



Structured Professional Development Impacts AYP across EL and Other Subgroups

Turlock Unified School District, Turlock, California

Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP®)

Demographics

- › Agricultural community
- › Mostly Title I schools
- › 14,000 students
- › 62% free and reduced lunch
- › 50% Hispanic
- › 38% white
- › 6% Asian
- › 27% EL (50% in some schools)
- › 13% special education

Challenge

For many years, the biggest achievement gaps in the Turlock Unified School District were among English learners and special education students. Each school was wrestling with the problem individually and unable to achieve any significant improvement despite many interventions. Up to 30 languages are spoken each year in the district.

When the district's director of professional development and EL programs, Kea Willett, attended a SIOP® (Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol) presentation in 2002, she was struck by the SIOP® emphasis on language objectives. "I realized that our main problem was students' lack of language skills in general and their difficulty in accessing grade-level content," she said. Although staff agreed with Ms. Willett's observations, they did not have a deep understanding of language acquisition and objectives, and there was no consistent instructional model in place.

Implementation

In 2007, Turlock Unified embarked on a SIOP® professional development program focused on language objectives and instructional models, and at the same time switched from a decentralized to a centralized approach. The first three-day SIOP® Institute was held in 2007. Attendance was voluntary, and only 30 out of 770 teachers participated. The district went on to hold several more voluntary SIOP® Institutes between 2007 and 2009.

Seven teachers were selected to become district-wide instructional coaches, trained by Pearson, but teachers rarely took advantage of the coaches once they became available. The district realized that teachers who had never worked with coaches didn't know how to call on them for support and principals who had never worked with coaches didn't know how to direct the effort.

Soon Turlock Unified had maximized voluntary participation without impacting the majority of teachers or students. The team, led by the new superintendent, Dr. Sonny Da Marto, decided the SIOP® training needed to become mandatory. "It was clear that we needed a consistent model of instruction to unite all our staff," said Dr. Da Marto.

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— Dr. Sonny Da Marto, Superintendent,
Turlock Unified School District

When the mandatory training plan for certificated staff was announced in the fall of 2009, some content area teachers did not understand how language development applied to their classrooms. However, the SIOP® training soon helped them realize that, because language is the vehicle for instruction in all classes, every teacher is responsible for closing the language loop in achievement gaps for ELs and special education students.

The next step was to ensure successful classroom implementation. "There's a difference between compliance and ownership, and we were looking for ownership," said Ms. Willett. Coaching helped achieve this goal, along with follow-up SIOP® Institutes and ongoing Pearson professional development at school sites. Significantly, administrators began a program of classroom walkthroughs, in which they used a SIOP® protocol to collect data trends related to teachers' implementation of SIOP® features.

According to Dr. Da Marto, this program allowed teachers and administrators to discuss specific aspects of instruction, impact on students, and instructional refinements on a regular basis. "It also helped to ensure that administrators and coaches were rating teachers consistently using 'valid and reliable' SIOP® models," he said. In the 2010–11 school year, Pearson consultants delivered a

minimum one-day mandatory follow-up component for teachers and a similar component for administrators. The district also brought in mandatory district-wide Pearson A+RISE® training, with a minimum one-day attendance, and is now on a maintenance professional development schedule.

Recognizing the need for outside expertise, Turlock Unified uses the same Pearson consultants year after year to keep the message consistent and provide objective, third-party support. “Our Pearson consultants are an extension of our district staff—not a typical vendor relationship,” said Ms. Willett. “They’ve bought into our district goals and are with us every step of the way.”

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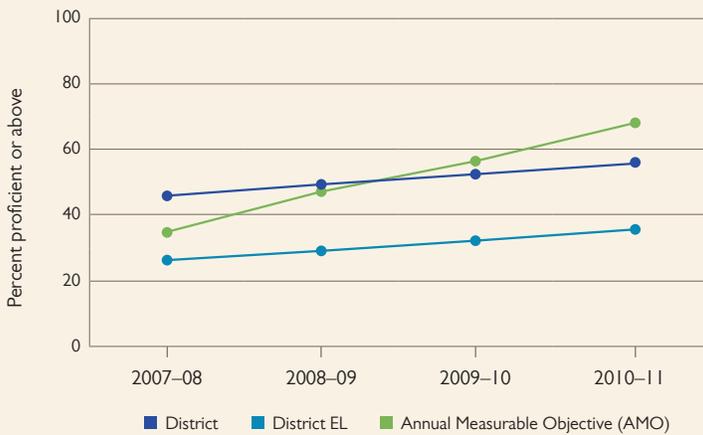
Results

Ms. Willett described the transformation at Turlock Unified as a powerful “second-order change.” “We’ve been misled in education to think we can do quick fixes—this is naïve and unrealistic,” she said. “SIOP® is not about tweaking around the edges—it’s about change from the ground up.”

Meaningful change takes time and commitment and must build on the SIOP® connections already in place, according to Ms. Willett. “As we know more, we do more. The SIOP® model provides the big picture, and then we zero in on specifics and keep going deeper to develop our understanding,” she said.

Since 2009, Turlock Unified has seen a positive impact on AYP for ELs and all other subgroups—validating the idea that research-based training positively impacts all students. “Educators in the district now have a common language around instruction, and this impacts achievement,” said Dr. Da Marto. “SIOP® has changed the dialogue in faculty meetings and on teacher collaboration days because everything is infused with SIOP® language.”

ELs Make Steady Gains in English Language Arts



ELs Narrow the Achievement Gap in Math

