “I can’t go into a classroom in our school district where somebody isn’t using a Thinking Map in some way, shape, or form.” The district has embedded Thinking Maps into their core Units of Study for each grade level, with support from their Thinking Maps trainer.

To support the needs of English Learners (ELs), VESD has also trained all their instructional coaches and support specialists on *Path to Proficiency*. This Thinking Maps training includes strategies for differentiating instruction for students at various English proficiency levels and using Thinking Maps to support language development. Some classroom teachers have also attended *Path to Proficiency* training.

At the leadership level, all school and district administrators have attended Thinking Map’s *A Language for Leadership* training. Leadership training not only equips administrators to better support teachers in implementing Thinking Maps,



but also provides strategies for using Thinking Maps to support communication, collaboration, and planning. Fortune notes, “It’s not always easy to lead conversations or build consensus. The leadership training has given our leaders tools to have these conversations with staff so they can lead effectively. It helps them build a frame of reference and gather ideas from all their staff members.”

AWARD-WINNING RESULTS IN LITERACY

Thinking Maps are now infused at every level of the district, from the classroom to the boardroom and across every grade from TK-6. That commitment to consistency and fidelity is paying off—especially in the wake of pandemic closures. They built Thinking Maps into their distance learning curriculum and recommitted to the strategies as students returned. Their strong recovery after the pandemic earned the **California State Pivotal Practice Award**.

Their results were especially impressive for their English Learners. An external study by the California Reading Coalition looked at reading achievement for ELs from 2019 to 2022 to evaluate the impact of the pandemic on these learners. VESD was **one of only seven districts in the state showing progress in reading for Latino students** out of 285 California districts studied. The district says that Thinking Maps has been a large part of this success.

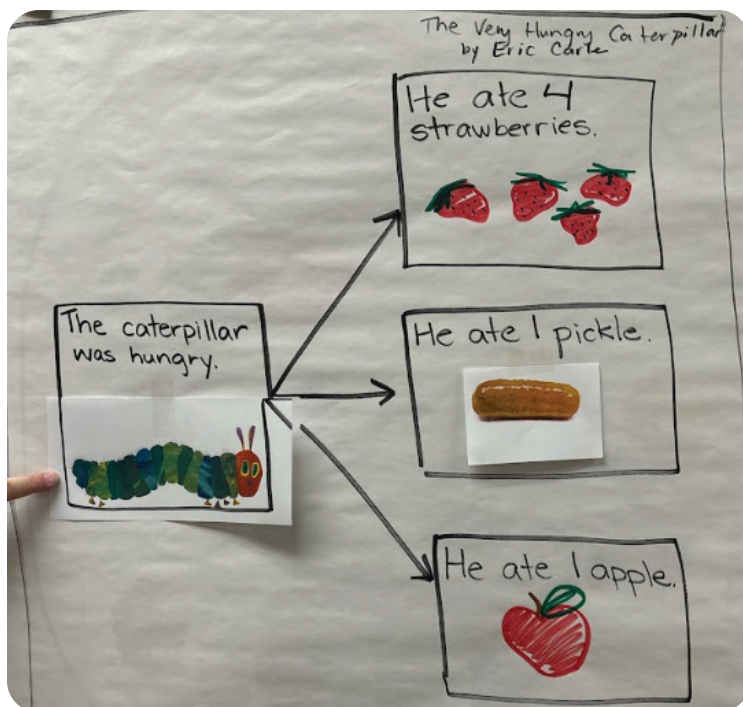
The district also boasts a **National Blue Ribbon School: Sixth Street Prep**. The school, located in a historic building in the heart of Victorville, serves a population that is 77% Hispanic, 24% EL, and 75% low-income status. In 2022-23, **78%** of students at the school met or exceeded the standard in

“We’re seeing growth on CAASPP, and our teachers say one of the reasons is because they teach their students how to read and analyze complex texts using Thinking Maps.”

