

Marshall Street

Collectively Improving the School Experience and Learning Outcomes of Our English Learners

Improvement Science + Targeted Universalism at Summit Public Schools

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Summit Public Schools

Improvement at Summit

Summit Public Schools is a leading charter management organization serving diverse communities across the San Francisco Bay Area and Washington state. Summit operates ten schools enrolling approximately 3,000 students. The organization launched over a decade ago with a deeply held belief that all children deserve a high-quality public education. Its mission is to ensure that every student has the opportunity to not only attend, but succeed in, a four-year college or university. Summit's schools consistently rank among the best in California and the nation, and its graduates are completing college at double the national average. At Summit, 99% of graduating seniors are accepted into at least one four-year college.

In 2015, Summit launched a school partnership program called the Summit Learning Program. Schools joining the program receive in-person summer training, ongoing mentor support, and the Summit Learning Platform--all for free. The Platform comes pre-loaded with teacher-developed and expert-curated projects, playlists of learning resources that students can navigate to support their learning, and mentoring tools to support students' development of Habits of Success. As of June of 2017, 132 diverse schools (over 70% are district public schools) in 27 states are in the Summit Learning Program, and each school is committed to project-based learning, student agency through competency-based progressions of content knowledge, and forming deep mentoring relationships with students and their families to support the social-emotional skills, academic mindsets, and self-directed learning behaviors that will propel students to success beyond their doors.

