

**Gadsden Independent School District**  
**Implementing Balanced Literacy in Two Languages**  
**By Ken Korn, Director, Program Evaluation and Accountability, Gadsden, ISD**

Gadsden Independent School District looks at *No Child Left Behind* as a challenge, a challenge to make sure that all of its students receive a top-notch education and are progressing to the best of their abilities. Teachers, principals, and central office administrators have designed a unified instructional system focused on student learning to meet this challenge: [Balanced Literacy in Two Languages](#).

**Background**

The Gadsden Independent School District is located in Doña Ana County, the southernmost county in New Mexico and one of the state's poorest. Situated in the Mesilla Valley, Gadsden Independent School District is bounded by Las Cruces to the north and Texas and Mexico to the south. The district is comprised of seventeen schools: twelve elementary schools, three middle schools, and two high schools. All of its elementary and middle schools are Title I Schoolwide Projects.

The enrollment of Gadsden Independent School District is approximately 13,000 students. A large number of the students enrolled face a language barrier. Students with Hispanic heritage comprise about 92% of the student population and at least one-third of those students are monolingual in Spanish when they enroll in school. Additionally, it is estimated that more than 50% of the students live in homes in which the language spoken is other than English.

**Impetus for Change**

After examining various data sources including longitudinal reading, language arts, and math achievement in the district, as well as a recent evaluation of the district's bilingual program, it became obvious that a new process was needed to ensure that 1) no child would be left behind, no matter what the language of instruction, and 2) the local school board's objective that all 3<sup>rd</sup> grade students will be reading on grade level by 2005-2006 be met. Therefore, [Balanced Literacy in Two Languages](#) was implemented in Grade K-3 in 2003-2004. In 2004-2005, the implementation was extended to Grades 4-6.

**Assessment Drives Instruction**

[Balanced Literacy in Two Languages](#) has adopted and adapted best practices from various school reform models including the Fountas and Pinnell reading levels. There is a focus on classroom assessments to drive instruction. Assessments include the EDL (Evaluación del Desarrollo de Lectura), DRA (Developmental Reading Assessment), Rigby *Benchmarks* in English and Spanish, weekly "running records," Qualitative Spelling Inventory, writing samples, fluency checks, and sight word lists. Data from these assessments are analyzed and evaluated to inform classroom instruction.

**The Progress Board**

Each child's reading level is displayed on a "progress board" located in each school's literacy center. The progress of all students including those receiving special education is based on the results of the EDL, DRA, and/or Rigby *Benchmarks*. Levels and test dates are posted on the back of each student's name tag on the board. This way, the principal and the teachers can determine at what level the students are performing and whether or not they are making progress. [Click here](#) to view a photo of the Progress Board.

### **Reading Materials Matched to Each Child's Reading Level**

Teachers no longer use basal reading books. Reading materials are available to match each child's individual reading level. As students progress, higher level reading materials become available to them. Through Title 1 monies, the district has purchased:

1. Guided Reading Books (40,000 titles)
2. Shared Reading Books (300 titles)
3. Read Aloud Books (300 titles and multiple copies)
4. Classroom Libraries (300 titles per classroom)
5. Professional Library for Teachers (50 titles and multiple copies)

[Click here](#) to view a photo of the bookroom.

### **Reading Process Trainers**

An integral part of Balanced Literacy in Two Languages is the Reading Process Trainer (RPT). The RPTs are master teachers who are practitioners of Balanced Literacy and who have received intensive training in the components of Balanced Literacy. Each of the fourteen elementary campuses in the district has one RPT whose sole duty is to monitor instruction and ensure that the instructional system is being implemented effectively.

More specifically, the RPT acts as a coach, model, and mentor to the teachers. The RPT manages and helps to interpret the data from the various assessments, manages instructional materials, and conducts district-wide new teacher training. In addition to the professional development supplied by the RPTs, each teacher in Grades K-6 has received professional development on Balanced Literacy in Two Languages at district-wide sessions.