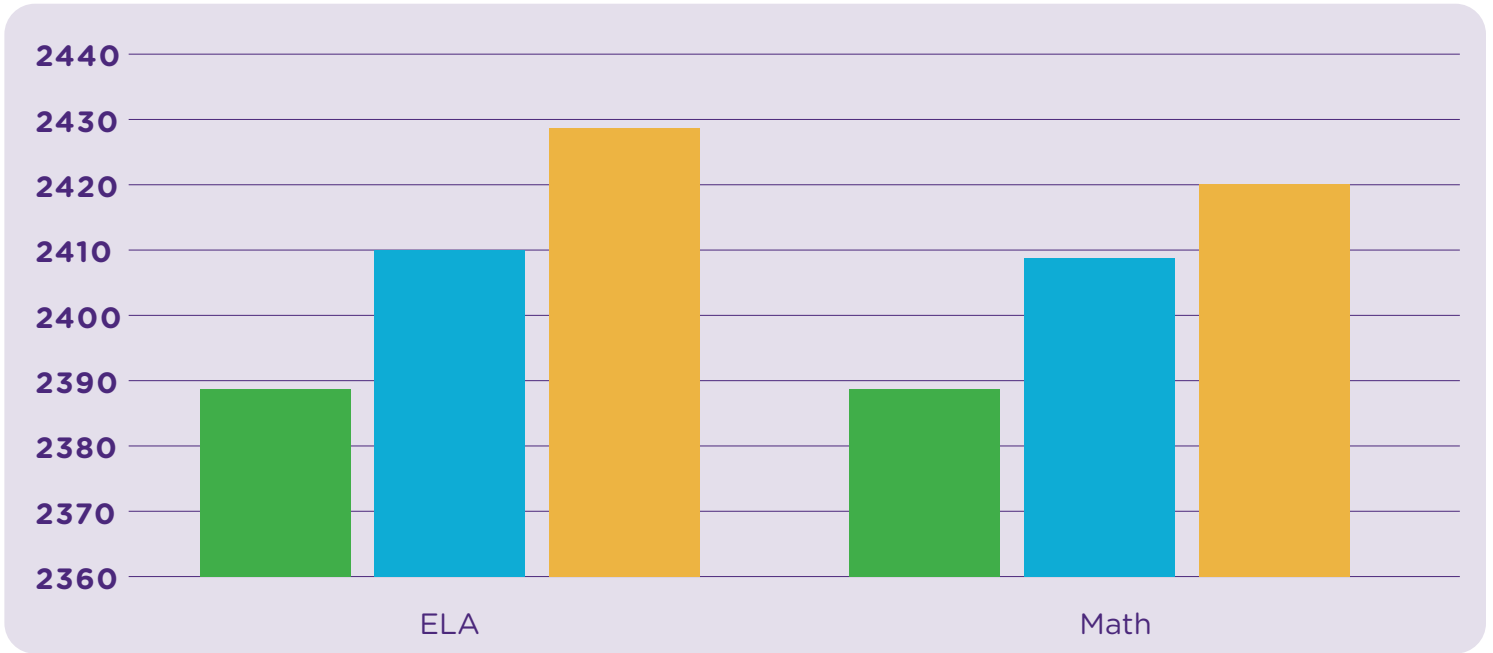
- Michelle Dale

English Language Arts, and **81%** met or exceeded the standard in math. Sixth Street also happens to be an exemplary Thinking Maps school. “If anyone wants to see Thinking Maps in action, that’s a school that is always first on the list,” says Fortune. “They’ve shown sustained success over the years and were recognized as a National Blue Ribbon School just last year. For Thinking Maps to be one of their core initiatives, I think that speaks for itself.”

For Michelle, the proof is in the classroom. “We survey our teachers, and so many of them say thank you because their students are better readers, writers, and note-takers,” she said. “Thinking Maps sets our students up for success, and we’re seeing the results.”



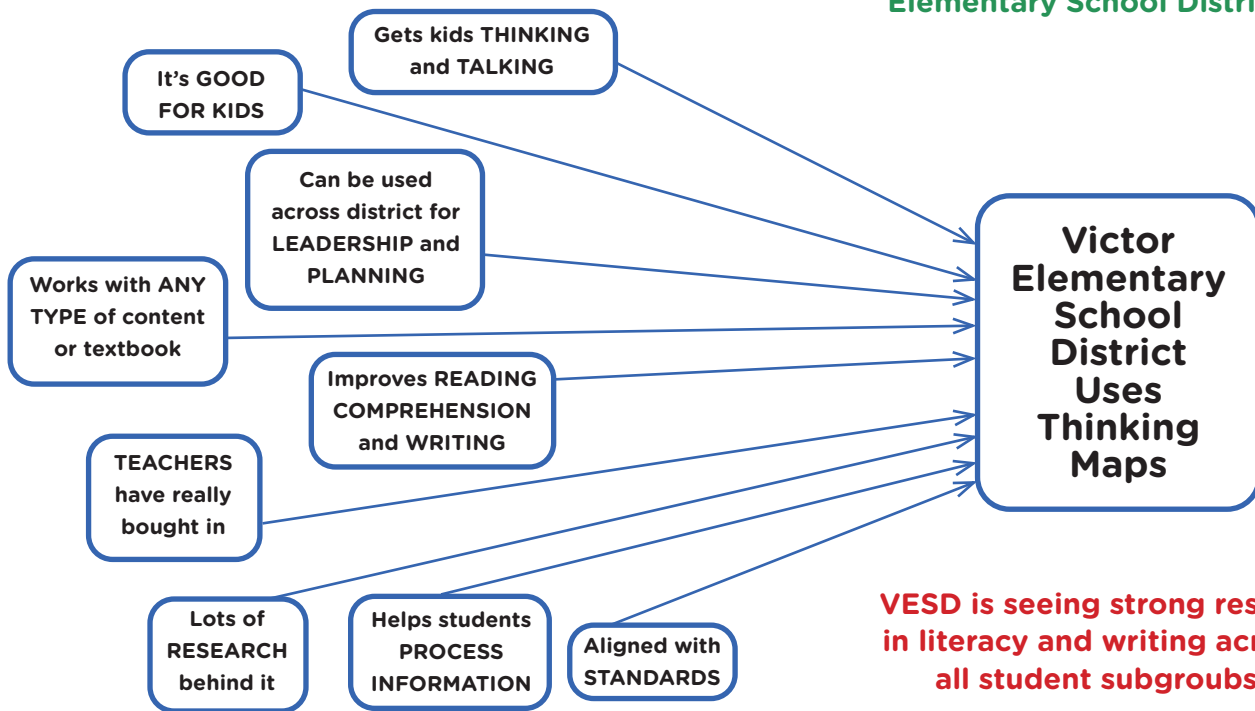
Victor Elementary CAASPP Scale Score Progression



■ 2022 ■ 2023 ■ *2024 Preliminary as of 10/04/2024

Victor Elementary School District considers Thinking Maps a core district initiative.

From interview with Fortune Barles and Michelle Dale, Victor Elementary School District



VESD is seeing strong results in literacy and writing across all student subgroups