

# English: 'I think they're feeling safer and more supported'

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tables, while also picking each other's brains.

"As an adult, you work with people in your job," said fifth-grader Rowan Heard about why students need to learn how to work in teams.

The students might not understand the intricacies of the educational models being tested on them, but several agreed on the emphasis teachers are putting on working in groups.

"It's really beneficial for the class as a whole, as far as making students accountable for being articulate, and sharing their opinions and backing it up with evidence," Jacobi said. "All students need to know how to do that."

Third-grade teacher Mona Foss, another of the teachers at Lewis and Clark with English learners, said the push-in model can be adjusted to help any student and fits well with the new, tougher Common Core State Standards students must reach.

"Common Core is filled with vocabulary that even your native speaker is not aware of," Foss said. "It's all content vocabulary. We're trying to unpack that vocabulary."

Jacobi added the new educational model will also help her students prepare for the new Smarter Balanced assessments, which instead of rote memorization asks her students to take a stand and back it up with evidence.

## A work in progress

Jacobi, Foss and other K-5 instructors in the coalition took a crash course last summer in the method. They visited other districts in the Portland metro area to see the model in action. Then they met in Astoria, to incorporate the program into grade-level curriculum while meeting Common Core's requirements.

The focus of the push-in model is in the lower grades, which have the most English learners. The district employs language specialists like Bigby at Lewis and Clark and Lori Hartill at Astor.

Bigby said English learners often come into school with fairly fluent conversational skills, but lacking academic vocabulary.

"When they're in the classroom, they have other, more proficient speakers around them; they're hearing that," Bigby said. "The groupings should be really heterogeneous like that. You should have all

**'Common Core is filled with vocabulary that even your native speaker is not aware of.'**

**Mona Foss**  
third-grade teacher



Joshua Bessex/The Daily Astorian

Posters decorate the classroom walls to provide students with references and help with sentence structure while they write.

academic levels in one group."

By starting the push-in model early, teachers are hoping to, over time, lower the achievement gap between minorities and the general student population, both a district and a board goal.

The goal for individual students is to have them test out of being designated English learners. The end result is students like Oscar Jimenez, another

fifth-grader in Jacobi's class who is almost ready to leave his English learner designation behind.

"I think they're feeling safer and more supported," Bigby said of the students. "They want to be a part of things, and they want to show they can do the same things. I think that's the biggest leap forward, is that those supports are now in the same classroom."



Edward Stratton/The Daily Astorian

Stefanye Rivera, left, and Ana Holen create a Venn diagram using aspects of the old and new Astoria in Mona Foss' third-grade classroom Tuesday.



Edward Stratton/The Daily Astorian

Mona Foss, a third-grade teacher, is one of four faculty members at Lewis and Clark Elementary School who have English Language Learner students in their classrooms.

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