

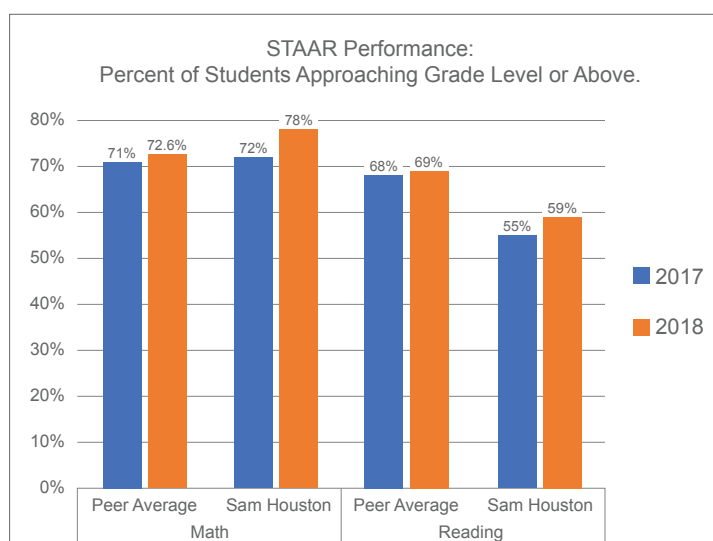


EL STUDENTS AT SAM HOUSTON MIDDLE SCHOOL OUTPERFORM DISTRICT PEERS ON STANDARDIZED TESTS

Ellevation is proud to play a role in serving school districts as they help their English Learners (ELs) achieve their highest aspirations. We are also delighted to showcase the gains schools are making with the help of our tools, including our Ellevation Strategies. As part of our Success Stories series, enjoy this piece about Garland ISD in Texas and one middle school's academic progress among ELs.

Sam Houston Middle School in Garland ISD (TX) may seem like a challenging place to improve student achievement. SHMS serves nearly 1,100 students, including over 500 ELs. At 47%, Sam Houston serves more ELs on a percentage basis than the district (28%) and the state (19%). Eighty percent of Sam Houston students are economically disadvantaged, and approximately 70% were considered at risk of dropping out during the 2016-17 school year. To the outside world, this might seem like an insurmountable obstacle. But then again, outsiders don't know Principal Don Hernandez and the school's approximately 90 dedicated staff members.

From 2017 to 2018, the percentage of ELs that achieved Approaches Grade Level or Above on the STAAR Math and Reading assessment improved 6 and 4 percentage points, respectively.



That compares to a gain of 1.6 and 1 percentage point in math and reading, respectively, for all Garland ISD middle school ELs. Furthermore, the Sam Houston Middle School Progress Domain score in math and reading was 75 and 72, respectively, 8 and 4 points higher than the district.

The achievement among the ELs did not go unnoticed. The school received 2 important distinctions from the state: “Top 25 Percent: Comparative Academic Growth (AG)” (#4 in group) and “Top 25 Percent: Comparative Closing the Gaps (CTG)” (#11 in group) last year.

Making these types of gains requires sustained instructional excellence and collaboration. Fortunately, Principal Don Hernandez knows good instruction and understands that delivering effective instruction at a large and diverse middle school is difficult. Over the years, Don and his staff have tried several different instructional approaches but never felt any of them were doing enough to help their ELs achieve their highest aspirations. In 2017 they decided a new approach was needed to help ensure educators could easily monitor student progress, access strategies for explicit and effective teaching, and work collaboratively with colleagues.¹

Don and the staff were thoughtful and deliberate. At the beginning of the 2017/18 school year, Don formed a team that set out to bring focus to ELs through the use of Ellevation Strategies and the data-driven instruction that is embedded in each of Ellevation’s instructional activities.

Teachers created videos of themselves and their peers using Ellevation activities in their lessons, which were then shown more broadly in instructional meetings. Each month, the team announced an Ellevation “Activity of the Month” in newsletters and on bulletin boards in the halls. Teachers were rewarded when seen implementing the “Activity of the Month” during instructional walkthroughs. When reflecting back on the implementation of Ellevation, Don says, “What makes any new implementation work is teachers. They need to feel a passion for it and believe that it will help their students be successful. Our teachers really embraced Ellevation Strategies and used them in the classroom.”

We are so pleased to see that Ellevation, when used consistently and deliberately, can support educators in the critical work they do every day, help boost student achievement, and help all English Learners achieve their highest aspirations. We are taking the lessons learned from Sam Houston and Garland and applying them to the hundreds of districts, thousands of schools, and millions of EL students that Ellevation has the pleasure of serving.

PRINCIPALS KEYS TO SUCCESS

1. Make EL achievement a priority by building strong campus teams to help drive success.
2. Use Ellevation during PLCs and PD to ensure educators have a deep understanding of students and instructional strategies.
3. Identify an area of focus and select an Ellevation Activity of the Week or month that aligns to that focus. Communicate this focus through newsletters and bulletin boards.
4. Open your classrooms. Implement structures that increase collaboration and sharing of effective practices by scheduling walkthroughs and peer observation opportunities.
5. Recognize teachers using Ellevation Strategies during walkthroughs with shout outs during announcements, faculty meetings, etc.

¹ In *Research-Based Methods of Reading Instruction for English Language Learners*, authors Sylvia Linan Thompson and Sharon Vaughn write: “Effective teachers—those whose students had the strongest academic outcomes—used effective instructional practices such as explicit teaching, monitoring student progress, and opportunities to practice. They also incorporated strategies that supported student acquisition of English language skills” (Graves, Gersten, & Haager, 2004; Haager et al., 2003).