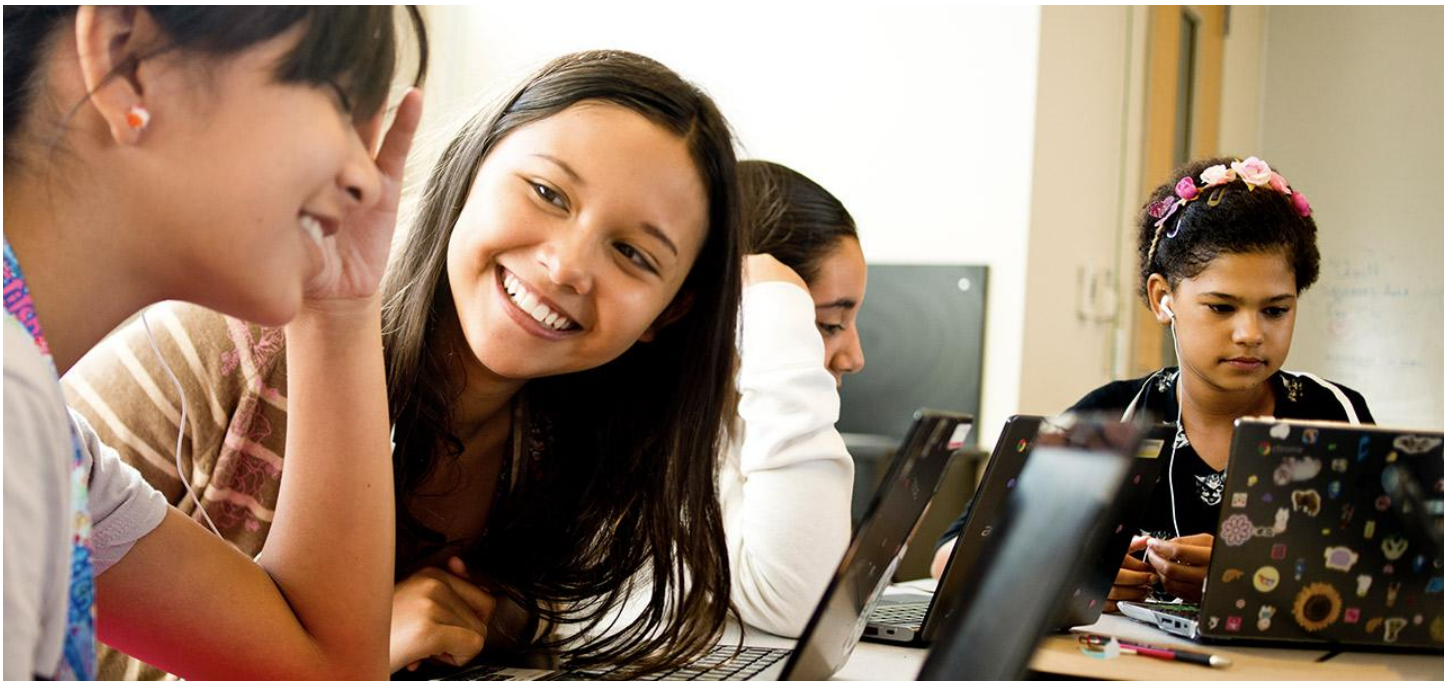
Summit Learning

Summit Learning is a research-based approach to teaching and learning adopted by hundreds of schools across the United States as part of the Summit Learning Program. The model incorporates project based learning, student agency, and mentorship to ensure that all students have a sense of belonging. The Science of Summit report (2018) provides detailed information about the model.

In March of 2016, the Summit Academics Team did a review of all available student learning data in order to identify the strengths and weaknesses of our system, to identify “positive deviants” from whom we could learn, and to propose priorities for the 2016-17 school year with our school leaders. We had spent a couple of years with Carnegie’s Student Agency Improvement Community, and in those years we engaged teams of teachers to develop theories of action, known as “driver diagrams,” and to try changes in their classrooms through a rapid testing cycle known as Plan-Do-Study-Act, or PDSAs.

Focusing on English Learners

In the course of our data review, we found that the one student group who was not consistently on trajectory for college readiness at Summit were our English learners. As a team, we believed that we had a significant challenge before us, and that we needed to work together across the organization to better support our English learners. We also believed that the challenge before us was not a simple problem of knowledge - a challenge we could overcome simply by implementing a new program or better understanding a research-based theory.



What the available data showed:

- In early 2016, across our network of nine schools, English learners comprised 12% of our student population.

- English learners at Summit were a heterogeneous group--reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills varied significantly, as did socio-economic factors and time in the United States. The majority of our English learners were conversationally fluent in Spanish.

- As a group, Summit's English learners entered our schools significantly behind grade level, and with lower foundational skills (as demonstrated on external and internal measures) than our non-ELs. Evidence of the achievement gap was clear upon beginning in grade 6, 7, or 9 with us.

- Summit's English learners were, on average, making advances in skill development and content knowledge acquisition, but not rapidly enough to be on trajectory for college readiness by the end of senior year. They were the only subgroup for whom this trend was true at Summit.

- On surveys of school and classroom culture (administered by YouthTruth), English learners were typically as favorable, if not more favorable, than non-ELs. They believed that school was relevant, safe, supportive, and engaging at higher percentages than their peers.

On surveys of mindset (growth mindset, self-efficacy, academic belonging, and value), we saw significant negative differences between EL and non-EL students (10-20% deviations). Particularly on survey items of growth mindset and academic belonging, Summit's English learners were likely to indicate greater fixed mindset and less academic belonging than their peers.

Organizing for Collective Improvement

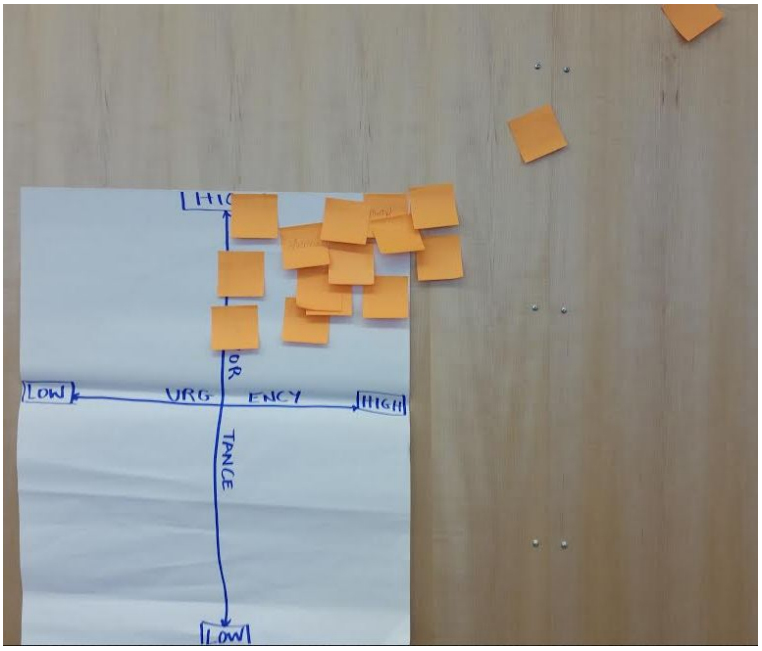
Given these results, we knew we had work to do to address academic belonging. We worked with school leaders and improvement experts at Carnegie to reframe our goal from "All Summit students are on trajectory towards college readiness by June 2017" to "The performance gap between Summit English learners and non-English learners is halved between June 2016 and June 2017, without any lowered performance of non-English learners." This change was made due to data collection and analysis constraints surrounding the notion of "trajectory," and in order to focus our efforts explicitly in support of English learners.

