

Aiming High

A COUNTYWIDE COMMITMENT TO CLOSE
THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP FOR ENGLISH LEARNERS

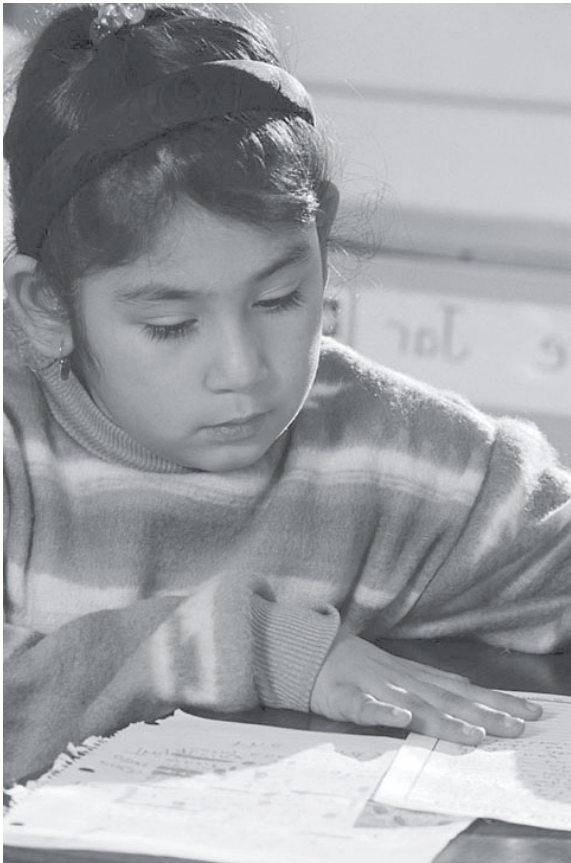
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RESOURCE

Designs for Learning

The responsibility for student learning rests with the teachers. They can't say, "I taught it. They just didn't get it." Teaching is when kids get it, when they have control of the content.

*—Stefanie Holzman, Principal
Roosevelt Elementary School*

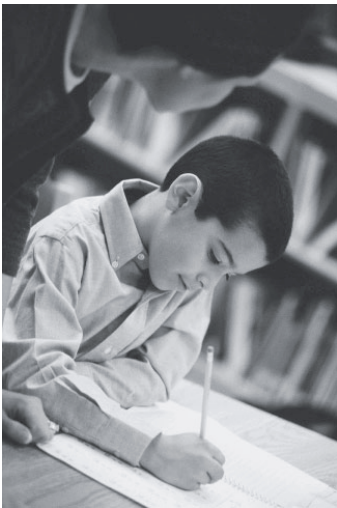


Unless we can connect a student face to the assessment data we're collecting and provide intervention based on need, a growing number of students will fall behind and the gap between the "haves" and "have nots" will persist.

*—Don Russell, Ed.D.
Assistant Superintendent, SCOE*



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About this publication

April 2005—In this publication, the fourth in our series of Aiming High resource briefs, the focus is success stories. Stefanie Holzman, principal of Roosevelt Elementary School in Long Beach, tells us her success story as she highlights her school’s efforts to close the achievement gap.

Although Roosevelt Elementary is located in a high-density urban setting, **the author’s message applies to *all* schools and is relevant to Sonoma County.** Factors that we all know can produce positive outcomes—data usage, measurable goals, time for teacher collaboration, quality instructional strategies, and student intervention—came together at Roosevelt Elementary with outstanding results! There’s a lot to learn from this school’s story.

After reading about Roosevelt Elementary’s journey, I encourage you to reflect on your own school’s progress. In light of our countywide emphasis on closing the achievement gap, please pay particular attention to the progress you’re making with your EL students.

Don Russell, Ed.D., Assistant Superintendent, SCOE

Are you meeting the needs of English Learners?

Classroom Elements of Effective Practices for English Learners, a self-assessment survey SCOE developed last year, is a free and readily available resource you may find helpful in determining how well you’re meeting the needs of English Learners in your classroom. Highlighting seven areas that are key to raising EL achievement, the survey provides a

framework for teachers to examine current practice and talk with colleagues about next steps for improving instruction.

At left are some examples from two of the areas covered in the self-assessment. For each item, teachers rate their classroom practices as Beginning, In Progress, Comprehensive, or Exemplary.

The self-assessment survey is included in the Aiming High Toolkit (available at every district office and each Aiming High school)—or it may be downloaded from the SCOE website at www.scoe.org/aiming_high.

