

Elementary Students Thrive in ASL/English Bilingual Classrooms
<http://www.csd.f.k12.ca.us/elem/results.html>



ASL + English = SUCCESS: SUCCESS in understanding the world around us, **SUCCESS** in our relationships with others and **SUCCESS** in academics. Students are successful at CSD because we embrace an ASL/English bilingual approach in the education of Deaf children. ASL, our students' first language, builds the brain power necessary for success. Furthermore, a bilingual approach is supported by research that shows a consistent positive relationship between ASL proficiency and English literacy (Cummins, 2006).

The Elementary teachers are currently in their third year of designing and implementing an ASL/English bilingual language arts program. The Elementary ASL Language Arts Curriculum helps students to gain linguistic knowledge of their primary language, ASL, so they can become fluent in their ability to develop higher level thinking skills, which grow out of understanding and communicating with others. ASL builds the necessary cognitive foundation upon which English skills for reading and writing can be acquired. By linking together the Elementary ASL Language Arts Curriculum and the

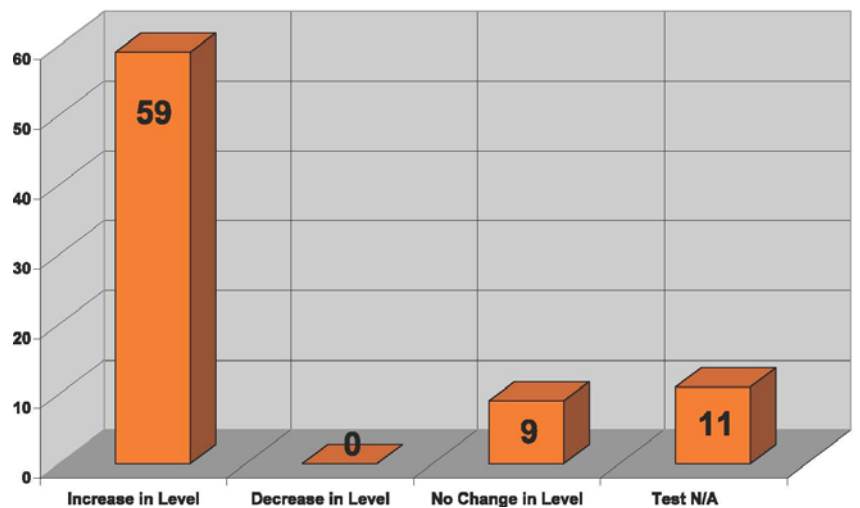
English Language Arts Framework for California Public Schools, careful attention can be given to essential areas of need, for each student, through the integration of instruction in receptive and expressive ASL, reading and writing. However, we face the same challenge as other bilingual programs -how to measure student progress and achievement fairly in both languages.

CSD Elementary teachers use a variety of assessment tools to guide their instruction in order to maximize the development of each student's potential. One assessment tool identifies a student's "instructional" reading level (IRL). This is the level that is used in the classroom to teach reading. For a level to be called "instructional", at least 90% of the words in the test booklet must be read accurately. As the student reads, the teacher observes and records reading strategies that are being used or not being used. For example, the teacher may assess what a student does when she tries to figure out the meaning of an unknown word. Students must also do a re-telling of the information in the test booklet using their first language, ASL, so that the teacher can see how much was understood. The advantages of this assessment are that each student is tested individually and both languages, ASL and English, are visible as the student translates English words into conceptually accurate ASL. In addition, the test atmosphere is very supportive as teacher and student engage in conversation around the test booklet using the student's natural language -ASL. Most importantly, students have full access to what is being asked of them because directions and questions are given in ASL. As a result, students perform at their optimum level while being tested about their second language -English. All of this information guides the teacher and the student in setting new instructional goals for strengthening and expanding the skills and knowledge necessary for advancing deeper understanding of both languages – ASL and English.



Last year, the vast majority of Elementary students who took the IRL assessment showed an increase in their reading levels and none of the students had a decrease (see chart). We believe that these results are an endorsement of our ASL/English bilingual program. In fact, students continue to show gains in English with the addition of more instructional time devoted to the development and study of ASL. ASL instruction builds the thinking skills that are necessary for the acquisition of academic skills in English. Research points out that the degree of ASL proficiency that Deaf children develop during the Elementary school years, no matter if their parents are Deaf or hearing, is positively related to the development of English reading and writing skills (Cummins, 2006). With the support of our bilingual program design, CSD's ongoing data collection and the increase in research in ASL/English bilingual programs, we look forward to our students' promising future and their continued growth and further accomplishments as they experience **SUCCESS** in their social and academic development as ASL/English balanced bilinguals.

**Elementary IRL Results
Spring, 2008**



Michele Berke Student Outcomes Teacher Specialist mberke@csdf-cde.ca.gov
 Nancy Brill Literacy Coach Teacher Specialist nbrill@csdf-cde.ca.gov
 Adele Ann Eberwein Elementary Principal aeberwein@csdf-cde.ca.gov
 Robin Zane Curriculum & Media Services and Communication Department Supervisor rzane@csdf-cde.ca.gov