

System Wide Reform: The San Francisco Unified School District Case

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Abstract

The Language Academy initiative enabled the district to redesign remedial, compliance-based programs for English Language Learners and transform them into standards-based language learning programs for all students in the district. Administrators relied on stakeholder involvement, coherent policy, and quality program design to achieve their goal of fluency in English and another language for all students.

The Language Academy concept is an innovative initiative that remodeled San Francisco's programs for English Language Learners (ELLs), moving them from a language deficit model for limited English proficient (LEP) students to a language enrichment model for all students in the district (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998; Apodaca & Rojas, 1997; Willig, 1985). The initiative was spearheaded by both the assistant superintendent and superintendent of schools who were determined to elevate the achievement of minority students in the district.

Approximately two years after commencing the initiative, the San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD) regained compliant status with the State Department of Education after being out of compliance for six years. In 1997-98, San Francisco ELLs were redesignated at a rate of 16%, as opposed to the statewide rate of 6% (San Francisco Unified School District: The Language Academy, 1999; Apodaca, 1998). An analysis of achievement test data also revealed that LEP students who were enrolled in Language Academy programs, and were subsequently redesignated as Fully English Proficient (FEP), were actually outscoring English Only (EO) students.

The success of the Language Academy programs can be attributed to quality program design, collaborative leadership, and a coherent policy of learner and family centered values focused on achievement. This article elaborates on these characteristics of the Language Academy in order to discover its roots and explore its future possibilities for further benefiting the educational development of children from all backgrounds.

Historical Background

As a result of a class action lawsuit brought against the officials of the school district by non-English-speaking Chinese students (*Lau vs. Nichols*, 1974) the U.S. Supreme Court ruled on Jan. 21, 1974, that the SFUSD must provide a program of “bilingual, bicultural education” for LEP students. The lawsuit sought redress against unequal educational opportunities offered to language minority students, which were alleged to violate the Fourteenth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. The unanimous decision initiated a new era in civil rights and mandated San Francisco to accommodate its language minority population and abandon sink-or-swim English immersion programs.

The San Francisco Board of Education formed a coalition of Asian, Latino, Black, and White parents, along with administrators and community stakeholders. In conjunction with the Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL), the coalition struggled to ensure that San Francisco schools settled for more than minimal compliance (ARC Associates, 1996; Center for Applied Linguistics and Citizens’ Task Force on Bilingual Education, 1975). The result was a state-of-the-art bilingual education plan, the *Lau Consent Decree*, which stressed the maintenance of students’ Chinese or Spanish skills after they learned English. The *Lau Consent Decree* specifically states, “It is adjudged, decreed, and ordered that the San Francisco Unified School District implement a program of bilingual, bicultural education” (San Francisco Unified School District, 1999).

After much debate, the *Lau Consent Decree* was accepted and the plan was implemented. While the *Lau Consent Decree* plan submitted to the Court was ahead of its time, it still only addressed language minority students. Furthermore, California passed legislation prescribing a transitional model for bilingual education that was, in actuality, a formula for remedial education. The most common response to this prescription was the implementation of English Language Development (ELD), California’s version of English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction. Early-exit bilingual programs were also implemented in an uneven fashion. However, two-way bilingual programs were eventually established in the district to help language majority students become bilingual. These programs would become the prototype for the many changes that the district would soon see.

The Vision and the Mission

In 1992, the SFUSD was concerned about low achievement of African American and language minority students and began to take steps to change the status quo. With assistance from the superintendent of schools, the goal became for all students, regardless of background, to reach the 50th Normal Curve Equivalent (NCE) on the California Test of Basic Skills (CTBS) by the year 2000. Although not all San Francisco students have achieved this goal, they have achieved higher reading and math scores for seven consecutive years. In addition, various strategies were employed in an attempt to break the

cycle of lower minority achievement, such as decreased class sizes and amplified high school graduation requirements in order to prepare students for college. A longer secondary school day and greater access to art, music, language, and technology were also provided for students. As a result of these tactics, the message was made explicit to the SFUSD community and educators around the state and nation that all children, particularly African American and Latino children, would achieve excellence.

