



Learning Upgrade helps break down language barriers in a multi-lingual district



Oakland, CA is one of the most ethnically diverse areas in California. About 29 languages are spoken in their public schools, and forty-six percent of their students are English Language Learners (ELL). The wide variance in students' skills has made differentiated instruction especially challenging for Manzanita Community School, but Learning Upgrade has proven to be an effective solution.

Students at Manzanita are at all different academic levels. Some haven't been to school before, while others are brilliant in Arabic, but struggle in English. With one teacher for 28 students, providing personalized instruction has been difficult.



350 Students

Oakland Unified School District

41% Latino

33% African American

15% Asian

8% Multi-Ethnic

46% speak English as a second language

2014/15 Lexile Growth at Manzanita Community School

The Lexile Framework for Reading is a research-based measure of reading skills from kindergarten through college readiness. Students, including ELL students, in every grade at Manzanita gained significantly this year.

Grade	ELL Students	All Students
Second	96	141
Third	93	111
Fourth	81	97
Fifth	105	90
School Wide	94	110

90% of students school-wide improved



Individualized Content: meeting each student's needs, wherever they are

Learning Upgrade provides differentiated instruction through engaging content that includes song, videos, and exciting games. The curriculum is fully aligned with the Common Core State Standards, and allows students to practice over and over until they grasp each concept. Students are awarded bronze certificates to commemorate completing a program, and gold certificates when they achieve 95% mastery in each concept.

Most classes at Manzanita use Learning Upgrade once or twice a week for 30-45 minutes. The combination of sound and pictures, says computer teacher Tamara Sturak, lets non-English-speaking students pick up English more quickly.

ELL students at the school made significant gains in reading on the Lexile Framework for Reading based on pre- and post-testing. One second grade ELL student worked 22.2 hours to earn her Gold certificate and gained 308 Lexile points. This ranked as the second highest growth in her class among ALL students, not just ELL students. A fourth grade ELL student went from 0 to 219 after completing English Upgrade in nine hours. And, eight of our third grade ELL students who completed a Learning Upgrade reading course gained an average of 167 Lexile points.

Foster and Reinvigorate Students' Interest in Learning

Tamara has been using Learning Upgrade for eight years. She wasn't looking for a teaching aid at the time. She ran an after school program, where she noticed many students who wrestled with their homework. "The students struggled with these horrifyingly boring worksheets, which as you can imagine was completely turning them off of school." She thought, "We needed to engage these kids in a way that made them excited to learn."

Tamara recalls watching one ELL first grader from Latin America struggle with her homework. "I went to her teacher and said, 'Sarah struggles with her worksheets. Could we allow her to use Learning Upgrade as an alternate homework assignment?'" The teacher agreed to let the girl try the program, and soon Sarah was engaged in her own learning.

Encouraged, Tamara went to the principal and volunteered to train the teachers herself to use Learning Upgrade. "Money is really tight," she explained, "so any program we use has to be really good." Today teachers, parents, students, and the principal are very enthusiastic about the program. That first teacher has become one of its biggest supporters. All of the students at Manzanita Community School now engage with Learning Upgrade.

Individualized Practice Engages Children in English

Estefana Ramos teaches a bilingual 2nd grade class to native Spanish speakers, meaning her instruction is mostly in Spanish. This year she tried Reading Upgrade once a week for 45 minutes. Soon her more advanced students were able to read up to a C-level in English without having received English instruction.

When her students are engaged in Learning Upgrade, Estefana is free to offer them 1-on-1 support. If a student grows frustrated with English, she has that student switch to math for a while. They build back their confidence working with numbers and pictures, and when they switch back they have some more experience with the vocabulary.



“I use it to improve my math lessons. The students loved that they could score points and track progress.”

~ Estefana Ramos, Second Grade Teacher

Learning Upgrade is a Responsive Partner in Teaching

First grade teacher Jennifer Kim is enthusiastic as well. She has played through the entire Math Upgrade program on her own to get a better sense of the pacing and format. Jennifer recalled, “Learning Upgrade feels like a partner. I once had a question the computer teacher wasn’t able to answer, but she said she would call Learning Upgrade and ask. I said, ‘Won’t that take forever?’ She answered, ‘Just watch,’ and dialed. A real person picked up the phone and helped us immediately.”

She loves that the program offers individualized practice specific to each student’s ability level. Jennifer explained, “The students are using multiple intelligences, problem solving, and higher level thinking skills. It’s been a great supplement.”

ELL students at Manzanita have seen huge improvements by talking and singing along with Learning Upgrade. Lots of colorful pictures make it easy to follow the Math and Reading programs. For students who are learning English while they learn to read, it is a rare thing to be so engaged. Teachers at Manzanita Community School have harnessed the power of Learning Upgrade so their English Learners can achieve breakthrough growth.