

# *GISD Maximizes the Keys to Multilingual Learners' Success with CLAVES™*

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Promising practices...

Gadsden Independent School District (GISD) is located in southern New Mexico. It is the fourth largest district in the state with 16 elementary schools, 3 middle schools and 5 high schools. Our district is large and has a very rural feel thanks to the area it covers. It is composed of many small communities, from Mesquite in the north to Sunland Park in the South, and from Chaparral in the east to La Mesa in the west. We currently have about 12,500 students enrolled from Pre-Kindergarten to 12th grade; approximately 5,500 students (44%) are multilingual learners (ML).

Over the last decade, GISD has taken several steps to change the mindset of teachers, especially at the secondary level. We wanted our teachers to shift the way they referred to our student population, from “those students” and their “bilingual teachers” to “our students” in “our school”. We began in 2006 by implementing the WIDA ELD Standards and offering districtwide professional learning for all teachers focused on language, culture, and instructional strategies we called the ELD Language Academy. Great gains were made in shifting mindsets and expectations, but we began to notice a plateau. Our leadership team knew that we had pockets of greatness across the district, but our challenge was spreading the knowledge in a way that would be consistent and purposeful for our students, while highlighting the wonderful instructional practices that were taking place. Other more widely learned frameworks were suggested, but since our schools had already been doing work toward lesson planning, strategies, assessment, culturally responsive instruction, and more, the decision was made to pursue a framework that would help us build on this work and bring focus to our multilingual students’ needs. In the spring of 2020, we began

our work with Dual Language Education of New Mexico’s instructional frameworks. We decided to implement CLAVES™ in our secondary schools and Project GLAD® in our elementary schools in the fall. Fall of 2020 changed our lives as educators but not the path we were on.



*GISD teachers learn about the 8 pathways of the CLAVES™ framework.*

We believed that the CLAVES™ (Contextualized Learning for Access, Validation, Equity, and Success) framework would help us get to where we wanted to be. With the COVID-19 pandemic in full swing, we were uncertain of many things, but

we knew that we had to keep moving forward with our instructional focus. As it turned out, for the teachers who participated in the CLAVES™ Building Capacity sessions during this time, it was a blessing. The CLAVES™ framework consisted of eight pathways with instructional strategies that would support multilingual learners in achieving greater academic success. They not only walked away with knowledge of the framework; they also learned new virtual strategies for engaging students in each of the pathways that they could use right away. Although we were faced with the challenge of virtual instruction and online professional learning, we were able to learn, adapt, and continue.

We also held virtual VISITAS™ (Viewing Interactive Sheltered Instruction, Teachers, and Students) and determined that while there is a difference between virtual and in-person learning, addressing the needs of our multilingual learners was never in the spotlight as much as it was at that time. VISITAS™ offers educators in varying roles the opportunity to visit classrooms and watch teacher-directed instruction. Specific “look-fors” representing the 8 pathways were decided upon by the entire staff before the in-class visits. The visits are non-evaluative; visitors simply observe and take note

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of what they see on the walls, the interactions with the teacher and between students, and the instructional moves that make up the teaching and learning in each classroom. Later, visitors dump the data—report on what they observed, and, together with the teachers who were observed, look for trends. An additional bonus in our case was that all administrators, directors, instructional specialists, instructional coaches, and our superintendent had the opportunity to participate together virtually. While having leadership team participation is part of the CLAVES™ opportunity no matter the circumstances, the pandemic made it possible to get all of the leadership team in the same “virtual classroom” at the same time. This was particularly helpful to our district because we are so large and spread out, and rarely have this opportunity.

One of the biggest challenges to professional learning in general, is that teachers often view it as one more thing to do. With CLAVES™, teachers have not had that reaction. The overall view of CLAVES™ from GISD teachers has been one of appreciation. Instead of feeling the need to add something new or change what they are doing, they have learned ways to tweak what they already know and make it better. They understand that success begins with using the 8 pathways to plan intentional lessons that are consistent and focused on schoolwide change.

While the CLAVES™ framework is intended to validate students, we have found that, in many ways, it has validated our teachers during a time when they need it most. Like teachers across the country, GISD teachers have experienced the added stress of a rapid shift to online instruction and students struggling academically and socially. A large part of this sense of validation has come from the VISITAS™ process. While we have only had two districtwide VISITAS™ opportunities, the

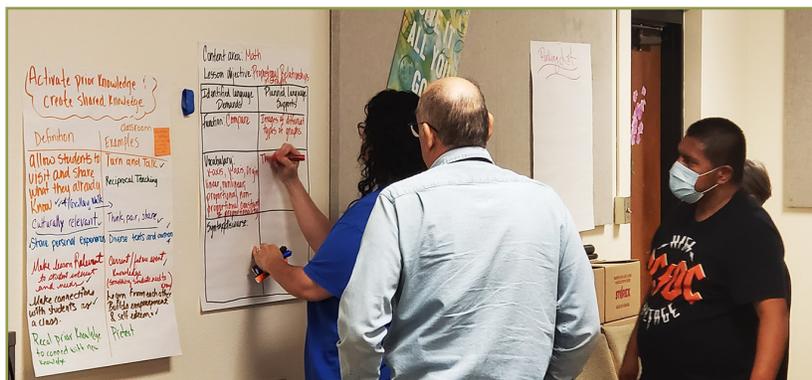
feedback from teachers has been that they enjoy the process of deciding what they are going to look for during their visits and then have the chance to go into classrooms to see if it is really there. So many times, we have great planning conversations,