In 1998, the superintendent, supported by the Board of Education, publicly opposed California's Proposition 227, stating "Parents in San Francisco schools are clamoring for more language education programs. Proposition 227 just offers an English only model. This initiative takes away local control and local successes" (San Francisco Unified School District: The Language Academy, 1999). San Francisco voters overwhelmingly refuted the referendum, but the proposition, which effectively dismantled bilingual education in the state, passed. The Board of Education then took the necessary steps to comply with both Proposition 227 and the *Lau Consent Decree*. This required the completion of parental consent forms for all 20,000 ELLs in the district, a task overseen by the Language Academy during the first weeks of the 1998-99 school year. The ultimate result has been a strengthened and coherent policy supporting both additive bilingual education and Intensive English Only programs for parents who desire a monolingual education for their children.

In 1996, the necessity to develop and improve programs for ELLs was examined, and the design for the Language Academy schools was built on existing strengths of successful schools in the district. Surveys and focus groups of parents designed to assess what students needed revealed that they wanted full competency in two languages, via more innovative and rigorous language programs. As a result, the school districts began to carve out a response to the students' needs.

Students would now be treated as linguistic and cultural resources who could benefit all stakeholders in the SFUSD community rather than as students who had a deficit that needed to be cured. In the context of globalization and the technological highway, it did not make sense to devalue and eradicate the knowledge that students introduced (Snow, Bruns, & Griffith, 1998; Crawford, 1997). Instead of replacing their home languages and cultures with American culture, the latter would be added in order to enhance the former. Thus, the kernel for English Plus germinated in San Francisco; not only ELLs, but all San Francisco students would have the opportunity to become fluent in English and at least one other language. The original design for the Language Academy "system" was based on exemplar schools with demonstration sites in different languages. For example, an exemplar site could have a performing arts focus and also teach language through a two-way bilingual model. This site would be further exemplified by Chinese and Filipino demonstration sites.

Alternately, a school might serve as a center for math and science with a Spanish language immersion program. Other schools with similar focuses would also serve as demonstration sites, in Spanish or other languages (Apodaca & Rojas, 1997).

A supplementary goal of these programs was for students and parents of different cultural backgrounds to learn from and about each other, in order to gain understanding about the cultures that surrounded them. In addition, high standards would be upheld for all students, resulting in a framework of achievement and excellence. Bilingualism would be an asset, and it would nurture students as critical thinkers adept at problem solving, lateral thinking, and cognitive flexibility. In the process, classrooms would be racially integrated

AMP 1. Programs are predicated on a research-based model that predicts positive student achievement.

The first step to ensuring program success is to examine the research evidence and ascertain which program designs are most effective at achieving the primary goal: to produce students who are fluent in English and at least one other language (Ramírez, Yuen, & Ramey, 1991; Krashen, 1996; Thomas & Collier, 1997a, 1997b). However, experience also indicates that there is no magic formula for any program; each school is a unique case requiring fine-tuning and site-specific innovation. Because each school site and student population is unique, however, it is necessary to have more than one effective framework available so that a match is made that satisfies parents, teachers, and administrators. In choosing a design, it is important to involve all segments of the learning community so that everyone understands the rationale behind it. This is especially true for bilingual education models, because of the misconception that only the non-English language is taught to students, and because of the sheer number of variations that can be made in terms of language distribution and who will teach which language. Even educators with experience in bilingual programs may be unsure of the design they are supposed to be implementing. That is why the outcomes, and critical elements to achieve those outcomes, must be made explicit for all stakeholders. Once everyone understands what the elements are and how to implement them, they can become more ardent advocates and monitors of the program. This collective perspective and language regarding the objectives for language minority children are essential for the creation of effective programs.

