Council of the Great City Schools

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Succeeding With English Language Learners:

Lessons Learned from the Great City Schools

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Preface

Work on this report—*Succeeding with English Language Learners*—began over two years ago as the Council of the Great City Schools and its English Language Learners and Bilingual Education Task Force began thinking about how district reform efforts were affecting students whose first language was not English.

Over the years, researchers and commentators of all sorts have devoted considerable attention to strategies and approaches for educating English Language Learners (ELLs), but little research has actually been done on how school districts have succeeded or failed with these students. Much of the work to date has been oriented around the investigation of various models of how ELLs might be immersed in English or transitioned to it. Unfortunately, these efforts have been subjected to considerable philosophical and political contretemps that ultimately shed little light on what worked and didn't work with this growing population of students.

This study takes a different direction by asking a series of new questions: Are some school districts making progress in teaching ELLs? If so, what are these districts doing that others are not?

The Council sought answers to these questions based on the assumption that a broader set of school dynamics is at play in the success or failure of these students than the canned programs and models that are often applied. The research presented in this report is in the best tradition of the systemic investigations that the Council pioneered in its *Foundations for Success* study several years ago. In fact, this study is partly modeled after that project, asking a series of comparative questions about the conditions, context, and instructional practices that might help explain why students progress in some districts but not in others. This time, we apply the questions to English learners.

We ask the questions the way we do in this study in order to give school districts a better roadmap to success with English language learners. In fact, a second assumption guiding this work is that school districts have to act at scale in order to achieve gains at scale with this or any other group. Pursuing reform simply through the adoption of one program or another typically will not give large urban school systems the improvements they are under pressure to produce. Therefore, we need to ask and attempt to answer questions about broad district situations and strategies.

The study focuses solely on urban school districts in part because the largest share of English learners are concentrated in big city public school systems across the country. Their success or failure in educating these students holds enormous implications for the country as it struggles to raise academic standards and remain globally competitive.

To ascertain whether any urban school districts were raising achievement among ELLs, we examined both state assessment data and results from the Trial Urban District Assessment of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). However, we found major limitations in both data sets. State data were not comparable from one site to another, and definitions of English language learners varied considerably across state lines. The report touches further on these limitations. NAEP data resolved some of these problems, but only a limited number of urban districts—11 in 2007—participated in this testing.

The Council decided to proceed in spite of these vagaries, surmounting the problem in part by insisting that the districts show substantial gains before we would even consider them for this analysis. The research team ultimately chose Dallas, New York City, San Francisco, and St. Paul to study. Of course, other districts were considered, including school systems like Newark that have shown substantial progress with ELLs. In addition, the research team selected two districts that have shown little progress with these students, although any number of others might have been chosen. These two districts are not named in the report.

We know, however, that the results are preliminary and only hint at causality rather than demonstrating it because we operated under a third assumption: It was preferable to begin asking the important questions rather than wait for every possible variable to be measured in precisely comparable fashion. The Council knows that the performance of urban school systems is not what it needs to be in teaching English learners. We are trying to conduct new research and develop new tools to improve our results. We think this strategy is far preferable to sitting by and waiting for someone else to reform us. It gives urban educators direction and hope.

We believe that the results described in this study are different enough from those of any other research study to have been worth the effort. They point to a more complex interaction of organizational, structural, instructional, and staffing issues behind the achievement of English learners than has been described to date. The results suggest that programming for these students has to be collaborative and it has to span the curriculum. Districts need to develop and communicate a clear vision and strategy for ELL instructional improvement, and work to provide schools with the tools, support, and oversight necessary to drive these reforms into the classroom. The results scream for better integration of English learners into the general educational program—and scream it more loudly than any other studies we have encountered so far.

The Council also believes that the findings in this study have important implications for the technical assistance the Council and others provide to school systems in order to improve achievement among English learners. We are being asked increasingly to examine the programming designed for these students, and the results of this research will give us a better pathway by which to advise our districts as they reform. The work that we have done so far with our Strategic Support Teams also tells us that the findings in this report are consistent with what we see on the ground in school districts not explicitly included in this study.

Finally, we suspect that this study has important implications for future research. Certainly, the methodology needs to be replicated and some of the results found here put to differing tests of validity. Larger-scale analyses need to be conducted. It is important, moreover, for someone

to start articulating where general education reform ends and where reform strategies on behalf of English language learners begin, if indeed there is such a demarcation. And considerable research is still needed on the pedagogical tools required to better equip all students with the academic vocabulary and broad literacy skills they need to be successful.

We know that an explicit emphasis on literacy and language instruction is an integral part of effective teaching for ELLs. We know that the strategic use of native language is also important. And we know that mastery of academic language and vocabulary is one of the most effective determinants of success for both native English speakers and ELLs. Many questions remain, however, as urban schools struggle to teach these students to the highest standards. For example, we still need to know much more about the best language strategies and uses of native language in content area instruction. We need to know more about the effects of small group and cooperative learning strategies. And we need to know more about effective professional development and the appropriate deployment of instructional interventions for ELLs. There is so much more to be done.

This report, however exploratory and preliminary, could not have been produced without the efforts of a good many people. First, the Council acknowledges and thanks Theresa Peña, the chair of the Council's Task Force on English Language Learners and Bilingual Education and president of the Denver School Board, for her leadership throughout this effort. There were probably times when she wondered if this project would ever come to fruition. We also thank Marion Bolden, the former superintendent of the Newark Public Schools who co-chaired the Task Force when this project was initiated. And we thank Meria Carstarphen, the former superintendent of the St. Paul Public Schools and current superintendent of the Austin Independent School District who picked up the banner when Marion Bolden retired. Without the stalwart support and nudging of these individuals, this project might have faltered.

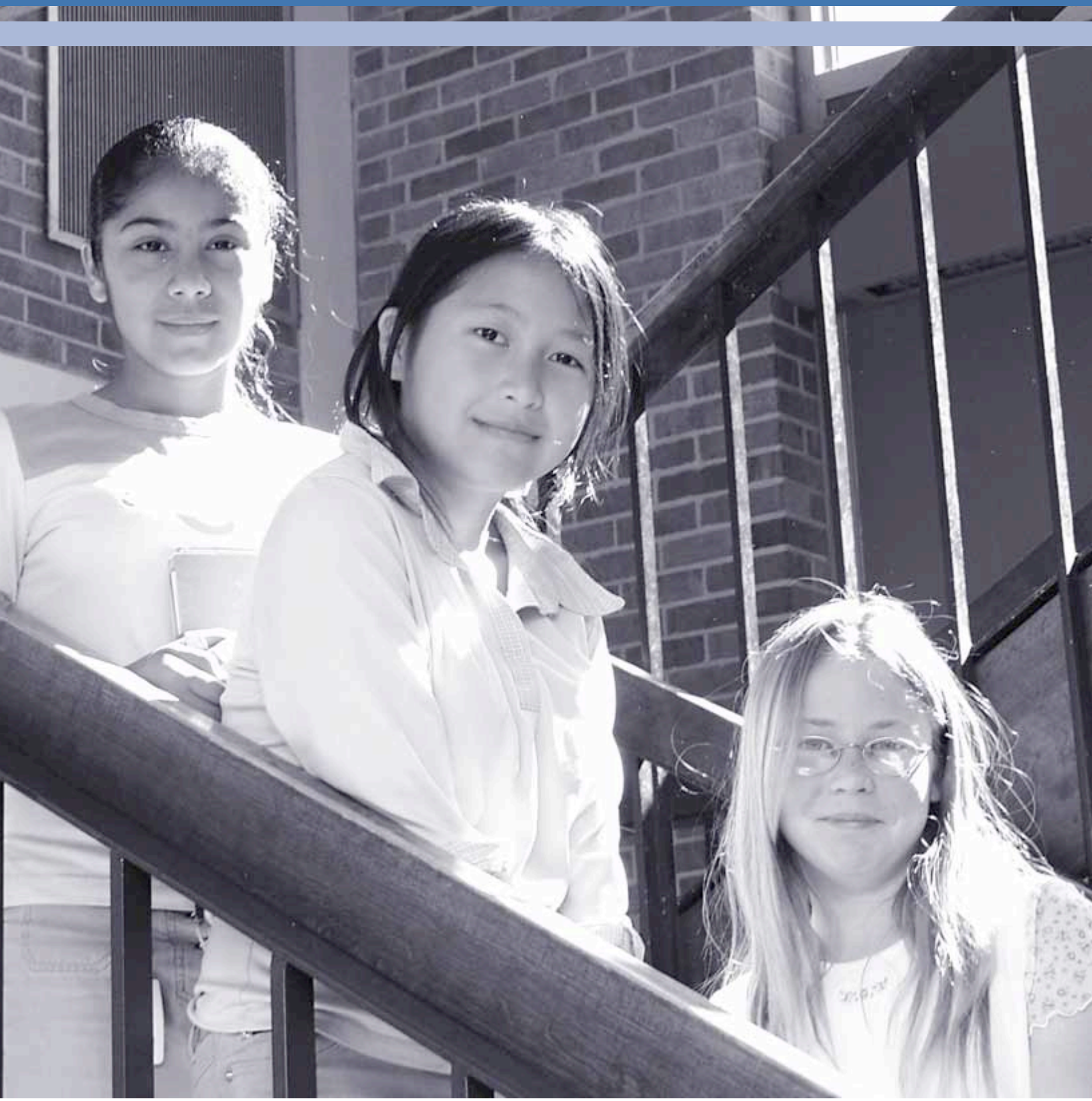
Next, I thank the Council's crack staff members, who were determined to get this project done even without any outside funding. The issues were too important and too interesting to let the effort wither on the vine. Key among the staff members responsible for this report were its primary authors, Amanda Horwitz and Gabriela Uro. This effort would not have happened without their expertise and tenacity. Candace Simon and Renata Uzzell, moreover, provided critical research and analysis that underpinned the effort. And Ricki Price-Baugh, the Council's director of academic achievement, and Sharon Lewis, the Council's director of research, were central to ensuring that the project reflected the best thinking about what works in improving the learning of urban students. Former staff members Jason Snipes, Adriane Williams, and Kyoko Soga also played key roles in the inception, design, and field research for this study, and we thank them for their important contributions.

Also, we thank the school board members, superintendents, staff members, and teachers from Dallas, New York City, San Francisco, St. Paul, and the comparison districts who provided all the data, materials, and personnel for the research team to do its work. Everyone was eager to understand what worked in boosting the performance of ELLs.

Finally, we thank the research advisory committee, who were most generous with their time and expertise throughout the project. Our appreciation goes to Diane August, senior research scientist at the Center for Applied Linguistics; Noelia Garza, assistant superintendent for special populations at the Houston Independent School District; Kenji Hakuta, professor of education at Stanford University; Tim Shanahan, professor of urban education and director of the Center for Literacy at the University of Illinois (Chicago); Valeria Silva, chief academic officer at the St. Paul Public Schools; Joanne Urrutia, administrative director for bilingual education and world languages at the Miami-Dade County Public Schools: Aida Walqui, director of teacher professional development at WestEd; and Teresa Walter, director of language acquisition at the San Diego Unified School District. Thank you.

We sincerely hope that this study will help improve the academic achievement and educational opportunities of all those children who are learning to speak English.

Michael Casserly
Executive Director
Council of the Great City Schools



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Executive Summary

School districts have been struggling with the challenges of teaching English Language Learners (ELLs) for decades. Yet few studies have examined strategies for districtwide instructional reform for ELLs. To address this need, the Council sought to explore the experiences of large, urban districts with differing levels of success in raising ELL student achievement to shed light on potential strategies for ELL reform.

Specifically, the study aimed to investigate the district-level policies and practices, as well as the historical, administrative, and programmatic contexts of school systems that showed growth in ELL student achievement from 2002 to 2006. At the same time, these experiences were contrasted with the experiences of districts that did not show as much growth in ELL achievement during the study period.

Methodology

Four districts were chosen on the basis of ELL student achievement scores on third or fourth grade state reading or language arts assessments during the 2004-2005 school year, as well as gains in ELL proficiency rates from 2002-2003 through 2005-2006. Study districts also had to have an ELL population of at least 9,000 students representing at least ten percent of the total student population. Districts that had assessment data available for only relatively small percentages of ELLs were eliminated. Additionally, the study aimed to represent the geographical and cultural diversity of the ELL populations across Council districts. The four districts selected for the study were Dallas, New York City, San Francisco, and St. Paul.

For comparison purposes, two additional districts that did not demonstrate progress with their ELL populations over the study period were selected. Those districts will remain unnamed.

Data collection for the study consisted of pre-visit research and compilation of materials as well as two site visits to each of the six case study districts. The site visits consisted of individual interviews and focus groups with key district leaders and staff. From these meetings and materials, the Council developed individual district analyses and a synthesis of common themes and patterns observed across the study districts.

Findings

There are a number of clear parallels in the stories of districts that experienced gains in ELL achievement over the study period, as well as some striking contrasts with the experiences of districts that showed little improvement. These key themes and patterns can be grouped into three categories: 1) contextual features—the steps that improving districts took or events that occurred that helped set the stage for districtwide change, 2) promising practices—the shared characteristics of and strategies employed by improving districts, and 3) limiting factors—factors that seemed to inhibit quality instruction and support for ELLs in districts with less success in raising student achievement.

Contextual Features

- **Shared Vision for Reform.** Improving districts capitalized on the accountability demands of NCLB as an opportunity to develop, communicate, and rally support behind a unified vision for districtwide instructional reform. This vision for reform often—but not always—involved a systemic strategy for improving instruction and services for ELLs.
- **Leadership and Advocacy on Behalf of ELLs.** In each of the improving districts there was a particularly effective, vocal advocate for the improvement of ELL instruction and services who was skillful in forming strategic partnerships and rallying support behind their reform agendas.
- **Empowerment of the ELL Office.** Often for the first time, the office of ELL programs—and its director—were included in the highest levels of decision making and given the authority to establish districtwide ELL practices and to work with other central office departments and schools to oversee progress.
- **External Forces as Catalyst for Reforms.** Legal battles were an important part of the context for several of the districts included in the study, and the districts that were able to steer their initial compliance efforts towards more systemic program improvements for ELLs saw greater increases in ELL achievement.

Promising Practices

- **Comprehensive Planning and Adoption of Language Development Strategies for ELLs.** Among improving districts, ELL reform was frequently couched within a larger district reform initiative—often focused on reading and literacy—that benefited from comprehensive planning and substantial support for implementation. These ELL instructional strategies shared an explicit focus on supporting academic language acquisition among ELLs.
- **Extensive and Continuous Support for Implementation.** The implementation of reforms in improving districts was approached as a long-term commitment of time and resources, and new initiatives were accompanied with clear guidance, tools, and oversight from the central office.
- **A Culture of Collaboration and Shared Accountability.** Staff in improving districts consistently recounted a dramatic shift in culture during this time period, with increased collaboration at the central office and school levels and greater emphasis placed on shared accountability for the achievement of all students.