but when we return to our classrooms and our students, we’re not sure if we accomplished what we discussed. VISITAS™ offered teachers a way to truly see their efforts in action and learn from one another. Initially, teachers were not sure about visiting each other’s classrooms due to

negative evaluative experiences. However, after participating in VISITAS™, they have appreciated the opportunity to focus on specific instructional practices and improve them.

Our secondary bilingual and ESL instructional specialists have continued to highlight and emphasize the 8 pathways in observation feedback and make connections between them and other district initiatives that have been implemented since we began learning about CLAVES™. School leaders (administrators, instructional coaches, and lead teachers) have also played a role in this work. We know that change takes time, and that it takes all of us working together to convey the message of the importance of the work being done. We also know that it is not perfect and that there are still areas to focus on, but we are making positive changes to the way we address our multilingual learners.

We have had multiple successes along the way, but one that I would like to highlight is our districtwide approach. While other districts have focused on one or two schools or specific content area teachers receiving the training, we have done things a bit unconventionally. When we began, we selected a few teachers from each campus to participate, largely due to the number of substitutes available, and to achieve districtwide implementation. In the beginning we did not have enough teachers at any one school to carry



*Teachers identify the language demands of key math concepts and plan for language supports to ensure that the lessons are comprehensible to their multilingual learners.*

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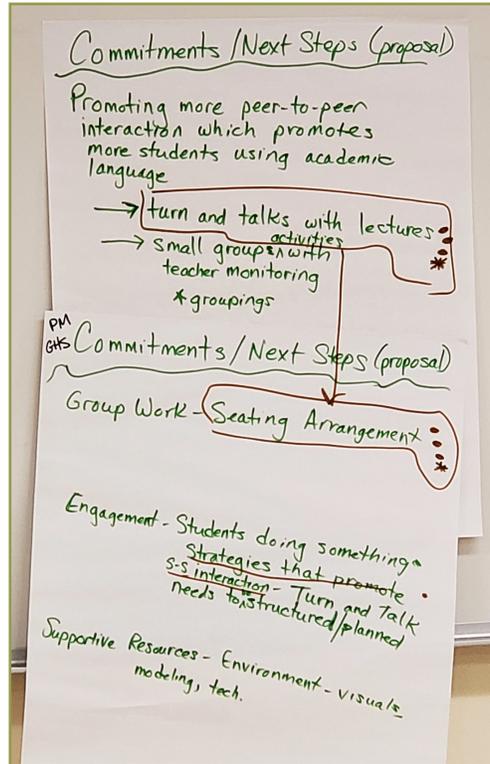


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 out the VISITAS™ process the way it was intended. Now, three years into implementation, it has turned out to be one of the better decisions we have made! It has forced us to slow down the process and really focus on a few cohorts of teachers at a time. This has sent the message to teachers and administrators that focusing on our multilingual learners is important enough to take our time and do it well.

Another success has been addressing our teachers' need for support with the Plan for Peer Interaction pathway. Many teachers struggled with having students talk to each other while collaborating in small groups, and this struggle became more pronounced as we worked through the pandemic. We addressed this need by adding Kagan Workshops to our professional learning. Without CLAVES™, we would not have known that this was an area that we needed to address. We now use structures such as Turn and Talk, and Inside Outside Circle to support student conversations, which we reviewed as we began building capacity in the CLAVES™ framework. Teachers' CLAVES™ learning emphasized the need to dig deeply into these types of structures in order for students to negotiate content learning and the language needed to articulate that learning. It made us aware that teachers needed a larger variety of structures to pull from; Kagans Workshops offered our teachers targeted strategies for their instructional toolbox.

GISD continues to work with the Leadership Team by having semester check-ins. These check-ins have allowed us to keep our CLAVES™ journey in the forefront. We acknowledge that bumps come up along the way, but by keeping our leadership teams informed and aware, we are able to overcome situations in a manner that affects teachers and students minimally, if at all.

Our plan, as we continue, is to add more cohorts of teachers for the coming year. At this point, we have one-third of our teachers at each campus



GISD participants developed commitments and next steps to promote more peer interaction among their students.

trained in the 8 pathways. We will also continue to provide specific support based on campus needs. As we continue to participate in VISITAS™, our hope is that teachers at each campus will use the data gathered during the classroom visits to suggest other pathways on which to focus. This information will inform future professional learning opportunities targeting specific outcomes and give teachers time in their PLCs to plan their use of the 8 pathways. Then, we will allow time for teachers to implement their new learning and carry out VISITAS™ again. We want this learning cycle to be continuous and are looking forward to ongoing learning and a positive impact on multilingual learners' success.




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Developed with **Silvia Dorta-Duque de Reyes**, Program Author

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