All Language Academy schools may identify a research-based program or choose from a group of four research-based bilingual/language learning designs. These designs form the basis and outline for the language program at each school. Each design has varying degrees of effectiveness with regard to academic success. Each one also has different specifications for staff, enrollment requirements, time allocations, and degrees of support through the targeted language(s). However, all of the programs implemented in San Francisco have a common denominator: Schools are required to teach two periods of English, in English, each day. Several factors are weighed in each school's decision to choose a particular design: desired student outcomes, parental support, district policy, and available resources are all considered. The designs from which schools select are:

- Total Immersion
- Two-Way
- Dual Language Enrichment
- Content classes taught in a language other than English plus content taught in English with ESL methods

Schools not associated with the initiative can choose dual language enrichment or intensive English. A thorough explanation of these designs, as utilized by SFUSD, is available in the 1998-99 *Language Academy Annual Report*, available online at <http://sf.bilingual.net>. Detailed explanations of the designs utilized in San Francisco are available in online publications (The Language Academy, 1999; Apodaca, 1998; Apodaca & Rojas, 1997).

AMP 2. Prerequisites and mastery criteria are clearly delineated and communicated to students and parents.

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ratification or denial. The district LPAAAC can mediate lack of agreement between the site LPAAAC and the parents. Complete training and procedures for LPAAAC review are provided for each site, and teachers are provided a stipend for this service.

Students in language programs participate in all assessments that they receive in the core program. Students who have been in a language program for less than 30 months are assessed in the primary language; students who have been in a language program for 30 or more months are assessed in the second language. Modifications allowed by rule and code are made for students whose progress has been less than optimal after 30 months of enrollment in a second-language program. No student is exempt since assessments are available in either the first or the second language. Accountability for each student is guaranteed, and the results of the assessments are communicated to the parents or guardians. The district monitors the progress of the students in both languages through the LPAAAC site.

Students are expected to gain one proficiency level per year (beginning, intermediate, advanced, transitional) prior to redesignation as fully English proficient. The district bases this expectation on the Ramírez study (San Francisco Unified School District, 1999; Ramirez et al., 1991) of the length of time most students stay in the program prior to redesignation. SFUSD students generally achieve redesignation in 4.2 to 4.8 years. To be eligible for redesignation, students must be at the 36th percentile in Reading and Math on the Stanford 9 test; they must pass the Integrated Writing Assessment (IWA) or the Language Academy writing sample test; they must maintain grades of C or better; and, as of this year, they must be at the advanced level or higher on the Language and Literacy Assessment Rubric (LALAR, see below).

The Language Academy is currently in its second year of the Language and Literacy Assessment Rubric (LALAR), which is based on performance standards tied to local, state, and national curriculum standards. The LALAR measures performance indicators in two languages (i.e., English and another language) across the four dimensions of language—listening speaking, reading, and writing—and across different levels of proficiency—beginning, intermediate, advanced, and transitional or fluent. Teachers fill in scantron bubbles beside each performance indicator when the student meets it. The LALAR is backed up by a portfolio of the student’s work, which serves as the evidence behind the scantron sheet. The LALAR, completed at the beginning and end of each academic year, then becomes part of the student’s cumulative file; it is also available on the district’s computer system. Initial feedback from teachers has been positive; they appreciate knowing what is expected of students rather than trying to guess or rely on their own experience. Parents have also been very responsive to this type of assessment. Some parents use it as a means of communication about student progress during parent/teacher conferences.

AMP 5. The curriculum is based on SFUSD core curriculum standards.

The district's core curriculum for content instruction is used to provide instruction for all students in all program designs. Curriculum is standardized throughout all programs so that it is driven by the same high standards required of the most able students in the district. Cognitively complex academic instruction in the first and second language is required of all curricula for language acquisition. All SFUSD students classified as LEP access the core curriculum in their first or second language, or in both.

