

Sanger Unified School District

- Located in Fresno County, CA
- 20 Schools
- 12,635 Students
- 14% English Learners
- 20% Reclassified English Learners (RFEP)



A District Focus on English Learners & Listening Comprehension

Sanger Unified School District has a well earned reputation for excellence in English Language Development (ELD) teaching and learning practices. In the last few years, Sanger explored new initiatives to further improve their rate of English learner (EL) reclassification and to decrease the numbers of students who become long-term English learners (LTEL). As part of these efforts, Sanger staff closely analyzed the achievement gaps in performance on state assessments between their English-only students and English-learner students.

Theresa Blanchard, the Curriculum Support Provider, and EL Program Specialist, was leading many of Sanger's efforts to advance these initiatives to



address the identified gaps, specifically through

professional development and additional English learner support at their secondary sites. They identified high-priority needs for enhancing academic discourse and for integrating English language development with content area instruction.

Listening comprehension skills were another district-wide focus, due to chronically low listening scores on the CAASPP (SBAC) assessments and ELPAC. The alignment of these two district priorities led educators to search for curriculum materials that could help their students build listening skills, especially for ELCAP and CAASPP readiness.

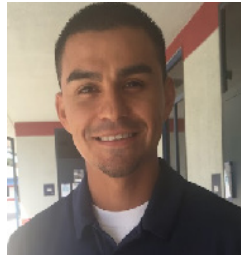
Piloting Listenwise with English Language Development Teachers

The district piloted Listenwise with a group of ten ELD teachers across Sanger High School and their middle schools. Blanchard took an intentional approach to evaluating the pilot and visited these

classrooms to see Listenwise in action. With the educator excitement bubbling up to the principals, there were larger conversations about using Listenwise to accomplish their team goals to build language and listening comprehension skills.

Blanchard said teachers find a lot of value from the authentic non-fiction standards-aligned lessons: “They really like Listenwise because it gives them that supplemental material and a different representation than just text format to give students exposure or new perspectives to different content topics.”

One of the teachers involved in the pilot was Paul Hernandez, an 11th grade history and ELD teacher. Hernandez says his LTEL students “all have a different story and they love listening to the variety of voices and perspectives” available on Listenwise. Hernandez uses Listenwise to scaffold his students’ learning over time, address the content standards and teach specifically their ELD language standards.



The combination of addressing general education curriculum standards at the same time as lan-

guage skills was key to Sanger’s approach to ELD instruction.

“It’s so important that Listenwise gives teachers the option to either supplement the content and build background knowledge or build specifically the listening comprehension skills, because we need to do both,” said Theresa Blanchard.

Year 1: Implementation Focus on Supporting English Learners & Equity

Sanger USD took a phased approach to a multi-year implementation. The decision to commit to a 3-year district adoption was a question of equity. Blanchard explained, “That pilot actually did give us the green light to purchase for the three years... We really wanted to give this the best chance to implement fully.”

During the first year of implementation, they emphasized the onboarding of teachers with designated ELD classrooms in grades 6-12. While they saw the potential for wider applicability, it made sense to focus on the students with the greatest program needs first.

Paul Hernandez said the 3-year adoption gives him confidence to plan his lessons with Listen-

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wise. “I know that Listenwise isn’t going to be gone tomorrow, so it does help when it comes to planning and time investment. We know any podcasts we choose or assignments we develop are resources we can use again.”

As they rolled out the program, Sanger established “Listenwise captains,” essentially a point person at every site for the Listenwise implementation. “It really helps systematically,” said Blanchard. “I want to make sure that I build their capacity as leaders and have these users of Listenwise support their teams.”

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Year 2: Expansion to Inclusion/Integrated Classrooms

“I actually love that we brought it in through ELD because it was almost like this gift to our integrated teachers.”
- Theresa Blanchard

In the second year of Listenwise implementation, Sanger broadened its adoption, bringing in teachers with integrated classrooms and providing more training and support through their lead teachers. Having recently overhauled their high school courses, Listenwise supported their particular em-

phasis on all teachers using rigorous strategies to build and develop language within the context of the California curriculum standards.

The content area teachers had found some great reading websites to support these goals but needed resources for other literacy domains. The high-quality library of podcasts and audio stories in Listenwise were a perfect fit to fill the gap in their digital tools and curriculum. Because the state of California tests listening on the CAASPP (claim 3), teachers take the time to focus on listening comprehension skills while also teaching the content area.

English (ELA) teachers used Listenwise mostly to supplement their instruction. Teachers found Listenwise useful for building background knowledge or for specifically addressing the listening comprehension skills using current events or other subject area collections for social studies or science or literature.

Early Data Shows Listenwise is Making an Impact

“Sanger teachers are saying, seeing, and reporting that Listenwise really works well to scaffold and support our English learners, and student enthusiasm and engagement has been very obvious during classroom observations.”
- Theresa Blanchard.

It's been particularly useful for designated ELD teachers because it gives them some high interest podcasts to build the necessary language skills. This supports students' motivation to learn, not just the skill practice. Listenwise has clearly been valuable for listening comprehension, but teachers also integrate Listenwise into lessons about argumentation or debate or expository writing and speaking. Sanger may have selected the program to fill a skill gap in listening, but it gives lots of opportunities for their teachers to work on a broader set of skills and content standards that they are responsible to teach. This has led to more buy-in from both ELD and content teachers alike.

The Sanger ELD team is particularly excited about Listenwise success, as they have found it is often difficult to find good resources to support secondary students. As a group, the secondary ELD students exhibit a wide range in their language proficiency. It can be a lot of additional work for teachers to develop resources to fill in some of those gaps, focus on listening comprehension skills, and build new routines that can help. Listenwise really has taken that burden off teachers by integrating easily into their instruction and supporting a wide range of learners through tools that facilitate differentiation.

"It's helpful that our state is measuring listening again on SBAC claim three. I think teachers are still trying to figure out how that's assessed—especially new teachers, because speaking and listening was not the focal point in their teachers' college.

Listenwise is another tool to support training for teaching practices." said Blanchard.

Teacher Paul Hernandez says he often uses the Listenwise quizzes that mirror listening questions on the CAASPP assessment, with a focus on listening comprehension. He also appreciates the culturally relevant content in Listenwise to help build culture in the classroom. For example, he deepens class discussion of family and identity by podcasts about refugees or new immigrants and their associated comprehension supports.

As Listenwise usage has grown across the secondary schools in the district, elementary educators are starting to try it as well. Madison Elementary School has one-to-one iPads for second grade and above, and teachers are looking for a balanced digital toolset. Listening has been identified as a gap area and the results from using Listenwise in the secondary schools is promising.

Sanger's district wide adoption of Listenwise is a roadmap for any district with a large EL population, especially if they are struggling with low listening scores on standardized tests. As many educators have found, concentrating on building listening skills through teaching with podcasts helps with engagement, skill building, and listening assessment preparation for English learners and all students.