

## **7 Steps to better learning**

*Basic strategies lead to spectacular results in Nogales*

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I recently ran a study that identified all schools that had at least 200 English Language Learners (ELL) in 2003, to see what percentage of those ELLs identified in 2003 passed all three AIMS tests (in English) two years later in 2005.

The range was instructive: from a low of 9%, to a high of 84%. The 84% was achieved by Gallegos "Basic" Elementary School in the Sunnyside Unified District in Tucson, a back to basic school with uniforms, significant homework, etc. The distinctions between schools that did well and schools that did not do well do not appear to be the amount of money available, but rather the leadership of the schools.

The really shocking data came from Nogales. Nogales is the plaintiff district in the Flores litigation, and has special problems because it is located on the border. Yet, five schools in the Nogales Unified District had between 60% and 78% of their 2003 ELLs pass all three AIMS tests in 2005!

I called the man responsible for this miracle, Kelt Cooper, the superintendent of Nogales from 2000 and 2005, and asked him what he did to achieve these spectacular results. Here are the seven most important things that he did:

1. Eliminate social promotion. When he arrived, social promotion was chronic. With a majority of the school board backing him up, he eliminated it: students who did not pass, were held back. This met fierce resistance from some principals and teachers. They are taught in education colleges that students should not be held back because it hurts their feelings. But the result of social promotion is a school-wide atmosphere where actions have no consequences, students progress whether they do any work or not, and academic achievement plummets.
2. Summer remediation: With social promotion, there was no need for intervention or summer remediation. Once they started holding students back, there was a need to intervene so the students could catch up.
3. Advanced programs: He enacted programs for advanced students, for example, in science and math for grades 4-8.
4. Class size: He reduced class size from an average of about 40 students per class, down to 22 students per class in the early grades.
5. Eliminate aides: He focused on hiring and supporting highly qualified teachers in every classroom. By eliminating aides, he was able to raise teachers' salaries.
6. Eliminate bilingual and emphasize English immersion: He adopted a program our Department recommends called "SIOP", in which the teacher posts a language objective and a content objective for every lesson, and there is a list of immersion strategies to use.
7. Eliminate interdisciplinary courses: He was shocked to learn that math was taught as a separate subject only 1.5 hours per week. He increased that to one hour per day. Reasonable amounts of time were established for each separate category of course work.

If Kelt Cooper could accomplish his spectacular results in a border school district, then everyone can do it if they adopt his leadership strategies.