

NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

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Benchmark Education Programs Help Boost Early Literacy in California's Palo Alto School District

***Benchmark Advance* and *Adelante* have been incorporated into the district's reworked approach to early literacy with significant results.**

NEW ROCHELLE, NY, Sept. 20, 2023—Literacy programs *Benchmark Advance* and *Adelante*, from leading educational publisher Benchmark Education Company (BEC), have played a role in helping improve early literacy in California's Palo Alto Unified School District. After launching a new early literacy initiative that incorporated the two programs in its reading curriculum, Palo Alto Unified saw significant progress in reading among high-need students, particularly low-income and historically marginalized students.

Considered one of California's top districts, Palo Alto Unified was nevertheless struggling to support its high-need students, according to a commentary piece from Todd Collins, a member of the district's school board. In the piece, entitled "How Our District Moved the Needle on Early Literacy (And You Can Too)" and published on EdSource.org on September 11, 2023, Collins noted that 80% of low-income Latino third graders in the district were reading below grade level. In response, district leadership went "all in" on a comprehensive reworking of their approach to early literacy, implementing the Every Student Reads Initiative (ESRI) in 2021, with the goal of having all students reading at grade level by the end of Grade 3.

As part of the initiative, the district removed Lucy Calkins's Units of Study from its curriculum and implemented *Benchmark Advance* and *Adelante*. *Benchmark Advance* is an award-winning core language arts program that aligns with state standards and Science of Reading research. Its knowledge-based framework provides a cohesive structure for the development of literacy skills and content understanding, expanding students' topic knowledge and vocabulary in each new grade. Its culturally affirming texts incorporate a wide range of student identities, languages, backgrounds, and abilities. *Benchmark Adelante* is a parallel and fully equitable program alongside *Benchmark Advance*.

Since 2021, Palo Alto Unified has seen significant improvement on the state's CAASPP/Smarter Balanced assessments across all targeted groups, despite obstacles stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic. Low-income Latino third graders have gone from 20% reading at or above grade

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level to 47%, reportedly one of the top results in the state. Collins described the results thus far as “impressive,” and added that nearly all groups saw double-digit growth in 2022, and that the share of third-grade English Learners reclassified to English proficient reached its highest level in at least the last 10 years. Further, last year’s third graders have held onto their gains in fourth grade.

“Early literacy is a ‘solvable crisis’ for California’s schools,” Collins wrote. “Any district can do what we did.”

“Congratulations to the Palo Alto School District on their tremendous accomplishments,” BEC Founder and CEO Tom Reycraft said. “We are thrilled that *Benchmark Advance* and *Adelante* were contributing factors to their success.”

ABOUT BENCHMARK EDUCATION COMPANY

Benchmark Education Company (BEC) is a leading publisher of core, supplemental, and intervention literacy and language resources in English and Spanish. BEC is also a provider of exceptional professional development to educators.

BEC is recognized as a responsive publisher that offers equally rigorous and engaging digital, print, and hybrid learning materials grounded in Science of Reading research. BEC monitors research outcomes carefully to create effective foundational resources that include strong decoding materials with systematic and explicit instruction and high-quality resources focused on language development and comprehension. BEC’s content-rich and authentic texts offer instruction in close reading and analysis, multiple perspectives, and authentic literature while building world knowledge and reflecting the individuality of every student in each diverse classroom.

Family owned and operated, BEC is committed to partnering with educators to provide the best for all students through resources of exceptional quality, world-class professional learning, and effective and dedicated customer support.