The district's core standards and performance standards are the foundations for all language coursework, and the performance indicators follow developmental lines according to language-proficiency levels. It is expected, however, that all students will make progress to the proficient standard in both first and second languages. A student may start at a beginning level in Chinese and at a fully proficient level in English. The student would be expected to be at a proficient level in Chinese in 5-7 years of study in a Late Exit, Two-Way, or Immersion model. A student taking Chinese for only one period per day would, in many cases, take 10 years or more to become proficient. It is also expected that students who start at a beginning level in English become fully proficient in 5-7 years of study in those same models. Specific rubrics with indicators for the various proficiency levels are being produced for each core subject area, and appropriate textbooks and materials for each level of proficiency within each subject area are made available to the students. Language Academy programs are academic programs, and students are expected to achieve the same high standards as other students in the district.

The Language Academy has developed ELD standards in tandem with local, state, and national SFUSD standards for learning. The district's Curriculum Improvement and Professional Development Department and the Language Academy work collaboratively in a number of areas, including the development of standards for Filipino, Chinese, and Spanish curricula.

AMP 6. Each course of study has a curriculum guide containing a full course description, standards, goals, and objectives.

Programs can only be implemented with a curriculum guide that has been approved by the SFUSD Board of Education. All curriculum guides have a complete description of the course of study, goals, objectives, prerequisites for the course, activities, and pre/post evaluation; district core standards drive all curriculum. The guide also lists specific and supplementary materials required for the course. Cognitively complex academic instruction through both students' first and second language must be reflected in the curriculum guide.

The guide has to be clear in the use of current approaches to teaching the academic curriculum through the first and second languages for the purpose of promoting active discovery, and cognitively complex learning. The establishment of a standard for each course of study supports articulation from grade to grade and level to level. The guides, in combination with LALAR, insure that teachers have the information they need to plan for effective instruction that meets the goals of the program.

Curriculum guides are developed at the Language Academy office by a team consisting of master teachers, administrators, university experts, and outside consultants. The Language Academy also relies on significant teacher input and feedback in the development process so that the products will not be relegated to the highest shelf in the Ivory Tower. The goal of the Language Academy is to provide the most current, quality, and state-of-the-art guides possible to empower teachers to become effective and constructive facilitators of knowledge. It is the intent of the Language Academy that each teacher uses the guides in structuring the classroom curriculum (Darling-Hammond, 1997).

AMP 7. Each school must purchase the identified core and supplementary materials that have been identified for each course of study.

All required textbooks and materials must be adopted through the district's regular process. They are only selected for use of current approaches to teaching the academic curriculum through the first and second languages for the purpose of promoting active discovery, and cognitively complex learning. Once adopted, the schools must purchase materials for each class. Unfortunately, the state of California does not provide sufficient funds for every child to have a textbook. Materials are made available for review at the Language Academy Clearinghouse library. The Clearinghouse is in the process of creating an online catalog of all materials at the Language Academy Web site by fall 2000.

AMP 8. Every Language Academy teacher demonstrates professional knowledge of language-acquisition theory as well as competency in using research-based pedagogy. Each is skilled in the languages being taught as well as in the appropriate utilization of tools, methodologies, and techniques used for planning, assessing, and evaluating.

All students, regardless of level of proficiency, are exposed to a rich educational diet and expected to achieve high standards. The curriculum is integrated across disciplines in which language-acquisition opportunities are interwoven with content instruction. Language arts curricula emphasize the development of mature literacy. Science and mathematics curricula involve

students in thinking and working like professional scientists and mathematicians. Students are guided toward self-motivated, collaborative learning. Teachers are key players in curriculum development and instructional improvement.

Schools organize instructional time in a way that enables students to focus on learning as they delve deeply into subjects. The organization of time should facilitate the development of critical-thinking skills. One of the key concepts underlying recent educational change initiatives is “teaching for understanding.” Instead of merely acquiring information, students should be assisted in learning how to think critically about what they are learning and how to integrate new information into what they already know. Recent cognitive research indicates that children do not learn by piling new information on top of the old. Instead, they “construct” new knowledge by continually rearranging new and old information so that it makes sense to them (Lambert et al., 1995; Fern, 1994; Brooks & Brooks, 1993; Garcia, 1988).

