

# Increasing the Proficiency of ELLs in a Culturally Diverse District

After three years of piloting and professional learning with Corwin, Bakersfield City School District exceeds expectations using the Fisher/Frey Close & Critical Reading Collaborative

**A** K8 school district in Southern California was focusing efforts on increasing the proficiency of its English language learners, a population that makes up 32 percent of its students. It also sought to reclassify as many ELLs as possible before middle school—a time when the defeatist mindset usually sets in.

Bakersfield City School District's goal was to create a space where students could be successful, says Marc Luque, assistant superintendent of education services. "To do that, teachers need to be empowered and supported in their work. We want our teachers to innovate, to try things, to take risks."

Educators are accomplishing exactly that—and more—since Bakersfield City adopted the reading collaborative strategies by Corwin's Douglas Fisher and Nancy Frey. In these practices, teachers take a step back from leading the class while students read passages several times for different purposes in order to answer critical questions about the text.

## A collaborative approach

To create an environment of innovation and support, Corwin consultants helped the district craft a three-year professional development plan and launched a three-year pilot program in 2013-14 at eight Bakersfield City schools with the highest percentage of ELLs.

The PD took several forms, including onsite workshops focused on coaching, sustainability skills and capacity-building for district leadership. At the school level, staff received insight on how to educate ELLs in both the English language development block and general-education classrooms.

In response to some teachers who were resistant to change, Corwin consultants built relationships with educators and shared their own struggles, work samples, stories and video clips of the Fisher/Frey practices in action.

Bakersfield City faculty also visited schools from nearby districts that had already begun implementing these Corwin strategies. After seeing these real-life successes from neigh-

boring districts, educators adopted the Fisher/Frey approach wholeheartedly.

"Something extraordinary is happening here," says Luque. "Our teachers have gone from tears to excitement."

## ELLs (and non-ELLs) achieve undeniable success

Since Corwin's Fisher/Frey trainers began working with Bakersfield City educators, the district has met its goal of increasing the proficiency of ELLs in its neediest schools.

In 2015-16, the third year of the program, 57 percent of ELLs rose in proficiency on the California English Language Development Test, an assessment that identifies students who need to improve

their listening, speaking, reading and writing skills in English. This increase was up from 54 percent in 2014-15 and 52 percent the year before.

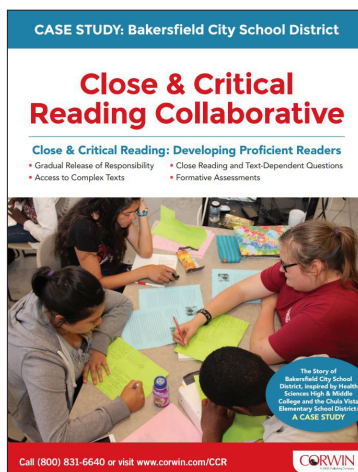
Even more satisfying, 32 percent of ELLs passed the same assessment in 2015-16, up from 29 percent in 2014-15 and 27 percent during the program's first year.

Bakersfield City accomplished another goal. Since the district implemented the program, the number of students reclassified from ELL to ELL Re-Designated doubled. In 2016 alone, nearly 2,000 students were reclassified.

Additionally, non-ELLs in economically disadvantaged areas are now benefiting from Corwin's same instructional strategies, strengthening all students' vocabulary and improving their speaking, reading and writing skills.

Before the initiative, 61 percent of students were reading below grade level. In 2016, that number had dropped sharply to 50 percent, a significant gain in proficiency.

"Our ELL students, who previously did not have a voice, now articulate their ideas with confidence," says Luque. "We hit a home run in bringing this work into our schools."



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