The RPTs are the keepers of the progress board. They check for assessment scoring reliability among the teachers to guarantee the validity of the test results. The Reading Process Trainers report directly to the Associate Superintendent for Instruction, and work closely with the Director for Professional Development, the Director of Federal Programs, the Director of Bilingual Education, and the Director of Program Evaluation and Accountability.

### **Intervention Teams**

Starting in August of 2004, students who were being "left behind" on the progress board were referred to an "intervention team" for assistance. Each team consists of at least one teacher and one instructional assistant. Schools with greater need may have two teachers and several instructional assistants. The intervention is designed as a short-term, accelerated model. The pupil-teacher ratio is no fewer than 3 and no more than five students per instructor. Children are grouped by specific instructional needs, not by teacher or grade level. The time allocation for intervention does not exceed 30 minutes per day, and if a student is not ready to "exit" after twenty days of instruction in a given skill area, the student is reevaluated by the intervention teacher.

### **Evaluation**

A complete evaluation of Balanced Literacy was completed in June 2004. Some of the findings:

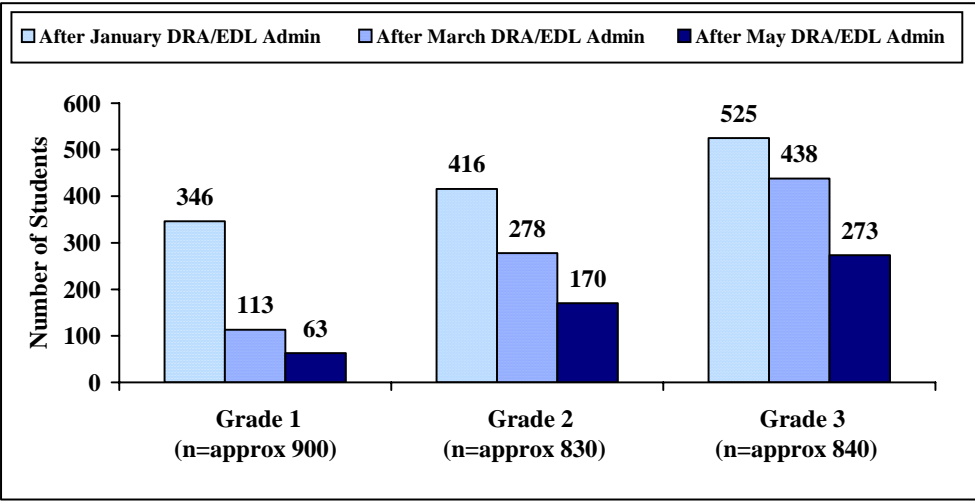
- The RPTs are highly valued by the teachers and the principals.

- ☑ After only seven months of implementation of Balanced Literacy in Two Languages, 81% of the teachers in Grades K-3 felt “more effective” or “much more effective” at teaching reading by following the Balanced Literacy in Two Languages training they had received.
- ☑ Principals are very involved in the process and use information they receive from the progress board to improve instruction.
- ☑ Principals made it very clear that they are convinced that Balanced Literacy in Two Languages, **given the time**, will be a benefit to their students.
- ☑ The RPTs, teachers, and principals all call for continued professional development.
- ☑ More training in the administration and scoring of the DRA/EDL is needed.
- ☑ Teachers need more assistance with the interpretation and analysis of test results.

As shown in the attached charts, each child’s progress is being monitored and the number of students “being left behind” is decreasing.

The chart below shows the **number** of non-special education students in the district (Grades 1-3) who were at least one grade level behind in reading each time the schools administered the DRA/EDL. Results are for students tested in their dominant language (English or Spanish). While the district still had many students left behind at the end of the school year, there was significant progress in just five-months-time (January to May). This is especially impressive since full implementation of Balanced Literacy in Grades 1-3 has not yet occurred in many of the schools/classrooms.