Urgency & Importance

We brought a data packet, a drafted aim, and some guiding questions to our instructional leadership team in June, 2016 to receive consensus, and to form a guiding leadership coalition comprised of individuals across teams (Academics/R&D Team, Schools Team, Data Analytics Team, teacher-leaders) to create a driver diagram, a communication and engagement plan, and an infrastructure for testing improvements. At the end of this meeting, we asked everyone in the room to indicate their belief as to the importance and urgency of the need to work together to support our English learners by placing a post-it on the the 2x2 in the photo. From this activity, we had a common understanding of a problem, a common belief in an aim, a common--and public--sense of urgency, and a guiding coalition of leaders across teams, sites, and roles in the organization.

Targeted Universalism

The approach we took was one of Targeted Universalism, developed by john a. powell. By focusing our efforts of improvement on a student group positioned furthest from opportunity, we targeted interventions and resources at English Learners. However, in the process of better serving our English Learners, we hypothesized that all students would benefit from universally effective instructional practices.



Each post-it note has the name of a Summit principal. The principals placed their notes on a 2x2 diagram indicating the level of urgency and the level of importance that they ascribed to the targeted efforts to improve the learning experience and outcomes of Summit's English Learners. This strategy offered a collective visual to return to across months of change management.

Theory of Action

In the summer of 2016, the guiding coalition, led by Kyle Moyer, a member of the Academics/R&D Team, developed an initial driver diagram to illustrate our theory of action:

AIM		Primary Drivers		Secondary Drivers		Potential Change Ideas
AIM: 100% of EL students are on trajectory toward college readiness/ success, by June 2017	<----------	Mentoring / Interventions	<----------	Parent Communication, Support, and Engagement		*PLP Family Meeting looks different for EL students; Intervention meeting w/S with entire team (early October) if Off-Track*
			<----------	Awareness of ELs levels, needs, goals, and growth		**Data must be built into systems, RT dashboard - teacher and student level**; constant visible cues; Look at ELL sub-levels (1-5 within ELL) and differentiate interventions within ELL
			<----------	Extra resources		
			<----------	Language-specific resources		Targeted interventions by population and purpose
	<----------	Instructional practices	<----------	Instructional coaching/PD		**Develop training for specific practices (academic language, etc.); Use a "core text" during ExPD and across sites.**
			<----------	Feedback approaches/frequency		Increase language production opportunities; Targeted language feedback
			<----------	Adult mindsets (towards ELs) - belief in their ability to improve		Hiring EL specialists;
			<----------	Awareness of ELs levels, needs, goals, and growth		Include Expeditions Teachers in EL support
	<----------	Mindsets & Belonging	<----------	Belonging*		Shared community texts;
			<----------	Community Time		**Friday breakouts for ELs**
			<----------	Growth Mindset		**Train tutors on SDAIE / EL; PLT Success course; scripting PLT moves**
			<----------	Career and Interests		**Identify successful EL alumni - make connections with current students ("career mentor")**
	<----------	Learning Resources and Strategies	<----------	Interaction with Resources		ELL audit of curriculum
			<----------	Content Assessment and Playlist Accessibility		**Habits of Success curriculum in PLT and 9th grade**
			<----------	PLT Success class		Differentiation of reading levels in ZPD
			<----------	Culturally relevant curricula		Resources/vehicle (tech vs. paper; text level, etc.)
			<----------	PLP		PLP Shows growth in data displays

Drafted theory of action to create alignment amongst a broad group of stakeholders.