Parents, teachers, administrators, and other staff participate in professional development that focuses on a constructive pedagogy. The weight of Language Academy resources—time, money, or personnel—is focused on this aspect of the organization. Because of a graying teacher corps and a shortage of certified teachers nationwide (Fern, 1998), the district is experiencing an influx of very young and inexperienced teachers. This is both a challenge and an opportunity for the organization. It is a challenge because of the many resources required to train so many new teachers at multiple sites; at certain schools, nearly every teacher has been teaching less than three years. Yet, it is also an opportunity to set a standard of excellence for professional development that helps mold and mentor effective educators for language learners. Administrative turnover is also a constant challenge. Once a new principal is employed, it is often necessary to improve the principal’s knowledge about the program and court support for the program, so that the principal becomes an effective instructional leader at the site.

Language Academy professional development activities not only impact all stakeholders in the SFUSD educational community, but they are *planned with the collaboration* of all stakeholders. The Language Academy’s plan for staff development is based on the *Characteristics of Effective Professional Development* of the National Partnership for Excellence and Accountability in Teaching (1999). In May 1999, the George Washington University, Institute for the Study of Learning, cited the Language Academy for having one of five outstanding professional development programs nationwide. The university specially recognized the Language Academy for providing professional development, including leadership training, to parents.

A many-pronged approach for teacher development is employed. For diverse topics such as assessment, materials adoption, and technology, cadres of teachers are grouped together to participate in ongoing professional development throughout the year. Another prong is Teachers on Special Assignment (TSAs), master teachers assigned to schools who coach teachers

in the classroom on a regular basis, and master teachers who are still in teaching assignments. They work with the TSAs to plan and conduct training on specific topics; this year they assisted in providing training on the LALAR. In addition, university consultants are employed to coach some of the principals and teacher cadres at specific school sites. Using this model the Language Academy is able to provide optimum support and collegiality for developing teachers. It also provides the opportunity to affect resistant teachers, whose observation of their colleagues' success with language learners has a significant impact.

The university researcher as coach can produce excellent results. An effective coach means an active catalyst for change at the more fortunate sites. Coaches who shared ownership for a school's program and stakeholders experienced the most success. It is important when using outside consultants to be very specific regarding expected outcomes and deliverables. The most effective coaches were not only process-oriented but also outcomes-oriented. It may be advisable to consider the proximity of the coach to the school's location; coaches stationed far from San Francisco did not enjoy the advantage of easy access to their schools. On the other hand, coaches who maintained frequent communication (e.g., email, phone, and written communication) and feedback to school staff produced the best results—teachers and administrators who responded personally and grew professionally. Using coaches was a fragile experiment because the administration reduced departmental staff by nearly 75% in order to contract these accomplished researchers. In the second year, the Language Academy limited the number of coaches and instead hired more full-time staff.

At a limited number of sites, it is the faculties who have embraced ownership for their own professional development. Fairmont Elementary School has become a teacher demonstration site, a teacher center, where district teachers can go to observe master teachers in action. The Fairmont staff development is directed by staff who have chosen a literacy focus for their learning. They meet on a weekly basis to share, reflect on their practice and teach each other, to arrange demonstration lessons, and to provide collegial support to one another. Ideally, all Language Academy schools will adopt this model for professional development so that the Language Academy can evolve into the role of facilitator and broker for the teachers' professional development needs.