ELD Instruction
■ Student progress toward full English proficiency is monitored using ELD standards and district benchmarks.
■ Every English Learner receives daily ELD instruction at their identified proficiency level.
■ Specific feedback on student progress in English language skills is provided.
Intervention
■ Extra instruction, practice, and review for students having difficulty is provided in class.
■ Appropriate referrals to specialists are made.
■ The instructional staff works collaboratively to communicate student needs and successes.
■ Additional resources are available to adapt the curriculum to meet the needs of EL students.
■ Students who need additional out-of-class instruction (tutorial, before/after school program) receive it.

The Story of Success: How a Large Urban School Became an Academic Success

by Stefanie Holzman

Principal, Roosevelt Elementary School, Long Beach, CA

Roosevelt Elementary School was built in 1924 for a population of 150 students. We now have ten times that number. Roosevelt is a year-round, multi-track inner city school with 99.9% minority students, 100% free and reduced lunch, and 85% English Language Learners. Most of the students' parents do not speak English, and most haven't graduated from high school. We have a very high transiency rate—every classroom has a turnover of at least five students during the school year.

There are over sixty elementary schools in my district, and traditionally Roosevelt has been at the bottom in terms of student achievement. But we are not at the bottom any more. We are in the middle third. We've gained 137 points in the last three years! Our API score is now 717, and we were just identified as a California Distinguished School. In terms of the California standards, 25% of our students are "proficient" or "advanced proficient" in reading and 50% in math. We know that's not good enough, but we have very few students now at "far below basic." That excites us because if we get them to "basic," we can move them further along that line of proficiency.

VARIABLES THAT INFLUENCE TEST SCORES

- Demographics
- Physical environment for testing
- Attitudes of teachers and students toward the testing program
- Alignment of curriculum and test content
- Students' test-taking skills
- Quality of the instructional program

Everything we've done has been done in spite of the demographics. We have not let that stop us. We realized we couldn't do anything about the students' socio-economic status, ethnicity, primary language, mother's education level, or family composition, so we decided to ignore the demographics. We have been working on the other variables that affect test scores.

Physical environment for testing. If children miss a test that was given in the classroom and they go to the cafeteria to take it, it's an automatic loss of ten points. We do make-up tests in a small group. We provide a quiet and comfortable setting because we need those ten points!

Attitudes of teachers and students. We keep an upbeat, positive attitude about the tests. We put up posters. We count down the number of days until the test. Our students say, "We're

going to show what we know."

Alignment of curriculum and test content. Our core curriculum and textbooks are closely aligned to the test. We now have Open Court and Houghton-Mifflin math.

Test-taking skills. We teach test-taking skills, but it is embedded in the curriculum. When I first came to the school four years ago, there was quite a bit of test-taking prep. That will get you ten or fifteen points the first year, but after that, it's flat, so there's no reason to work only on test-taking strategies.

Quality of instructional program. This is what makes the biggest difference. If you change the quality of the instructional program, you are going to change what the students do on the test. So that's where we focused all of our energy.

We knew there were a lot of reasons why our students might not be successful, but we decided not to make, or to accept, any excuses. We developed the attitude that our students can do it. We base everything we do on what's good for the kids, not what's good for the teachers. That didn't feel good for some of the teachers, so they chose to go to another school. In the first year I was there, I lost fourteen teachers. I have had a turnover of 75% of the staff, so the staff I have now is not the staff I had four years ago. We all believe that our students will go to college, and we start talking about that in kindergarten.

We started to make some big changes at the school not only because of district pressure to close the achievement gap, but also because people in the community were looking at the low test scores and didn't want to come to the school. We needed to show that an inner city school can be successful. We made changes in three areas—leadership, instructional strategies, and curriculum. Most of the changes are in the first two areas, and I will briefly describe some of them here.

Leadership Changes

Leadership is not just the principal. Leadership includes the teachers who are leaders in every way. The leadership changes I'm describing here are the changes that take place outside the classroom.

Measurable goals. The first thing we did was to establish measurable goals that we could review mid-year and at the end of the year. For example:

- Every child will read at grade level as determined by the benchmark books;



- Every child will write to proficiency based on the district rubrics;
- Every child will compute quickly/accurately as per the basic math facts exam;
- Every child will demonstrate mathematical thinking as per the district's end-of-course math exam;
- Every child will learn English as determined by CELDT.