- **Hybrid Models of Instructional Management and Local Empowerment.** Improving districts often coupled managed instruction and school-based accountability for student progress with a certain level of flexibility and empowerment of school leaders.
- **Strategic School Staffing.** Improving districts strategically deployed ELL teachers, coaches, and support staff to achieve a variety of district goals, from improved consistency in ELL instruction to site-based support for teachers of ELLs.
- **High Quality, Relevant Professional Development.** Professional development efforts in improving districts tended to be rigorous and long-term, providing educators with hands-on, site-based strategies for ELL instruction. These initiatives were targeted not only for ELL teachers but all teachers of ELLs, as well as principals and school administrators.
- **The Use of Student Data.** Improving districts made the use of data a cornerstone of their reform strategies, significantly expanding the accessibility, quantity, and types of student data available to educators. In particular, these districts took steps to give teachers and school leaders access to accurate, timely student measures that could be used to help them diagnose and respond to individual student needs.
- **Reallocation and Strategic Use of ELL Funds.** ELL reform efforts benefited from both increased funding and the strategic reallocation of existing resources.

Limiting Factors

- **No Coherent Vision or Strategy for the Instruction of ELLs Systemwide.** Neither comparison district effectively articulated or communicated a vision for the kind of instructional programming it would pursue on behalf of ELLs. The instructional needs of ELLs appeared to have been an afterthought.
- **Site-Based Management without Support, Oversight, or Explicit Accountability for Student Progress.** There was a widely expressed feeling that schools in the comparison districts were "on their own," with no clear articulation of ELL instructional models, no system in place to support or monitor the implementation of adopted programs, and little accountability for ELL results.
- **Lack of Access to the General Curriculum.** In the comparison districts there was no system in place for ensuring that ELLs had access to the core curriculum or were being taught to the same standards as other students.
- **No Systematic Use of Disaggregated Student Data.** There was no clear strategy in either comparison district for tracking the academic progress of ELLs or making student assessment data available to schools and teachers in a meaningful, timely way.
- **Inconsistent Leadership.** High turnover in district leadership positions made it nearly impossible to sustain a coherent instructional program or reform agenda.
- **No Systemic Efforts to Build ELL Staff Capacity.** The comparison districts did not have a coherent strategy for building ELL staff capacity through the identification and placement of qualified ELL teachers, targeted professional development, or the strategic deployment of qualified instructional aides.
- **Compartmentalization of ELL Departments and Staff.** ELL staff at both the district and school levels appeared to work in isolation from other instructional departments and programs. This resulted in the ineffective use of funds, less access to instructional resources and training, and the general sense that ELL staff and teachers—alone—were responsible for the achievement of ELLs.
- **The ELL Office Lacked Capacity and Authority.** The ELL offices in both districts at this time lacked the authority and resources to take strong leadership roles on ELL issues.

Enduring Challenges

Despite some of the striking contrasts between districts, the most enduring and intractable forces confounding efforts to improve the academic achievement and long-term prospects of ELLs are very much shared challenges. Leaders and staff in each district were quick to point out the specialized needs of adolescent, newcomer students, yet acknowledge that a majority of the students falling through the cracks are long-term ELLs who have been in the system for years. These students are likely to be segregated in their classrooms and in their communities, with little exposure to native English speakers. They are also likely to be taught by teachers who

lack the preparation and skills to meet their academic needs. The lack of a coherent, national standard for ELL identification and assessment has led to varying levels of exclusion in the assessment of ELLs and has limited the ability of districts to track long-term ELL progress and evaluate program effectiveness. And while some progress has been made at the elementary level—and even at middle schools—districts have yet to make similar progress at the high school level. These ongoing challenges have important implications for the future direction of ELL reform efforts at the local, state, and federal levels.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Despite the diversity of the districts profiled in this study, a fairly consistent picture emerged of the preconditions and practices that existed in improving districts. These strategies for improving ELL achievement closely mirrored those identified in *Foundations for Success* as having contributed to districts' efforts to improve teaching and learning for all students. However, such across-the-board district reform efforts do not automatically or inevitably lead to high quality ELL programming. Districts that saw improvement of their ELL instructional program—and of ELL student achievement—demonstrated the capacity and political will to explicitly address the academic needs of English Language Learners.

While no school or school district has found a way to meet every student's needs and to close the gap between ELLs and native English speakers, clearly some districts are setting higher standards for all of their students and making progress toward these goals. Based on what we have learned from their experiences and approaches to reform, several broad-based recommendations can be made to help district leaders think about ELL program reform efforts in their own cities. These recommendations fall into two broad categories: context and strategy.

Contextual Recommendations

It was clear from the results of this study that improving the academic achievement of English language learners involved more than instructional strategy and traditional bilingual education models. It also meant creating an environment conducive to implementing and sustaining districtwide reform efforts. To create these preconditions for progress, the Council would propose that school districts—

- **Develop a clear instructional vision and high expectations for ELLs.** This means being clear about academic goals for these students, communicating these goals emphatically to stakeholders in the district, and ensuring that ELLs are held to the same high standards as other students throughout the district.
- **Approach external pressure to improve services for ELLs and other students as an asset rather than a liability.** Rather than addressing state or court directives defensively or adopting measures aimed solely at ensuring legal compliance, external requirements should be approached as mandates for long-term, systemic reform efforts to raise student achievement.
- **Incorporate accountability for ELLs organizationally into the broader instructional operation of the school district.** This entails being clear at the leadership level that everyone is accountable for the academic attainment of these students—not simply ELL teachers and ELL department staff. This not only spurs collaboration, but it provides greater assurance that these students have broader and fuller access to the general education curriculum and resources.
- **Empower strong ELL program administrators to oversee progress.** Prioritizing ELL reform ELL reforms also means appointing and empowering someone in the district to serve as a "point person" on ELL issues. In improving districts, the office of ELLs and its director were included in the highest levels of decision making and given the authority to oversee implementation of the district's strategy for ELL reform.
- **Pursue community support for initiatives designed to accelerate achievement among English language learners.** Having the community behind the district's efforts to improve academic performance helps create the political conditions under which reforms can be sustained.

Strategic and Instructional Recommendations

The contextual recommendations allow for reforms to be articulated and sustained, but the district must couple them with a convincing instructional strategy that is capable of teaching ELLs to the highest standards. The Council would propose that school districts—

- **Review general education and ELL programs to ensure that there is an explicit focus on building academic literacy and cultivating English language development.** Focusing on academic literacy among ELLs—and all students—and providing them with specific language acquisition strategies are critical steps for ensuring the long-term academic success of students.
- **Ensure that all teachers of ELLs have access to high-quality professional development that provides differentiated instructional strategies, promotes the effective use of student assessment data, and develops skills for supporting second-language acquisition across the curriculum.** This professional development should be made jointly available to ELL and general education teachers and evaluated for how well it is implemented and its effects on student achievement.
- **Assess district standards for hiring, placing, and retaining teachers, paraprofessionals, and staff members who work directly with ELLs to ensure that these students have access to highly qualified personnel.** While these decisions are sometimes shaped by state policy, in other cases they are the result of locally determined policies and collective bargaining agreements that districts should be mindful of as they craft their ELL programs.
- **Conduct a comprehensive assessment of the level of access that ELLs have to the entire spectrum of district course offerings, including gifted and talented programs and special education.** The results of these simple analyses can reveal to districts whether ELLs—and others—have equal access to educational opportunities and are held to the same academic standards as other students.
- **Ensure that resources generated by and allocated for English language learners are properly and effectively expended to provide quality ELL instruction and services.** Districts also should be careful to not allow the categorical nature of various funding sources to limit ELL programming or services. General education funds, federal Title I funds, categorical state funds, and other resources can be used to ensure that these students get the support and instruction they need across the board.
- **Develop a system for tracking multiple measures of ELLs' educational progress.** The collection and analysis of data on the characteristics, teachers, English proficiency level, program placement, and academic attainment of ELLs are critical to ensuring the success of these students. This means integrating all data on ELLs into the district's general database to ensure broader access and to promote regular review of this data by school and district instructional staff and the board.

Figure 1
Key Characteristics of Case Study and Comparison Districts

Key Characteristics	Case Study Districts	Comparison Districts
CONTEXTUAL FEATURES		
1. Political Context	District leadership created and communicated a unified vision for improving instruction for ELLs.	The district lacked a systemwide vision or strategy for educating ELLs.
	The district and community focused on raising achievement and improving student outcomes.	The polarized and highly contentious nature of the district environment drove a focus on adult power struggles rather than student needs.
2. Approach to external pressures	Court cases served as catalysts to authentic instructional improvement for ELLs.	Compliance with state or court mandates was seen as an administrative burden rather than an opportunity to pursue meaningful instructional reform on behalf of students.
	Districts built on legal requirements to develop policies and programs with a long-term view of improving ELL performance.	Districts adopted policies and practices aimed mainly at ensuring legal compliance with state or court mandates.
3. Organizational Context	The relative stability of the district and ELL department leadership led to continuity of instructional programming and reform efforts over several years.	Turnstile changes in district and ELL department leadership led to inconsistency in ELL programming and reform efforts.
	The ELL office and director were included in the highest levels of decision-making and given the authority (and budget) to establish and enforce ELL program reforms.	The ELL office was seen mainly as playing a peripheral role with little influence over instructional or funding decisions.
4. Leadership and Advocacy	There was at least one vocal, effective advocate for ELLs who was skillful at forming strategic partnerships and rallying support behind ELL reforms.	The district leadership was either unresponsive to ELL issues or unable to rally support behind ELL reform efforts.
	There was strong community interest and action on behalf of ELLs.	There was an absence of effective community advocacy on behalf of ELLs.
DISTRICT STRATEGIES		
5. Curriculum & Instruction	The ELL instructional program was aligned with the district's core curriculum.	There was little, if any, effort to link the ELL instructional program with the district's core curriculum or to hold students to common standards. ELL programming was viewed as largely supplemental.
	The district considered the needs of ELLs in textbook adoptions and other instructional initiatives.	The needs of ELL were not sufficiently addressed when adopting textbooks, programs, or instructional initiatives.
	ELL instruction focused on both English language acquisition and the development of academic literacy to access core subject matter content.	Instruction was not guided by an understanding of both the English language development and academic literacy needs of ELLs.
6. Support for Implementation	The district engaged in comprehensive planning for the adoption and roll-out of ELL reform strategies and initiatives.	There was no clear plan or efforts to strategically roll- out programs or initiatives or gain buy-in from key constituents.
	There was extensive, ongoing central office support, monitoring, and enforcement of program implementation.	There was no clear guidance, tools, or oversight for ELL programming provided by the central office.

7. Staffing & Professional Development (PD)	The district provided joint PD opportunities for ELL and general education teachers on a districtwide basis.	ELL teachers had little support or access to school or districtwide PD opportunities.
	PD for ELLs was aligned to general education program standards and instructional strategies.	PD for teaching ELLs lacked coordination with the district's overall PD strategies.
	There was a systemic effort to ensure that PD provided ELL-specific instructional strategies to both ELL and general education teachers to support language development across the curriculum.	PD generally did not provide content area teachers with strategies for differentiated instruction to meet the needs of ELLs across the curriculum.
	PD for principals equipped them with an understanding of the importance and features of quality instruction for ELLs.	Principals did not receive PD aimed at helping them understand or prioritize the instructional needs of their ELLs.
	The district strategically hired, placed, and monitored ELL teachers and instructional support staff.	ELL teachers and support staff were often inefficiently allocated and under-utilized at school sites.
8. Collaboration	The district took proactive steps to encourage, and at times mandate, collaboration across departments within the central office.	The compartmentalized structure of the central office led to the isolation of ELL department staff.
	ELL teachers worked in collaboration with other teachers in their schools.	ELL teachers worked in isolation from other teachers in their schools and were sometimes excluded from school leadership teams.
9. Accountability	School-based accountability for student progress drove a sense of shared responsibility for improving ELL instruction.	The weight of accountability for ELL results rested solely on ELL teachers at school sites.
	At the central office, all departments were responsible for working together to provide schools with the resources and tools necessary to improve ELL instruction and raise student achievement.	The ELL department was singularly responsible for managing ELL programs despite being cut off from the resources and authority necessary to drive reform.
	Instructional management by the district was paired with increased support and the empowerment of school leaders.	The district's site-based management structure resulted in ELL programming decisions being made at the school level without guidance, support, or oversight from the central office.
	Reports of ELL achievement and progress were discussed regularly at board meetings.	There was no expectation of reports of ELL academic progress at board meetings.
10. Use of Data	ELL reforms focused on expanding the accessibility, amount, and types of student data available to educators.	ELL data were not easily accessible or available to teachers or staff in a timely manner.
	Data were disaggregated to show achievement trends and areas of student needs among ELLs.	Data systems were not in place to meaningfully disaggregate data for ELLs.
	Data were used to diagnose ELL student needs and target instruction and academic interventions.	The district either lacked the capacity or will to review and act on data to improve ELL instruction and services.
	The use of assessments and other data were supported by training and professional development.	Little, if any, training, support, or guidance was provided for teachers or administrators in understanding and/or using data.

Chapter 1:
Study Overview and Methodology

I. Overview

Introduction

School districts have been struggling with the challenges of teaching English Language Learners (ELLs) for decades. This is particularly true for large urban school districts, which educate large concentrations of ELLs. In 2008 almost 20 percent of the students served by the Council of the Great City Schools districts were identified as ELLs. These students represent approximately 30 percent of the ELLs across the nation.

More recently, the accountability requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) have raised the stakes for schools and districts, requiring them to disaggregate data to show that their ELLs are making progress on subject matter assessments on a consistent basis and within a rapid time frame. The last 50 years of research has generated significant knowledge regarding effective strategies and interventions for educating ELLs, but there remain areas where the research is relatively weak and topics that have yet to be studied. For example, research on academic language development for ELLs is surprisingly thin, and few studies have examined systemic reform efforts to improve instruction for ELLs on an ongoing basis and at a districtwide scale involving more than a couple of schools.

