

## Burnett posts gains with English language development classes

by Shannon Barry, Milpitas Post

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Other schools in Milpitas Unified School District will follow in the footsteps of William Burnett Elementary School, which continues to foster a solid foundation for its English language learners.

To reach this large subgroup, which makes up 49 percent of the school's population, all students take English language development classes for 30 minutes Monday through Thursday. There are different classes, ranging from beginning/early intermediate to advanced and fluent English proficient. The grouping is determined by a student's score on a placement test.

The classes are in their third year at Burnett. Michelle Dimas, the school district's assistant superintendent of educational services, expects it will be implemented at Randall, Rose and Weller elementary schools in 2012. Teachers are training for it at each of those sites.

The program was put in place at Burnett after staff analyzed test scores over several years that revealed many of the English learners got stuck at the intermediate level.

"We came to realize that explicit instruction in how to use language must be provided if we are to move them forward in English language acquisition and academic vocabulary," Principal Catherine Waslif said.

By working closely with Crista Koch, a school district teacher on special assignment in English language development, staff learned of company E.L. Achieve and its program Systematic ELD.

The instruction provides a framework addressing accurate and fluent

language use; ease of comprehension (listening and reading) and production (speaking and writing); accuracy (including syntax, morphology, phonology and vocabulary) in both spoken and written language; and a facility of language use for a wide range of purposes. It does not replace literacy or other content instruction.

"It's intense and it's focused," said Olivia Contreras, who teaches Burnett's early advanced/advanced class. She is also a designee who has monitored English language learners' progress for the last five years.

"Our numbers are astounding and they keep growing," Contreras said.

In 2006, the growth Academic Performance Index for English learners was 799. The 2011 test scores for the same group revealed an increase of 74 points to 873.

"...the purpose of systematic ELD instruction is really oral language and having them carry the oral language into writing and speaking and listening," said Breanne Romano, who teaches Burnett's intermediate class. She was selected to help with the launching and coordinating of English language development throughout the district.

During a recent classroom observation, Romano administered a test to her students about polite interactions on the playground.

"This is not a spelling test," she said to the students. "This is a language test. ... You have to think about

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the conversations that you've had."

The test is one of few they typically do in the class.

"One of the things that I like about ELD is it has these cooperative structures that allow students to engage in conversation in a meaningful yet low judgment way," Romano said.

In Contreras' class, students are asked to use the stand up, hand up, pair up system to find a partner. From there all pairs simultaneously take turns asking and answering one another's questions that are projected on a screen. This allows the teachers to see their lessons in action as they walk around the classroom.

"So the kids are using everyday language with correct bricks and mortar, or grammar structure, but doing it in a way that is meaningful to them," Romano said. "They don't feel like the teacher is judging them."

Fourth-graders Kenia Montes De Oca, a bi-lingual student who knows Spanish, and JT Kliatchko, a bi-lingual student who speaks a Filipino dialect, said they enjoy these exercises not only because it is good practice, but also it is nice to get to know new people in their class.

Dimas is pleased with the progress English language development has made at Burnett and is looking forward to keeping track of it once it begins at three other sites next year.

"Any time when you're working with a school that is making ongoing progress, there are pieces to the puzzle," she said. "This is one more piece to the puzzle to make sure students are achieving."

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