

SUCCESS SPOTLIGHT

Mississippi School District's New EL Framework Leads to Greater Learning and Growth

From 2000–2018, the number of English Learners (ELs) in Mississippi increased by nearly 580 percent (2,176 to 14,771).

Pascagoula-Gautier School District (PGSD), a suburban district located on the Mississippi coast, has the second-highest EL population in the state. In 2018, its leaders decided they needed to overhaul how the district approached EL instruction. “We know how important it is to reach our ELs,” said Mireya Garay, PGSD’s federal programs coordinator. “We’re committed.”

When it came to choosing a new EL framework, Dr. Melissa DeAngelo, PGSD’s director of English language education, knew her district needed a research-based and proven approach. After diligent information gathering and observing a Georgia district, DeAngelo and other PGSD leaders determined that the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP), an instructional framework developed by the US Department of Education, was the best fit for PGSD’s students.

SIOP would maximize the amount of time ELs spent in the classroom with their native English-speaking peers as well as their exposure to academic language and grade-level content. It also would enable PGSD educators to make the most of valuable programs they already used, including *i-Ready Assessment* and *i-Ready Personalized Instruction*, Curriculum Associates’ integrated formative assessment and instruction programs, and Ellevation®, a comprehensive EL platform.



“Achieving high levels of academic competency in both English and at least one other World Language is an integral part of making the vision of student accessibility to success a reality.”

—PGSD Seal of Biliteracy

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What They Did

Nearly 13 percent of PGSD's 7,000 Pre-K–12 students are ELs, and meeting their needs is, on its own, an impressive task. However, in adopting SIOP, PGSD educators strove to improve learning for all students, not just their ELs.

Through rigorous professional development (which continued despite COVID-19), the ongoing use of *i-Ready* and Ellevation, and the adoption of *Ready® Mathematics*, a standards-aligned, discourse-centered math curriculum, PGSD educators have steadily introduced rich instructional practices that help all students build their academic language and access grade-level content.

PGSD's transition to a new instructional framework has been driven by:



Mastery: Instead of training educators broadly in several different principles, PGSD delves deeply into one topic (e.g., using *Ready Mathematics* resources, planning with SIOP, and discourse-driven math). Only once educators feel well versed in a best practice do they progress to a new topic.



Expertise: PGSD leadership quickly recognized that the fastest way to spread new best practices was to make the most of relationships with trusted partners (PGSD has, for example, completed 140 professional development sessions with Curriculum Associates) and foster internal SIOP experts. Teacher leaders who master cornerstone SIOP concepts are now asked to train their colleagues throughout the district.



Community: In addition to best practices, such as providing resources in multiple languages and having Spanish-speaking educators at every school, PGSD ensures ELs' families feel valued and supported by offering skill-building workshops for nonnative English speakers and programs that celebrate families' cultures and provide community learning opportunities.

What They Accomplished

Though PGSD is still building its educators' SIOP and *Ready Mathematics* knowledge, the district's educators are encouraged by the accomplishments students and educators have already made. "We have had students who started as ELs at the kindergarten level . . . and they came out being either in the top five or valedictorian of the school district," DeAngelo said.

PGSD became the first district in Mississippi to implement a Seal of Biliteracy, which recognizes students who demonstrate proficiency in English and at least one other language with a seal on their high school diplomas and transcripts. When Mississippi's Department of Education decided to create a statewide Seal of Biliteracy program in 2019, educators from PGSD served on the Mississippi Seal of Biliteracy panel.

For now, PGSD educators are focused on the continued dissemination and implementation of best practices, integration of EL families, and success stories. "We have a lot in front of us to do, but I just think it's great that everybody's on the same page," said Garay.

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—Dr. Melissa DeAngelo,
Director of English
Language Education

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