

Technology-Driven ELL Instruction Engages, Motivates and Drives Academic Achievement at Wigwam Creek Middle School



Overview

- Wigwam Creek Middle School has made a school-wide commitment to technology. Their core beliefs behind the technology integration include:
 - Technology must be accessible. Students need to have the opportunity to use technology on a daily basis.
 - Technology should be imbedded into every day instruction.
- To accomplish this, students are afforded the opportunity to utilize computer labs before school, after school, and within their classes. A mobile cart with wireless laptops is also available. All content area teachers are encouraged and expected to incorporate technology into their lessons.
- The ELL program at Wigwam Creek Middle School, led by ELL coordinator Toniann Perry, has taken full advantage of the available technology and have integrated PLATO® Instructional Solutions as their primary resource for core subject instruction.

The staff at Wigwam Creek Middle School shares a common drive to incorporate technology throughout the program. “Students at the middle school age need to be engaged in learning. They have grown up using computers and are eager to use computers within the classroom,” said Toniann Perry, ELL coordinator.

As part of their commitment to technology, Wigwam Creek Middle School used Title I funds to purchase a computer cart with 16 laptops. Using both the available laptops and a full-service computer lab, Perry is able to deliver technology-based instruction that is both motivating and engaging to her ELL students. Since 2002, she has incorporated PLATO Instructional Solutions as a key component of her core ELL curriculum.

At Wigwam Creek, English Language Learners (ELLs) attend a full school day in core classes. They then go to the PLATO ELL class rather than an elective such as music or art. Students also have the opportunity to utilize the computer lab before and after school.

Each time they come into the lab, students go directly to the computer and log on; Their assignments are waiting on their own personal login page each day. “The laptops make students feel special, like they are being treated like adults. There are only a few laptops in the school, so students really feel like they have a unique opportunity granted to them.”

INSTITUTION: Wigwam Creek Middle School, Litchfield Park, AZ

DISTRICT: Litchfield Elementary School District

SCHOOL POPULATION: 1,114

GRADES: 6–8

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“One of the best features of the curriculum is that all lessons build on prior knowledge and reinforce prior lessons. Just as students’ skills build, the level of difficulty within the PLATO® lessons build.”

Ms. Perry works on all subject areas with students but they initially start with language arts. When they are enrolled in the PLATO Learning program, students are given assessment to identify their skill level. They are then assigned the appropriate PLATO® curriculum through the PLATO® Web Learning Network. Students entering the class average a 2nd or 3rd grade reading level. “Once the students reach grade level in language arts and reading comprehension, they can move on to math and other subjects,” said Perry.

Building on Prior Knowledge

Within the curriculum, students work at their own pace. Headsets are provided so students get authentic language sounds as they are learning. Students progress through a tutorial, practice activity and complete the lessons with a mastery test. They must achieve 80% or greater before they can move on to the next lesson. “One of the best features of the curriculum is that all lessons build on prior knowledge and reinforce prior lessons. Just as students’ skills build, the level of difficulty within the PLATO® lessons build. As educators we know that prior knowledge is so important to the success of our students, and PLATO Learning has built that into the design of the curriculum.”

Because the program is web-based, students are able to log on from any Internet-connected computer. So students can extend the work they are doing in the classroom into their home or public library, which has become especially helpful during weekends and holidays. The reporting system keeps track of all student work, so Perry doesn’t have to have the students in her classroom to see their progress, mastery and time on task.

Using reports to target and motivate

The PLATO® Web Learning Network management system is an integral component of Perry’s classroom. “I use the reports as second nature now. It gives me eyes on every student’s work, even if I am not working one-on-one with them at all times.” For example, Perry saw one student’s daily usage report that showed that the student had taken the mastery test 10 times in 12 minutes. “I knew the student wasn’t trying to work out the problems and get correct answers. She was just hoping to guess right. I could then intervene and instruct her to explore the tutorial if she didn’t know the content on the test.”

The Daily Usage Report shows time-on-task, as well as mastery. “Time-on-task is so important,” said Perry. “I know immediately if students are on task and attending to their lessons. I can also quickly identify if they are getting stuck on specific concepts. This leads to very individualized conversations between me and my students about their school work.”

Perry also uses The Comprehensive Activity Report on a regular basis to present to the school board and classroom teachers on progress her students are making and the impact the ELL program is having. “The reports help me and the regular classroom teachers collaborate together to help the students improve and plan instruction appropriately.”

