

SHERMAN ACADEMY, CALIFORNIA: WHERE PARENTS AND TEACHERS WORK TOGETHER

Sherman Academy is located in the historic Sherman Heights neighborhood east of downtown San Diego. Named after the original purchaser of the land, the neighborhood has a long history of immigrant populations, including German, Italian, and Jewish immigrants in the early 1900s, followed by Chinese and Japanese immigrants in the 1920s, '30s, and '40s. It also is home to a sizable African-American community, and beginning in the 1970s, has seen an increase in Mexican and Mexican-American residents. It is noted for its historical architecture, including the Villa Montezuma, built in 1887 by musician and artist Jesse Shepard.

The school recently has undergone a transformation. Closed for two years between 2006 and 2008, it re-opened for the 2008–09 school year with a new principal and staff. Today, Sherman Academy is a regular public school serving 639 neighborhood students in prekindergarten through the fifth grade. The students are predominantly from Spanish-speaking backgrounds, and 80% of the students are English learners. Almost all of the students (98%) are from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds.

All San Diego students will graduate with the skills, motivation, curiosity, and resilience to succeed in their choice of college and career in order to lead and participate in the society of tomorrow.
 San Diego Board of Education, 2009

Todos los alumnos de San Diego se graduarán con las destrezas, motivación, curiosidad y capacidad de adaptación para triunfar en su elección de institución educativa superior y ocupación con el fin de participar y dirigir la sociedad del mañana.
 Mesa Directiva de Educación de San Diego, 2009

The reopening of the school saw the implementation of a dual immersion program beginning in the 2008–09 school year. The first incoming cohort, who began in first grade, is now in fourth grade, and the model will be expanding to fifth grade in the 2012–13 school year. In Sherman's 50-50 dual immersion program, half of the content is taught in English—including English language arts, mathematics, and health education classes, and half of the content is taught in Spanish—including Spanish language arts, science, social studies, and history. The goal of the program is biliterate students who have strong literacy skills in both of their languages.

Sherman Academy Goals

Students are prepared for life in a global society by receiving a strong foundation in English and Spanish language arts (reading and writing via a 50/50 Dual Immersion Program), mathematics, science, history/social science, cultural understanding, technological and media literacy, and visual and performing arts. The overall goal of the 21st Century Skills Program is to assure high academic achievement and to prepare students for the future by teaching them **core values** and **higher-order thinking skills**, which they can apply in the "real world."

Parent Involvement: A Commitment to Biliteracy

Engaging parents is very important and that's why parents, teachers, staff, and the administration make a commitment to work together for the benefit of our students. The parents walk next to the principal, not in front of or behind him, and this supports our children's success.

Minerva Espejo, Sherman Academy Parent

A key facet of Sherman's approach is ensuring that parents take ownership of their children's biliteracy.

Una visión de éxito estudiantil reconoce que además de estar preparado académicamente y dominar el inglés, **todos los alumnos** se benefician de dominar otro idioma.

A vision of student success recognizes that in addition to being academically prepared and fully proficient in English, **all students** benefit from being proficient in another language.

Excerpt from Language Learning Policy,
Unanimously adopted by SDUSD Board of
Education, August 4, 2009

Involving parents in the school's vision and goals begins with a mandatory orientation for all parents of incoming kindergarteners. The orientation is in English and Spanish, and provides parents with both a conceptual understanding of the bilingual program as well as emphasizing the active role that parents are expected to play. The orientation session first defines biliteracy and immersion, and outlines Sherman's 50-50 instructional model. Educators clarify how English learner students are identified and the expectations for progress in English language acquisition. A clear explanation of the benefits of home language instruction also is provided, as many parents may have the impression that instruction only in English is most beneficial for English acquisition.

The orientation also covers school policies, ensuring that parents and school are partners in setting consistent expectations for students. The

presentation stresses the importance of attendance and of completing homework. Sherman's **Policies for Success** include punctual attendance, school uniforms, and effective communication between parents and teachers, as well as parent volunteering and attendance at school events. School personnel outline the expectations and opportunities for parent involvement in the school, including parent-teacher conferences with both the English and Spanish language teachers, volunteering in the school, and attendance at school social events.

