



Fresno Unified School District

Fresno Unified School District Case Study

**How Fresno USD is “Achieving Our Greatest Potential”
Through Personalized Learning**



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Overview of District

Fresno is one of the four metropolitan hubs of California's Central Valley, a region known as an agricultural epicenter for the world. Serving the fifth largest city in the state, the Fresno Unified School District educates over 70,000 students in more than 100 schools.

In what started as research into the best way to spend \$4M in newly received technology funding, district leaders Phil Neufeld (information technology) and Ryan Coe (curriculum instruction and professional learning) worked together to review how technology use was informing and supporting instruction. This focus expanded to identifying ways to better prepare every student for their #AsYetImagined futures, something that Phil was exploring. "We have to provide [students] with the skills for like 10 iterations of job changes, not just 'what's my career going to be'. It's one thing to say 'future ready skills'; it's another to have the instruction—the methodology—to actually build those skills." In 2015, Neufeld and Coe formed a team that began researching and planning how to better integrate technology resources into teaching and learning for use by both teachers and students both in and outside school. Through their unique, mutually supportive collaboration, they determined that personalized learning was really about blending components and incorporating the effective use of technology as a meaningful tool that champions future readiness and supports students as they engage in their learning. Coe said, "Technology means a lot of

different things. We started to realize that this really was an instructional initiative as we were in the planning phase and in the design phase. Personalized learning is instructional, but it's also future readiness. It's very much student voice and student ownership in their learning. And it's really about teacher voice in the process, teacher voice in the learning, and teachers becoming the designers of personalized learning approaches that they apply in the classroom."

When they launched their initial wave in 2016, they worked with 220 teachers, 2 per site, at 89 sites where over 12,000 students were impacted. In presentations summarizing their PLI work over the past several years, Fresno leaders said they chose to fully embrace personalized learning as a way to achieve the substantial shifts in student readiness required for students to effectively navigate the changing world of work, learning, and life including knowledge, skills competency, social-emotional skills, and agency. Personalized learning provides multiple pathways for students to access and show mastery of academic content, and it prepares them to become critical thinkers, communicators, collaborators, creators, and contributors.

Once the decision was made to expand PLI across the district, Fresno knew they needed a deeper professional development program that was much more systemic in order to reach all schools successfully. That was when Education Elements joined the team.

By the Numbers



72,000+
students

Pre-K to 12th grade

- 84% Low Income
- 19% English Learners
- 1% Foster Youth
- 12% Students with Disabilities
- 88% Students living with Disadvantaged Circumstances



110 schools*

- 66 Elementary Schools (primarily grades K-6)
- 14 Middle Schools (primarily grades 7-8)
- 3 K-8 Schools
- 5 High Schools (primarily grades 9-12)
- 6 Other

* Through 2023, 57 sites have trained teachers in PLI over 5 waves



10,000+
employees

- 200+ PLI trained

Partnering for Success

Fresno USD was starting their second “wave” of personalized learning instruction when they asked Education Elements to collaborate with them in their PLI professional [development program](#). [Ed Elements](#) brought support, structure, and strategy to PLI professional development for both existing and new PLI schools and teachers through a combination of school-level and district-level work. Our consultants coordinated and developed the training initiatives and subsequent support for both leaders and teachers across the district as they tried new things, took risks, and deepened their professional practice.

Ryan Coe, Fresno’s Director of Curriculum Instruction and Professional Learning, described the partnership this way: “The model that we applied alongside Education Elements was really a design thinking process building from teacher strengths. We would ask teachers, ‘Where are your strengths in whole group instruction?’ ‘What are your strengths in collaboration and independent practice and student goal setting and reflection?’ Our teachers helped us to design what our criteria for success was in these instructional components and areas. So it was teacher voice alongside research and best practices that defined what our own criteria for



I'll say there's huge joy in seeing teachers change their practice, but not just change it for its own sake. It's about transforming your practice in ways that has every student being able to learn better, being able to be better prepared for their futures. Credit to Education Elements as well.

Dr. Phillip Neufeld,
Executive Officer, Enterprise
Infrastructure & Services



success for Personalized Learning was. So it was exciting.” Further, Coe believes that one of the most important concepts about personalized learning is the recognition and incorporation of teachers’ strengths and assets. “All teachers come with tremendous strengths that they bring into the classroom. All students come with tremendous strengths and assets they bring with them into the classroom. And when we believe in our students, connect [with them], and we ensure that our curriculum reflects who our students are, we start to connect the learning to those strengths. And the strengths grow.” These concepts are foundational to Education Elements’ approach to PLI support, so we were natural partners for Fresno.

