

El Sol Science and Arts Academy Model Programs and Practices

School Information

CDS (County District School) Code: 30666706119127

County: Orange

District (Local Educational Agency): Santa Ana Unified

School: El Sol Science and Arts Academy

Demographics

Enrollment: 900 students

Location Description: Urban

Title I Funded: Yes

Type of Program: School-wide

School Calendar: Traditional

Charter: Yes

Overview

El Sol Science & Arts Academy of Santa Ana (herein El Sol) is an outstanding dual-immersion charter school in Santa Ana, California. Founded in 2001 with 110 students in kindergarten and 1st grade, El Sol now has over 900 students enrolled in preschool through eighth grade: 95% are Latino, 70% qualify for free and reduced lunch, and 46% are English Language Learners (herein ELLs)- demographics that mirror those of the broader school district and community. El Sol operates a robust extended day program that offers supplemental academic instruction for struggling students and cultural enrichment activities in the areas of music, dance, sports, and art. Collaboration with diverse community partners, such as Share Our Selves-providing services at our on-site federally qualified health center and Second Harvest Food Bank-providing food for our onsite mercado (food bank), contribute to our robust environment of achievement.

El Sol's dual immersion program is heavily focused on language acquisition and language mastery in first Spanish, and then, English, regardless of the students' primary

home language. The ultimate goal of the school's language program is for students to attain fluency and literacy in both Spanish and English and to meet or exceed grade-level proficiency at all academic benchmarks. Kindergarten students are immersed in Spanish instruction 90 percent of the day and exposed to English instruction the remaining 10 percent of the time in order to develop linguistic and academic competence. The percentage of Spanish and English instruction is then reduced and increased in intervals of 10 percent, respectively, until the fourth grade student reaches 50/50 bilingual instruction. While the program is designed to be, and is, successful for English Only students as well as ELLs, El Sol has found it to be particularly successful with students who have limited English skills. Teachers are provided ongoing professional development and support in modifying curricular materials and creating units of study to meet students needs.

El Sol values accountability and expects everyone – including students, teachers, administrators, parents, and the community – to support the success of the school. As a result, in its short history, El Sol has achieved excellent results for all student groups. In 2016–2017, the percentage of students proficient in state tests was double or more than that of local districts. Our commitment to meeting students' language needs through our model practice of English Language Development (ELD) and Spanish Language Development (SLD) content integration yields remarkable results not only in students' bilingualism but also on state testing conducted in English. In fact, the percentage of ELLs reaching proficiency or above levels in state testing at El Sol Academy was more than three times that of their peers in California for English Language Arts and almost four times that of their peers in California for Math.

Model Program and Practices

Name of Model Program/Practice: English Language Development (ELD) and Spanish Language Development (SLD) Content Integration

Length of Model Program/Practice: 2–4 years

Target Area(s): Closing the Achievement Gap, Parent, Family, and Community Involvement, Professional Development

Target Population(s): Hispanic, Socioeconomically Disadvantaged, English Learners, Students with Disabilities

Strategies Used: Small Learning Communities, Parent Engagement, Data-Driven Decision Making, Professional Development, Implementation of Academic Standards Basics (Teachers, Instructional Materials, Facilities)

Description

Given our schools language model and the complexity of language development, teachers were finding that each classroom had students at different stages of language

development needing different language supports. In the summer of 2016, EI Sol piloted the first in the nation Project GLAD en Español Summer Institute with the support of the Orange County Department of Education and EI Sol families that eagerly signed up to bring students to campus during the summer. More than 15 teachers participated in the summer learning institute that began with a two-day Research and Theory Training followed by four days of demonstrations and exposure to more than 30 research-based strategies. Because the institute was on-site, participating teachers observed how trainers analyzed EI Sol students' language proficiency needs and then met those needs by integrating SLD strategies within content instruction. Through purposeful study of language development continuum and assessment of students' language proficiency levels, teachers learned strategies that facilitate the transference of student's literacy and content knowledge fostering literacy and content mastery in two languages. Positive social-emotional growth is evident as students emerge competent in multiculturalism through the understanding of different cultures and the development of high self-esteem.