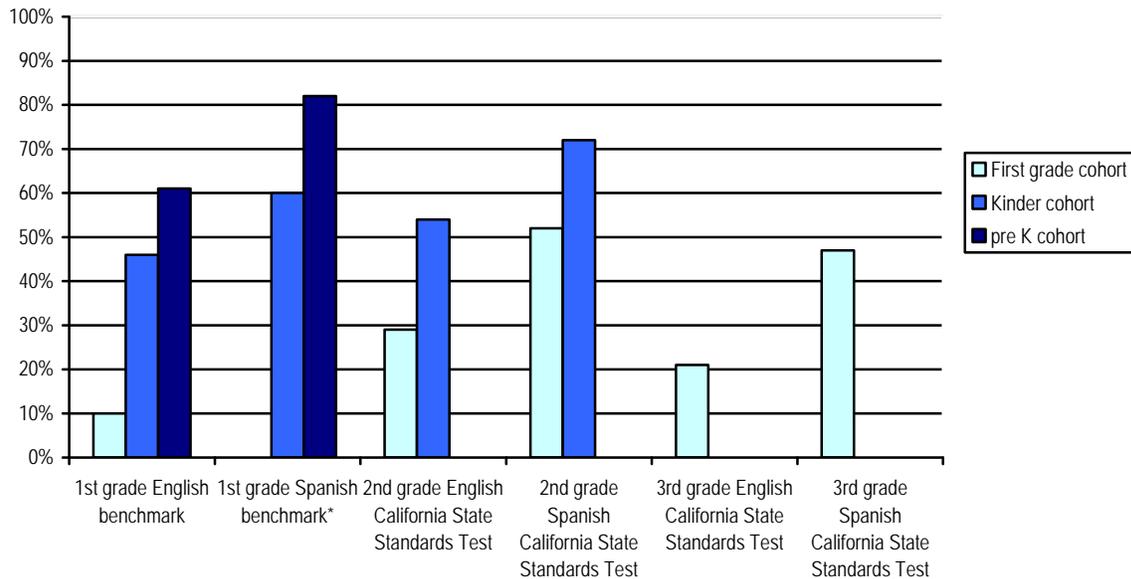
Outcomes

Historically, Sherman had been identified by the State Board of Education as one of the 1,000 lowest performing schools in California. When the school reopened in 2008, the 50-50 dual immersion model was implemented with incoming first-graders, kindergarteners, and prekindergarteners. Since the reopening, the school has raised performance by 139 points on the California Academic Performance Index, a school-wide accountability measure calculated by aggregating tests across multiple grade levels and content areas (California Department of Education, 2011). In the 2008 school year, the school performed 127 points lower than the state average. In 2011, the difference was a mere 13 points.

Students who began the dual immersion program in earlier grades appear (with the available data) to show greater achievement on the school's tests. The prekindergarten cohort (which started preK in the 2008–09 school year and was in first grade for the 2010–11 school year)

outpaces the two cohorts before it on the first grade benchmark tests of English and Spanish. Similarly, the kindergarten cohort (which started out the 2008–09 school year in kindergarten, and was in second grade in 2010–11) shows higher test scores than the first grade cohort.

Sherman Academy Assessments, Grades 1–3, 2008–11



*There was no Spanish benchmark for the first grade cohort, and the test was in pilot stage for the Kinder cohort

Contributing factors to these results may include the time that children have spent in the program. They also may include the increase in school personnel experience across the three years in the program.

An additional factor that supports the instructional program is the consistency in teaching and curriculum. English and Spanish grade-level teams are given weekly release time to review student data, and to plan and develop curriculum and lessons. The entire grade-level team meets monthly to align curriculum and strategy work. Several times a year, multiple grade levels meet to collaborate and align curriculum and strategy work vertically. This horizontal and vertical articulation among and across grade levels and languages fosters a consistent Pre-K–5 language and content program that has contributed to the success of the instructional program.

Although these data do not point to a definitive cause for the increase in Sherman's results, it is clear that the school's practices are benefitting the children of Sherman Heights. The 50-50 dual language program, along with the parent commitment to biliteracy, provide a familiar and nurturing learning environment for the children from this San Diego neighborhood to acquire English language skills while building on and enhancing their first language skills, and to comprehend and learn academic content in ways that honor both their first and their new language.

References

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