From the outset, our work has centered around supporting school sites in defining and designing high-quality, personalized instructional approaches that meet the current needs of Fresno’s students, while also developing a responsive culture that would prepare schools for the number of unforeseen instructional shifts in the near future. As their partner, Education Elements has carefully aligned programming with Fresno’s priorities making sure to speak the same language used in their initiatives. For example, through our partnership, we provided expert facilitation to build the capacity of teachers, and in doing so, aligned the initial vision for personalized learning to continued teacher development.

This work occurs primarily through a series of in-person, teacher-facing professional development workshops, school-based learning walks, and leader-facing strategic sessions geared towards scaling and sustaining this work. Personalized learning is never discussed in isolation, rather, it is part of the larger vision for preparing future ready graduates.

AT THE SCHOOL-LEVEL

- Providing in-person professional development sessions to teachers
- Sharing of best practices and strategies by PLI teachers within professional learning communities
- Building empathy and understanding of the student and teacher experience through focus groups
- Supporting teachers and leaders with understanding what strong PLI instruction looks like in practice through learning walks and debriefs
- Developing leader capacity to lead and sustain PLI work on their campuses through leader 1:1 virtual calls

AT THE DISTRICT-LEVEL

- Supporting CIPL leadership and the PLI team with creating a shared vision for personalized learning across Fresno USD, including an in-person strategy session
- Providing content and strategy support to the Community of Practice

COHORT AND TEAM STRUCTURE FOR SCHOOL PLI TEAMS

- 6-8 teachers per school
- Principal included
- PL champions at site
- Attends all PL workshops
- Shares learnings across sites

What is PLI? Connecting the Dots

Future Ready | The Graduate Profile

An adaptable + productive problem solver	A digitally literate citizen	A responsible + ethical decision maker	A creative and adaptive learner	A skilled communicator + collaborator
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Goals | IPG Tenants

Every Student Improving Every Day	Culture of Learning	Challenging Content	Student Ownership	Academic Discourse	FUSD Digital Content	FUSD 0365 Tools
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Zone of Implementation | Criteria for Success for Blended Learning - Instructional Practices

Whole Group Instruction	Targeted Small Group	Collaborative Task	Independent Practice
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The Way We Get it Done | Elements of Personalized Learning - Frameworks

Collaboration + Creativity	Reflection + Goal Setting	Targeted Instruction
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At Fresno's Easterby Elementary School, Nancy Her is in her 7th year working with PLI and is now the school's principal. She recalls when they started their work with Education Elements six years ago. "We were able to train one teacher from every single grade level on the components of blended learning and the personalized learning initiative. We learned that PLI really was about other individual student needs and being able to center our instruction around that."

As other schools in the district have done in recent years, Easterby's PLI work has added a literacy focus this year with a cohort of K-2 teachers. They have attended PLI workshops and worked closely with us in looking at literacy strands and instructional practices. The teachers then go back to the classroom with things to try. Her commented, "We also had Ed Elements come in just to walk through to see what was going on, and some things that they saw were good things and [they offered] feedback for the next step, really just digging deeper into what Easterby needed, and where we were in our PLI journey."

When asked about student engagement, particularly with young students, Her said they go through various stages of use within PLI. "Sometimes our students are consumers. Sometimes they are producers, right? Or they are collaborators. And so, depending on what the task calls for, you might see that in various stages in the classroom."



What Personalized Learning is not in Fresno is 30 kids in my classroom just all going after individual separate lessons at the same time. That can be tough and can be a bit chaotic. We're looking at Personalized Learning as ways to provide students different ways to access and engage in the learning and provide those just- in-time supports to access grade-level content during core instruction while at the same time, at different time frames, being able to provide some of the extra supports that are needed.

Ryan Coe,
Director of Curriculum Instruction and
Professional Learning



Phases of Our Work



Plan + Align

Understand the current and aspirational states of learning in schools and align on a project plan



Foundations

Build foundational knowledge around personalizing learning practices and the Fresno Unified Criteria for Success.



Design

Deepen knowledge of the Core 4 and Instructional Models. Build prototypes to try out in our classrooms.



Reflect + Iterate

Gather additional data and reflect on current wins and opportunities for growth at our school.