A continuous challenge for the Language Academy has been the infusion of technology into professional development efforts. In 1997, the Technology Advocates program was established to bring Language Academy teachers up to technological speed. Teachers from each Language Academy School were nominated by their principals to participate in the program. Working with the Web master as facilitator, the Advocates studied various technologies—Internet, Web site development, teleconferencing, and CD-ROM production—for 30 hours after school and on Saturdays. Turnover and recidivism from year to year have necessitated ongoing teacher recruitment efforts. The scarcity of technology-savvy personnel who are also skilled staff developers is also a

recurring theme for this program. It is difficult enough to attract “techies” to the field of education in terms of lower salaries and social status; it is a rare occasion indeed to uncover a minority technology staff developer who is also a bilingual professional. It has also been difficult to recruit language minority BCLAD/CLAD teachers for the program; the more experienced teachers seem reluctant to embrace the technological challenge, while many of the newer teachers are overwhelmed with other credentialing concerns. Notwithstanding these challenges, the Advocates who have participated on an ongoing basis are quite accomplished. For example, this year several members of the cadre made a presentation about ways they are using technology to teach language at the California Association for Bilingual Education Conference.

AMP 9. Each site ensures access to co-curricular and extracurricular activities that focus on the targeted languages and their respective cultures.

This principle is reflective of the Language Academy’s philosophy that language and culture are central to a student’s identity. There is also a conscious desire to optimize opportunities for real negotiation in the targeted languages. Thus, schools are required to make language acquisition a focus of co-curricular and extracurricular activities (Cárdenas, 1995; Carter & Segura, 1979). For example, SFUSD Chinese language learners visit factories in Chinatown where the employees are Cantonese speakers; they also visit the elderly at a Chinese nursing home and converse with the residents. Buena Vista Elementary, home to a two-way program, raises money each year to send its students to Mexico. The Language Academy also sponsors the Language Olympics each year so that students have an opportunity to see their language skills valued by their teachers, parents, and communities as they present essays and oratory. At present, the Language Academy is developing a national Olympics so that San Francisco students have the opportunity to compete with their peers in other districts around the country.

AMP 10. Parents, site administrator(s), and school staff demonstrate knowledge and support of the Language Academy AMPs.

As mentioned above, the Language Academy focuses considerable professional development effort on making sure that all stakeholders understand and support the 10 AMPs. This begins by ensuring that the Language Academy staff has a full knowledge of the AMPs. Language minority families need to know what benefits are available to them through the programs so that everyone in the learning community has ownership of its success (Apodaca & Rojas, 1997; Fradd, 1992; Carter & Segura, 1970). Language Academy schools are held accountable for implementing and upholding these principles, at the risk of losing their designation. But Language Academy stakeholders continually express enthusiasm about being part of an organization with such high standards, and they constantly demand more information and services.

Transformation: Administration for Success

Leadership

When a school system is embroiled in the challenges of transformation, the top administrators need to be knowledgeable and caring instructional leaders who can be authoritative advocates of the educational programs. Effective administrators occasionally sacrifice their popularity with staff and colleagues in order to achieve goals; at times, an honest examination of the organization causes conflict among stakeholders. However, effective administrators will create opportunities for success for *all* stakeholders, from the students to the parents, to teachers and policymakers. The following example illustrates how this is accomplished.

An Honest Proposal for Access and Respect

The assistant superintendent initiated a leadership-training program for Latino parents called *Latino Parents as Leaders*. During the past two years, parents at schools throughout the district have received 45 hours of training and developed their own academic improvement projects at their sites. The parents' burgeoning awareness of their rights prompted them to generate a policy that would explicitly require schools to include a minority parent involvement component in the site's improvement plans.

The parents created schemata—with alternative scenarios—for the barriers to their involvement. Language Academy staff collaborated with the parents to produce the parents' testimony, a draft resolution, and a rationale for its adoption. The district's Latino Education Summit served as the venue for the initial presentation of the proposal entitled, *An Honest Proposal for Access and Respect*. They invited the president and vice-president of the school board to attend a special meeting with the parents. The Language Academy facilitated communications and logistics such as prepping board members with an advance copy of the proposal, arranging for translation equipment at the meeting, and helping the parents prepare to give testimony.