In March of 2008, the Council published its eighth annual *Beating the Odds* report of student achievement in big city school districts. A review of this report suggests two clear implications concerning ELLs. The first is that, although NCLB requires public reporting by subgroup, data regarding the performance of ELLs are often not available in a manner that is easily accessible to track ELL progress and to inform instruction. The second is that, with very few exceptions, the existing data point to consistently low performance among ELLs across districts and states. In support of this finding, NAEP data show that there were no significant differences in reading scores for fourth grade ELLs in Large Central Cities (LCC)[1] or across the nation from 2002 through 2007 (see Figure 2).

Figure 2
4th Grade ELLs Average NAEP Scale Scores in Reading for National Public and Large Central City; 2002, 2003, 2005, 2007

Year	National Public	Large Central City
2002	183	182
2003	186	184
2005	187	184
2007	188	183

Therefore, to the extent that some districts have improved more than others, the Council sought to investigate their progress and learn as much as possible from their experiences. The uniqueness of each district's history, demographic make-up, political context, and state laws precludes the direct application of any given district's policies or practices. However, identifying and exploring shared strategies for educating ELLs among improving districts will have broader implications for district-level efforts to raise the academic achievement of ELLs.

Goals of the Study

This study examines the experiences of districts that have had differing levels of success at raising ELL student achievement to shed light on potential strategies for ELL instructional reform throughout the Council's member districts as well other districts, large and small.

Succeeding with English Language Learners is modeled in part after *Foundations for Success*, published by the Council in 2002. *Foundations for Success* explored promising practices among districts that had been successful at improving student achievement and reducing achievement gaps, using the experiences of these districts to develop a general framework for reform as well as several specific hypotheses regarding strategies for systematically improving student achievement. However, there are some important points to note regarding what findings and information *this* study is designed to provide and, perhaps more importantly, what it is *not* designed to accomplish or provide.

1. **The study does not intend to present any one district as having achieved complete success with their ELLs.** The "improving" districts profiled in this study have not succeeded in closing the gap between ELLs and their peers. ELL achievement remains low across the board, and, rather than fitting neatly into the categories of "improving" and "not improving," what we saw were districts either farther along or farther behind on a continuum of achievement. To be clear, each of the districts openly acknowledged that they still have a long way to go to improve ELL student outcomes. The districts that are highlighted in this report have, however, seen more progress in the achievement scores of their ELLs than other districts with similar demographic characteristics over the same time period.
2. **The study does not provide simple solutions or a checklist for ELL reform**. The characteristics and strategies of improving districts are not intended to serve as recipes for success. The promising practices identified among case study districts are just that—practices that seem to have served these particular districts well in their efforts to raise the quality of ELL instruction. More importantly, the study emphasizes the importance of ongoing efforts to support and sustain implementation of various strategies and initiatives. Without this support and oversight, as well as "buy-in" from leadership and key administrative staff, the practices and policies themselves would most likely be rendered meaningless.
3. **The study does not provide causal evidence of program or policy effectiveness.** The study aims to document district-level policies and practices and the ways that these policies affected instruction for ELLs at the school and classroom levels. However, it is not designed to yield causal evidence of the impact on student outcomes of any one given reform strategy or policy, or even prove that any of the steps taken by the district were responsible for increasing ELL achievement, as measured by test scores..

4. **The study offers retrospective analysis of district experiences.** The retrospective nature of the study was designed to extract, from personal recollections and reviews of selected documents, a picture of the key initiatives and policies underway during the study period. The study does not purport to be an exhaustive reconstruction of all that was happening during these years. Rather, it aims to present a picture of the key initiatives and policies that seemed to have had an impact on improvements in the instructional services for ELLs during the study period.

Primary Research Questions

The following five questions guided the design and execution of this study:

- Can we identify school districts that have experienced improved student achievement among ELLs?
- What is the historical, administrative, and programmatic context within which ELL student achievement is improving in these districts?
- What district-level strategies are being used to improve ELL student achievement and reduce disparities between ELL and non-ELLs?
- What is the connection between policies, practices, and strategies at the district level and actual changes in teaching and learning experienced by ELLs in their schools and classrooms?
- In what ways do the experiences and strategies of improving districts differ from those of school systems that serve similar populations, but that have yet to make similar progress?

II. Methodology

In order to answer these questions, the Council produced a set of four synopses of districts that have experienced gains in ELL student achievement, as well as a combined synopsis of two districts that have similar ELL populations but have not experienced a similar degree of progress in ELL achievement. It is anticipated that the analysis of the similarities and differences in the contexts, challenges, and approaches in these two sets of districts will have important implications for reform efforts to increase the academic achievement of ELLs.

Criteria and Process for the Selection of Districts

Identification and selection of districts for this study was based on five demographic and state reading assessment criteria.

Demographic Characteristics:

- The proportion of ELLs in a district was equal to or greater than ten percent
- The number of ELLs was at least 9,000

State Reading or English Language Arts Assessment Data:

- Percentage of 3rd or 4th grade ELLs passing the state reading or English Language Arts (ELA) assessment during the 2004-2005 school year
  - Council member districts within a state were examined
  - Districts with the highest percentage of 3rd or 4th grade students passing within the state were ranked 1
- Increase in the percentage of 3rd or 4th grade ELLs proficient in reading or ELA from 2002-2003 to 2005-2006
  - Council member districts within a state were examined
  - Districts with the highest growth within the state ranked 1
- Percentage increase in reading/ELA scores for ELLs on 3rd or 4th grade state assessments outpaced the state's increase
  - Council member districts within a state were examined
  - ELL gain scores were examined from 2002-2003 to 2005-2006
  - District growth scores were compared to state growth scores
  - Districts with growth scores higher than the state were given a "yes"

Finally, districts that had assessment data available for only relatively small percentages of ELLs were eliminated. Figures 3 through 6 show how each of the selected districts met these criteria.

Additionally, the researchers wanted the study to represent the geographical and cultural diversity of the ELL populations in Council districts. In particular, the research team sought to include districts with substantial numbers of Spanish-speaking ELLs. However, given the increasing diversity of ELLs and the influx of non-Spanish-speaking ELLs from various parts of the world, it was also important that the study include at least one district that served an ELL population that was diverse in terms of native language. The result was that the districts selected showed improvement among their ELLs, but they were not always the fastest improving across all cities, something that was nearly impossible to determine using state test results. The following four districts were selected for study:

- Dallas, Texas
- New York City, New York
- St. Paul, Minnesota
- San Francisco, California

Figure 3
Study Districts' ELL Enrollment, 2005

District	ELL enrollment	ELL%
San Francisco	16,391	29%
St. Paul	14,257	34%
New York City	124,976	12%
Dallas	50,658	32%

Figure 4
Study Districts' Percent of Grade 3 or 4 ELLs Proficient in Reading/ELA on State Tests and State Ranking Among the Great City Schools, 2005

District	Proficiency %	Proficiency Ranking in CGCS districts within Each State
San Francisco	34%	1 out of 7 districts
St. Paul	52%	1 out of 2 districts
New York City	20%	2 out of 3 districts
Dallas	44%	3 out of 4 districts

Figure 5
Study Districts' and States' Grade 3 or 4 ELL Reading/ELA Proficiency Rates on State Tests, 2002-2003 to 2005-2006[2]

ELL Case Study State/ Districts		2003	2004	2005	2006	3yr Diff
State	Texas	49%	60%	58%	63%	**14+**
District	Dallas	35%	49%	44%	52%	**17+**
State	California	15%	15%	19%	24%	**9+**
District	San Francisco	25%	29%	34%	37%	**12+**
State	Minnesota [3]	37%	33%	46%	42%	**5+**
District	St. Paul	30%	33%	52%	42%	**12+**
State	New York [4]	14%	23%	35%	27%	**13+**
District	New York City [5]	4%	12%	20%	17%	**13+**

Figure 6
Study Districts' Grade 3 or 4 ELL Reading/ELA Proficiency Rates and Growth on State Tests, 2002-2003 to 2005-2006

District	2003	2004	2005	2006	Percentage Diff	Growth Rank of CGCS districts within each State
San Francisco	25%	29%	34%	37%	12%	1 out of 7 districts
St. Paul	30%	33%	52%	42%	12%	1 out of 2 districts
New York City	4%	12%	20%	17%	13%	2 out of 3 districts
Dallas	35%	49%	44%	52%	17%	1 out of 4 districts

For comparison purposes, we also selected two districts that met the demographic requirements but did not demonstrate progress in the achievement of their ELL populations over the study period. Those districts will remain unnamed.

Data Collection

Data collection for the study consisted of pre-visit research and compilation of materials as well as field research conducted in each of the six case study districts. Prior to each site visit, the research team collected and reviewed materials outlining relevant district history and policies. In particular, the team collected documents outlining the district's key reform initiatives and policies of ELL identification, placement, and assessment, as well as district progress reports, strategy memos, organizational charts, and other information pertaining to the instruction and services provided to ELLs.

Each district was then visited twice. The site visits were conducted by a team of Council researchers over the course of two days and followed pre-determined interview protocols with key questions.

The first visit focused on understanding the general historical, political, programmatic, and administrative context of the district and on understanding the central office policies, programs, and practices pertaining to ELL education. In short, this visit was intended to develop a clear picture of district-level strategies for improving ELL achievement. The visit consisted of individual interviews and focus groups with key district leaders and staff, each spanning an average of about an hour and a half. In each district the Council team spoke with the superintendent, board members, the chief academic officer, chief research officer, director of ELL programs, grade-level directors (elementary, middle, high schools), teachers' union representative(s), and other relevant contacts, depending on the district.

The second site visit focused on answering questions that stemmed from the first visit and in understanding the connection between district-level policies and initiatives and changes in the teaching and learning of ELLs at the school level. In addition to follow-up interviews with key staff, the Council team conducted focus groups of up to 15 people assembled according to job responsibilities during the study period. These focus groups consisted of principals, teachers, ELL coaches, and various other support staff. This second visit equipped the Council with a clearer picture of how initiatives were implemented, supported, and monitored in schools, and how school-level staff reacted to districtwide reforms. Finally, the interviews provided a glimpse into the district staff's perspective of the value of changes in policy and practice related to the education of ELLs. It is important to note that, given the retrospective nature of the study, classroom observations were not conducted.

Interviews were semi-structured and open-ended. In preparation for each visit, interview protocols were created, along with a framework outlining the main topics for discussion. Although the interviews were not transcribed, extensive notes were taken by at least two researchers present at each session. These notes were then synthesized into a set of detailed master notes for each district. The Council used these notes to organize findings around the initial research questions and major themes that emerged from the site visits. A synopsis of each district was prepared and shared with the study districts for review and correction of factual inaccuracies.

The Council also collected additional district and student data from each study site. Each individual district analysis includes a brief demographic profile, as well as a summary of student achievement patterns.

Research Advisory Committee

To help guide the design and execution of the study, a group of prominent researchers and practitioners was invited to serve on a research advisory committee. (See Appendix A for committee composition). The committee consists of experts in the areas of language acquisition, ELL assessment, developments in ELL curriculum and instruction, and large urban district reform. The committee met twice in Washington DC at integral points in the conduct of the study. They also provided input through conference calls and emails. The committee played a key role in refining the research design and interview framework and protocols, helping the research team identify and develop the main themes that emerged from the site visits, and reviewing drafts of the study in advance of publication.

III. Limitations of the Research Design

Case study research faces a number of inherent limitations, and the reader should carefully consider the constraints of the information presented in this study.

1. The data and findings presented are inherently subjective. This study relies heavily on personal accounts and perspectives, although the inclusion of multiple points of view does serve as a check and balance in terms of clarifying and confirming the story of what was happening at the district and school levels during the study period.
2. By design, the study documents the experiences of districts from 2002 to 2006. Site visits to the districts commenced in 2008—a considerable lapse in time of nearly two years after the end of the study period. Thus, interviewees were asked to step out of the present situation in the district and recall events and their experiences and perceptions of nearly six years ago. Often they had relocated to different schools or departments and changed job positions since that time.
3. Concentrating on the period of 2002 to 2006 also carries the added limitation of presenting information that is now dated and, in some cases, irrelevant where district, state, or federal policies have changed. Thus, the study should not be approached as a survey of current ELL reform practices but as an account of the initiatives districts were pursuing and the strategies that were being implemented during a fairly recent time period wherein student test scores were rising.
4. The interviews were designed to be open-ended discussions of the key reforms or strategies that the participants felt most directly affected or improved the quality of ELL instruction during the study period. The research team asked broad questions and did not require participants to address every event, policy, or program in place in the district. Thus, there may be some important omissions in the stories presented in the districts synopses. The strategies and programs not covered may indeed have contributed to changes or improvements in the district, but they did not emerge as key themes of the discussions on which this study is based.
5. Interviews were not recorded or transcribed. When weighed against the possible cost in terms of interviewee candor, it was decided that the interviews and focus groups would be led by one or two members of the research team, while one or two members took notes. These notes were then synthesized, providing a thorough, though not exhaustive, account of the points and information shared over the course of the discussion.
6. While student achievement data are presented to show overall trends in each of the study districts, it is not possible to compare or rank districts based on these data. Given that the nation has 50 state educational systems, each with its own standards and assessments administered according to their respective state laws, it is not technically sound to compare the student achievement scores or trends of school districts across state lines.
7. No tests of statistical significance were performed either during the site selection process or in the compilation of achievement trend data to confirm the significance of the growth in test scores over the study period.
8. The study's focus on elementary school reform and strategies is largely a reflection of the realities in the field. District reform efforts have mostly focused on ELLs at the elementary level. Moreover, while districts have generated and reported ELL student assessment data at the secondary level, these data do not often lead to systemic and strategic information regarding the achievement of ELLs at the middle and high school levels.
9. There is no nationwide standard definition of an ELL. The study did not attempt to develop or use a common definition of ELLs, instead relying on each district's own definitions. In response to this variance, as well as

differing state standards, assessments, and exiting criteria for ELLs, our methodology was careful to make district comparisons only within a given state.

10. Finally, the study does not account for differences in accommodation policies and the rules governing exclusion rates. Nor does it address changes in these policies or shifts in various technical specifications of state tests that might have affected trend lines on ELL results.

These limitations reinforce the exploratory nature of this work. Again, the study does not aim to or accomplish the goal of providing proven strategies for improving ELL student achievement. It is a qualitative inquiry into the experiences of districts that have had differing levels of success reforming ELL instruction and improving ELL student outcomes. The aim is to present each district's approach to ELL reform and to learn as much as possible about the challenges, strategies, and promising practices that emerged.

IV. Directions for Future Research

In the course of our research and analysis, a variety of concerns and areas that warrant further investigation became apparent. While some research topics were identified by the districts involved, others emerged from the analysis of cross-district trends and challenges.

