



SUCCESS STORY

KEY FINDINGS

- NGSP’s data-driven and collaborative *Professional Development* meets district’s needs
- Teachers’ English language development instructional skills have improved
- English language learners show growth in reading on state achievement tests

National Geographic School Publishing Professional Development Improves Teaching and Learning



Challenge

Tucson Unified School District’s (TUSD) Language Acquisition department faced a daunting task when the state of Arizona mandated that English language learners (ELLs) receive four hours of daily instruction in a specific set of explicit skills for reading, vocabulary, grammar, writing, and oral language development. For the district’s leaders, it was essential for English language development (ELD) teachers to integrate the skill areas of English language acquisition during instruction, not teach them in isolation. They sought a solution that aligned state requirements with a solid instructional program for ELLs.

With 65 elementary schools and many competing district-wide initiatives, the team needed a strategic approach to support about 400 ELD teachers and ensure that the curriculum was implemented with fidelity. “We wanted teachers to have in-depth professional development so the skills weren’t just taught in isolation but were embedded within the content,” explained Ms. Sandoval-Taylor, TUSD Language Acquisition Specialist. “Our teachers also

needed to gain a deeper understanding of research-based ELD instructional strategies and skills to more successfully meet the diverse learning needs of their students.”

Solution

National Geographic School Publishing Professional Development (NGSP PD) was selected by TUSD to support teachers’ ELD instruction because of its collaborative and data-driven approach in designing and planning ongoing professional learning (**Figure 1**). TUSD’s Language Acquisition team leaders appreciated how the *NGSP PD* team actively listened to their needs and helped target the strategies and skills that would increase the quality of ELD



Figure 1. NGSP PD and TUSD’s ongoing collaborative process for professional learning

District Statistics	
District	Tucson Unified School District, Tucson, AZ
Schools	65 Elementary Schools
Teachers	Over 400 Elementary ELD teachers
English Language Learners	5,000 (9% of total school population)
Student Diversity	61% Hispanic; 25% White, non-Hispanic; 6% African-American; 4% Native-American; 3% Asian-American; 1% Other

instruction. Ms. Sandoval-Taylor noted, “The *NGSP PD* team met with us and visited classrooms to help us assess areas in which our teachers could be more effective as they implemented the ELD

curriculum and taught the mandated skills. This collaborative approach helped us devise a workable, yet flexible long-term professional learning plan.”

In the fall of 2007, online needs assessments for teachers and administrators identified priorities for professional learning. The **NGSP PD** team and TUSD Language Acquisition team used this data, together with information gathered during site visits, to make informed decisions about specific course topics and objectives. Each in-depth course covered research-based instructional strategies and skills to build teacher capacity in providing more comprehensive and effective instruction for their ELLs. Additional needs assessment data was collected the following year to guide future course offerings.

Since the winter of 2008, over twenty **NGSP PD** courses have been offered for ELD teachers on subjects ranging from Building Academic Vocabulary, to Effective Comprehension Strategies, and Data-driven Instruction. TUSD estimated that at least 80% of the ELD teachers have attended courses.

Course evaluations completed by participants were also used to highlight needs and fine-tune offerings. A course, Managing Flexible Groups, was customized for TUSD based on teacher data. Another course that aligned the state-mandated Discrete Skills Inventory (DSI) with TUSD’s comprehensive ELD curriculum was developed to support teachers as they integrated the specific grammar skills into their lessons.

“**NGSP PD** and TUSD were responsive to our needs—they added sessions on using the technology tools we have in our classrooms when teachers indicated that we wanted to use the interactive whiteboard and graphic organizer software to teach the ELD curriculum,” Mr. Palomino, an ELD teacher noted. “Now my students are learning skills they can transfer to other classes to help them organize information.”

Results

Walkthroughs of ELD classrooms have helped TUSD’s Language Acquisition team gather evidence that instructional practices are changing across the district. “It becomes very clear that teachers who have attended **NGSP PD** implement the ELD instructional strategies and skills with fidelity,” explained Ms. Sandoval-Taylor. “We discuss our findings with principals so they know which teachers have participated and how instruction has improved. Principals often encourage other teachers to attend courses.”

Mr. Ruiz, TUSD Language Acquisition Director noted that the ongoing support has been especially powerful for new teachers, “I can tell the difference in teachers’ instruction, motivation, and fidelity of embedding skills into the curriculum—now, it’s all about

meeting each student’s learning needs with the strategies and skills introduced during **NGSP PD** courses.”

“TUSD has shown steady improvement in the percentage of ELLs achieving mastery (“Meets” or “Exceeds”) in Reading on the Arizona Instrument to Measure Standards (AIMS) since the **NGSP PD** courses began in 2008 (**Figure 2**). “We track students’ assessment data along with ELD instruction to determine academic progress and to target areas for future PD,” Ms. Sandoval-Taylor explained.

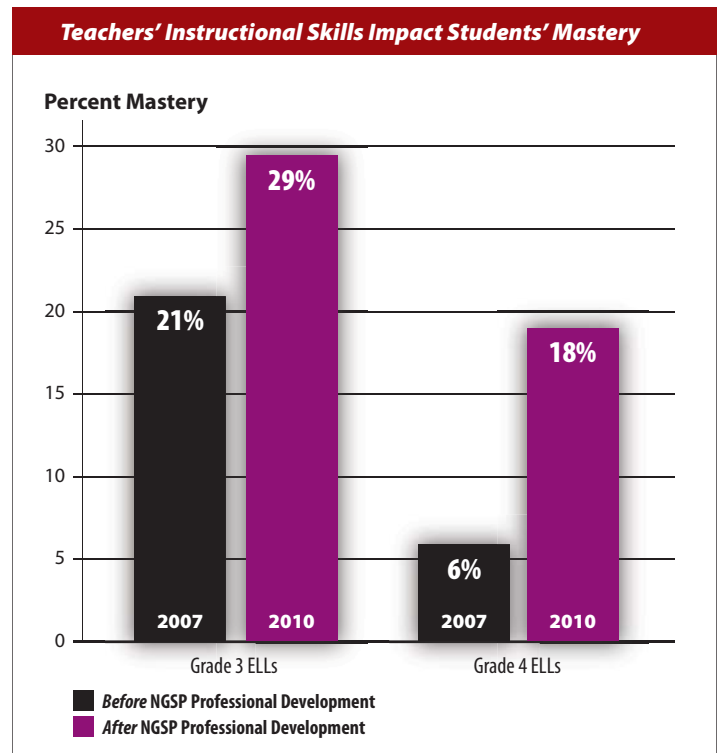


Figure 2. Percentage of ELLs achieving mastery (“Meets” or “Exceeds”) in Reading on the Arizona Instrument to Measure Standards (AIMS), 2007 (prior to NGSP PD) and 2010 (after NGSP PD)

“One indicator that my ELD teachers are more skillful is that other teachers (mainstream, special education, etc.) want them to share differentiation activities and strategies for integrating explicit skills into content instruction,” stated Mr. Alvarez, principal of Manzo Elementary School. “TUSD’s collaboration with **NGSP PD** has also helped administrators understand what rigorous ELD instruction entails.”

Ms. Chavarin, an ELD teacher explained, “The strategies I’ve learned have truly transformed my teaching; they are so focused on student achievement.” Another ELD teacher and coordinator, Ms. Kelsey, remarked, “**NGSP PD** has allowed me to grow as a teacher and bring that knowledge back to my students and also help other teachers understand the types of support that our ELLs need.”

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