By the time it was presented, the Board quickly adopted the proposal. The next step was its implementation, guided by both parents and the Language Academy. In this case, students, parents, and policymakers all reap the benefits of the exercise. Some examples of the practices it calls for include conducting meetings in the language of the parents and using district personnel rather than students for interpretation. The full text of *An Honest Proposal for Access and Respect* and the resolution can be viewed at the Language Academy web site.

Shared Vision and Mission from Top to Bottom

It is important that everyone, from the superintendent to the site administrators, have a collective perspective regarding the vision and mission of the Language Academy. Both the vision and mission must be continuously developed and revisited to enhance what is working and discard what is not.

There must be a shared vision and mission that is neither all top-down nor all bottom-up; core values pervade all activities and are part of everyone's daily routine. The philosophy the superintendent and assistant superintendent share with stakeholders must be child-centered, and this core value should permeate all activities. The question posed when considering any innovation is, "How will this benefit the child? Teachers? Parents?" For example, SFUSD was the only school district in California to take a stand against state law requiring non-English-speaking students to take standardized achievement tests in English. Backed by numerous professional, civil rights, and community organizations, the case is still making its way through the courts. The superintendent should be an advocate for the groups of students that will be affected by administrative policies. This has also meant hiring teaching staff reflective of the student population. Since 1992, minority teaching staff in the district has risen from 39% to 45% (Asimov, 1999).

Providing a "world-class education" for all students necessitated certain district-wide academic innovations during the superintendent's tenure. Programs do not operate in a vacuum; thus, it is important that population-specific programs such as those for ELLs are also supported by initiatives that address the needs of the entire student body. This ensures that quality programs do not operate alone and are part of a collective organism that is moving toward the goal of excellence.

Free Exchange of Information and Ideas

Communication is a priority in the department and has been facilitated by the establishment of a clearinghouse that includes a library, a publications department, a newsletter, and an interactive Web site. Communication is formal and informal through email, meetings, symposia, the annual report, publications, letters, and memoranda. Solicitation of input from parents, teachers, administrators, and students has become part of the regular routine for planning any major implementation or project.

The Language Academy takes advantage of its stakeholders' expertise through surveys, focus groups, and committees, and there is an honest effort to respond to these voices in implementing any activities. For example, focus groups convened this year have addressed diverse topics such as clarifying needs for a grant proposal, planning the celebration of the Language Olympics, and planning for a review by a team of university researchers. Typically, the Language Academy includes parents, teachers, and site administrators from various schools in these meetings. It is during these sessions that some of the most creative and innovative ideas and strategies are generated.

An illustration of this process occurred in January 1999, when the Language Academy held a symposium on Best Practices in Two-Way Bilingual Programs. The conference was held at an elementary school where a long-established and very successful Chinese two-way program operates. Teachers, parents, and administrators were invited to attend the program. In one session, representatives from these three groups were brought together to discuss

the program with a nationally recognized university teacher. The occasion caused by this mingling of rarely combined groups—parents and administrators, in particular—proved particularly fruitful in facilitating improvement efforts. Having anticipated the importance of the symposium and its potential for serving as a teaching resource, the day’s lessons were formatted into a Web page, which was then made available to the symposium audience and all stakeholders. The availability of information through the World Wide Web ensures that a Language Academy portfolio of activities can be accessed from anywhere in the district, state, nation, and world.

Funding and Budget

California’s per-pupil expenditures are ranked among the lowest in the nation. There are no allowances made for intrastate cost of living differences, and San Francisco is among the cities with the highest cost of living in the nation (Money, 1999). Therefore, the Language Academy initiative was made possible by local monies dedicated to the bilingual departments budget, in combination with other funding, (e.g., a Title VII Bilingual Education Systemwide Improvement Grant). The bulk of the money was spent on substitute teachers, teacher and parent stipends to cover release time, and extended hours spent on professional development.