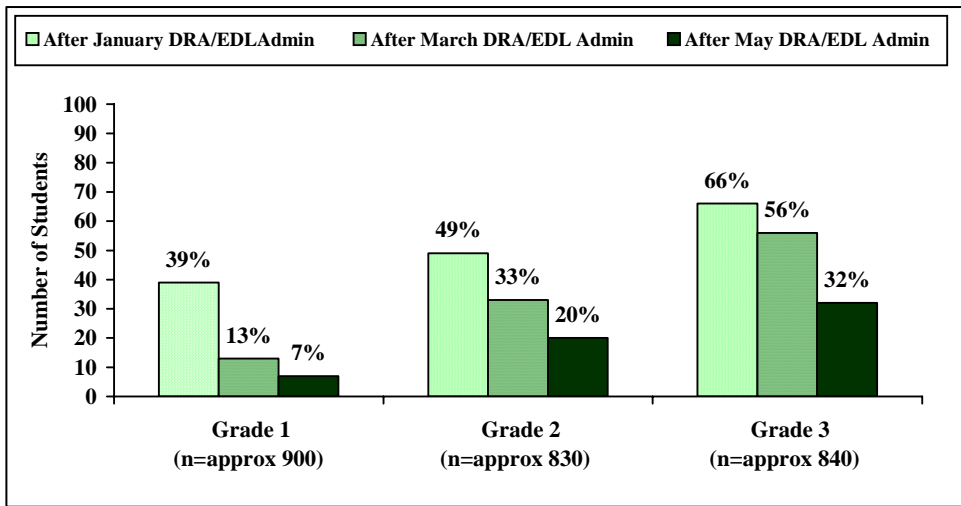
**Number of Non-SPED GISD Students Who Are At Least One Grade Level Behind in Reading in Their Dominant Language 2003-2004**



The bar chart below has the same information as the bar chart on the previous page, except that the bars represent the **percent** of students in the district who were at least one grade level behind in reading each time the DRA/EDL was administered.

The percentage of first graders dropped 32 percentage points to 7% in five months. The percentage of second graders declined 29 percentage points to 20%. The percentage of third graders was cut by more than half from 66% in January to 32% in May.

**Percent of Non-SPED GISD Students Who Are At Least One Grade Level Behind in Reading in Their Dominant Language 2003-2004**



The results for the Kindergarten DRA/EDL are presented below. Only data from March and May were reported by the RPTs. It is important to remember that implementation of many components of Balanced Literacy were not appropriate for Kindergarten classrooms until much later in the school year. It was felt that most Kindergarten students were not ready to be assessed in January when the other grades were tested.

**Number / Percent of Kindergarten Students Not at “Grade Level” in Reading**

	DRA Results (English)		EDL Results (Spanish)	
	March Admin.	May Admin.	March Admin.	May Admin.
<b>GISD</b>	135 / 31%	55 / 12%	225 / 47%	123 / 26%

Combining the students who tested in English with those who tested in Spanish, a total of 178 students in Kindergarten were not “at grade level” in reading when they were tested in May 2004. This equals almost 1/5 of the Kindergarten non-special education population in GISD.

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The spring 2004 *TerraNova/CAT* and *SUPERA* reading scores were examined and compared to last year’s scores. The *TerraNova/CAT* is the state-mandated English norm-referenced test for New Mexico; the *SUPERA* is the Spanish norm-referenced test.

While a difference in reading scores cannot be solely attributed to the use of Balanced Literacy in Two Languages, it would seem likely that a change in instructional strategies would impact standardized test scores at least to some degree. Of course, at many of the campuses, implementation of Balanced Literacy had only begun when the students took the state norm-referenced test, so no conclusions should be drawn from the data.

**GISD**  
**Median National Percentiles**

<b>READING</b>	<b>TerraNova/CAT</b>		<b>SUPERA</b>	
	<b>2003</b>	<b>2004</b>	<b>2003</b>	<b>2004</b>
<b>Grade 2</b>	<b>32.7</b>	<b>36.6</b>	<b>36.4</b>	<b>35.4</b>
<b>Grade 3</b>	<b>33.2</b>	<b>35.1</b>	<b>38.9</b>	<b>41.7</b>

For the 2004-2005 school year, the *TerraNova/CAT* and *SUPERA* will be replaced by a criterion-referenced test, the New Mexico Standards-based Assessment.