However, when students are tested in linguistic speaking in July and tested in reading and writing in October or November, the scores are not particularly valid. So we use our academics as a measure of students' English language growth.

Data-driven instruction. We wanted to base our instruction on what the students need, but how do we know what they need? We realized early on that we needed to gather and look at data. Everything in our school is data driven. Numbers tell us if we are on track. We look at assessment data, not only the standardized test data but also our benchmarks, our math facts, and student writing.



But as we looked at all the paper and pencil tests, we decided that wasn't good enough. Looking at the student work that is produced at the end of a lesson might be too late. We need to look at what is happening *during* the lesson. So we took the very big step of gathering observational data during lessons. Are the students getting it? If not, the teacher needs to do something different *at that time*. No lesson continues the way it is written on a piece of paper without checking to see if the students are getting it, and if they are not, the teacher has to make a change. We call this *active participation*. For example, if the children are asked to write the word "knot" on their white boards, the teacher can look and see which children have done it correctly. She says to herself, "Not everybody got it. Should I move on? Should I go back and re-teach?" This active participation serves two purposes: it keeps kids engaged and it provides data for the teachers to use.

Every month teachers turn in assessment data: reading data, writing data, math data, pre- and post-tests for chapters, and Open Court assessments. Do I look at it? Not a lot. I have fifty-five classrooms, and it would take me forever. I want *them* to reflect on the data and to make changes based on the data. And that's beginning to happen.



Teacher reflection. In the second year of data collection, I asked teachers not only to collect the data, but also to reflect on it. I wanted them to talk about what they were going to *do* with the data. There's no point in collecting data if you are not going to change. Teachers sit together by track or by grade level and talk about their data. They decide where they are going to spend more energy during the next month.

Time for collaboration. There is a lot of collaboration at

DESIGNS FOR LEARNING PROGRAM



The comprehensive schoolwide changes made at Roosevelt are a good example of the systemic change envisioned in the California Department of Education's Designs for Learning program where every aspect of teacher learning is linked to student learning. This program includes ten Design Elements that are central to the teaching and learning process for teachers, and, subsequently, to improved learning for their students. These are: (1) Using student data; (2) Creating a long-term professional development plan; (3) Providing time for professional learning; (4) Encouraging teacher leadership; (5) Developing teachers' content knowledge and pedagogical skills; (6) Promoting inquiry and reflection; (7) Providing opportunities for collaboration; (8) Designing appropriate learning environments; (9) Ensuring support for teacher learning from parents and community; (10) Using results as a basis for future learning activities.

References to the Design Elements are included in the margins when they are mentioned in the text. For a complete description of the ten design elements and the complete Designs for Learning program, see www.cde.ca.gov/pd/ps/te/designs4lrng.asp.

the school. Collaboration is not good just for students, it's good for teachers as well. How do we find the time? First, we took fifty minutes off Thursday and added it to the other four days so we have a short day on Thursday. The afternoon kindergarten comes in much earlier on Thursday so everybody can get out at the same time. Twice a month we have a *one-hour grade-level meeting* from 1:30-2:30, and the teachers look at data and talk about individual students. They also talk about curriculum and instruction and plan together. Following these one-hour grade level meetings, we have *staff meetings*, which always include some kind of staff development.

On another Thursday, we have a *two-hour grade-level meeting*. This is when the teachers actually work with the data. They score each other's writing and they do their reflections. It only happens once a month, but it's what they need.

Every Thursday, we have *Teacher Teaming Time* (TTT) from





8-11 a.m. There are two blocks per hour designated for TTT. A teacher can sign up and be released from the classroom. An administrator or support staff covers their class, and they are free to observe another classroom or to sit down with a coach or colleague and plan together or work on their assessments.

Knee-to-knees are where I literally sit knee-to-knee for a half hour in a teacher's classroom. It takes me about nine days to do this because of the large number of teachers. We talk about student data, looking at the trend of the whole class and also at individual students. They tell me what they're doing, and I take notes. I do this once or twice a year depending on the need.

We use categorical funding for *release days* for teachers. When we do release days for all grade levels, we spend half a day looking at data, planning, and talking about what's working and what's not. I want them to have time for collaboration, and I find ways to give it to them because I don't want that to be an excuse.

