

Professional development workshops For ELL teachers in Yonkers Public Schools

The Center for International Foreign Language Teacher Education (CIFLTE) at Teachers College, Columbia University, proposes a partnership with Yonkers Public Schools to effectively help improve the quality of English and foreign language instruction in its 39 schools.

The Context

The City of Yonkers offers a mix of residential and business districts, a revitalized waterfront, and educational challenges characteristic of all large urban centers as it serves the largest population of immigrants and English Language Learners (ELLs) in Westchester County. The Yonkers City School District (YCSD) is the fourth largest district in New York State, located in the lower Hudson Valley, north of New York City. A learning community of over 26,500 students from 100 nationalities in grades Pre-K through 12, it is guided by a rigorous core curriculum and innovative programs. The YCSD houses students in thirty-nine schools consisting of: ten PreK-6 schools; twenty PreK-8 schools; one Early Childhood Academy; one Montessori Academy, PreK-12, one IB middle/high school, 7-12; one Public Safety Academy, 7-12; one Early College high school, 9-12; and four comprehensive high schools. The student population is 19% Black, 7% Asian, 17% White, 1% Multi-racial, and 56% Hispanic. Currently, 76% are eligible for free or reduced lunch, 12% are ELL, and 16% receive Special Education services.

As of September 2017, the number of English Language Learners is 3,169. 236 of those students are classified as Long-Term ELLs who have received ESL services for 6 or more years. Of those 236 students, 214 are also Students with a Disability (SWD). 84% of our English Language Learners have a home language of Spanish and more than half of our ELLs were born in the United States, followed by the Dominican Republic as the country of birth. As per New York State regulations on ELL services, YPS offers three forms of instruction: English as a New Language (ENL)- formerly known as English a Second Language, Transitional Bilingual Education (TBE), and Two-Way Dual Language program (DL). ENL seeks to expedite the acquisition of English by using only or mostly English in instruction. TBE seeks to transition students from the home language to English by decreasing the percentage of instruction using the home language and increasing the use of English in instruction, with the ultimate goals of using English only instruction. Lastly, DL seeks to maintain the home language by using a 50/50 model of instruction in English and Spanish. Because this is a two-way model, the classes are mixed heterogeneously with ELLs and native speakers of English with the expectation that the native speakers of English learn the foreign language. Please note that the TBE and DL programs are in Spanish.

Yonkers students in general, ELL students in particular, continue to strive for progress on NYS ELA and Mathematics assessments. ELL grades 3-8 ELA scores show a slim increase from 2.5% in 2016 to 3.9% in 2017 *at or above proficiency*. ELL grades 3-8 Math scores show a slight increase from 4.4% to 7.1%. Although minimal gains were achieved at the elementary grades, the overall results are still dangerously low and require immediate intervention. This sense of urgency is also reflected in secondary school results. In 2016 only 31% of ELLs graduated on time, while 36% graduated in 2017. Again, although there are slight gains, only about a third of the ELL population is graduating on time. On the New York State English as a Second Language Achievement Test (NYSESLAT), an annual standardized K-12 exam, the majority of ELLs remained at the same level of proficiency, while the second most results

improved followed did not improve. Having reviewed the data with the CIFLTE, it was determined that there is a pressing need for professional development for ELL instructors in YPS.

The Proposal

The persistent lack of qualitative improvement stems largely from the quality of instruction. For that reason, CIFLTE offers to train ELL teachers in YPS in cutting-edge pedagogy. The focus of the training will be on best practices in integrating content and language in the classroom. Using systems thinking to guide its professional development activities, CIFLTE, led by Professor ZhaoHong Han, a world-class expert in instructed second language acquisition, will begin by offering a four-day workshop at Teachers College in Spring 2018 to 30 teachers from YPS. The workshop will be held on four Saturdays, 4.5 hours a day, covering both the macro social aspect of bilingual and multilingual education and micro aspects of pedagogy –from planning to implementation.

Participants will walk away with a systematic understanding of what it means to teach subject matters to adolescents in a second language and how to provide conditions that will maximize both content and language learning by ELLs.

The four-day workshop promises to be an eye-opening and transformational experience for the participants. The impact of the workshop will be evaluated in three ways: a) feedback from the participants; b) classroom observation by CIFLTE faculty, and c) the performance of students taught by trained teachers on standardized tests.

The Budget

To be able to run the workshop, CIFLTE will need a commitment of \$27,000 from YPS. A breakdown of the costs follows in Table 1.

| Item | Cost | Note |
|------------------------|-------------|-------------------------|
| Registration fee | 15,000 | \$500 per attendee x 30 |
| Curriculum development | 2,000 | |
| Instruction | 4,000 | |
| Facility | 2,000 | |
| Materials | 1,000 | |
| Follow-up observation | 3,000 | |
| Total | 27,000 | |