The state and local funding situation has not improved over the course of time, so it has been necessary to seek funding from outside sources. Because San Francisco is a “World-Class City,” the Language Academy is able to attract dynamic and talented professionals to the instructional and administrative staff. It is able to keep them because of the innovative nature of the organization—high achievers want to be a part of a creative, forward-thinking team that has shared values and philosophy.

There is a whole dimension of public relations that has an important impact on SFUSD stakeholders’ willingness to work for the children. The Language Academy spends modestly to make district stakeholders feel that they are appreciated for being professionals. In another instance, the Language Academy sponsored a bilingual summit in which the department presented awards to the superintendent and school board for supporting bilingual education during the challenge of Proposition 227. At this same event, new teachers were feted at a sit-down luncheon; tables were decorated with Hispanic Heritage Month gifts such as supplementary materials for the teachers to take away.

Accountability

Over the past seven years, standardized test scores in Reading and Mathematics for African American and Latino students have significantly improved and are well above scores for comparable groups in other large urban school districts. Between 1993 and 1998, African American students’ CTBS scores rose from 38.8 to 41 NCE in Reading, and from 35.4 to 39.9 NCE in Math. Initial results of the 1998-99 STAR test and Stanford 9 test illustrate a continuation of this upward trend (San Francisco Unified School District, 1999).

The Language Academy and SFUSD use a portfolio approach in evaluating program effectiveness. This allows for a more holistic and balanced collage of performance. For example, SFUSD uses norm-referenced achievement tests such as the California Test of Basic Skills (CTBS) and criterion-referenced testing, such as the Integrated Writing Assessment (IWA) to gauge program results.

Careful record keeping about teacher attendance at Language Academy training sessions also allows for an analysis of the correlation between training and student outcomes. The LALAR facilitates the analysis of how well students are achieving standard-based performance indicators, while measuring students' proficiency level in two languages. It also helps troubleshoot for students who have been in the programs for more than five years and still have not reached an advanced proficiency level. Because of the nature of the LALAR design, it also allows for analysis by teacher, school, program, targeted language, and any number of other variables incorporated in the LALAR. With the introduction of the LALAR in the district this year, the Language Academy will be able to accurately gauge the progress of ELLs in a manner that is more reflective of the ways in which students acquire language.

In order to discover the truth about SFUSD programs, both internal and external evaluations are utilized to gauge their effectiveness. Here is an understanding that the objectivity of external evaluators is useful in uncovering weaknesses. For example, an analysis of CTBS scores (1994-97) by an external evaluator revealed that Language Academy programs were achieving significant results; in fact, students who had gone through the programs and been redesignated as fully English proficient were actually outscoring native English speakers. Nonetheless, the evaluation also revealed where gains were modest and helped the administration to concentrate energies where they were most needed. The Language Academy was able to visit the various sites with the data analyses in order to help schools confront their challenges with candor and with the information they needed to move forward and upward. In one instance, the discovery that two-way programs were not well articulated between elementary and middle school led to the creation of a study group led by a consultant specializing in two-way programs. This group continues to be instrumental in constructing solutions to the problems uncovered by the independent evaluator.

Conclusions

Strong instructional leadership promoting innovation, stakeholder involvement, an insistence on staff accountability, flow of information, and quality programming based on solid research evidence are all factors that have contributed to the success of San Francisco Unified School District's initiatives. Other factors include a shared vision and mission from top to bottom and a horizontal organization to focus on continuous improvement.

Staff development continues to be the keystone of all progress and the greatest challenge to departmental resources, and the future lies in creating more schools where teachers are the catalysts for their own learning. Funding is a perpetual challenge that requires creativity in the leveraging of fiscal and human resources, and promises to be an issue in the next decade. A variety of measurement instruments, as well as internal and external evaluations, assist in determining where efforts need to be refocused. The next step in the movement from compliance to excellence is a focus on prevention through pre-Kindergarten bilingual programs and other effective interventions such as HIPPPY.

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