Teacher evaluation. Most of the teachers at the school have less than three years of experience so they need to be evaluated. I do about thirty evaluations, and my vice-principal does about twenty. I always schedule the evaluation visits because I want to see their best teaching. I take a video camera in the classroom, and I video the students. You hear the teacher's voice, but you only see the students. That's really good data. The students do a lot of think/pair/share, group work, and cooperative learning. The video captures all of it. At the end of the class, I hand that videotape to the teacher. A week later we talk about the lesson and the video. We discuss what went well, and what didn't. I ask, "What would you have changed?" Teachers are more reflective as a result. This has been a really wonderful process. Every teacher has agreed to have an observation assessment.

My job is to remind the staff that it's all about the students—and their learning. The responsibility for student learning rests with the teachers. They can't say, "I taught it. They just didn't get it." Teaching is when the kids get it, when they have control of the content. As an instructional leader, I apply pressure and provide support. If they want materials and resources, I get them. But I also put a lot of pressure on them. I make it personal: Which child in your class do you not want to go to college?



Knowledge of results. Students need to know where they stand with respect to the established benchmarks. Parents also need to know. At my school, we have six-foot banners in the hallway with all the benchmarks on them. Every child's name is placed at his or her benchmark level. We can see the children in the first grade who are at the first-

grade level, and we celebrate that. We also see that children in the second grade are at the first-grade level. That's not good, so we talk about that—with both the students and the parents. It's very concrete for the parents of English Language Learners. They see where their child should be, and we celebrate their growth as they move toward that goal.

This is knowledge of results, and we make it visible. We don't hide that data. The parents love it; they want to know. A lot of people visit our school and say, "Don't the kids feel bad?" And I say "No. We show them where they are." Data is just data. It's not that they are bad or not smart. They need to work harder, and we need to help them. This is not a competition; it is development. If you acknowledge where they are and celebrate their growth, there are no self-esteem issues.

Instructional Changes

Our instructional format is based on Madeline Hunter and the Essential Elements of Effective Instruction (EEEI). We feel that the children, especially English Language Learners, need a bridge from the known to the unknown. They already know something about the topic. They may not realize that they know something about it, but they do. The kids have to know what they are supposed to learn. Otherwise they try to figure it out, and they may figure it out wrong.

The second part of our instructional change was to follow the "active participation" model I described earlier. This means that children are engaged and teachers are looking to see if students are learning what they should be learning.

Gradual release of responsibility. When I went to school, the teacher would model something, assign a task, and then assess the learning. But when English Language Learners are "assigned and assessed," they don't get it. So after we do a lot of modeling, then we go to guiding. Guiding is where the teacher is still going to scaffold the learning; she lets them try it without any risk if they get it wrong. Our teachers of English Language Learners model a great deal. They make things concrete with pictures or artifacts. The children are learning in an environment that is not risk-free but is free-to-risk. Then, when 80% of them can do it 80% correctly, we go to independence. If 80% can't do it, then we continue to guide or model.

This was one of our biggest instructional changes because what was happening was the teacher would model, then she would assign, and then she would go to independence. And the kids would fail so it was a waste of instructional time. It's okay to model 500 times, especially for English Language Learners or for children of poverty who don't have certain reference points. For example, students were reading about the history of medicine in Open Court. But they don't know what an antibiotic is, and they may have never seen a doctor in their entire life. So we



CLOSING THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP FOR ENGLISH LEARNERS

can't just have them read and ask them to comprehend it. We have to do modeling of the clarification strategies. That was an important learning for us.

Instructional grouping. Open Court is whole group instruction. If you send 80% of the kids on to independence, what are you going to do with the other students? You have to do small group instruction or guided reading. If some kids are not getting it, you have to find a way to spiral back and pick them up. That's a management issue. You have to keep them engaged and academically challenged. We have them go to centers that support what they have already done in Open Court or math. Then, if that doesn't work, we go one-on-one.

Sometimes in small groups of English Language Learners, teachers pre-teach so the kids get it twice. They do "workshop" before they do Open Court. In workshop, they learn vocabulary words so they know them before they get to the Open Court story. We also have re-teach workshops for those who read the story and are still not getting the summary.