To begin with, there is a need for larger-scale analysis of district-level reform strategies for improving ELL instruction. This study presents a complex picture of the interaction of various efforts, from managed instruction and curricular alignment to professional development and strategic staffing. More focused investigations of best practices in each of these areas, as well as the relative impact of these efforts on student achievement, would provide invaluable guidance and direction for school districts. For example, this study points to the importance of comprehensive planning, support, and oversight to ensure consistency in implementation of district reforms at the school and classroom levels. The next step might be to look at the specific policies and practices that best promote program implementation and fidelity, as well as the connection between program fidelity and student outcomes.

There is also a pressing need for further research into strategies for helping ELLs and non-ELLs alike develop the academic language and literacy skills necessary to access content-area subject matter. While great strides have been made in equipping students with foundational reading skills such as decoding and phonemic awareness, it is clear that a student's academic success depends on his or her ability to fully comprehend and engage grade-appropriate text and materials. This is going to require a better understanding of how to meet ELL instructional needs in later grades and across content areas, as well as how to design and implement structural and instructional reform efforts at the secondary level to improve ELL student outcomes.

Moreover, there is a need to investigate how disaggregated student data are—or should be—collected and applied to improve ELL instruction. Certainly NCLB, with its focus on subgroup data and accountability, spurred efforts to improve ELL instruction across the country. Yet much remains unclear about the appropriate approaches and instruments for accurately tracking ELL achievement, as well as how to build accountability systems around these data to provide meaningful and achievable goals for academic achievement. Furthermore, while education practitioners and researchers cite the term "data-driven instruction" *ad nauseum*, there is a growing need for clarification in the field as to how student data can be most effectively applied to diagnose student needs and target instruction and academic interventions. It is clear that this will require substantial investment not only in data systems, collection efforts, and instruments of measurement, but also in ongoing training for district and school level staff.

Chapter 1 Endnotes

[1] The National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) defines "large central city" as a central city with a population at or above 250,000.
[2] See snapshots on each study district for ELL proficiency data through 2007-08.
[3] Minnesota changed its state tests in 2006.
[4] New York state changed its state tests in 2006 and the results may have had an effect on ELL proficiency rates.
[5] New York City serves approximately 70 percent of all ELLs in the state. New York City did not show statistically significant gains on NAEP fourth-grade ELL reading scores between 2003 and 2007.

Chapter 2:
Study Findings

Education reform in urban school districts is never a simple, consistent process, and the picture of ELL reform that emerged from the site visits was a study in district diversity. In each city, efforts to improve the quality of ELL instruction were shaped by the local and state context as well as the attributes and vision of individuals in key leadership positions. Yet there are a number of clear parallels in the stories of districts that experienced gains in ELL achievement over the study period, as well as some striking contrasts with the experiences of the comparison districts. This chapter provides an overview of these recurring themes.

The key patterns observed can be grouped into three categories:

I. **Contextual Features:** Steps that improving districts took or events that occurred that helped set the stage for district-wide change.

II. **Promising Practices:** The shared characteristics of and strategies employed by improving districts.

III. **Limiting Factors:** Characteristics and practices that seem to inhibit quality instruction and support for ELLs in districts showing less improvement.

I. Contextual Features

Among improving districts, it became clear that certain events occurred and steps were taken that fundamentally altered the way decisions were made concerning ELL instructional programs and resource allocations. These steps were often organizational in nature and served to create the foundation necessary to advance ELL reform on a districtwide basis.

Shared Vision for Reform

The study focused on the period directly after the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act—the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB). NCLB, with its emphasis on assessment and accountability for subgroups, required schools and districts across the country to report the achievement levels of the ELL subgroup. In some districts, the low achievement of ELLs spurred intense scrutiny of ELL programs as the academic needs of ELLs were brought into the spotlight. All case study districts cited NCLB as an important factor in understanding the context of what was happening during this time.

However, among improving districts there seemed to be greater determination to capitalize on this context as an opportunity to further advance a clear, unified vision for district reform. In St. Paul, for instance, the district abandoned its approach of segregating ELLs from the general student population and moved toward a system of integration and support. In New York City, the district moved from an uneven patchwork of regional and site-specific ELL programming toward alignment and loose centralization of control. In Dallas, an ELL advocate on the school board used disaggregated student data to consistently raise the issue of low performance of ELLs throughout the district. In San Francisco, the district's approach centered on identifying and focusing school improvement efforts on a subgroup of chronically low-performing schools, many of which enrolled large numbers of ELLs.

The process of communicating this vision and rallying support behind district goals often created the momentum districts needed to push for large-scale reform and restructuring efforts. Indeed, in New York City, reform came in the shape of a dramatic, systemwide overhaul of district organization and leadership. While somewhat less dramatic, the district reform and restructuring efforts spearheaded in Dallas and St. Paul also signaled a district commitment to far-reaching, systemwide change.

Leadership and Advocacy on Behalf of ELLs

In each of the improving districts, there was a particularly effective, vocal advocate for improvement of ELL instruction and services who helped shape and advance the reform agenda. This advocate was often the ELL director, although in some districts the chief academic officer, superintendent, or a key board member played this role. In St. Paul virtually every teacher, principal, and district staff member interviewed confirmed that the driving forces behind the changes in the district's ELL strategy were the superintendent and ELL director, who developed a clear vision for ELL reform and aggressively advanced this vision throughout the study period. In Dallas, many cited the efforts of a board member who seized on student data to draw attention to the critical needs of ELLs and drive much-needed program reform.

Leadership can be a hopelessly imprecise concept, but in each district these leaders shared several characteristics and priorities. In addition to having expertise and a commitment to quality ELL instruction, they were skillful in forming strategic partnerships and rallying support behind their reform agendas. They took mindful, proactive steps to break down the compartmentalized organization of the central office and build a culture of collaboration. They worked closely with the directors of various subject area and grade level departments and encouraged similar collaboration at the school level. They were also able to connect with people outside of the district office, maintaining a regular presence at school sites and community meetings. They understood the importance of setting high standards for ELL achievement and then providing the tools and oversight schools needed to meet these high standards. They were also great believers in the importance of research and data, mandating and supporting the use of student data to improve instruction and services for ELLs.

Leadership and the Empowerment of the ELL Office

In improving districts, the prioritization of ELL reform was usually accompanied by the empowerment of the office of ELL programs and its director. Interviewees consistently recounted a perceptible shift in the role and stature of the ELL department during the study period. Often for the first time, this office was included in the highest levels of decision making, such as the superintendent's cabinet, and given the authority to establish districtwide ELL practices and to work with other central office departments and schools to oversee progress.

Without exception, superintendents in these districts were well served in their decision to appoint and explicitly support strong administrators to carry out a broad mandate to reform the ELL program. The ELL directors who had a greater voice in the decision-making process were better able to harness district resources—both funding and staff—to support instructional improvement for ELLs. In New York, for example, the ELL executive director was once charged with various other roles in addition to leading the ELL office. At the outset of the study period, this executive director was put in charge of ELL issues alone and endowed with new decision making powers and a significant budget to pursue and implement ELL reforms across the district.

External Forces as Catalyst for Reforms

Legal battles were an important part of the context for several of the districts included in the study. In addition to several notable desegregation court cases, some districts were engaged in additional court cases specific to ensuring ELL's access to the core curriculum. Most—if not all—of the court cases resulted in the creation of extensive data collection processes designed to meet the specific requirements of the courts. Yet in some cases, the district went beyond meeting the data reporting requirements and used the data to drive instructional reforms on behalf of ELLs. In Dallas, for example, a desegregation lawsuit prompted the district to start collecting and reporting extensive data on the achievement of ELLs and Latinos even before NCLB. These reports provided critical information on how ELLs were performing in the district and gave impetus to the board to improve ELL instruction and services.

Whether these legal battles became a catalyst for reforms or the cornerstone for improved accountability systems hinged on the leadership's vision and capability to go beyond mere exercises in compliance. The districts that were able to steer their initial efforts in compliance towards more systemic program and instructional improvements for ELLs saw greater increases in ELL achievement.

II. Promising Practices

The debate over effective instruction for ELLs often focuses single-mindedly on the value of specific program models and the extent of native language use in instruction. Yet what appeared to advance the quality of teaching and learning for ELLs in the case study districts were broader, more thematic strategies and shifts in district procedures and practices.

Among improving districts, ELL reform was frequently couched within a larger district reform initiative—often focused on reading and literacy—that benefited from comprehensive planning and substantial support for implementation. New initiatives were accompanied with guidance, tools, and oversight from the central office. These districts directed their attention and resources toward ensuring ELLs equal access to a common, districtwide core curriculum and providing intensive, high quality professional development for all teachers—and principals—of ELLs. Staff members in these districts recounted a dramatic shift in culture during this time period, with greater emphasis placed on the use of assessment data, increased collaboration at the central office and school levels, and shared accountability for the achievement of all students.

It is important to note that much of this observed consistency among improving districts applied to three of the four cities profiled. San Francisco provided an interesting counterpoint to many of the characteristics and strategies pursued by Dallas, St. Paul, and New York City. Specifically, while the other study districts appeared to pursue reforms aimed at providing systemwide coherence and alignment of curriculum, instruction, and professional development, San Francisco concentrated its efforts in a subset of chronically low-performing schools. While the other districts articulated ELL-specific reform initiatives, San Francisco's improvement efforts focused more broadly on low-performing students. To be sure, there were important parallels between what the other districts were doing districtwide, and what San Francisco was supporting in low-performing schools. However, in general San Francisco presented a slightly different picture of reform.

Comprehensive Planning and Adoption of Language Development Strategies for ELLs

The majority of the districts that were beginning to experience progress in ELL student achievement had established a districtwide instructional improvement strategy—often with a particular emphasis on improving reading and literacy for all students. These improvement strategies included specific efforts to systematically build schools' capacity to instruct and support ELLs. Communication with and involvement of school staff and the community were essential in the roll out of these reforms. Most of the successful districts actively engaged teachers, principals, and other

school administrators in the adoption of organizational and instructional strategies. Several launched substantial parent and community outreach efforts to promote broad-based support and buy-in.

Although there was some variation among districts regarding specific policies, instructional techniques, and program models, successful districts reported making concerted efforts to understand the demographics and needs of their ELLs and to address these needs via a coherent plan for ELL instructional improvement. Importantly, these ELL instructional strategies shared one critical component: an explicit focus on supporting academic language acquisition among ELLs, regardless of the second language acquisition model being used (e.g. bilingual, ESL, dual language, etc). This and other studies have found that the development of academic language skills—i.e., the vocabulary, reading comprehension, and discourse skills necessary to access higher-level course content—is a critical determinant of academic progress for all students. The literacy initiatives launched by improving districts thus incorporated explicit instruction in vocabulary and reading comprehension, including the strategic use of native language, as a key lever for improving overall student achievement in the district and ELL achievement in particular.

Successful districts were also likely to have a deliberate policy and specific practices for the English language development (ELD) of ELLs. In several districts the ELD policy was expressed as a Language Allocation Policy (LAP) while in others, the ELD component was integrated into the broader curriculum and professional development efforts. Such district strategies and practices signaled an implicit understanding of the dual academic challenge of ELLs: to acquire both proficiency in English and the literacy skills to comprehend content. In New York City, for example, the LAP was a mandatory part of schools' comprehensive education plans. ELL teachers were required to receive training related to the implementation of the LAP, and the central office conducted walk-throughs to determine fidelity of implementation and to ensure coherence and alignment of the use of native language across schools.

Extensive and Continuous Support for Implementation

In each district, the level of support for implementation was a crucial factor in the success or failure of district reform efforts in general and ELL initiatives in particular. The implementation of reforms in improving districts was clearly mapped out and approached as a long-term commitment of time and resources. Expectations for school-level implementation were made clear—often in writing. The district actively engaged school leaders in the formulation of these strategies, instituting clear systems for monitoring and oversight at the school and classroom levels.

For example, each school in New York City received an ELL toolkit from the central office with guidance on the kinds of instruction and services that needed to be offered to different students. This toolkit included curriculum guides that explained the district's philosophical approach to instruction and how to implement its components, along with videos, planning and pacing guides, and professional resources on second language acquisition. To further clarify and support fidelity in the implementation of the district's policies, site-based support staff received training developed by the central office on how to use the toolkit. The district also offered in-service training to regional and local administrators. Each region then devised and submitted to the district its plan to roll out the toolkit, and subsequent curriculum audits ensured that each school's instructional program was aligned to state standards and the district's philosophical approach.

Staffing also played a key role in implementation support and oversight. For example, in St. Paul each school site was assigned a teacher on special assignment (TOSA) who provided information and coaching on the newly adopted collaborative model of instruction, conducted presentations for staff, facilitated meetings, and worked with school personnel to facilitate professional development activities. These TOSAs—referred to as the "eyes and ears" of the ELL office—essentially acted as liaisons between the school and the district, ensuring that schools had the support they needed and were implementing the district's collaborative teaching model. Similarly, implementation of the Students and Teachers Achieving Results (STAR) Schools Initiative in San Francisco was supported by site-based support staff (instructional reform facilitators) assigned to work in the STAR Schools to assist principals and teachers with data analysis to inform instruction.

A Culture of Collaboration and Shared Accountability

Cities with stronger ELL reform efforts took steps to change the organizational culture of the district through increased collaboration and shared accountability for ELLs. At the school level, teachers in successful districts were directed,

trained, encouraged, and sometimes required to work with their colleagues to improve ELL instruction across the curriculum. In New York, for example, the ELL office conducted joint professional development sessions with ELL and content area teachers throughout the district. The very focus of reform in St. Paul—the adoption of the collaborative model of instruction—drove increased transparency and the need for content area and ELL teachers to work as a team.

Interviewees reported that this increased collaboration, along with a district emphasis on schoolwide accountability for student achievement across the board, helped teachers understand their role in the education and progress of ELLs. Accountability also prompted principals to think of themselves as instructional leaders and to make themselves available to support and oversee everyday classroom instruction at their schools.

At the same time, accountability in these districts was reciprocal in nature. While the district held schools accountable for raising student achievement, the central office was accountable for providing schools with the necessary guidance, support, and resources to achieve these results. To meet these needs, districts went to great lengths to dismantle old barriers between departments and subject areas at the highest levels. In Dallas, for instance, when the district ramped up its efforts to implement a bilingual education staffing plan that required transferring a large number of ELL teachers, the chief academic officer, the director of their ELL programs, and the head of the teachers' union made joint presentations and fielded questions as a united front throughout the implementation process. Such consistency in communications conveyed an important message: teachers, general education departments, and the office for ELL programs shared in the responsibility for ELL achievement.