Reflect + Plan

Reflect on school-level data to plan a long-term approach to personalizing learning.

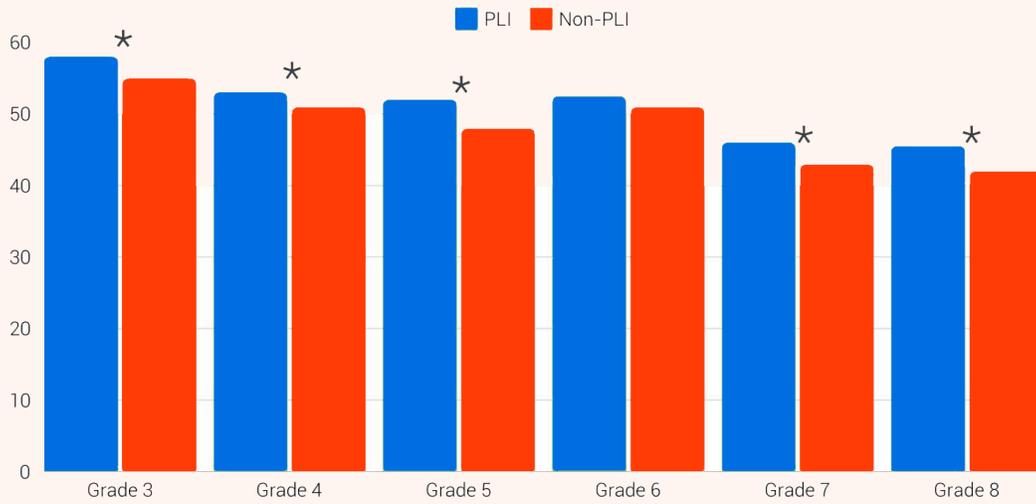
Measurable Outcomes

There are many tangible and intangible positive outcomes from Fresno's PLI journey and Education Elements' partnership and support. Fresno and their PLI put teacher collaboration, student collaboration, and the use of technology to facilitate that collaboration at its core. They had a very clear picture of what they wanted teachers and students to be doing in the classroom, and Ed Elements collaborated to design and deliver the professional development around that core pedagogical model.

The evidence presented below reflects analysis conducted in partnership with several external organizations including Education Elements. Students with a PLI teacher have notable proficiency differences from those who do not have PLI teachers for both math and ELA.

The graphs below show the increase in ELA and math 2018 SBAC Scores for PLI students relative to non-PLI students after adjusting for prior 2017 SBAC scores, ethnicity, gender, ELL status, low income, homelessness, special education status, parent education, grade and attendance rates as well as variation in school climate between schools. As these figures show, PLI students outscored their non-PLI peers on these assessments in grades 3, 4, 5, 7 and 8 on ELA assessments, and in grades 3, 4, 5, 6 and 8, on math assessments (SBAC assessments are not given for grades 9, 10, and 12, and thus grade 11 SBAC scores could not be adjusted for prior achievement).

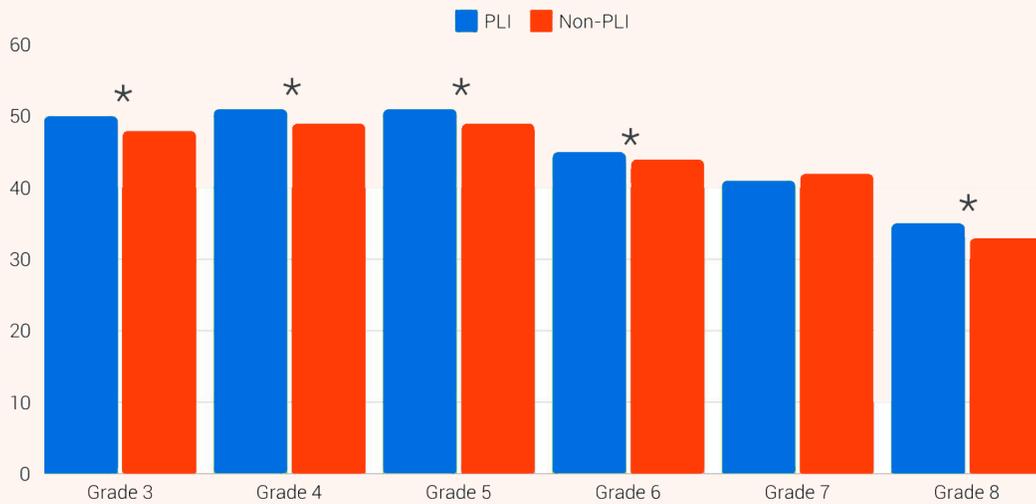
ELA preliminary 2018 SBAC[†] scores for PLI and non-PLI Students, by grade