During dedicated time in teacher's schedule for team weekly planning and bi-monthly in-house PD, teams of teachers created and revised units that integrate ELD and SLD instructional strategies within content instruction. To ensure fidelity and a cohesive implementation, teachers were provided with grade-level release days each semester to add to their units, refine their practices, and reflect on the effectiveness of instructional strategies. Curriculum specialists supported teachers in analyzing student work to anticipate misconceptions, look for trends in levels of development, differentiate between mastery and surface level understanding of standards, and monitor pacing. Each release day builds upon the work from the prior one due to the continuity of grade level leads and teacher retention. By integrating ELD and SLD into content instruction and meeting the needs of all learners, our model practice supports our LCAP goals of equitable access (all EI Sol students have equal access to high-quality curriculum and learning supports that are accessible at school), college and career readiness (all EI Sol students will demonstrate knowledge, skills, and aptitudes to be productive and engaged citizens through college and career readiness), and school climate (all EI Sol students, staff, and parents have a healthy and safe school environment that fosters learning).

Implementation and Monitoring

During the implementation process, student progress was monitored carefully to ensure that attempts to improve teaching and utilize innovative teaching practices did not comprise student learning and outcomes. School wide assessments allowed teachers and administrators to monitor individual and aggregate student progress. Administrators continued to monitor reclassification information and rate for ELLs to ensure that model practice had impact on ELLs progress. Formative and summative assessments were carefully analyzed and correlated with state wide testing measures to ensure that all standards were taught to the full extent. Success of model practice is evident in California School Dashboard Indicators that rate EI Sol Academy's English Learner Progress as High Performing.

School-wide efforts to integrate ELD and SLD within content instruction required a culture of trust and collaboration among teachers and administrators. As we engaged in innovation, there was a clear understanding that growth requires collaboration and a willingness to reflect on outcomes; a schoolwide practice evidenced by the open door policy among teachers who often invite their peers into their classrooms for support. As such, peer coaching by teacher-leaders provided, and continues to provide, teachers with individualized, ongoing feedback. To build capacity and ensure that after-school intervention strategies aligned with model practice, school support staff and after-school instructors were included in on-site professional development. To ensure that they were ready to integrate ELD and SLD into content instruction, curriculum specialists modeled instructional strategies and provided coaching and feedback for support staff and after-school staff.

Parents at El Sol are valuable assets to the school; our commitment to innovation relies heavily on the relationships and trust between teachers, families, and administrators. To this end, El Sol is piloting Parent Learning Walks (PLWs), an innovative parent engagement program that brings parents into the classroom to engage with and observe our model practice in action. With the support of Anaheim Union School District which has comprehensively implemented PLWs over the past fifteen years, El Sol is engaging parents in understanding how our model practice, integrating ELD and SLD instructional strategies within content instruction, facilitates the transference of student's literacy and content knowledge leading to literacy and content mastery in two languages. The PLWs are implemented alongside Teacher Reflective Learning Walks, or TRLWs. TRLWs are designed to increase teachers understanding of our model practice and other best practices. They provide teachers with the opportunity to reflect on their practice, refine their craft, and collaborate with colleagues around instructional strategies that meet the needs of all learners.

Results and Outcomes

Our commitment to meeting students' language needs by integrating ELD and SLD into content instruction yields remarkable results not only in students' bilingualism but also on state testing. In 2016–2017, the percentage of El Sol students proficient in state tests was double or more than that of local districts. The rise in the number of all student groups attaining mastery has provided teachers with evidence of the positive impacts of their collaborative efforts thereby increasing teacher efficacy and reaffirming El Sol's commitment to collaboration. Curriculum specialists continue to support teachers in monitoring the performance of case-study students- long term ELLS, students with special needs, newcomers- and matching specific ELD and SLD integration strategies to their specific instructional needs. By crafting specific and measurable goals for individual students, administrators and teachers have data points on the effectiveness of ELD and SLD content integration and can modify instructional plans as needed. As teachers collaborated to analyze student work, developed their content and language development expertise, and learned from each other, services for all student groups improved leading to school-wide achievement gains in both English Language Arts (ELA) and Math.

A review of performance on the state indicators listed on the California Dashboard and local performance indicators- quarterly content assessments, benchmarks, end of unit tests- shows an increase in performance on state testing for all students including, most noticeably, ELLs. Improvement in services to ELLs is evident based on an increase of 22.9 points on ELA and 21.3 points in Math on state tests over the last two years. The status change report on the California Dashboard indicates that English Learner Progress for students at El Sol is very high. ELLs and economically disadvantaged student performance at El Sol was also significantly higher than the district and state. Most notably, the percentage of ELL students proficient in ELA at El Sol was more than three times that of peers in the state and almost four times higher in math. Improvement in content-area knowledge and increased achievement for all student groups inspires students and families to engage further. By ensuring that all students, regardless of their language proficiency level, achieve academic success, El Sol delivers on its promise to families debunking the notion that Latino students, specifically English Language Learners, cannot perform at proficiency levels on par with their language proficient counterparts.