Hybrid Models of Instructional Direction and Local Empowerment

Improving districts often exhibited hybrid school governance models that combined instructional management by the central office with site-based empowerment. These hybrid model districts were more likely to have a district-determined curriculum, clear models for ELL programs, districtwide adoptions of instructional materials, district-supported, coordinated, and prioritized professional development, and strong accountability systems reaching down to the school level. There were variations, however, in how these elements were applied in the study districts.

At the same time, this increased central office role in instructional management was accompanied by increased flexibility and authority over budgeting and staffing at the school level. For example, while St. Paul instituted a fairly prescriptive ELL instructional model (collaborative teaching) and held schools accountable for raising student achievement, school leaders were given more support and leeway to make important school governance decisions, such as the removal of teachers who failed to meet the needs of ELLs. In New York, the district—during the study period—articulated a common core curriculum and more defined instructional practices, but each school created its own Language Allocation Policy based on the specific language needs of their students.

The level of instructional management of schools by the central office varied among the study districts, sometimes focusing on specific areas such as reading or on a subset of schools. In other cases, instructional management was defined largely around accountability goals. For example, instructional management in San Francisco targeted a subset of chronically low-performing schools. Yet in most districts, instructional programs provided systemwide coherence by giving ELLs access to grade-appropriate coursework aligned with district standards as well as with the district's general education program. Conversely, districts wherein school-level decisions were not guided by a districtwide program or curriculum and where accountability structures were weak typically had inconsistent programs and services for ELLs across schools.

Strategic School Staffing

The recruitment and placement of qualified teachers and ELL support staff was another key lever of ELL instructional reform. Across case study districts school staffing changes ran the gamut from the creation of new positions and whole networks of support staff to the systematic reorganization or reallocation of teachers and staff. In New York City, the district created a highly elaborate, multitiered personnel structure of instructional specialists, coaches, and other support staff. This staffing structure translated the city's ELL instructional goals down to the local level and provided ongoing support, supervision, and training for those on the front lines. Teachers, in particular, identified the site-based support offered by this network of staff as the most effective element of new ELL initiatives.

Dallas achieved greater programmatic consistency for ELLs through a bilingual staffing plan that was initiated and

carried out over most of the period under study. The district carried out a comprehensive and strategic effort to re-assign bilingual-certified teachers to grades Pre-K through 3 on bilingual campuses, which accounted for two-thirds of the district's elementary schools. Although the staffing challenges the plan presented to principals led to early resistance and frustration, it was eventually lauded as having successfully improved the educational experience for ELLs by ensuring they are taught by a succession of bilingual teachers in the early elementary grades. The plan also helped increase consistency in the implementation of bilingual programs across schools.

In St. Paul, a key factor in instructional improvement was the systemwide removal of ineffective ELL teachers from the classroom combined with the recruitment of new teachers more open to the district's collaborative model of instruction. To address the persistent challenge of low ELL teacher quality in the district, a rubric for evaluating teachers was created. The ELL director personally worked with principals to support the use of the rubric as a tool to clarify expectations and evaluate teacher quality. Using this rubric to support school-level ratings of teacher adequacy, 71 teachers were released over the study period—a significant number given that there were only 79 ESL teachers in the district at the outset of reform. At the same time, approximately 120 new ESL teachers were hired between 2000 and 2006. Importantly, as part of the hiring process, the district administered a questionnaire asking candidates about their willingness to work collaboratively with other teachers. In other words, through a strategy of calculated teacher turnover, the district was able to build a corps of more qualified teachers who shared their instructional vision.

High Quality and Relevant Professional Development

Given the importance of access to quality teachers for student achievement—particularly among ELLs—it came as no surprise that access to high quality professional development (PD) for general education teachers and ELL teachers alike was instrumental in the reform initiatives of improving districts.

In fact, in each of the districts professional development was approached as the key mechanism for supporting implementation of ELL reform strategies at the school and classroom levels. In St. Paul, a heavy emphasis on joint professional development of ELL and general education teachers in specific techniques and instructional strategies was at the heart of the district's strategy for rolling out their collaborative teaching model. In New York, the district employed extensive professional development in literacy instruction to help bolster its reading and literacy reforms for ELLs.

Conversations with teachers, principals, and central office staff in these districts revealed the importance of the quality and rigor of these PD opportunities. Few districts conduct formal evaluations of their professional development initiatives, and this study did not uncover any conclusive evidence regarding the relative impact of different professional development strategies. However, an overall picture of promising practices did emerge from the professional development efforts and initiatives carried out in the districts studied. In particular, the team found that higher quality professional development programs:

- were founded on the best research available in the fields of literacy and ELL instruction
- were sustained and long-term
- went beyond merely transmitting information and involved hands-on, site-based strategies such as lesson or technique modeling, coaching, and providing feedback based on close monitoring of practice
- were available to teachers of every subject to help build the skills necessary to support ELLs across the curriculum
- targeted not only teachers, but also principals and other school administrators and leaders
- featured training in the use of student data to diagnose student needs and tailor instruction

Moreover, improved and expanded opportunities for professional development often had the added benefit of building collaboration and buy-in among teachers and school leaders. By showing principals and other school-based administrators what high quality ELL instruction looked like and what to look for in classrooms, successful districts were able to create an engaged, school-level support structure for teachers. Principals were also able to monitor their staff to ensure that the concepts and instructional vision behind the district's professional development efforts were being consistently applied at the classroom level.

Finally, the most effective efforts at improving professional development also included general education teachers. This signaled an understanding on the part of the district that all teachers could benefit from specialized training in how to teach literacy across the curriculum and how to

support all students with differentiated instruction. Dissemination of relevant, high quality instructional strategies for teaching ELLs also resulted in greater chances for teacher collaboration and shared accountability for the achievement of ELLs.

The Use of Student Data

Another common practice among improving districts during the study period was the collection and strategic use of student assessment data. Even for those districts "ahead of the curve" in terms of student data collection, NCLB brought with it new requirements, including the mandated disaggregation of student data by subgroup. This shed light on the work that still needed to be done to raise the achievement of ELLs. Improving districts made the use of data a cornerstone of their reform strategies, significantly expanding the accessibility, quantity, and types of student data available to educators. In particular, these districts took steps to give teachers and school leaders access to accurate, timely student measures that could be used to help them diagnose and respond to individual student needs.

Central office staff in New York reported that student data drove conversations about the need for reform and accountability. These conversations served to clarify expectations regarding improvement for ELLs and also helped schools, teachers, and the central office monitor their progress. In some cases, the effective and strategic use of ELL achievement data was also seen as instrumental in driving board or other policy decisions and discussions with district leadership. In Dallas, for instance, one particularly vocal champion of ELL issues focused on student achievement data to highlight the specific academic needs of ELLs and the critical need for instructional reform across the district. In San Francisco, meanwhile, student achievement data were analyzed to identify low-performing schools and target instructional improvement efforts.

Reallocation and Strategic Use of ELL Funds

In many districts, ELL reform efforts benefited from both increased funding and the reallocation of existing resources.[6] In St. Paul, for example, a careful examination by the ELL department revealed that funds allocated to support ELL instruction and services were being diverted from the ELL program to support other school and district priorities. The ELL director vigorously pursued these budget issues and worked to ensure that ELL resources were allocated appropriately. This dramatically increased the amount of available resources—resources that were instrumental in supporting the district's ambitious new ELL reform agenda.

In several of the districts, the reallocation of resources was mandated by a court order. Some of these court orders even required that specific dollar amounts be targeted at specific schools. Others required investment in specific programs serving racial minority students or ELLs.

The strategic use of these additional resources allowed districts to expend certain funds on centrally-determined goals and priorities while allocating other funds to directly support schools. Strategic funding also allowed for economies of scale and coordination in the acquisition of instructional materials and support. More importantly, perhaps, centrally-funded and supported professional development, curriculum development, and ongoing instructional support for the district's ELL programs created greater programmatic coherence.

III. Limiting Factors

Among slower-improving districts, a number of factors seemed to limit the potentially positive impact of programs or initiatives or to divert attention and resources from the central matter of improving teaching and learning for ELLs. In particular, the shifting goals and priorities that often accompany a change in district leadership undermined ELL reforms through inconsistency and a lack of sustained focus on any given reform agenda. At the same time, many of the districts, whether during or prior to the study period, faced external pressure in the form of law-suits and compliance agreements with the state. While these legal mandates can at times spur meaningful change, in these districts they led to the adoption of compliance-oriented policies and practices with no real value or regard for supporting ELLs or improving instruction.

Other aspects of the district environment at both the central office and school levels can also impede progress and support for student achievement. In particular, staff in struggling districts reported a lack of resource equity and collaboration across departments—a silo-like work environment where ELL teachers and ELL department staff were on their own, in terms of both access to resources and accountability for ELLs.

No Coherent Vision or Strategy for the Instruction of ELLs Systemwide

Through conversations with leadership and staff at all levels, it was clear that neither comparison district effectively articulated or communicated a vision for the kind of instructional programming it would pursue on behalf of ELLs. There was no districtwide blueprint for ELL instruction and services, little backing from district leadership, and no real authority in the ELL office to guide school sites in their implementation of effective programs. Neither district's ELL program was founded on research or even a general consensus about how to develop academic literacy among ELLs—or among general education students for that matter. By and large, the instructional needs of ELLs appeared to have been an afterthought and, according to school level staff, there were scarce materials, little professional development, and few strategies that could be used to raise student achievement.

In response to federal accountability measures such as NCLB, state measures, or federal court orders, the ELL policies and procedures these districts adopted were aimed more at ensuring legal compliance than at authentic educational reform. In these cases, district leadership failed to capitalize on the court orders and other legal requirements to spur the needed reform.

Site-based Management without Support, Oversight, or Explicit Accountability for Student Progress

The lack of a coherent vision for ELL instruction, coupled with both districts' long held practice of site-based management, resulted in systems that devolved most instructional responsibilities to individual schools without accountability for results. There was a widely expressed feeling that schools were "on their own," with no explicit goals or targets for student progress and no system in place to support or monitor the implementation of adopted programs. This lack of support and oversight led to inconsistency in the curriculum, instruction, and services available to ELLs across each district. ELL programming decisions were primarily a function of the personal judgment and leadership capabilities of school leaders, the varying priorities of communities, and access to resources or categorical grants. As a result, the quality of programming varied from school to school.

Such programmatic fragmentation led to low expectations for children and little accountability for results. The schools' relative freedom in operating their site-based programs was not coupled with clear accountability for the educational outcomes of students or consequences if students did not progress. Neither district had the structural components necessary to exact accountability for ELL results (such as regular data reporting on ELLs, stable ELL office leadership, or school board advocacy). Nor was there strong internal or external political pressure to examine ELL performance in the district. In these districts, monitoring and oversight of ELL instruction was approached merely as an administrative exercise instead of an opportunity for review and continuous improvement of instructional practices and programs.

Lack of Access to the General Curriculum

ELL instruction in both comparison districts was largely approached as supplemental—not integrated into the core curriculum and not monitored to ensure consistency with districtwide instructional standards. Both districts mandated specialized language support for ELLs, but the lack of guidance and oversight of this ELL program component led to schools adopting different approaches to the amount of time allotted for this support, how to group ELLs given the various levels of proficiency and languages spoken, and how to assign teachers. By most accounts, pulling students out of subject area classes for 30, 45, or even 90 minutes a day on an *ad hoc* basis was not effective at meeting the needs of ELLs and resulted mainly in ELLs missing out on access to the core curriculum.

Even in mainstream classrooms there was no system in place for ensuring ELLs were being taught to the same standards as other students. ELL department staff members were rarely involved in the selection of new programs or materials. As a result, adopted materials and programs did not necessarily take into account the language acquisition needs of ELLs (or of general education students, for that matter) and did not specify how various program components should be customized in schools with sizable numbers of ELLs. General education teachers were rarely equipped with any specialized training in English language development strategies or differentiated instruction.

No Systematic Use of Disaggregated Student Data

There was no clear strategy in either comparison district for tracking the academic progress of ELLs or making student assessment data available to schools and teachers in a meaningful, timely way. Both districts did have benchmark testing systems during the study period that could have provided potentially useful information on ELL student progress

and program effectiveness. However, it took months for the results of these assessments to become available to teachers, and the data reporting systems in these districts were repeatedly described as inaccessible and unreliable. Moreover, teachers did not have access to data showing patterns of student achievement or progress on critical standards, subject strands, or specific test questions, so data could not be used to target instruction or offer specialized support to struggling students. In the absence of solid benchmark test-score data, both districts relied heavily on classroom assessments of ELL progress—processes that were inconsistently administered and inherently subjective.

Inconsistent Leadership

While high turnover of district administrators is a reality in large urban school systems across the country, it was a particularly persistent challenge in the comparison districts. Changes in leadership are not always an obstacle to educational reform and quality. However, in these districts each new leader brought a different philosophy and agenda, making it nearly impossible to implement a coherent instructional program. This created a lack of confidence and faith in the district's ability to sustain meaningful instructional reform. Staff came and went, districtwide practices were revised, and management structures overhauled. As these administrative changes made their way down the district's organizational food chain, programs not considered critical to the district's new mission—often including ELL programs—were neglected.

In both districts, this high turnover was a symptom of distracting power struggles. Many in these districts reported feeling that the focus during the study period was on the adults in the school district instead of on the children. Confidence was further undermined by the selection of administrators without a perceived commitment to ELLs specifically or quality instruction generally.

No Systemic Efforts to Build ELL Staff Capacity

By and large, the comparison districts did not have a coherent strategy for building ELL staff capacity through the identification and placement of qualified ELL teachers, targeted professional development, or the strategic deployment of qualified instructional aides. While certification requirements may have existed, these guidelines were rarely observed. One district-level staff member in a comparison district recalled that schools operated with very little fear that uncertified teachers would be removed from classrooms because "we were a district who didn't follow up on our threats."

In these districts, professional development was largely voluntary, not unlike other districts that have negotiated agreements with the teachers' union. In the absence of centrally-defined, supported, and monitored professional development, each school determined and provided for its own professional development needs. Thus the focus and quality of professional development varied from school to school. Most professional development opportunities that existed did not integrate ELL-specific content into their offerings or address strategies for differentiated instruction. There was also no concerted effort to ensure that ELL teachers were even included in the professional development that existed for "mainstream" teachers. ELL teachers in these districts recounted being asked to cover classes for general education teachers attending professional development seminars and workshops.

Furthermore, while both districts had policies providing ELL instructional aides or teaching assistants to schools, little district guidance was provided to principals as to how such staff members were to be allocated, managed, or trained. As a result, these aides were not strategically deployed in the schools to provide instructional support to ELLs. Instead, they were often used at the discretion of school leadership or general education teachers. For example, without much prior notice these aides were pulled away from classrooms to monitor school lunches, translate school documents and interpret for school staff, and perform other non-instructional support activities. In addition, there was no set procedure or requirement governing the training and resources made available to these aides, and it was reported that most received little to no relevant professional development.