* Statistically significant relationship

† Preliminary SBAC data, rescaled to 100 points

Math preliminary 2018 SBAC[†] scores for PLI and non-PLI Students, by grade



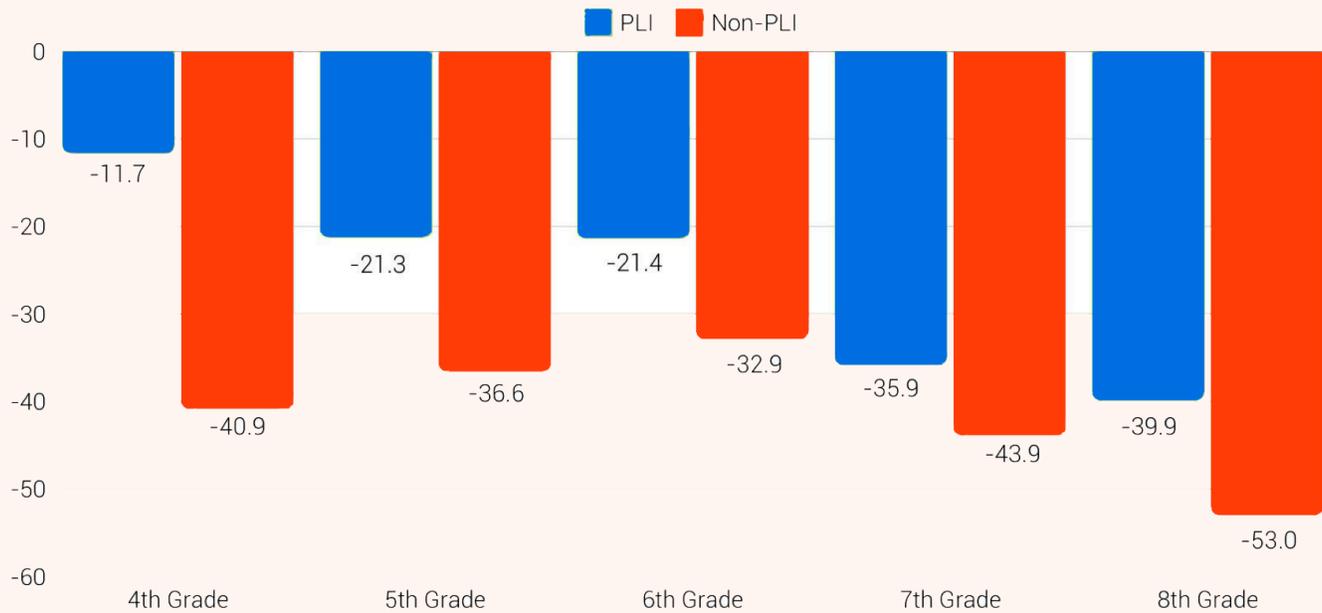
* Statistically significant relationship

† Preliminary SBAC data, rescaled to 100 points

In addition, Fresno’s internal Equity and Access department also conducted analysis on the impact of PLI and also found similar statistical significance on both math and ELA SBAC and iReady over 3 years. In addition to student proficiency data, they have also seen a return on investment on student use of a combination of technology tools in support of their learning and rigorous tasks. [see figures below]

In the findings, the partner school effect was stronger than the cohort model and also proved stronger than the parent’s level of education, a significant indicator of student outcomes and long term trajectory. This indicates that PLI as an intervention is a powerful and impactful intervention to help reverse persistent and pervasive trends in achievement and outcomes.

