



California Case Study

Impressive Literacy Results at Nearby School District Inspires Walnut High School Administrators to Mirror the Success

THE CHALLENGE

Meeting the District's Literacy Improvement Goals

At Walnut High School in California's large and diverse Los Angeles County, Lisa Tanner, M.S., works as an educational specialist supporting English Language Arts instruction for the district's nine elementary schools, three middle schools, two regular high schools, and one alternative high school.

Widely known for her talents in reading instruction, Tanner was recruited in 2005 to bring her expertise and background in literacy instruction to Walnut High School. Administrators there sought to make significant improvements in instruction for struggling learners, with the goal of giving these students a better chance of success at graduation and beyond. They had witnessed Tanner's success at nearby Rowland Unified School District, and were eager to emulate it.

"I was trained in the *LANGUAGE!*® Fourth Edition program almost 15 years ago and brought the program with me to Walnut to use in my self-contained classroom," Tanner said. "I'd had real success using *LANGUAGE!*, and my students were flourishing.

"I knew the key to improvement was the use of the Voyager Sopris Learning® program, so after a year of research and exploring other programs, we started using *LANGUAGE!* Fourth Edition," Tanner continued. (*LANGUAGE!* Fourth Edition is an ELA program written by Dr. Jane Fell Greene, published in 2009 as an intensive intervention for students in grades 4–12 who are substantially below grade-level expectations for literacy.)

"I was so glad they made the decision for all of our middle schools to use the program because I'd seen students succeed using *LANGUAGE!* Fourth Edition at all levels and we know earlier intervention leads to increased success throughout high school," Tanner said. "I was thrilled the district funded it and our teachers went through the five-day training."

After five years of implementing *LANGUAGE!* Fourth Edition, educators at Walnut High School began to explore a way to integrate technology into their solution for students.



Tanner's students enjoy the interactivity of *LANGUAGE!*® *Live California*. Here, students work independently with the program's online component.

A NATURAL TRANSITION TO *LANGUAGE! Live*

Drawn toward a blended approach to instruction, the interactivity of technology, and the foundation of success created by *LANGUAGE!* Fourth Edition, officials at Walnut High School (and several other schools in the district) transitioned to Voyager Sopris Learning's *LANGUAGE! Live California*, authored by Dr. Louisa Moats. *LANGUAGE! Live* is a California-approved intensive intervention for grades 4–12 blending the best of online instruction with the important aspects of teacher-directed instruction to empower struggling learners and close the achievement gap.

The program combines the power of teacher-led instruction in advanced reading and writing skills with age-appropriate and engaging online instruction in the foundational skills students might have missed in earlier grades.

Tanner said any technology-based tool or learning program has a better chance at success when teachers use it with fidelity. With this in mind, Tanner and Judi Koorndyk, director of special education and her district specialist, made consistent, daily implementation a priority. Koorndyk provided valuable support with the program starting at implementation. Tanner believes that led to most teachers embracing the new literacy program and why they utilize it with fidelity.

All student-generated work has improved noticeably, and students are progressing in high school courses, according to benchmarks. Additionally, students initially identified as struggling readers now are thriving in mainstream high school college-preparatory English classes.



Educators at Walnut High are proud of the school's various achievements, both academically and through athletics. Overall, the school is known for its student success.

Watching students who had previously struggled with literacy using new skills with the self-assuredness of their higher-achieving peers, is beyond rewarding, Tanner said. "The great thing about *LANGUAGE! Live* is they start at the middle-school level and continue into high school," she said. "It is continuous, as opposed to a one-time intervention. When students get to high school, we can tell through their writing and overall confidence how the program has affected them. Once they enter into general education English, they have a better foundation and confidence to access the curriculum."

Using block periods and Chromebooks to maximize *LANGUAGE! Live's* Impact

Walnut High School uses block periods to dedicate one full period to learning on Chromebooks™, which helps to ensure students get plenty of practice each week in the *LANGUAGE! Live* program (which works on other devices, as well). Another teaching period is spent directly teaching *LANGUAGE! Live* lessons specific to comprehension, vocabulary, grammar, and writing.

During this time, teachers and students review video and audio clips to support background knowledge acquisition. This allows teachers to closely monitor and support struggling students by working on specific skills. "I love the interactive components of the directed teaching part," Tanner said.

Tanner is equally happy with the program's ability to monitor student's online work and data.

"It is exciting to see everything the student is doing live on our own computers. It shows which students really get it and can move quickly through the program and illustrates which kids need more time."

"The data we can gather from the different tabs on the dashboard are valuable for IEP (Individual Education Plan) meetings, grade-reporting periods and for parents to see actual tangible data for their child. With *LANGUAGE! Live*, there is so much data at our fingertips for each student, we can always track their progress," Tanner said.

Walnut High students enjoy using *LANGUAGE! Live* due to its instructional games and other online components, including activities that teach the foundational skills that help students learn to read. The program's peer tutors provide humorous yet important lessons in skills they need. They also enjoy the avatars and the sight word game. As Tanner said, "The avatars make them feel like they are playing a game and they unlock units to gain access to more options for their avatars."

Tanner's students are excelling with *LANGUAGE! Live*, and engagement has vastly improved, due to the program's peer tutors and avatars.



Lisa Tanner

"With LANGUAGE! Live California, there is no need to supplement or pull in alternative curriculum to make sure all areas are being taught. This program has it all done for you."

—Lisa Tanner, M.S., Educational Specialist, Walnut High School, Los Angeles County, CA



THE RESULTS

The Ripple Effect of Building Confidence and Skill

Just a few years ago, some students needed as many as five attempts to pass the California High School Exit Examination (CAHSEE). That's no longer the case, since it was found that special education high school students taking the last version of the CAHSEE for the first time who were instructed using *LANGUAGE! Live* passed at a higher rate than first-time nondisabled peers.

Not only are teachers pleased and students more engaged, Tanner said, but the real difference is improved academic outcomes at Walnut High School.

"We're seeing comprehensive foundation of skills developed—writing, fluency, reading comprehension—and closing gaps," Tanner said. "With these skills mastered, each student has a better chance at a bright and promising future."



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“LANGUAGE! Live California is a full, comprehensive curriculum that empowers students to access learning from sound to text with confidence from beginning to end.”

—Lisa Tanner, M.S., Educational Specialist, Walnut High School, Los Angeles County, CA



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