A digital assessment pilot for English learners yields timely results

Old Adobe Union School District, Petaluma, California

The Challenge

"Like in a lot of California districts, our English learners are lagging behind. There is an achievement gap. In 2014, we were in year two of not meeting our annual measure of academic outcomes for our English learners," said Craig Conte, curriculum director, Old Adobe Union School District (OAUSD).

To decrease this gap, OAUSD wanted to find an assessment solution that provided timely data. Conte explained, "We wanted to get a better handle on where we were and not wait from year to year for our self-testing or state testing to find out whether or not we hit the mark. Other than anecdotal information, we didn't have a good assessment to measure where kids were."

Pearson

A Digital Assessment Solution

In early 2015, Conte learned about the Test of English Language Learning (TELL), Pearson's tablet-based language proficiency test. TELL is a self administered assessment that allows educators to screen, diagnose and progress monitor their students with immediate results. During the test, students watch video clips, interact with pictures and words, answer questions out loud and in writing, provide summaries of text they read, and respond to oral prompts. Intrigued by the product, Conte agreed to participate in a field study.

The field study took place at Miwok Valley Language Academy. Conte was impressed with the efficiency of the test. He also observed how engaged students were when taking the digital assessment. So even though the district exited Title III improvement status at the end of the 2014-2015 academic year, he decided to work with Pearson on a district-wide pilot program.

Before the pilot, staff at the district's five schools received a half day of training. Nina Cervantes, a bilingual assistant and computer lab technician at Loma Vista Immersion Academy, noted, "It helped us learn how to read the results charts and showed us what the kids went through when they were taking the test."

A diagnostic test was given to English learners throughout the district in January 2016. OAUSD plans to administer the test again this academic year to measure student progress.

The Results

The digital assessment addressed OAUSD's concern regarding timely, actionable data. "Before, we were always relying on old data," explained Kristy Corbett, a teacher on special assignment who administered the test at La Tercera Elementary School. "We took the California English Language Development Test (CELDT) at the beginning of the school year, but we didn't get the scores until December. So we had to rely on the previous year's data, and then there was a bit shuffle when we got the data. It's nice to have the instant feedback from TELL, so we can shift students to a different group the next week if necessary."
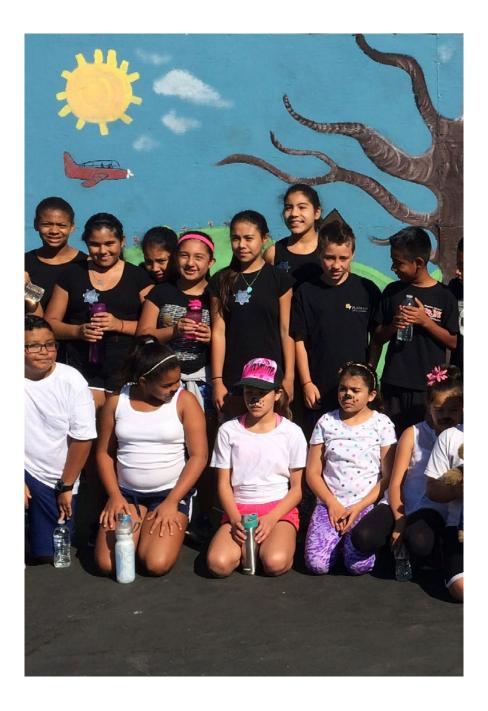
In addition, staff who observed students taking the assessment reported students were engaged with the test. From an administrator's point of view, Conte commented, "We noticed the engagement that the students had with the assessment, so we felt that we were getting accurate data in that regard. Often times with the CELDT, which is a one-on-one or small-group paper-and-pencil test, the level of engagement for our students wasn't as intense as we would have liked it to be."

Cervantes agreed. When she administered the test at Loma Vista, she observed, "it's not so much about filling in bubbles on a piece of paper. They have a video or something they watch. I find this more accurate because they pay more attention."
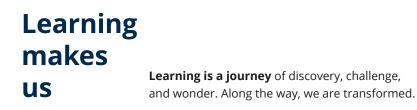
When Corbett administered the test to younger students at La Tercera, she asked them what part of the test they liked best and "they always refer to the part where they were able to move items physically across the page. For the students, TELL is a lot more engaging than the CELDT."

Looking forward, OAUSD plans to continue using TELL for diagnostic and progress testing of English learners. Corbett explained, "Our plan at this point is just to have access to relevant data that's more timely, so we can assist our students quickly and meet their needs."

> " I find TELL to be a little more accurate because the students seem more engaged. "
>
> —Nina Cervantes, Bilingual Assistant and Computer Lab Technician, Loma Vista Immersion Academy

> **Overall, I really like TELL. It's content rich and the kids are engaged.**
>
> —**Craig Conte,** Curriculum Director, OAUSD

> **With TELL, you get feedback instantly.**
>
> —**Kristy Corbett,** Teacher on Special Assignment, La Tercera Elementary School

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