In case you haven't seen a driver diagram before, the idea is to create a series of nested hypotheses. In other words, if you read a driver diagram from left to right, then you'll start with an Aim, and the next column of boxes tell you **how** we'll arrive at the aim. So, in our case, we believed that our primary drivers impacting the success of English learners at Summit were:

1. Improving our mentoring and student support interventions
2. Improving our classroom instructional practices
3. Focusing on cultivating positive academic mindsets--particularly academic belonging
4. Improving our learning resources and strategies (primarily curricula, assessments, and online delivery mechanisms)

Following further right, you can see our secondary drivers, which tell you what we were going to focus on to positively impact our primary driver (eg, we hypothesized that consistently improved parent communication and engagement would improve our mentoring program, which would positively influence the success of our English learners).

If you read the driver diagram from right to left, you understand **why** we were making particular changes within our system.

What you don't necessarily see from this admittedly ugly visual is the collaborative effort and data collection that went into the development of this initial theory of action. You also don't see the evolution of the theory, the myriad tests that were conducted to support our English learners, or the rigorous data collection and analysis that we used to see whether the changes we made to our system resulted in improvements.

Improvement Science in Education

We were fortunate to be a part of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching's Student Agency Improvement Community. Carnegie has taken the improvement practices developed and tested in healthcare by the Institute for Healthcare Improvement and adapted them for use in public education. While standardized outcome measures remain elusive in education, improvement science offers a tangible set of practices for making progress for students.

Improved Outcomes for Summit Students

You also can't see the engagement of our school communities. Five teachers applied for, and were offered, 25% of their salaries to be quarter-time teachers on special assignment. They remained full-time employees, but 25% of their time was given to creating and testing interventions with their students, collecting data, and working with this small team of testers to analyze the data and spread changes that appeared to be improvements within and across Summit schools. If you were an EL student in one of these teachers' classrooms this year, you would have experienced incredible growth--as would your non-EL peers.

More importantly, all students benefited, not just those in the classrooms of partial-released teachers. **Based on data from April 2017, the performance gap between English learners and non-English learners at Summit has decreased by 50%, while non-EL performance has increased this year, as well.** In other words, with a concerted organization-wide effort over the course of less than one school year, we have significantly improved the outcomes for our English learners, with no indications of negative effects.

Mindsets

At the same time we were driving towards these improved outcomes for our English learners, we were working to support the academic mindsets of all students--and particularly of our English learners--since the evidence of academic belonging and growth mindset discrepancies were part of the initial improvement effort. Our improvement efforts, along with countless other factors, led to increases in English learners' growth mindset and academic belonging.

The Achievement Gap as an Outcome Measure

There are real concerns using the "closing of an achievement gap" between student groups as an outcome measure. For one, a gap can be closed by employing the Bergeron Effect: lowering achievement of high performers while maintaining achievement for others. Equally worrisome is norming against student groups instead of against performance standards. We never want to assume that one group is "normal" and another group's success is defined only in relation to others.

For instance, to the statement, “You have a certain amount of intelligence, and you can’t really do much to change it” (a positive response coded as a proxy for growth mindset), English learners had a 23% increase in positive responses between fall and spring 2017, additionally narrowing the gap between their responses and those of their non-EL peers. The same trend held true for the statement, “When I have to work hard at my school work, it makes me feel like I'm not very smart,” to which English learners increased positive responses by 16% between fall 2016 and spring 2017. On items of academic belonging, our English learners also demonstrated gains from fall to spring, although more modest, and began to close the gap between ELs and non-ELs, particularly on items such as “When you think about school in general, how often, if ever, do you wonder: "Maybe I don't belong here?” and “The adults at my school care about me.”

Interestingly, while we saw significant improvement of our English learners’ growth mindset and academic belonging, those improvements appear to have possibly come at the expense of students’ perceived value of school. To statements such as, “The main reason why I learn in school is so I can make a difference for other people one day,” and “What I learn in school will help me in real life when I'm done with school,” English learners trended downward. This concerning trend (just as the hopeful trend in academic belonging and growth mindset) require further analysis so that we can ensure that academic improvements and mindset interventions don’t lead to “just doing school.”

What’s Next

In the first months of 2017, we’ve also been engaging our Summit Learning Program (SLP) partners to better understand what’s working beyond the ten schools we operate. Our 132 SLP partner schools are in 27 states and some have very different student demographics than we have at Summit (eg, over 70% of our partner schools are district public schools, not charters).

