Project Smart Team Action Report Form

Using Common Core Learning Standards & Data to Improve Student Achievement

2012 - 2013

Teacher(s)/School: Fowler High School

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Teacher Participant Names: Dawn Kivlehan, Kendal Salehi, Adel Bouallagui, Chelsey MacDougall, Michaela Clark

Project or Team Name: Fowler High School Project Smart

Please answer the following questions:

**Action:** Describe your CCLS project. Which CCLS standards will you target?

**Description:** Our project involves professional development for the ESL teachers who teach English as second language to urban high school students. Through our project, these teachers have a chance to reflect on their own and others’ ESL teaching practice, and discover, invent, discuss and plan for specific ways to improve their own teaching practice.

Specifically, in our project, we ask our closely-monitored undergraduates to provide an hour of instruction (in the form of large group, small group or individual tutoring, depending) to Fowler High School ESL students. After that hour of instruction, the teachers, undergraduates and professors all reflect upon the teaching and learning they just experienced. We all receive teachers’ frank written feedback, and discussions ensue. Our discussions are designed to be a “win-win”—meaning that everyone learns something from the discussions.

**CCLS standards we target:** The ESL teachers are charged with the related and difficult tasks of using English as both an object and a medium of instruction. In other words, students must learn the English language itself (thus, English is an **object** of instruction). And they must learn their content through English (thus, English is a **medium** of instruction through which students learn, say, US History). Because the function of English in Fowler High School is so broad ranging, ESL teachers are challenged to address large parts of the CCLS over the course of the year’s project.

It is no secret that the CCLS, as written, assume native English-speaking students, and were not written for our population. Nevertheless, the anchor standards that our project targets in the greatest depth are:

- Reading anchor standards 1 through 6 (out of 11),
- Writing anchor standards 1 through 3 (out of 11),
- Speaking and Listening anchor standards are 1, 4 and 5 (out of 11), and
- Language anchor standards 1 through 6 (out of 6)

**Rationale:** Fully state your rationale for the project. Why is this work important?

Fowler High School is an urban school with a very large population of English language learners. The six teachers are spread very thin. Because the Fowler High School students who are in our program have an incomplete knowledge of English and because this keeps them from succeeding on tests, the teachers...
feel a need for and appreciate our involvement. The teachers and the professors craft an experience that we feel will be a “win-win,” meaning that all of us will come away having learned something new about teaching. We provide undergraduates who offer small group teaching/learning or one-to-one tutoring in content areas that the teachers have identified as the problem areas we will target this year: US History and Global Studies. We all share new resources, new teaching ideas, new ideas for more inclusive and effective teaching practices.

**Responsibilities/Timeline:** Identify a series of action steps you will take to complete your project. Next to each step, identify person(s) responsible for carrying out that task. For each step also identify your timeline (during what month(s) you plan to complete each step).

We meet weekly (Wednesdays from 2:30-4:30). Every participant is expected to be there for the entirety of this time. Our work occurs during this time, and we supplement our work as necessary with meetings with the Fowler High School teachers.

**Evaluation:** What data will you collect that shows the impact of your project on student achievement of CCLS? How will you document student learning? Teacher learning?

Student learning is documented by regents test scores and by oral and occasionally written feedback given as we work with them over the course of the experience.

Teacher learning is documented by their written feedback, conversation during our weekly meetings and our supplemental meetings.

**Resources:** What resources will you need for this project? What costs, if any, will be incurred? What are possible sources of funding for needed resources?

**Analysis of Data on Teacher Learning:** We examined our reflections on the 6 shifts, and CCLS and found the following: (Support each claim with examples/evidence)

We cannot answer this question in precisely the same way as other groups might. This is where we are. ESL teachers in general have always endeavored to teach deep literacy skills so that their ESL students can succeed in all content areas. The FHS teachers are no exception. The challenge, of course, is that English language learners need to have learned a certain amount of the English language (the skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking fluently in English) in order to do this. Without the necessary English language skills, access to the Common Core can be nothing but limited. The professional organization for TESOL is monitoring the ongoing work in the US to come up with new assessments for ESL students. These should be by operational by 2015-2016. Our claims can be double-checked by readers of this report here [http://newsmanager.commpartners.com/tesolc/issues/2012-12-15/3.html](http://newsmanager.commpartners.com/tesolc/issues/2012-12-15/3.html) and here [http://www.tesol.org/docs/advocacy/overview-of-common-core-state-standards-initiatives—for-ells-a-tesol-issue-brief-march-2013.pdf?sfvrsn=4](http://www.tesol.org/docs/advocacy/overview-of-common-core-state-standards-initiatives—for-ells-a-tesol-issue-brief-march-2013.pdf?sfvrsn=4).

For the present, we know we need to persist with the work we do to help our students to access the Common Core. We need to a) build knowledge through content-rich nonfiction, b) promote reading, writing and speaking grounded in evidence from both literary and informational texts and c) ensure regular practice with complex text and its academic language. (Adapted by Diane Staehr-Fenner from Student Achievement Partners. (2012). Description of Common Core shifts.)

To do this, we used texts and supplementary materials in US History and Global. Where it was most helpful we emphasized:

i) text-to-self and text-to-group connections (for example, in lessons about voting, democracy, types of governments, geography and landforms),
ii) extensive work with vocabulary (for example, helping students understand the differences between homophones like ‘or’ versus ‘ore’, making use of new technology on iPads that students and FHS teachers found intriguing mostly for vocabulary but some content),

iii) frank conversations about best practices in teaching (when to directly ask whether the students know something and expect an accurate answer versus when to find out in indirect ways, when to step in and take charge versus when to let the students consider their contributions for longer times, how long should wait time be and under what conditions should wait time be used, when to use visual teaching strategies, becoming conscious of speed of speech, how to flag important words and language structures while still staying organized in the lesson, good use of questioning to prompt students toward answers)

iv) emphasis on using the practices in (iii) to reduce very high levels of student stress and anxiety

v) teachers continued to notice and value the effect of instruction at the college, particularly about writing, that really helped the pre-teachers help the students.

vi) Conversations on figuring out exactly how to teach language through content. The SIOP methodology is wonderful for content teachers, but it alone is not enough for ESL students to learn English. There is still something more to be taught and ESL teachers are the ones with the knowledge and background to be able to do it. Although it seems clear that the two go hand-in-hand (there is no content if there is no English, and if English is being used there is always some content), seeking the right balance between these two things is hard. The high level of content expected at the high school does present a challenge that teachers grappled with and discussed throughout the year.

vii) There are always aspects of cultural awareness to be learned since the canonical American expectations are not universal

viii) School geography: being able to hear each other, ways around that in large rooms, reducing confusion, taking charge and demanding excellence, staying prepared.

ix) Teachers acknowledged how much they had learned since their earliest days of teaching.

### Analysis of Data on Student Learning:

1. **Regents:** We examined regents score on Global - taken after Global 2. The students in our program had previously failed Global. Of the 53 FHS students we worked with, 29 passed, some with flying colors. 20 still have not passed. 3 did not take the exam.

2. **Oral and occasionally written feedback:** We examined feedback (oral and some written) we received throughout the year. We found that students and teachers are very appreciative of having so many extra hands; this was evident. We found that we were perceived able to be able to help more easily in US History than in Global Studies. Teachers explained that this area requires a great deal of preparation on the part of the ESL teacher. Most students who attended say they benefited from extra attention, from teachers’ scaffolding of a) how to write the essays for the regents, b) how the tests are structured and what the tests are asking.