Compartmentalization of ELL Departments and Staff

A particularly critical impediment to ELL instructional improvement in the comparison districts was the highly compartmentalized organization of the central office. This organization failed to engender collaborative working relationships across departments and instructional areas. In particular, offices of ELL programs sometimes appeared to work in isolation from other instructional departments and programs, resulting in the ineffective use of funds and less access to instructional resources and professional development. This silo mode of operation was often directly linked to the fragmentation of various funding streams that come

to the district. The categorical nature of much of the funding made it challenging for district staff to think outside of these categories to maximize the use of various funding streams to address ELL instructional needs across the board.

As a result, many teachers and staff members in these districts acknowledged that textbooks, curricula, and instructional strategies were often ill-suited to meet the specialized needs of ELLs. Compartmentalization also institutionalized the general sense that the office for ELL programs—alone—was responsible for the achievement of ELLs.

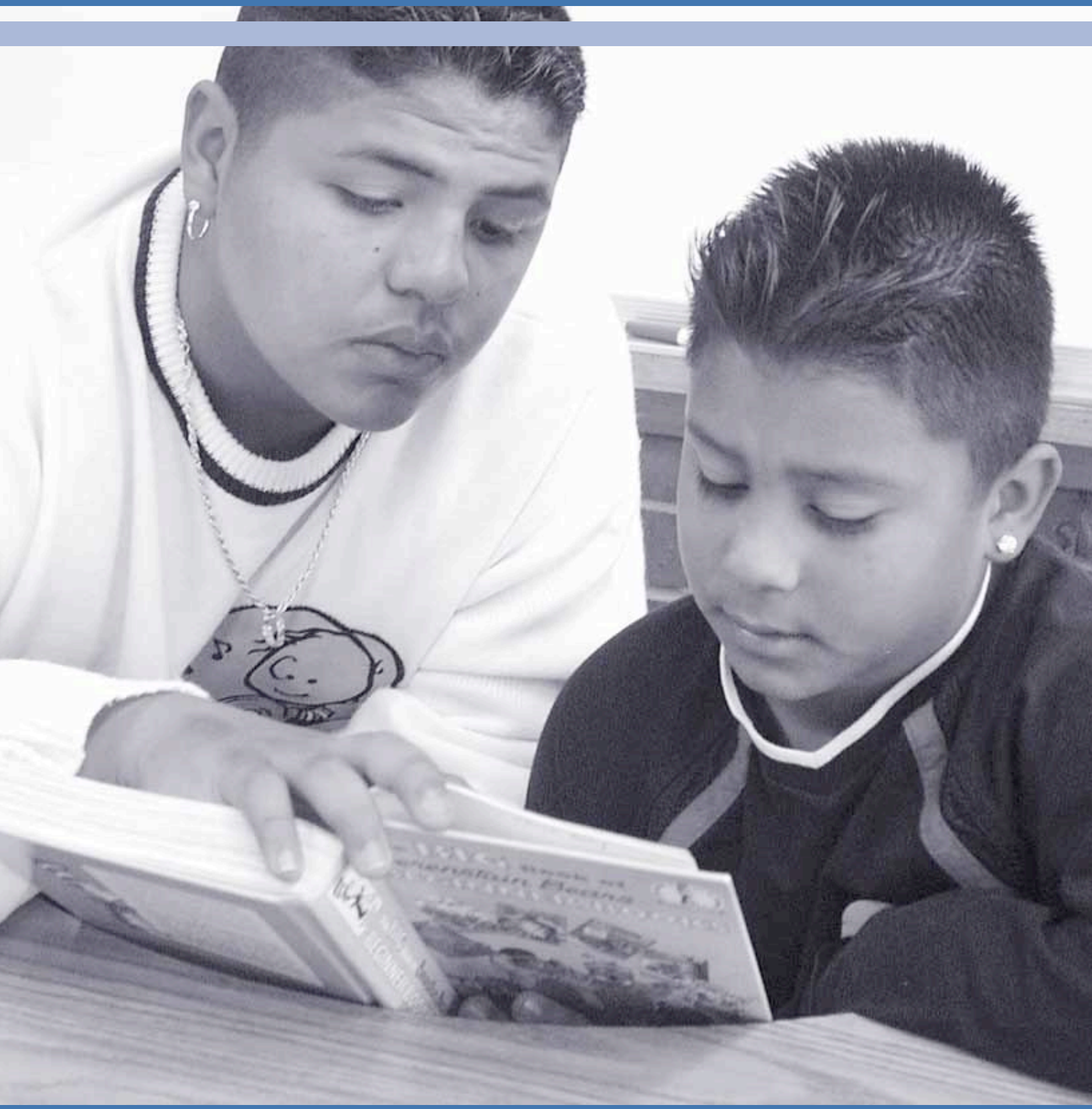
The lack of collaboration at the central office trickled down. At the school level, there was an assumption that ELL teachers were solely responsible for ELLs regardless of what curriculum was in place or the fact that they didn't have access to professional development or resources. There were no conversations or work around how to meet ELL student needs throughout the day and across the curriculum. There was also not enough pooling of knowledge or resources among schools, leading to duplication of work and services.

The ELL Department Lacked Capacity and Authority

Finally, the office of ELL programs in both districts at this time lacked the authority and resources to take strong leadership roles on ELL issues. With limited influence, the ELL director was not empowered to monitor or enforce implementation of ELL initiatives or to provide direct assistance to school leaders in examining instructional practices for ELLs. The role of the ELL office was often relegated to that of ensuring compliance with legal mandates, with little connection to teaching and learning and the broader initiatives of the district.

Chapter 2 Endnotes

[6] This increase in resources was probably helped in many cities during the study period by the change in the federal Title III system of allocating resources to the local level made by NCLB.



Chapter 3:
Enduring Challenges

Despite some of the striking contrasts between the two sets of districts, the most enduring and intractable forces stymieing efforts to improve the academic achievement and long-term prospects of ELLs are very much shared challenges. Leaders and staff in each district were quick to point out the specialized needs of adolescent, newcomer students, yet they acknowledge that a majority of the students falling through the cracks are long-term ELLs who have been in the system for years. These students are likely to be segregated in their classrooms and in their communities, with little exposure to native English speakers. They are also likely to be taught by teachers who lack the preparation and skills to meet their academic needs. The lack of a coherent national standard for ELL identification and assessment has led to varying levels of exclusion in the assessment of ELLs, and has limited the ability of districts to track ELL progress and evaluate program effectiveness. And while some progress has been made at the elementary level—and even at the middle school level—districts have yet to make similar progress at the high school level. These ongoing challenges have important implications for the future direction of ELL reform efforts at the local, state, and federal levels.

Long-Term ELLs

The majority of ELLs failing to make progress or graduate high school are long-term ELLs. Long-term ELLs are generally defined as those students who have been enrolled in the education system in the United States for seven or more years and have yet to acquire the level of English proficiency necessary to exit from ELL programs. As staff in the case study districts pointed out, a majority of these students were born in the United States and have been in the education system their entire lives. Across the country, it is estimated that 76 percent ELLs at the elementary level and 56 percent of ELLs at the secondary level were born in the United States.[7] While districts were unanimous in voicing their concern for such students, finding effective interventions to move these long-term ELLs along the proficiency continuum remains a challenge.

Lack of Progress at the High School Level

The challenge of advancing achievement among long-term ELLs is inextricably linked to the challenge of secondary school reform—particularly at the high school level. Each of the study districts acknowledged that the greatest amount of work for ELL instructional reform was focused at the elementary level for a number of reasons, including state initiatives, access to instructional materials, and even state laws limiting funding or capping the amount of time these students can remain in ELL programs. There also appeared to be more expertise and a greater comfort level at the elementary level, where it was easier to break down walls between subject areas and promote collaboration between ELL and general education teachers. Addressing literacy needs across the curriculum—for ELLs as well as students in general—seemed to be a greater challenge at the high school level, where literacy instruction is often supplemental in nature and aimed mainly at struggling readers.

Lack of Continuity in Reform Efforts

Another persistent challenge to effective ELL instructional reform is the tendency of districts to shift directions either before reaching full implementation or before determining the relative impact or promise of a given strategy. Districts rarely evaluate the relationship between the level of program fidelity—and the amount of time it takes for a district to fully implement a given program—and student achievement. Rather than addressing those issues, programs are often completely abandoned. Such frequent program turnovers result in school-level confusion and skepticism toward new approaches, as well as a waste of time, energy, and already scarce funding.

Clearly, reform efforts do require course adjustments and continual improvement. Moreover, if student achievement data indicate that a program is not contributing to student success, another approach is warranted. However, many of these changes are undertaken as a result of political pressure to initiate new programs and meet student growth targets at a faster rate. Rather than being driven by data, these programmatic changes result from changing reform priorities or a school board that has a different philosophical stance. Other changes result from a desire to abandon the initiatives of a previous administration. Students may even be demonstrating gains, but the gains may not meet district expectations.

Consistency in implementation of ELL programs faces the additional challenge of political controversy. The politics of language are intimately tied to questions of rights and identity in the United States, and school districts often find themselves caught in the middle of an increasingly contentious battle over the use of native language in public school classrooms. One side encourages native language instruction as a way to better acquire academic knowledge and bi-literacy; the other demands the fastest possible transition to English-only instruction in the name of assimilation to mainstream culture. The end result is that school districts are frequently forced to make ELL programming decisions—and alterations—based on politics rather than considerations of how to provide effective, high quality instruction.

No Coherent System for ELL Classification, Assessment, and Tracking

The struggle to identify effective approaches for supporting ELLs is also hampered by the inconsistent criteria, policies, and instruments for the classification and assessment of ELLs. Each state has its own process for the identification and placement of ELLs, along with varying instruments and policies for administering such assessments and for monitoring progress among ELLs for accountability purposes under NCLB. This lack of consistency and coherence calls into question the validity of current assessment instruments

to accurately and meaningfully measure student achievement, and has led to varying rates of exclusion in the assessment of ELLs from district to district. This also limits the ability of states and districts to track long-term ELL academic progress.

Moreover, most states and districts only track data for current ELLs. In the absence of policies and mechanisms for tracking former ELLs—as well as linking them to the ELL program they were enrolled in or the services they received— it is not only hard to meet adequate yearly progress (AYP) subgroup accountability targets, but districts are missing out on important sources of data regarding the relative impact of various instructional approaches on ELL achievement.

It is also difficult to obtain a comprehensive picture of ELL achievement because districts often have a patchwork of data systems developed over time for distinct purposes and subject to various funding constraints. In many districts, the ELL data are dispersed among three or four different databases. For example, districts may collect information on ELL enrollment, attendance, language proficiency level, scores on state assessments for accountability, and special education status, but these data are rarely linked or readily available to educators as a comprehensive resource. Unless districts make a concerted effort to construct a more complete picture of an ELL's schooling experience (attendance, program enrollment, assessment, and progress), schools will not have the necessary information to adjust instructional practices to improve ELL achievement, and the district has no way of measuring the effectiveness of its programs and practices.

Continued Isolation of ELLs

In our study districts and in districts across the country, ELLs are likely to reside in communities designated as "linguistically isolated" by the U.S. Census and to be educated in schools—and classrooms—with high concentrations of other ELLs. Latino students in particular—both ELLs and fluent English speakers—have become the most highly segregated minority group in the nation.[8] This unequal distribution of ELLs within schools and districts makes it difficult to expose ELLs to native-English-speaking peers—a key factor in the acquisition of fluency and academic English. While integration of ELLs into mainstream classrooms and access to a common curriculum were promising practices observed in improving districts in this study, these and all districts will have to make further progress addressing racial and linguistic segregation if they are to improve the educational opportunities and outcomes of ELLs and other minorities.

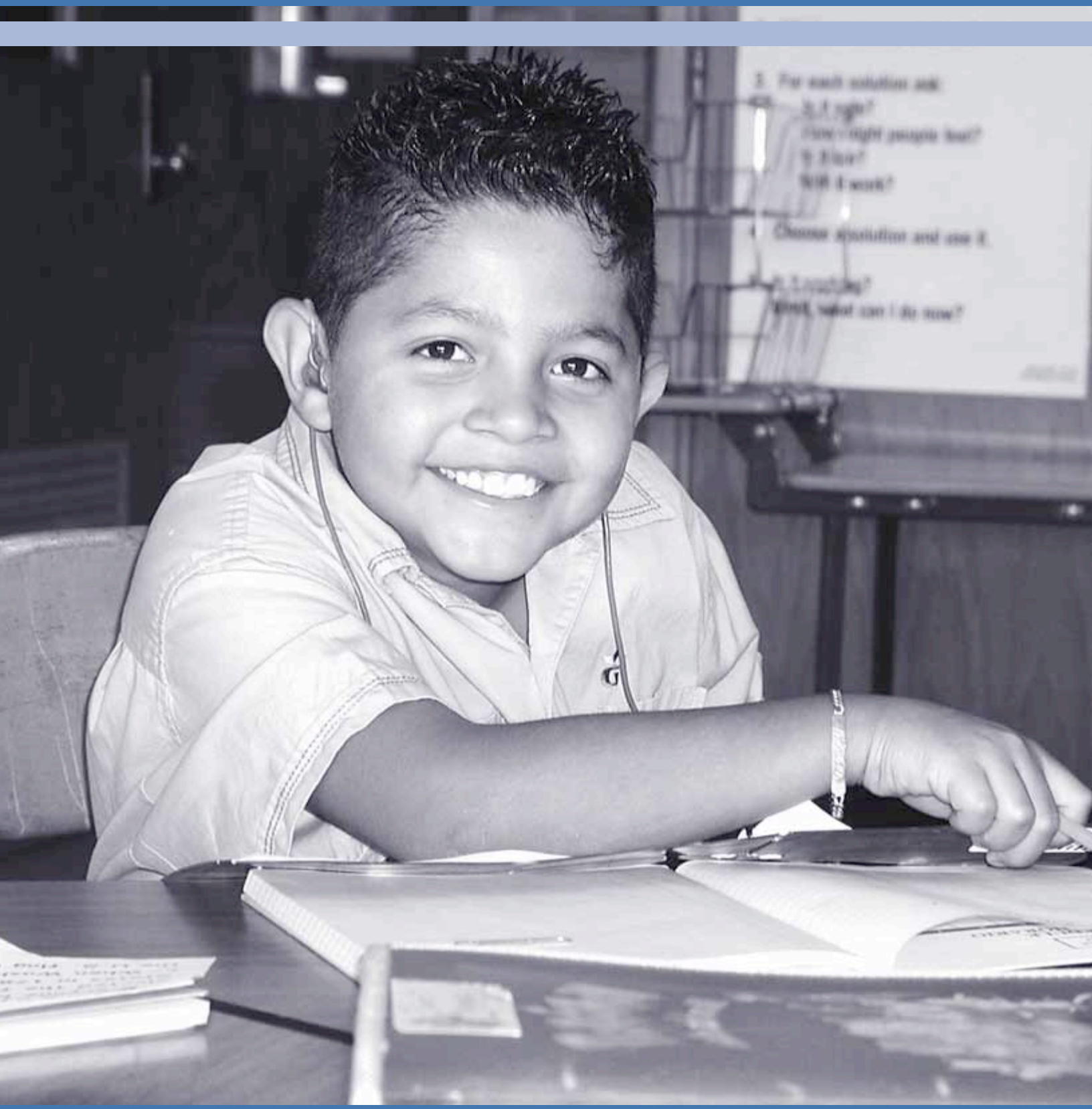
Shortage of Qualified Teachers for ELLs

Finally, despite efforts to expand the instructional capacity of ELL and content area teachers through professional development, school districts face a critical shortage of qualified ELL teachers. Currently, there is no coherent national standard for the preparation and qualifications of teachers of ELLs, nor are there agreed-upon standards of practice in ELL instruction. Pre-service teacher-preparation programs rarely incorporate ELL-specific strategies or a practicum to build hands-on teaching experience. Most districts and states have bilingual or ESL certification programs and policies, but the certification process often does little to identify quality teachers or equip them with the skills and experience necessary to support the learning needs of ELLs. Moreover, content-area teachers are rarely equipped with the training or materials necessary to help ELLs access the subject matter and develop content-specific literacy skills.