Recognition of success

Reports have also helped Perry recognize success and motivate her students. She uses Summary Reports that provide a quick snapshot of the skill level students started at and how much progress they have made. “I don’t tell them what

level they started at until they are near their end goal but once they see the report and how far they have come, they are really proud. Any time a student in the class achieves grade level, everyone stops and applauds for them. The program reporting helps me encourage my students but it helps them encourage each other too—which often means even more.”

Perry contends that the design of the PLATO® curriculum has built-in motivation. “The PLATO curriculum is also a natural motivator for the students. The students see their success at the end of each lesson. The screen lights up and students can print off certificates of completion. The students are really excited to be recognized for what they have accomplished.”

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ELL COORDINATOR

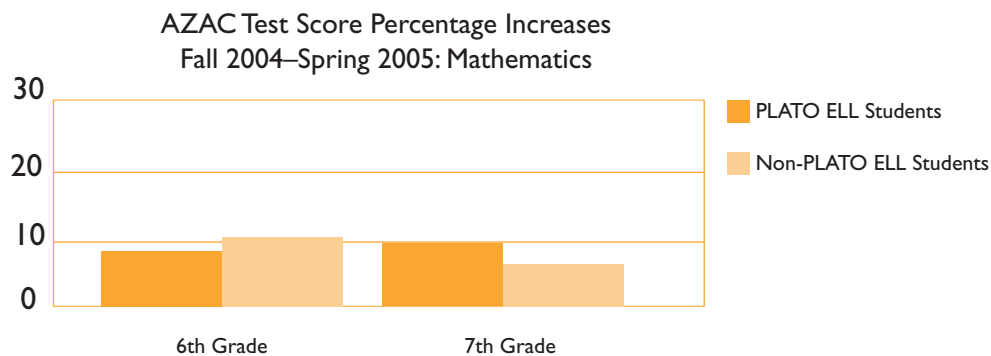
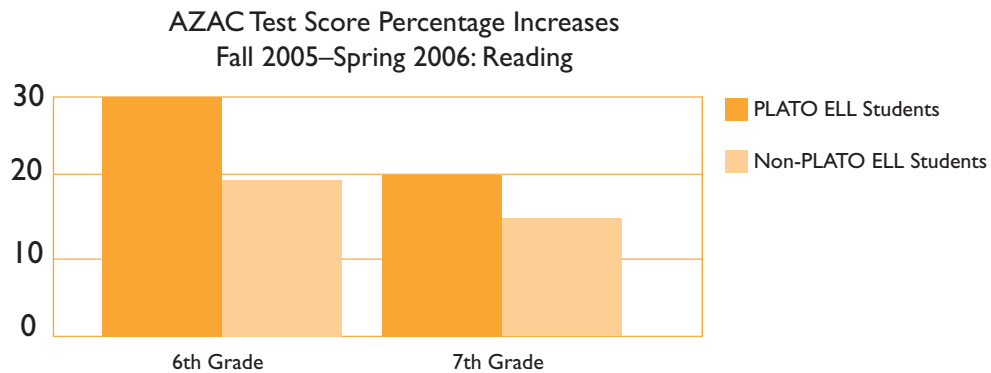
A non-threatening environment that promotes learning

The true beauty of not just PLATO Learning but technology in general for ELL programs, according to Perry, is the safe, non-threatening environment it creates for students. “I love that I can have 10–15 students in my class at a time on 10 or 15 different levels. But they put on a head set and no one else knows what level they are working at. The students feel secure and are more willing to take a risk in this environment. At the same time, the self-paced learning gives students structured independence, which is something they crave at this age.”

Real learning. Real results.

Anecdotally, Perry has heard from other teachers that the ELL students are going into their core classes more prepared because they have the basic skills they can apply to higher levels of learning.

In addition, Perry’s students were able to achieve significant score gains on the Arizona Assessment Consortium (AZAC) test. This assessment, given three times per year in reading and math, is used to track student progress toward skill and standards mastery. The results below are for over 100 students in the ELL program, 60 of whom use the PLATO system.



Reaching Core Classrooms

Wigwam Creek Middle School is dedicated to school-wide technology integration. The whole campus also has access to use PLATO Learning in the classroom. The school’s laptop cart has wireless access, so it often gets wheeled from room to room. “All content area teachers are encouraged and expected to incorporate technology into their lessons and students are expected to use technology for their assignments,” said Perry. “In fact, the math teachers use the PLATO mathematics curriculum in whole class presentations to reinforce lessons, taking advantage of the graphics and interactive nature of the tutorials.