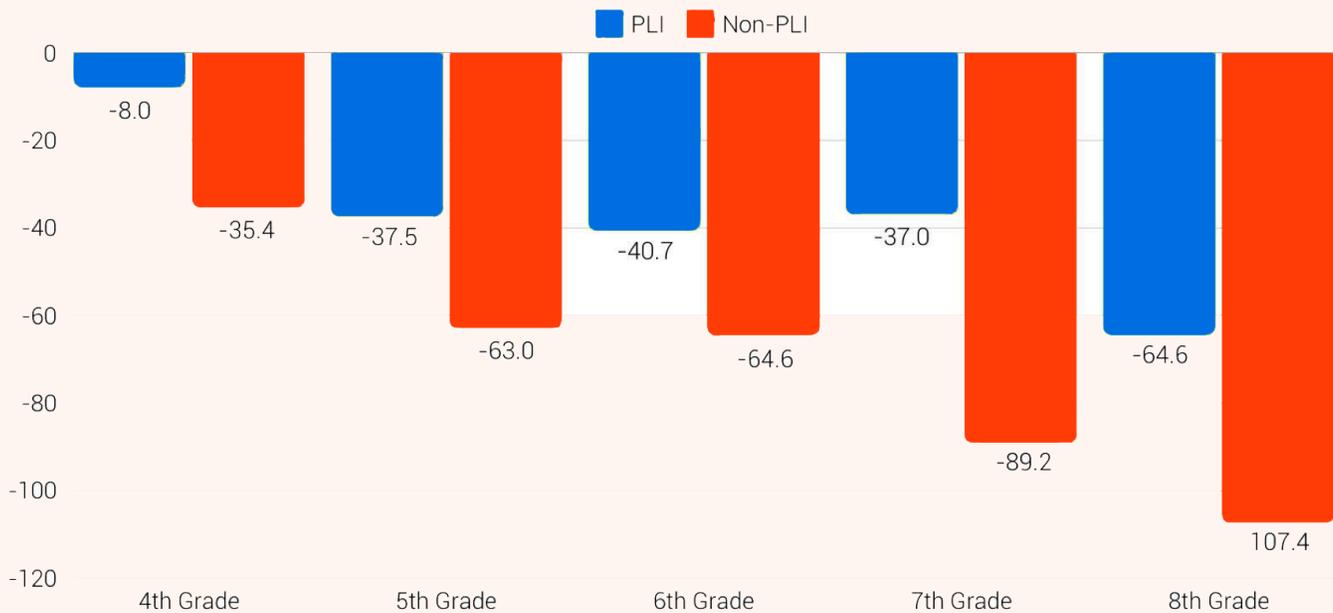
ELA SBAC Average Distance from Proficiency; PLI vs non-PLI



All data represented in this graphic is for non-cohorted students. Any student who had an ELA SBAC result in 2018-19 is reported in this data.

Data prepared by Equity & Access. Data Source: ATLAS Date: March 30, 2020

Math SBAC Average Distance from Proficiency; PLI vs non-PLI



All data represented in this graphic is for non-cohorted students. Any student who had an ELA SBAC result in 2018-19 is reported in this data.

Data prepared by Equity & Access. Data Source: ATLAS Date: March 30, 2020



So one of the hardest tasks when you are in the classroom is—you might teach a grade level, for example, fourth grade—but within that grade level you may have 25 kids who are 25 different levels. When you utilize a Personal Learning initiative or blended learning, you're able to meet the needs of those students if you're able to use the tools. So that has really changed the teachers mindset. It's actually helped reduce teacher burnout because our teachers' intention is actually to be able to engage and reach all of our students.



Nancy Her,
*Principal at Easterby
Elementary*

PLI'S IMPACT IS SEEN ACROSS THE BOARD

- Observable shifts in teacher practices during Learning Walks
- Student academic achievement and growth
 - An analysis of PLI years 1-3 revealed students were more likely to meet and/or exceed grade-level standards on CAASPP (CA Assessment of Student Performance and Progress) in classrooms with a PLI teacher.
- Responsive leadership practices consistently being leveraged by the PLI team

ACCELERATING EVERY STUDENT THROUGH PERSONALIZED LEARNING

Since 2017, Ed Elements has supported FUSD to develop, scale, and deepen best practices related to personalized learning through a cohort model in which 57 of the district's 100 elementary, middle, and high schools participated in skill development and capacity building opportunities to leverage reimagined instructional models to bring personalized learning to life for students. Current waves (5 and 6) have a specific literacy focus tied to district and state emphasis on the Science of Reading.

EXPANSION IN THE NEXT 12-18 MONTHS (WAVES 7 AND 8)

- FUSD is continuing to expand PLI to the high schools
- Central Office Staff will receive additional professional learning opportunities
- FUSD is leaning into the Science of Reading across the district
- FUSD is exploring project-based learning (PBL) at some elementary and middle schools