Chapter 3 Endnotes

[7] See, e.g., Capps, R., Fix, M., Murray, J., Ost, J., Passel, J., & Herwantoro, S., *The New Demography of America's Schools: Immigration and the No Child Left Behind Act*, Washington, D.C.: The Urban Institute (2005), 18.

[8] Orfield, G. & Lee C.M. (2004) *Brown at Fifty*. Cambridge. MA: Harvard University Civil Rights Project



Chapter 4: Conclusions and Recommendations

The districts profiled in this study represented a wide range in terms of the specific ELL instructional reforms they designed and implemented, the context in which these reforms were pursued, and the success they had increasing ELL student achievement. Yet what emerged was a fairly consistent picture of the preconditions and practices that existed among the improving districts.

These strategies for improving ELL achievement were similar to those identified in *Foundations for Success* as contributing to districts' efforts to improve student performance across the board. In particular, improving districts in both studies focused on student achievement, created concrete accountability systems, and held schools responsible for the progress of all students. For the most part, they pursued districtwide alignment of curricula and instructional approaches and supported these systemic strategies through professional development. The central office played a key role in driving reforms into the classroom through extensive guidance, support, and oversight of program implementation. And at both the school and district levels, student assessment data were used to diagnose student needs and inform decisions regarding instruction and services.

That promising practices in ELL instructional reform should mirror sound reform strategies overall should not come as a surprise. All students benefit from access to a strong curriculum, effective teachers, and instruction designed to help them develop the academic literacy skills they will need to access higher-level course content. Districts are better able to meet these shared academic needs when

there is a strong, unified vision for instruction and a coherent, well-supported strategy for instituting reform guided by this vision.

However, such across-the-board district reform efforts do not automatically or inevitably lead to high-quality ELL programming. Districts that saw improvement of their ELL instructional program—and of ELL student achievement—demonstrated the capacity and the political will to explicitly address the academic needs of English Language Learners. To this end, these districts often seized on external forces such as court orders, federal requirements, and state audits as an opportunity to pursue meaningful, systemic reform on behalf of ELLs. These reform efforts involved the mindful adoption of pedagogical strategies for advancing second language acquisition. Alignment of curriculum and instruction for ELLs in these districts was a defining feature of reform efforts, but it was dependent on equipping ELLs with the *academic* literacy skills necessary to access grade-level content. To support this focus on continuous language acquisition, improving districts implemented professional development initiatives that were both targeted in their focus on literacy development, and broad in their applicability to teachers of ELLs across the curriculum.

The ultimate success of these targeted ELL program reforms depended on the vision and leadership of a few committed, outspoken advocates for ELLs. In most cases, the prioritization of the needs of ELLs in the district was driven by a newly empowered ELL department—and its director—within the central office. Often for the first time, this department had the authority and resources it required to wade through the politics of language and institutional inattention to the needs of ELLs to effect meaningful change. Moreover, the impact of state policies and funding for ELL instruction cannot be overstated. State and federal policies can enable or limit the quality of ELL education, and districts must operate within these confines.

The striking commonalities demonstrated by improving districts are both instructive and encouraging. Yet perhaps equally instructive were the experiences of those districts unable to improve ELL student achievement during the study period. By and large, these districts lacked a vision and plan for enacting systemwide change, as well as a system for monitoring or supporting quality ELL instruction. ELL programming was undertaken as more of a compliance-based drill than an effort to improve the academic outcomes of a vulnerable population with specialized needs. These districts were uniformly described as compartmentalized environments where accountability for ELLs was set squarely on the shoulders of ELL teachers and staff despite the fact that these teachers and staff were cut off from the resources and training necessary to support the needs of ELLs.

While no school or school district has found a way to meet every student's needs and close the gap between ELLs and native English speakers, clearly there are districts that are setting higher standards for all of their students and making progress toward these goals. Based on what we learned from their experiences and approaches to reform, several broad-based recommendations can be made to help district leaders think about ELL program reform efforts in their own cities. These recommendations fall into two broad categories: context and strategy.

Contextual Recommendations

It was clear from the results of this study that improving the academic achievement of English language learners involved more than instructional strategy and traditional bilingual education models. It also meant creating an environment conducive to implementing and sustaining districtwide reform efforts. To create these preconditions for progress, the Council would propose that school districts—

- **Develop a clear instructional vision and high expectations for ELLs.** This means being clear about academic goals for these students, communicating these goals emphatically to stakeholders in the district, and ensuring that ELLs are held to the same high standards as other students throughout the district.
- **Approach external pressure to improve services for ELLs and other students as an asset rather than a liability.** Rather than addressing state or court directives defensively or adopting measures aimed solely at ensuring legal compliance, external requirements should be approached as mandates for long-term, systemic reform efforts to raise student achievement.
- **Incorporate accountability for ELLs organizationally into the broader instructional operation of the school district.** This entails being clear at the leadership level that everyone is accountable for the academic attainment of these students—not simply ELL teachers and ELL department staff. This not only spurs collaboration, but it provides greater assurance that these students have broader and fuller access to the general education curriculum and resources.

- **Empower strong ELL program administrators to oversee progress.** Prioritizing ELL reform ELL reforms also means appointing and empowering someone in the district to serve as a "point person" on ELL issues. In improving districts, the office of ELLs and its director were included in the highest levels of decision making and given the authority to oversee implementation of the district's strategy for ELL reform.
- **Pursue community support for initiatives designed to accelerate achievement among English language learners.** Having the community behind the district's efforts to improve academic performance helps create the political conditions under which reforms can be sustained.

Strategic and Instructional Recommendations

The contextual recommendations allow for reforms to be articulated and sustained, but the district must couple them with a convincing instructional strategy that is capable of teaching ELLs to the highest standards. The Council would propose that school districts—

- **Review general education and ELL programs to ensure that there is an explicit focus on building academic literacy and cultivating English language development.** Focusing on academic literacy among ELLs—and all students—and providing them with specific language acquisition strategies are critical steps for ensuring the long-term academic success of students.
- **Ensure that all teachers of ELLs have access to high-quality professional development that provides differentiated instructional strategies, promotes the effective use of student assessment data, and develops skills for supporting second-language acquisition across the curriculum.** This professional development should be made jointly available to ELL and general education teachers and evaluated for how well it is implemented and its effects on student achievement.
- **Assess district standards for hiring, placing, and retaining teachers, paraprofessionals, and staff members who work directly with ELLs to ensure that these students have access to highly qualified personnel.** While these decisions are sometimes shaped by state policy, in other cases they are the result of locally determined policies and collective bargaining agreements that districts should be mindful of as they craft their ELL programs.
- **Conduct a comprehensive assessment of the level of access that ELLs have to the entire spectrum of district course offerings, including gifted and talented programs and special education.** The results of these simple analyses can reveal to districts whether ELLs—and others—have equal access to educational opportunities and are held to the same academic standards as other students.
- **Ensure that resources generated by and allocated for English language learners are properly and effectively expended to provide quality ELL instruction and services.** Districts also should be careful to not allow the categorical nature of various funding sources to limit ELL programming or services. General education funds, federal Title I funds, categorical state funds, and other resources can be used to ensure that these students get the support and instruction they need across the board.
- **Develop a system for tracking multiple measures of ELLs' educational progress**. The collection and analysis of data on the characteristics, teachers, English proficiency level, program placement, and academic attainment of ELLs are critical to ensuring the success of these students. This means integrating all data on ELLs into the district's general database to ensure broader access and to promote regular review of this data by school and district instructional staff and the board.

Across all of the districts profiled, much has happened since the period of study. For the most part, growth in ELL student achievement has continued to rise in each of the study districts. In the comparison districts, new systemwide improvement efforts undertaken on behalf of ELLs give us confidence that urban districts possess the will and capacity to identify their own shortcomings and move forward. The need to improve educational, economic, and social outcomes for a growing population of schoolchildren who are non-native English speakers remains a pressing issue of social justice and equity. Examining and building on promising practices is an important first step to improving our performance, but it will take a great deal more work and introspection to guarantee equal opportunity for all of our children.

District Snapshot: Dallas Independent School District

District Context

The Dallas Independent School District (DISD) is the second largest district in Texas, enrolling roughly 53,000 students identified as Limited English Proficient (LEP) at the outset of the study period. Close to 93 percent of DISD students are from ethnic minority backgrounds, with Hispanic students making up the majority. At the beginning of the study period, ELL test scores were low, test exemption rates were high, and students languished in Bilingual Education (BE) or English as a Second Language (ESL) programs for years. At the request of DISD, the Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts commissioned a performance review of the district's operations, culminating in a final report issued in June 2001. This review proved to be a catalyst for change in the Dallas Independent School District.

The state's report revealed critical weaknesses in the district's operational and instructional programming. At the time of the comptroller's review, DISD had 28 low-performing schools—the highest number in the state—and suffered from financial and leadership instability. DISD's placement of BE/ESL teachers was found to be ineffective, and only 78 percent of BE/ESL teachers had the appropriate certification for their assignments. To fix the problem, DISD had offered stipends for teaching ELLs—but failed to keep proper track of such stipends.

DISD resorted to requesting BE exceptions and ESL waivers for ten consecutive years instead of addressing the strategic assignment of teachers to support ELL programs. The BE exception allowed the district to sidestep the state law stating that for 20 or more students who do not speak English but who speak a common language, the school must provide bilingual education. The end result was that the ELL program was erratic and inconsistent. Students might attend a bilingual program for one year, followed by an ESL program the next, and then back to a bilingual program one or two years later at the same school.

Setting the Stage for Reform

The state comptroller's recommendations were aimed at restoring trust with the community and ensuring that all students received a quality education, providing explicit direction and priorities for the work DISD had to do to improve its instructional programs and school operations. DISD immediately began implementing the recommendations made in the comptroller's final report. The superintendent, the board, and administrators all carried out specific tasks to lay the foundation for improving student achievement. In

fact, a six-month report card and a one-year progress report released in September 2002 showed that DISD was moving at a rapid pace to address the many issues raised in the report.

A three-decade-old desegregation case against Dallas Independent School District could also be credited, in part, with providing a foundation for many of DISD's programs affecting the achievement of minority students. The DISD case included English Language Learners in the development of a comprehensive desegregation plan for DISD. When the district was released by the court from its monitoring status in 2003, the board institutionalized its support for instructional programs for ELLs by adopting the Covenants—a contract that committed the district to continuing a series of educational programs that explicitly included comprehensive Bilingual and English as a Second Language programs in grades PK-12.

Another key factor setting the stage for district reform during the study period was strong and consistent leadership. In 2002 a former state commissioner of education was hired as the DISD superintendent and by many accounts he brought much needed stability to the district. In addition, a key board member who served throughout the study period was uniformly described as a relentless champion for improving educational services for ELLs. Known for his data-driven advocacy, this board member built coalitions within the diverse board of trustees to push through policies designed to help ELLs. The combination of consistent leadership on the part of the superintendent and a more active board allowed the district to weather resistance from schools and the community and to promote instructional changes for English learners.

Finally, at the recommendation of the comptroller, the role of the ELL office—known as the Multi-Language Enrichment (MLEP) department—was strengthened and its work became more central to the overall mission of the district. This expanded role allowed the central office to function with greater consistency and accountability in the process of supporting schools in the implementation of new ELL policies and practices.

Key Policies and Strategies for Improving Instruction for ELLs

Adoption of a unified vision for reform focused on instructional consistency

ELL reform efforts in DISD were part of a larger, systemic reform effort grounded in raising the expectations for all students in DISD through managed instruction. One of the key recommendations in the controller's report concerned the need to establish a single vision for educating students focused on common standards of learning. This led the district to adopt a common-core curriculum aligned with the state's educational accountability system. This shift towards a more centrally determined curriculum was no small feat given the site-based tradition in DISD, but it provided greater instructional coherence to the overall system. This consistency also helped reduce the instructional challenges related to high mobility among DISD students.

The district's focus on improving the quality and consistency of classroom instruction benefited DISD students in general and ELLs in particular. While the district's overall model of ELL instruction continued to be "transitional" in that the goal was to move ELLs into English mainstream classes as soon as possible, the district began to better support and standardize the BE and ESL programs through increased teacher recruitment and placement, improved program design, clearer instructional materials and guidelines, and stronger professional development. At the outset of the study period, the district began to restructure its ELL program to place greater emphasis on bilingual education in grades PK-3 and ESL programs in grades four through six. Newcomer programs were piloted at 17 sites to address the needs of recently arrived students in grades three through six. These programs were then expanded to additional sites in subsequent years.

These ELL reform efforts were aided by programmatic consistency during the reform period. Even throughout the succession of three superintendents, DISD's overall vision for ELL instructional improvement was sustained, allowing the district to continue to push for greater institutionalization of new procedures and policies. Many of the initiatives pursued during this period were complex and even painful reforms that, despite the leadership turnover, continued moving forward.

