

Fisher/Frey PD Collaborative: Developing Proficient Readers

- Gradual Release of Responsibility
- Access to Complex Texts
- Close Reading and Text-Dependent Questions
- Formative Assessment



One School's Journey

The Story of Chula Vista
Elementary School
District: Case Study

CHULA VISTA ELEMENTARY SCHOOL DISTRICT

The Context: About the School/District

Chula Vista Elementary School District (CVESD) is a mid-size urban district serving 29,300 students primarily in grades pre-K–6, and is the largest elementary school district in California. CVESD is organized across 45 school campuses.

These students live in communities South San Diego, Chula Vista, Bonita, and Sunnyside, just north of the world's busiest international border crossing (San Ysidro Port of Entry). CVESD is organized across 45 school campuses, including seven charter schools, which represent 15% of total enrollment. The free/reduced lunch rate for students in 2014–15 was 50.9% (15,179 students). In 2014–15, the district reported the student demographics in the table below.

Demographics

- Number of Hispanic/Latino students **20,594 (69.0%)**
- Number of White students **3,497 (11.7%)**
- Number of Filipino students **2,836 (9.5%)**
- Number of Black or African-American students **1,051 (3.5%)**
- Number of Asian students **716 (2.4%)**
- Number of Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander **199 (0.5%)**

Thirty-five percent of CVESD students (10,619) are English

Learners. The dominant language among English Learners is Spanish (92.6%). This represents a higher concentration of Spanish speaking students when compared with the rest of the county (84%) and is reflective of its geographic location. Rounding out the top five languages spoken are Filipino/Tagalog, Korean, Japanese, and Cantonese.

In 2014-15, 897 English Learners (8.5%) at CVESD were redesignated as Fluent English Proficient (RFEP), meaning that these students had met district-specified scores on state English language proficiency assessments. This is a commendable success rate and CVESD is rightfully proud of this achievement. Progress of English learners has been and continues to be a primary mission of the district.



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The Challenge

For several years in the late 1990s and early 2000s, the district staff focused on Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) (e.g., DeFour & Eaker, 1998). Generally, PLCs consist of a group of educators who work together to improve teaching and learning. They are often seen as an alternative to “sit and get” professional development or make-it/take-it sessions because members of the learning community collaboratively learn, investigate, develop, and implement evidence-based practices (Leithwood, Patten, & Jantzi, 2010). Principals were trained in leading these communities and were expected to operationalize PLCs in their schools. The PLCs were allowed to choose their focus, based on school data, and design interventions to improve student achievement.

In California, where the district in this study is located, the state accountability measure in place since 1999 is called the Academic Performance Index (API). District and school performance is calculated using measures of student progress on the state’s standards-based tests for major content areas. The California Department of Education **designated 800 as the target for all schools.** Schools and districts that do not achieve an 800 are assigned a target proportional to the gap. In 1999, when California first released assessment results, **37% of the CVESD district students were proficient or advanced in reading.**

In the spring of 2006, the district leadership team met to develop a district-level intervention. At the time, schools varied greatly in their focus and professional development efforts. Some schools were implementing Reading First (2002) with fidelity to a basal program whereas others were attending to student culture. As the Superintendent said, “There is no rhyme or reason to the professional development our teachers get.” One of the Assistant Superintendent noted, “We haven’t helped teachers get better at their craft, they’re just implementing programs and that’s not long-term.” A district literacy coach suggested, “It’s hard to engage with schools when you really don’t know what their PLC is focused on - it could be anything from writing prompts to read alouds. One school even has a focus on community gardens.”

The Results

In 2008, two years before promised, the district topped 800 on the API, earning 811 points. By 2012, the district API was 869. Schools across the district were performing better than they had before and the plateau seemed to have been conquered. By 2012, EVERY school in the district scored over 800, up from eight in 2004. **By 2012 74% of the students were proficient or advanced in reading, up from 38% in 2004 and 37% in 1999.**

Since then, the district has transitioned to the Smarter Balanced Assessments, also earning distinctions. On the 2015 administration, 55% of the students in the district met or exceeded the reading standards. This compares with 44% of students statewide, which is less diverse than Chula Vista. As noted on the SBAC website, “because these exams are based on more challenging academic standards, the results are too fundamentally different to compare to old scores.”

