

Delta Elementary Charter School: Finding Balance with *Wonders*

Vanessa Belair has been an educator for 13 years: she spent ten years as a classroom teacher and just finished her third year as principal of Delta Elementary Charter School. Principal Belair describes her school as a “rural charter school outside of Sacramento, California” where about a third of the student population receives free and reduced lunch, and slightly more than a quarter are English Language Learners. In 2013, Delta Charter began the search for a new literacy curriculum for their school.

Challenge

In the past, the curricula that Principal Belair used as a classroom teacher were not hitting the mark. “I was at a district-level school and the curriculum was very rigid,” she shared, “As a teacher, you had to read verbatim what was printed in the book. Then I taught at a private school where I had no program to support me at all.” Her list of requirements for Delta Charter’s new ELA program included a proven research base, a strong close reading strategy, a flexible instructional model, and support for the shifts in ELA standards.

Solution

As Delta Charter began their search, *Wonders* came highly recommended by an administrator in a neighboring district that had adopted it the previous school year. From her research, Mrs. Belair felt that “*Wonders knew what it was doing with close reading strategy and was on the forefront of the shifts*” to the new standards. She was impressed by the research behind the program and the flexibility of *Wonders*, and appreciated the candid discussions she was able to have with her sales representative. After determining that their requirements would be met, Delta Charter implemented *Wonders* in grades K-6 for the 2014-2015 school year.

Results

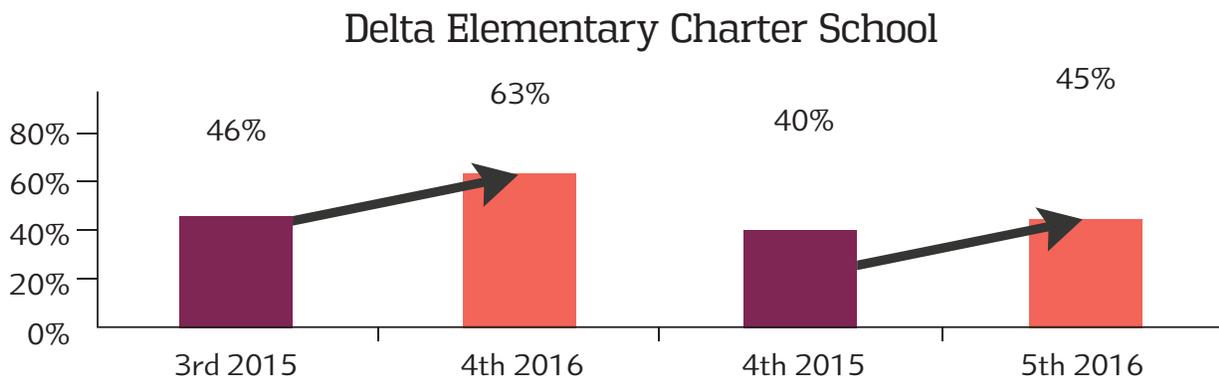
Delta Charter has been using *Wonders* since their original implementation in 2014. Mrs. Belair reports that the teachers at Delta Charter “all enjoy using the Reading/Writing Workshop” and “love the differentiation in *Wonders*.” Whether a student is Approaching Level, On Level, Beyond Level, or an English Language Learner, the differentiation supports provide equity of access for all learners. The teachers refer to the differentiated instruction as WINN—“What I Need Now time”—and have indicated that it’s really helpful to students at all levels.

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It's been the right fit for the school, according to Principal Belair. **“With charter schools comes freedom,”** she commented, and *Wonders* has provided her teachers with the flexible instructional model she was looking for, and the freedom to implement the program based on their students' needs and their professional judgment.

When asked how *Wonders* differs from other reading programs, Mrs. Belair replied, “I like the balance. I like that *Wonders* is a curriculum you can jump right into. Our new teachers appreciate the structure the *Wonders* curriculum gives them because, without that, it can be really overwhelming for new teachers.” Some of her more experienced teachers choose to use *Wonders* in a less structured and more flexible fashion—several treat the curriculum as a guide to ensure consistency of instruction, while others have adopted it as a set of resources so they “don't have to find ways to create their own.” Principal Belair is supportive of these various models— **“Teachers have different avenues of being successful; as long as they are successful, it doesn't matter what avenue they take.”**

Percent of Students Who Met or Exceeded ELA Standards on the California Smarter Balanced Assessment, by Cohort:



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