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Carver Elementary Sees ELL Gains with Achieve3000

Achieve3000 has helped ELL students at Carver Elementary School realize significant gains, with almost 70 percent of students using the program scoring at 75 percent or higher on the first try.



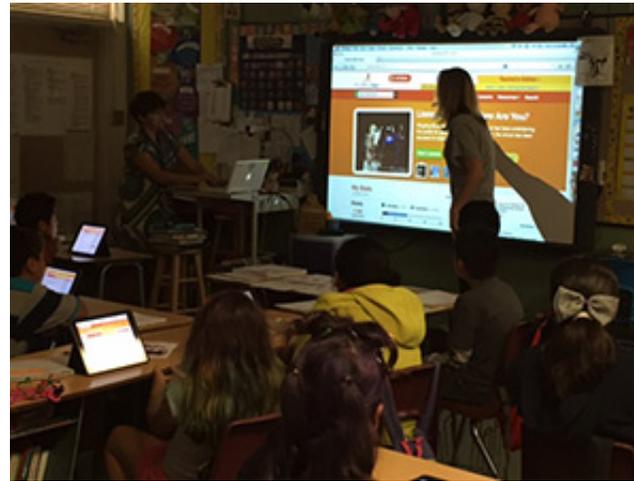
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If there's any doubt that a strong home life and community contribute to academic success, the story of George Washington Carver Elementary School in Yuma, Ariz. is sure to bring some clarity.

A K-6 school with 500 students, Carver Elementary was once the "centerpiece of a blighted neighborhood" – something the community has worked hard to change since the year 2000, according to Principal Deb Drysdale-Elias.



"There was a movement to change the neighborhood," she said. "The community built safe, affordable housing to replace dilapidated buildings, and then we began to see growth in academics and student achievement."

Around this time, Deb said the school also implemented [Achieve3000](#), which she says was a major contributor to that achievement, and part of the solution to the struggles students were facing at home and school.

"Achieve 3000 was part of meeting those challenges head on," she said.

Tight Budgets and Failed AYP

Before Deb discovered Achieve3000, she found herself in the middle of a budget crisis, and with a school that failed to make Adequate Yearly Progress, or AYP.

"Arizona schools had no money, but we did have Title I funds," said Deb.

When thinking about how she could use those funds to turn their school around, she

wanted to be sure she invested in something that the school would be able to fund for the long term.

“You get the money in January or February, and you can’t hire staff because you don’t know if you’ll have funding next year,” she said.

So she decided to look at the equipment and programs that were available, instead.

“I was going to spend all that money on a program, so I asked myself: ‘What’s the best thing out there?’”

The Case for Differentiation

Deb remembers that she first heard about Achieve3000 during a training that Apple did at their school about seven years ago. At one portion during the training, the trainer showcased Achieve3000. Deb was interested in learning more about [differentiation](#), so she contacted the company for more information.

That same afternoon, an Achieve3000 rep was at their school.

“She stopped by on the way to pick up muffins,” recalls Deb. “She taught me about [Lexile scores](#) and the power of differentiated instruction. I’d never heard that before.”

Following the Achieve3000 demonstration, Deb said they looked at other cheaper, district-recommended solutions as well.

“We had a powerful base to say, ‘But where’s the differentiation?’”

But differentiation isn’t all that drew Deb and her teachers to the program.

“When we first heard about the Common Core – and that students must be exposed to

50 percent of informational text – we didn't see anyone out there developing programs specifically for capacities under Common Core," she said.

"There was little money, no reading textbook adopted, and the anthology list and core reading was nothing but fiction. Finding informational text for teachers was almost impossible; teachers were on their own."

Achieve3000 helped fill that gap, she added – seven years before anyone else was doing it.

"The Common Core is about measuring growth using Lexile scores," she said. "Here was Achieve3000 before Common Core became an Arizona state thing. They had the people who wrote the Common Core on their board."

Deb was also impressed with how Achieve3000 "stays ahead of national trends and national research."

Achieve3000 Goes District-wide

When the decision was made to implement Achieve3000, Carver Elementary began with a two-year license.

"We showed two and a half years' growth in the first year of implementation," Deb recalls. "I remember thinking that no matter what happens, I must always be sure I have enough money for Achieve3000!"

Fast-forward several years, and now every student in grades 2 through 8 across the district is using the program.

"You get the full gamut in K-2 of learning how to read," said Deb. "After that, you need a program to teach kids to learn. Achieve3000 is that program."

Deb explained that the school uses Achieve3000 in both whole- and small-group instruction.

“We’ll do a group lesson that might include finding the main idea, or introducing vocabulary, and use our Promethean board to see it in a large format,” she said.

“When the lesson is over, students do their own lesson on their iPad at their reading level that is differentiated. There are a million articles and a million ways to drive home the focus skill, at every child’s ability level,” she said.

She added that, in order to be able to work well with the program, teachers need to attend [professional development](#) sessions.

“Training is really important because you have to be able to navigate through the website, know where to get teacher resources, and what the icons mean.”

When Carver Elementary started out with Achieve3000, they held professional development sessions two times per year, said Deb, but now that they use it district-wide, they hold sessions once per month. In addition, they model lessons to teachers so they can better understand how to use it in their classroom.

“If teachers are not using the program, we’ll bring in Achieve3000 and show them,” she said.

For example, one day, teachers in grades 3 through 6 had a lesson modeled in writing and science, in which they used science as a vehicle to teach the writing lesson.

She also thinks training helps with the home and school connection.

“Achieve trains parents on how to ask questions about articles,” she said. “They also

have an 800 number where parents can call in, specify their language, and get good questions to ask around the dinner table.”

Finally, she advocates attending training simply to keep up with the latest technology.

“Achieve3000 changes all the time because they are always on the edge of breakthrough technology,” she said. “If you don’t go to the trainings every year, you’re going to miss out on the new products.”

Gains for ELL Students

Deb says that Achieve3000 has helped her [ELL students](#) realize significant gains, noting that almost 70 percent of students using the program are now scoring at 75 percent or higher on their first try.

“That’s significant because Carver School has the highest percentage of ELL students in the district, and the highest number,” she said. “We have 200 kids learning English. The comprehension piece is the hardest piece to get when you’re learning.”

Deb explained that with Achieve3000, students can hear the article in their native language – or if they need vocabulary assistance, just click a button.

“They can hear a word, watch a video, or hear a definition,” she said. “It empowers them to go back to the article.”

Deb says the growth in her students is contingent upon reading 40 articles in a semester – or approximately three articles per week.

She also notes that 27 to 33 percent of their ELL students have been reclassified as proficient, adding that in years past, she’s seen this reclassification percentage stuck at

12 percent.

Outstanding Readers at Carver Elementary

Deb is quick to recognize the tremendous effort that her students put forth on a daily basis to help them become better learners, and there are two students she is particularly proud to acknowledge.

First is fourth grader Drew Dyer. Drew is the number one Achieve3000 reader in his grade level in the entire state of Arizona.

She also shared the story of fifth grader Alexis Cooper, who received national recognition in Achieve3000's summer contest this year.

"Alexis is not a typical learner," said Deb. "She gets a lot of support at school."

Deb recalls that when Alexis came to Carver as a third grader she had a lot of gaps in her reading. But thanks to her dedication in working with Achieve3000, Alexis is now meeting and exceeding the state standards for reading in Arizona.

"Achieve3000 has given her the opportunity to become a better reader, and she's figured that out. She uses the tool to challenge herself to become the best reader she can possibly be."

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