Within this overall instructional process, these are some of the concrete strategies we use:

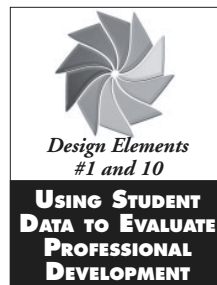
- **Strategy-based teaching.** We no longer teach content. We teach strategies. For instance, we no longer teach the basic math facts; we teach strategies for answering. For example: "It's a double or a double plus one" or "It's a neighbor." We want the students to have strategies for responding, not just the facts they have memorized.
- **Thinking Maps®.** We use Thinking Maps to show students their thinking. We believe this strategy accounts for a big part of our students' success.
- **Checking for understanding of content vs. English language/usage skills.** We don't ask English Language Learners to answer in complete sentences. They give us the words or a Thinking Map that shows what they know. We're assessing their content knowledge and we don't want their spelling or grammar to be part of that assessment. The kids who can read and write and speak more fluently do need to write in paragraphs.
- **Non-linguistic representations.** We do a lot of visual and kinesthetic learning activities. We also support sharing in the classroom. We find ways to get kids up and talking to each other, like mix/freeze/match or think/pair/share. They can talk in any language. We want them to develop oral skills.
- **Pacing charts.** Pacing charts in math and Open Court help us ensure that students are getting the content before the test.

We use 154 days for the math book instead of 180 because the test begins on the 155th day. This means teachers need to do a lot of spiraling back, which is particularly good for English Language Learners.

Everything we teach is aligned to the California Content Standards. We do full implementation and use all the Open Court materials, but we have improved the pedagogy. We have turned it into a Madeline Hunter-style lesson so we can really teach it, not just expose kids to it. We monitor to see if kids are getting it, and we spiral back as we go to the next lesson.

We use student data to determine our staff development needs. Then we use student data to assess whether or not the strategy is working. If it's not, we drop it.

We continue to refine these strategies and to make new changes in leadership, instruction, and curriculum. We identify things we still need to work on and create new strategies that help our teachers teach better. It's an ongoing cycle. That's part of what has made us successful—we see the need for continuous improvement and we work together toward our goals for students. We have been able to do what we have done because we have a common language, common expectations, and common strategies.



STRATEGIES SPECIFIC TO ELL

- Oral Expressive Language Rubric used with entering students. Students are asked to tell a story, and we use the rubric to score their understanding, not their development.
- K Camp for kindergarten students and their parents. We introduce them to the school and teach parents how to help their students and how important attendance is.
- Full-day kindergarten—from 8:30 to 1:30—for students who speak no English.
- Pairing with other students who speak the same language.
- Read-in with parents once a month for half an hour. We provide childcare and parents sit with their child while the child reads or points to words. The read-in is followed by a parent meeting in Spanish that features a raffle and prizes.

For more information about Roosevelt Elementary School and its programs, contact Stefanie Holzman, principal, at sholzman@lbusd.k12.ca.us.
For more information about the use of Thinking Maps and the trainings offered by Thinking Maps, Inc., see www.thinkingmaps.com.

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Connecting a face with the data

Unless we can connect a student face with the assessment data we're collecting and provide intervention based on need, a growing number of students will fall behind and the gap between the "haves" and "have nots" will persist. The student intervention matrix below outlines the key questions schools must answer as they provide intervention services to students.

1. Who are they? Which students are at the <i>Basic</i> , <i>Below Basic</i> , and <i>Far Below Basic</i> levels?	2. Why are they there? What common student needs are indicated by the data?
3. What can we do about it? What process variables can we change?	4. How are they doing? Are students progressing as a result of our efforts?

AN INTERVENTION QUIZ

- ◆ Can you quickly and easily access the names of your students who are at the Basic, Below Basic, and Far Below Basic proficiency levels in language arts, mathematics, and science?
 Yes No
- ◆ Can you state the specific and unique needs of each student?
 Yes No
- ◆ Does each student have access to intervention options based on need?
 Yes No
- ◆ Is each student progressing and, if he or she is not, are other strategies and interventions available?
 Yes No

TWO NEW RESOURCES

SCOE has made student intervention a priority for the coming year and will provide two new resources to local schools.

- ◆ A CD of intervention resources will be available this fall. It will include probing questions for schools to consider, details about intervention approaches, program suggestions, and curricular resources.
- ◆ SCOE will partner with one or two schools that could use some site-specific support to develop a comprehensive intervention system. Call or email Don Russell, 524-2786 or drussell@scoe.org, if student intervention is a school priority and you want some assistance.

RELATED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Student intervention is a priority for schools working to close the achievement gap, and SCOE is emphasizing intervention in its summer and fall workshops. Look for dates and details on these trainings after June 1 at www.scoe.org/training.

