

INTEGRATING BEST-PRACTICES IN EARLY CHILDHOOD TO ACHIEVE LONG-TERM SUCCESS

In 2018, the Paskenta Band of Nomlaki Indians -Corning Promise co-developed with the Tehama County Department of Education (TCDE) the Early Language and Literacy Development Initiative. The initiative is an integrated, scientifically based instructional program that focuses on improving language and early reading skills of children in public and private preschools in Corning. The initiative has three major components: 1) ongoing professional development including in-classroom coaching for preschool educators; 2) scientific-based instruction and curricula focused on language and early reading skill development; and 3) programming designed to increase parental involvement.

High-quality teachers are key to successful preschool programs. The initiative is focused on providing direct support to early childhood educators. Regular professional development activities are facilitated by experts in early language and literacy development. Trained coaches work side-by-side with teachers in their classrooms to ensure the implementation of scientifically based instructional approaches and curricula.

Regular parenting programs include parent training and home literacy programming. Training sessions empower parents to engage in their roles as their child's first and most important teacher. Parents are taught strategies on how to promote language and early reading in their homes. Additionally, the initiative supports parent group events. For example, well-known author and entertainer, Eric Litwin, the original author of 'Pete the Cat', and Jose Luis Orozco, bilingual children's author and performer, came to Corning to promote reading. Children, young and old, from far and wide, came to the local renovated Rodgers Theater to laugh, sing, share, and dance in the small rural community.

The initiative regularly collects data to monitor student

learning and to determine the extent to which program goals are achieved. Student data are collected and analyzed and shared with classroom educators. Teresa Manning, the initiative's coordinator, explains the process, *"At the end of each of the three assessment periods, we come together as a team to compile the data, share the results, and look at it from a growth perspective..."*.



Another valuable assessment is the Early Language and Literacy Classroom Observation (ELLCO), an observational measure used to assess classroom environments and instructional programming. The data from the ELLCO are used to drive decisions about which literacy materials to purchase with the goal that each classroom will become a "Center of Excellence". Kayla Diehl, the Preschool Director at Sunshine Preschools, describes how the funds were used at her preschool, *"... we were able to use the funds to set up a writing center. The children use the tools at the writing center to help build literacy skills"*.

Implementation of this initiative is only eight months old, but data show significant increases in English oral language and early reading skill development.

Student growth can be attributed to the simultaneous implementation of all three of the initiative's components. The accomplishments of teachers and students do not go unacknowledged, Manning adds, *"We celebrate growth and share improvement strategies."*

"At the heart of the initiative are the children; they are the reason the Tribe is investing in proven strategies that help set children up for a lifetime of success," commented Dawna Holiday-Shchedrov, Director of Corning Promise. Manning sums up the initiative's primary goal, *"We want to ensure that we are building something for the long haul. Our promise to Corning is to sustain high-quality educational programs for all young children in our community – today, tomorrow, and always."*