

ELD Links™ Pilot Helps District Speaking and Listening Skills Soar to Success



In response to rigorous new ELD and Common Core State Standards, districts across California are looking for ways to prepare their English Learners for 21st Century Skills, including college and career readiness. Learn how one district is using Lingual Learning's ELD Links™ in conjunction with their core ELD curriculum to improve Speaking and Listening skills and help prevent long-term EL status.

Two Structured English Immersion sites at Anaheim City School District improved their Listening and Speaking CELDT scores faster than the district norm for students in grades 1 - 3. Both SEI sites serve large Hispanic EL populations. What's surprising is that it happened in one school year, and the upward trend continues.

Seven years ago, ACSD successfully implemented a core ELD curriculum, which has yielded significant

gains in language acquisition. Yet despite that success, the district needed to expedite fluency outcomes for EL students who continued to struggle with Speaking and Listening skills.

"We have a significant number of English Learners with less than reasonable fluency," said Andrew Apodaca, ACSD's Coordinator of State and Federal Projects/EL Instruction. One of California's largest school districts, 60% of ACSD's 19,164 students are English Learners.

A Solution that Works

With the newly minted California ELD standards and Common Core State Standards, districts like ACSD statewide are intent on preventing Long-Term EL status, which research shows disproportionately leads to high drop-out rates at the secondary level.

In 2012, as part of a revamped designated ELD initiative, ACSD created several SEI Accelerated Language Academies (ALA). The district's goal was to improve their Annual Measurable Achievement Objectives (AMAOs), moving as many students as possible to 'reasonable fluency' and transitioning them out of the SEI program.

ACSD knew they needed to add instructional minutes to their designated ELD in order to get the results they were looking for. However, it's rare to find a high quality ELD curriculum that linguistically teaches students what they need to know to speak English.

"I've looked at countless ELD programs and, honestly, most ELD programs don't teach language systematically," said Apodaca, who has a degree in Linguistics. Encouraged

by ELD Links™ use of targeted, ELD/CCCS-aligned listening and speaking lessons, ACSD knew they'd found a solution that could work. At both sites, ACSD piloted ELD Links™ in combination with the district's core ELD curriculum.

Prior to the pilot, the two SEI sites were two of the district's many schools that traditionally used the English Language Mainstream model, systematic SDAIE (Specifically Designed Academic Instruction in English), throughout the day with thirty minute ELD pullouts.

Built Around ELD Standards

Lingual Learning's ELD Links™ is designed to develop students' language confidence. Its simple two-page lesson design uses targeted academic language frames, robust vocabulary, and fun, game-like activities to encourage maximum language output.

"I like the fact that it's written around ELD standards. More important, it's focused on listening and speaking," said Apodaca, who has served in the district since 1996.

"With ELD Links™ it's quite clear the authors understand how the English language works. That's very evident. That shouldn't be something special, but it is."



With their hands-on trainings and their practical and logistical feedback to teachers and administrators, the team at Lingual Learning has built a reputation for helping districts expand their oral language development practices and closely teach the ELD Links™ program, as designed, for maximum results.

'Building A Menu of Language Structures'

Approximately 250 ELs scoring at CELDT level 3 or below in either Listening or Speaking received additional designated ELD instruction four days a week, for 25 to 40 minutes. Tier 1 RTI teachers supplemented their core ELD curriculum with ELD Links™. Students were homogeneously grouped in homerooms according to language-proficiency.

"With ELD Links™, it's quite clear the authors understand how the English language works. That shouldn't be something special, but it is," Apodaca said.

As ACSD's first point of contact for ELD instruction, Apodaca is often out at schools. On a typical day you can find him walking classrooms, sitting in on trainings, and talking with teachers on-site. He found that the program's straightforward design was a plus for teachers. It saved on planning time and helped ELs get more explicit language practice.

"It has definitely helped, specifically with the speaking and listening," he said. "The predictable, routinely formatted lessons set the students up for success."

According to Apodaca, the program increased students' confidence, broadened their speaking skills set, and gave them a solid foundation in grammar and language structures.

"It has definitely helped specifically with the speaking and listening. It's helped give them a bigger menu of language choices, of language structures to pull from, as well as vocabulary. It's just broadened their skills set in speaking."

"Students have to complete sentences in ways they wouldn't have to in Spanish – like ending with a preposition. Sometimes it doesn't even dawn on us that we have to teach that. I've seen lessons where there have been very explicit grammatical constructions and the kids have gotten the corrective feedback they need."

"There are some lessons where students have to complete sentences in ways they wouldn't have to complete sentences in Spanish – like ending with a preposition, you don't do that in Spanish. Sometimes it doesn't even dawn on us that we have to teach that," Apodaca observed.

ALA students wrote everyday. Journaling activities using ELD Links™ language frames ensured meaningful transfer of speaking skills and valuable vocabulary development. "It wasn't just writing for writing's sake," Apodaca said, "It put writing in its proper perspective as it pertains to ELD instruction."

District / Student Population / EI Population:

Anaheim City School District / 19,164 pupils / 60% EL

District Reclassification Rate:

14.4%

ELD Instructional Plan:

Dual Language Immersion, English Language Mainstream, Traditional Bilingual, Structured English Immersion

School Site / Student Population:

Betsy Ross Elementary / 917 of 1009 students (91%) are Hispanic, Jefferson Elementary / 600 of 653 students (92%) are Hispanic



A 'Staircase' to Increased Language Output

The results were very exciting. During the pilots' first year of implementation, ALA students' Speaking and Listening scores were 10% lower than the non-ALA groups, on average. ALA students not only caught up to their non-ALA peers, but also, in most cases, continued to improve into the second pilot year. In one stand-out third grade ALA cohort:

- The percentage of ALA students considered Advanced more than tripled from one year to the next, improving faster than the non-ALA group in Speaking.
- In comparison, the ALA group outperformed the non-ALA group in Speaking skills, showing a two-thirds decrease in the number of Beginning to Early Intermediate level students; while the non-ALA group saw only an approximate 2% decrease in the lowest performing students overall.
- Across the board, more ALA students jumped to a higher level than their non-ALA peers in Speaking and Listening skills.

"What's awesome is there's a downward staircase. Do you see it?" said ACSD's Director of Program Evaluations, Rhonda Robertson, referring to the steady pattern of declining numbers at the Intermediate levels. Many districts across California are challenged to move their EL students beyond the Intermediate level in Listening and Speaking.

Continuing EL Achievement

With built-in features, ACSD continuously encourages teachers to implement across content areas: language frames as an instructional scaffold, quality visual aids (SDAIE), and clearly defined lesson objectives, ELD Links™ is a good fit, moving forward.

After successfully implementing ELD Links™ as designed, and following the program closely from 2012-2014, the district expanded the pilot to five school sites for the 2014-2015 school year. ACSD is implementing ELD Links™ district-wide in 2015-2016.

"I think it really all comes down to: if you're focused in on improving the achievement of English Learners then you have to be focused on improving the speaking and listening of English Learners," Apodaca said, "The only way you're going to raise the literacy level is to raise the language level. If you're focused in on that, then this is a good tool for it."

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Spotlight

Two Instructional Levels:

ELD Links™ I: Emerging

ELD Links™ II: Expanding/Bridging

Key Features

- 96 Quick 20-to-30 Minute Lessons
- Five Fun Themes Per Level
- Daily Language Frames
- Clearly Defined Objectives, Language Purpose, and Grammar Focus
- 200+ Photo Cards
- Print or Online