Summer Data Institute: One of the greatest challenges instructional leaders face is working with staff to effectively use data to improve student achievement. Several free web-based tools have emerged to provide data in a more accessible, focused, and comprehensible manner. We'll explore SMART, Just for the Kids, and School Profiler.

High Point: This two-day institute, presented by teachers who are High Point experts, is designed for grade 4-12 teachers who want to use High Point as a reading intervention or English Language Development program. We will examine and plan the use of language development lessons, preview and analyze ELD assessments, learn and practice the "learning to read" strand, and plan instruction for the first month of school.

Focus on Intervention in Adopted Reading Programs

Join us in taking an in-depth look at the support handbooks provided by the Houghton Mifflin and Open Court reading programs. This workshop will focus on using the handbooks to support struggling readers in the classroom, in intervention programs, and at home. Embedded assessments that can provide information to guide instruction and systems for supporting reading intervention will also be explored.

Intervention in Mathematics: Making Connections, Module 2

Learn to increase English Learner success in mathematics through the use of visuals, strategies that increase and extend language interaction, and "background building" to expand students' context for and connection to the curriculum. Videotaped examples of teachers working with these strategies in their classrooms will be viewed and discussed.

Miwok Valley takes a schoolwide approach

Old Adobe's Miwok Valley Elementary School enrolls just under 500 students. About a third of them are English Learners. The school's most recent API score was 783 and its similar schools ranking was 9.

This is the second year that Miwok Valley Elementary School has used a model called Integrated Support Services (ISS) to deliver skill-specific language arts support to students. The school's reading specialist, special education teacher, classroom teachers, and trained assistants work as a team to ensure that every student receives the support he or she needs—whether it's remediation, grade-level instruction, or acceleration.

All students, from special ed through GATE, participate in “simultaneous pull-out sessions” that group students by skill level for concentrated language arts instruction. For 50 minutes a day, students receive assistance in beginning reading, emergent reading, reading comprehension, writing, grammar, study skills, frontloading, and extension activities. Working as a team, the staff is able to efficiently deliver individualized instruction in a coordinated and collaborative fashion.

Each fall, Miwok Valley teachers, specialists, and assistants meet together to assess the needs of their students. Results from DIBELS, STAR Reading Inventory, Accelerated Reader, CELDT, and the state's STAR test are used to determine beginning-of-the-year groupings. Every five weeks, planning meetings are held to review new student assessment data, discuss any concerns the staff has about individual students or student groups, and regroup students for the next five-week period. Groups are collapsed and reformed, and individual students are moved according to their personal needs.

Instruction delivered in the skill-level groupings complements the language arts instruction provided in the classroom. Literature circles are common in the upper grades and guided individual reading is used in the primary grades. Vocabulary development is a schoolwide emphasis. The staff has been discussing Isabel Beck's *Bringing Words to Life: Robust Vocabulary Instruction* at schoolwide meetings. Miwok Valley is also participating in SCOE's Organizing Student Thinking project, which provides teacher training and school support for the use of Thinking Maps and other graphic organizers.

“Our overarching goal is simple,” says principal Kim Harper. “It is to improve student learning. Our commitment is to monitor this program closely to be certain students are seeing a benefit from the ISS model of support. We know our students are improving! By formally and informally assessing their progress every five weeks, we see growth.”



AFTER-SCHOOL TUTORING, LIBERTY SCHOOL

Liberty School is regularly among the county's top-ranking elementary schools, based on API results. About 200 students attend Liberty; 10% are English Learners.

Liberty School has an intensive after-school tutoring program for students in grades 1-3 who are in danger of not meeting grade-level standards in reading. In the first month of school, student reading skills are assessed using multiple measures and students are referred to the tutoring program based on the results. Meeting for 50 minutes a day, four days a week, the after-school program can serve up to 24 students at a time.

The program is staffed by one teacher, two instructional assistants, and upper-grade student volunteers. Students are divided into four groups of six each, based on skill level. Staff rotate through the groups during the week, so that each group has access to teacher-led activities, support from paraprofessionals, and peer tutoring delivered by upper-grade schoolmates. The instructional emphasis throughout the program is on reading skills, use of sound units, basic vocabulary, reading fluency, and comprehension.

The tutoring program teacher talks with classroom teachers weekly to monitor students' progress in their regular classes. Some students assess out of the tutoring program after the first semester, but most benefit from continued participation. “We have found this program to be a big contributor in getting our students to grade-level standards,” says principal Casey D'Angelo.