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Implementation

Chula Vista invested in teacher knowledge and skills. To accomplish this, the site administrators engaged in professional learning about **quality instruction on a monthly basis.** The focus of these sessions was on recognizing quality instruction and providing teachers with honest, growth-producing feedback. In addition, the district provided **6 full days per year for each site-based Instructional Leadership Team.** These days consisted of 3 hours of new content and 3.5 hours of facilitated support for taking the information back to teachers. The ILT then provided **professional learning experiences for all teachers at their site,** focused on the major topics—gradual release of responsibility, access to complex texts, close reading and text-dependent questions, and formative assessments—agreed to in the professional learning plan for the year.

Key Outcomes

Overall student achievement has increased. Equally importantly, the achievement gap that had existed within the district is closing.

Next Steps

The future of the district is bright. Future professional learning focuses on purposeful teaching and collaborative learning.

Testimonials

“As the Assistant Superintendent for Instructional Services in the Chula Vista Elementary School District I cannot say enough about the impact that Doug and Nancy had on our District. With over 30,000 students CVESD is the largest K-6 district in California and the challenge of focusing on an instructional model to be implemented consistently across 45 schools was a daunting task. During the several years of professional development for administrators, grade level teachers, and instructional leadership teams we saw a transformation in how teaching and learning looked across all grade levels and schools. It was nothing short of miraculous. The professional learning involved two parts: 1) Content around the Gradual Release of Responsibility instructional model and Common Core State Standards and 2) processes to support implementation at school sites. Schools worked at their own rate to implement these best practices with the goal of improving learning for all students. As a result of these efforts CVESD continues to outperform other districts with similar demographics. A true testimony to the work of Drs. Fisher and Frey. Thank you”

—John M. Nelson III, Ed.D., Retired Assistant Superintendent for Instructional Services
Chula Vista Elementary School District

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“Dr. Doug Fisher planned and presented professional development for district administrators and my school leadership team. Upon request, he personally visited the school and walked through every classroom. Dr. Fisher spoke to children about their learning and to the adults about their teaching. He offered specific feedback in a positive manner; the feedback was accepted and changes were implemented because teachers felt a genuine connection with him. Dr. Doug Fisher made a profound impact in our district, on our school campus, and continues to be highly-regarded by all”

—Toni Fadis, Principal, Chula Vista Elementary School, Chula Vista, CA

“Dr. Fisher’s work with CVESD over the years has had a significant impact on my instruction and the best practices utilized at the school sites where I have worked. Not only is Dr. Fisher a dynamic presenter, the professional development he provided was always research-based and relevant to me as a classroom teacher.

As a direct result of the professional development Dr. Fisher first provided, my colleagues and I have grown in our understanding the Gradual Release of Responsibility model and our ability to naturally integrate it into our instruction. The trainings also taught us how to develop meaningful objectives for our lessons and how to clearly communicate the purpose to students throughout the lesson. Over the years my grade level partners and I have increasingly been able to apply these skills, which ultimately strengthened our ability to design and deliver meaningful lessons.

The training I received from Dr. Fisher transformed my thinking and enhanced my lesson design and instruction. Not only that, I witnessed the impact my new learning had my students’ ability to deeply understand and converse about text.”

—Ray DeVore, Assistant Principal, Chula Vista Elementary School, Chula Vista, CA

Fisher/Frey Reading Collaborative

Follow the lead of other districts and invite Douglas Fisher, Nancy Frey, and their collaborative to deliver long-term customized professional development centered on proficient reading. The program revolves around 5 Access Points—Purpose & Modeling, Close & Scaffolded Reading, Collaborative Conversations, Independent Reading Staircase, and Performance. One day, one week, one year, the Collaborative can work closely with you and your staff both on site and online to reach your learning outcomes.

Kick-Off Institutes:

Administrators and teachers establish a shared vision and language

On-Site Workshops:

Intensive, strategy-based learning builds instructional capacity

Implementation Days:

Ongoing job-embedded coaching ensures sustainability



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