Scaling Improvements

Problems of scale are some of the most challenging to overcome. Largely, change management is the work of spreading effective practices and programs. To this end, we try to be clear about the changes to spread, and the methods for spreading. Typically, the infrastructure for change includes:

1. Data products
2. Curriculum products
3. Professional Development
4. Coaching support
5. Blanket and target communications by leadership

We conducted a **"positive deviants analysis"** in which we looked at teacher performance across the ten Summit schools and identified teachers whose students were most successful, and for whom the gap between the performance of English learners and non-English learners was the narrowest. We then went and interviewed these teachers, asked for their materials, and built them into a "change package," or set of resources that anyone can use to better support English learners. These twenty teachers--our "positive deviants"--were happy to talk with us because we approached them in the spirit of learning. After collecting resources and wisdom from these excellent teachers, we built a first draft of the change package (available here) and then built professional development sessions for our Summit Learning Program partners. We delivered these sessions during regional convenings in the first quarter of 2017, and then collected further best practices from the teachers in attendance. We've since strengthened our change package to include the strategies of more excellent teachers, in other Summit Learning contexts around the country.

We remain committed to this type of practitioner-led, data-informed research and development. This is research that requires uncomfortable honesty about the system of education we've created, and about the roles we play within it. The work is accelerated by a robust data system, trained practitioners, and time to do the work. We dedicated approximately 2 FTEs to our continuous improvement efforts this year, and the English learner initiative was, by far, the most significant. This type of research also requires an attendance to these six core principles of improvement science, a commitment at all levels of the system, and a desire to embed learning and improvement in natural channels, as opposed to writing white papers filled with abstract findings. For us at Summit, the primary ways in which we embed our improvements are:

1. The Summit Learning Platform, which we are developing with engineers and designers at the Chan-Zuckerberg Initiative. This platform is free and available for anyone to use at www.summitlearning.org

2 Our **curricula and assessments**--including mentoring curricula and supports to encourage the development of habits of success, culture, and community--which are also free and publicly available in the Summit Learning platform. Note: some of the mentoring curricula are not yet available in the platform as we continue to develop our mentoring programs.

3 **Professional development, training, and onboarding programs** for educators. These are also free for Summit Learning Program partner schools, and we're working to build more and more of our training resources into the platform so that more people have on-demand access to them.

4 **Data products**. In the case of English learners, we want to make sure that educators have access to information that is actionable so that all students are supported and educators are able to target their efforts in the places that are most effective and research-based. This actionable information must include information not only about what students are learning, but *how* they're learning, and it must support educators so that they can focus their work with students on what matters most--cognitive, content, or social-emotional. Data dashboards are available for free to Summit Learning Partner schools in the platform, and we supplement those dashboards whenever it's possible and helpful for educators with more focused reports and dashboards.

5 **Communications**. We do publish our findings in quarterly "Research Roundups" to all of our partner schools, and we try to make these findings as helpful to teachers and administrators as possible.

Marshall Street Initiatives

In 2019, the Summit Learning Program "spun out" of Summit Public Schools to become its own nonprofit organization. At Summit, we took the opportunity to focus even greater attention on our schools and the field-building programs that we have developed to support schools, teachers, principals, and parents. Marshall Street Initiatives conducts continuous improvement work, along with other support programs. Find out more at www.marshall.org.

After we have completed the 2016-17 school year, we will analyze all the available data about our progress this year and report what we've accomplished and what we've learned. We've already developed case studies, as well as a data-heavy internal slide deck (83 slides and counting…) summarizing our findings and suggestions for next steps. What's clear is that we still have a lot of work to do to support all students, and that the way forward is to engage educators at all levels of the system to take a clear-eyed look at what's working, for whom, in what contexts--and then to develop a theory of action in which we're able to collectively improve the experience and outcomes for our students. We also must attend not only to students' academic achievement and progress, but the habits of success such as mindsets, self-directed learning behaviors, sense of purpose, and social-emotional learning that drive positive behaviors. By adopting a comprehensive process of continual improvement, we hope to model the type of learning that we aim to teach our students.

Update

This report was published for Aspen's National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development. The work of that commission has now concluded, and we are proud to have informed the ambitious initiative of better serving America's young people. Since 2017, we have indeed continued our improvement work, and have expanded the work to target interventions and programs for Students with Disabilities. For more information, look for a forthcoming report at www.marshall.org.

Authorship & Acknowledgments

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