Redistribution of ELL teachers through a comprehensive Campus Bilingual Staffing Plan

One of the key elements in the district's ELL reform agenda was the Campus Bilingual Staffing Plan. The district began working on the staffing plan after the release of the state comptroller's review, which called attention to the district's need to assign teachers more strategically to support ELL instruction rather than relying on exemptions and waivers to circumvent the state's bilingual education statutes. The comptroller specifically recommended that grades K-3 receive first priority for bilingual education teachers. So in 2002, the district divided its elementary campuses into two groups: BE campuses—those with 100 or more Spanish-speaking ELLs, which accounted for two-thirds of the district's elementary schools—and ESL campuses—those with fewer than 100 Spanish-speaking ELLs. Qualified BE teachers were then reassigned and concentrated in the earlier grades on BE campuses. Gradually the district staffed subsequent grades in the same manner.

The staffing plan was jointly developed by the curriculum department and the MLEP department directors and was phased in over several years due to the continuing shortage of BE teachers. Professional development was provided to bilingual teachers who were moved to different grade levels as a result of the plan, although perceptions of the adequacy of the professional development vary. Collaboration between central office administrators and the head of the teachers' union was a particularly critical element of implementation. The president of the teachers' union and district instructional leaders jointly convened teachers and announced the program, thereby diminishing potential resistance.

Nevertheless, the process was described by staff and union representatives alike as painful and created much consternation and even animosity among teaching staff. Yet despite these initial challenges, staff acknowledged that the plan resulted in greater programmatic consistency and higher quality instruction for ELLs, who benefited from access to bilingual teachers at a critical point in students' educational development.

Schools were provided with tools and guidance to help support implementation of ELL programs

Significantly, the specific models used by the district for ELL instruction proved to be less important than the amount of guidance and support DISD provided to schools to help them implement reforms. In order to ensure systemwide consistency, the MLEP department provided schools with a blueprint for implementing the various instructional models available for ELLs. For example, high schools were given guidelines for determining where ELLs should be placed within a four- to five-year sequence of instruction, taking into account the time it takes to obtain English proficiency and the time available to graduate from high school. These guidelines described the type of staff that was to provide instruction, the academic objectives, and the language of instruction for reading and the content areas. By developing such clear program models and guidelines, the MLEP department reduced the burden on each school to determine its own sequence of courses and maximized the chances of ELLs graduating.

The MLEP department also provided support to schools implementing ELL programs by developing a number of documents that aligned and unpacked the state standards and the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) for Second Language Acquisition. The documents provided course syllabi, scope and sequence (curriculum), and various BE/ESL instructional models. The scope and sequence documents, in particular, incorporated strategies for second language acquisition to scaffold sheltered English language instruction and defined the objectives, standards, and assessments for each program or course. Teachers also had access to additional instructional tools—strategies and graphic organizers for ELLs, a pacing plan, and a differentiation guide for modified bilingual programs—to assist them with instructional delivery. These centrally developed and funded guides and materials increased the instructional cohesiveness of programming for ELLs across the district and made it more likely that all teachers had access to the same materials and directions.

Monitoring and oversight of ELL program implementation

The district also had a process and mechanism in place for monitoring the implementation of program improvements and their effects. Indicators included student achievement, professional development participation, and staff feedback. In fact, DISD's implementation of the Covenants included yearly reports on the implementation of a series of academic programs, including BE/ESL. This regular evaluation process also included achievement data and English proficiency rates to determine the effectiveness of the various ELL instructional models.

The central office also looked to school staff for valuable and timely information on ELL programs, conducting surveys to gauge program implementation and "buy-in" from teachers and others. This survey data provided feedback from principals and teachers on a number of initiatives, highlighting key challenges at the school level and areas in greatest need of improvement.

Strategic use of funding to support ELL programs

Implementation of DISD's ambitious ELL reform agenda, moreover, depended on the strategic allocation of available funds. Specifically, the district managed multiple sources of categorical funding for ELLs in a way that was consistent with the district's overarching vision for reform. In doing so, DISD avoided the duplication and gaps in services and supports that often occurs when allocating money according to categorical funding formulas. For example, the MLEP department used state funding to support campus BE assistants, ESL teachers, materials and technology, while using the district's desegregation funds to support campuses with newcomer programs, purchase Woodcock-Muñoz Language Surveys (WMLS), and implement activities of the Testing Office, the Translation Department, and the MLEP Department. Some desegregation funding was also consolidated with federal Title III and Title I funding to strategically support staff development, provide technical support to teachers and administrators, and conduct activities that would enhance community outreach and family literacy. Rather than allocating all ELL categorical funding (both state and federal) down to the campuses, DISD retained funds at the district level to support systemwide programs and provide technical assistance in a comprehensive and instructionally coherent manner across the district.

The district also sought additional outside funding to support improvements to the ELL program. For example, DISD worked with Southern Methodist University in applying for federal funds from the Office of English Language Acquisition in the U.S. Department of Education. A total of $1.5 million was awarded to SMU to work with DISD to provide scholarships to DISD teachers who wished to receive certification in bilingual education.

A focus on literacy instruction

General education students and ELLs alike benefited from the district's stronger focus on literacy and reading instruction. The state funded a statewide reading initiative for early elementary grades. The initiative required reading-acquisition training for teachers throughout the state and created master reading teacher positions. To enhance the state's program, additional district resources were provided to hire a Reading Czar and to increase the number of master reading teachers. Some 24 master teachers were strategically deployed across the district to work with principals and teachers who volunteered to participate in the program. Both BE/ESL and general education teachers attended training in reading instruction that went beyond the state's professional development requirements. Under the Reading Czar, native-language instruction was integrated into the district-wide balanced reading program.

Increased access to and use of data

DISD also benefited from the development of a comprehensive data warehouse and reporting system that provided educators with valuable information on student progress. Educators had access to student, teacher, and program data, including English-proficiency levels, academic achievement, listings of services provided to ELLs, program exit and retention rates, and characteristics of teachers serving ELLs.

The district aggressively analyzed achievement data, in particular, to discern areas of academic weakness and determine instructional priorities. The desegregation case contributed to the data system indirectly, since the district had to provide regular reports to the court on a series of indicators—including achievement, disaggregated by race, ethnicity, and language proficiency status. These reports provided critical information on how ELLs were performing and gave impetus to the board's pursuit of better programming for ELLs.

Increased collaboration

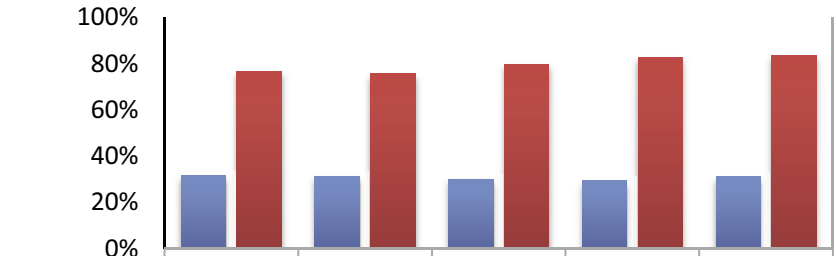
It was also clear that the district understood the importance of coordination between the MLEP department and its general education programs. The lack of communication between the MLEP and curriculum departments, in particular, had led to numerous programmatic mishaps prior to the study period. Spanish-language instructional materials were not distributed, orders were duplicated, and literacy programs were adopted that did not well serve ELLs. To strengthen collaboration, a curriculum-development position was added to the MLEP department. This liaison was charged with coordinating the work of the curriculum-development department and the BE/ESL program.

Although staff interviewed during the site visits described a less sequential and smooth evolution in collabora-

tion between the departments, they indicated that there was now a system in place through which modifications in the district's curriculum could be made on behalf of ELLs. The district now has a clearer emphasis on the general education program, learning English, and acquiring bi-literacy. Districtwide instruction for ELLs is no longer an afterthought or a supplemental effort.

** Figures 7 through 9 show DISD demographic information and fourth-grade ELL reading proficiency rates and compares the district with the state.

Figure 7
Dallas Independent School District ELL and FRPL Enrollments
2002-2003 to 2006-2007

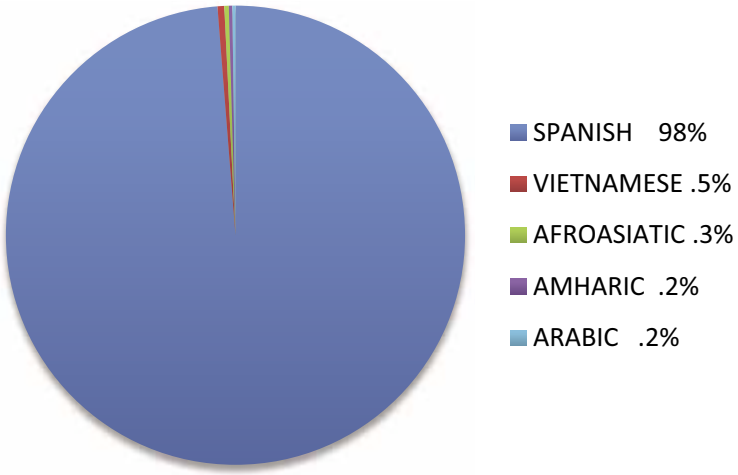


	2002-2003	2003-2004	2004-2005	2005-2006	2006-2007
ELL Enrollment	32%	31%	30%	30%	31%
Free and Reduced-Priced Lunch	77%	76%	80%	83%	84%
Total Enrollment	159,990	157,796	155,862	158,700	156,708

ELL Enrollment Free and Reduced-Priced Lunch

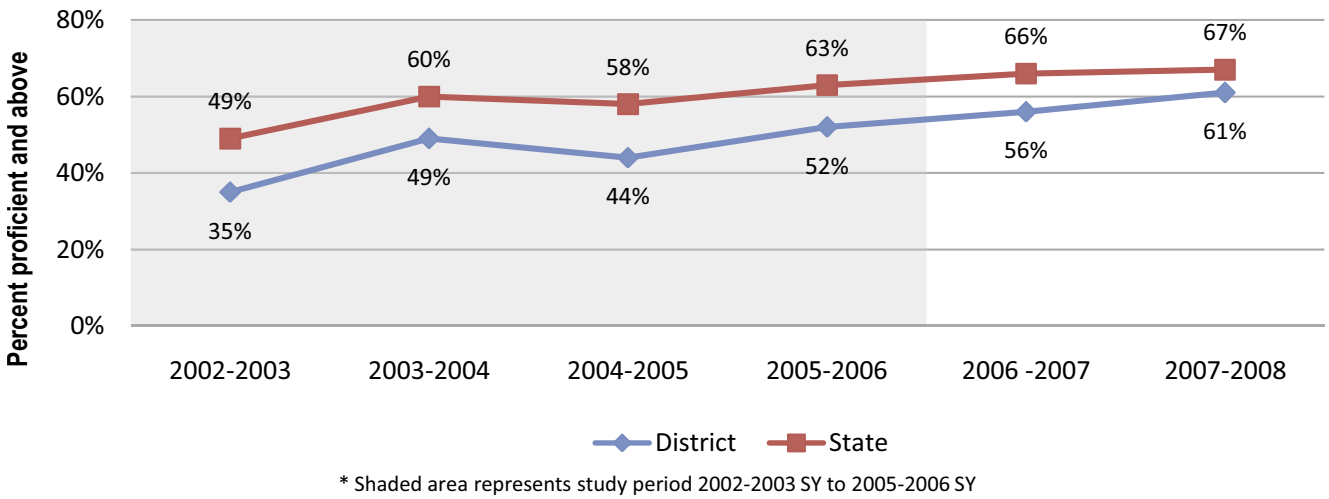
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data

Figure 8
Dallas Independent School District Top 5 ELL
Home Languages 2004-2005



SOURCE: Dallas Independent School District

Figure 9
Dallas Independent School District and Texas State Public Schools 4th grade Reading ELL Proficiency Rates on State Test
2002-2003 to 2007-2008



* Shaded area represents study period 2002-2003 SY to 2005-2006 SY

Source: Texas Department of Education, Texas Education Agency LONESTAR data report; Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills.

District Snapshot: New York City Department of Education

District Context

The New York City Department of Education (NYCDOE) is the largest school district in the country. Over one million students attend the more than 1,400 public schools overseen by the NYCDOE. At the outset of reform in 2002, the citywide school district did not always act with a single vision. Instead, it had a highly decentralized management structure, with 32 community school districts functioning more or less independently. Each community school district largely determined what services were offered to ELLs and what instructional program was taught. There was even considerable inconsistency within each district. The approach to ELL instruction varied from school to school depending on the vision, skills, and priorities of school leaders and individual teachers. There was little monitoring or oversight of ELL program quality and no clear system for tracking ELL academic progress. Teachers reported that students who were in ELL classes for three years or more were often taught the same things repeatedly, and the system devoted little attention to students' academic growth. This lack of oversight extended to the quality and training of ELL teachers. Many bilingual teachers were described during this time as "among the worst teachers in the system." They often lacked sufficient professional development and support and were oversubscribed at their school sites.

Setting the Stage for Reform

The reform of ELL services in New York City cannot be separated from the districtwide reorganization and reorientation of the system that accompanied the high-profile mayoral takeover of the district in 2002. New leadership was put into place that adopted a clear, unified vision for systemwide reform. The first step—unifying and stabilizing the school system—began with an overhaul of the Department of Education's management structure. To this end, the 32 community school districts were largely replaced with 10 geographic regions, and authority over instructional policy and resource allocation was concentrated at a new Department of Education located next to City Hall.

In addition to the reorganization, the new NYCDOE adopted a more consistent, systemwide approach to reading, writing, and math instruction. By many accounts, ELLs were a focus of efforts to reform teaching and learning throughout the district during this time, and ELL instructional reforms benefited from an aggressive mandate from the top to improve. In 2003, the mayor and new schools chancellor outlined seven recommendations for the improvement of ELL instruction at a press conference held at the foot of

the Statue of Liberty—a high-profile event aimed at signaling the city's commitment to ELL reform.

At the same time, the city school district elevated the role and authority of the Office of ELLs, giving the ELL executive director new powers and resources to pursue an ambitious ELL reform agenda. This ELL executive director was widely lauded as a tireless advocate for ELLs and was ever-present at professional and community meetings. She built strategic relationships with school and central office staff and spurred collaboration between departments at the school and district levels to better support the instruction of ELLs. She personally interviewed each of the ELL support staff, and regularly visited school sites throughout the district. This hands-on approach to leadership signaled both her personal engagement and the emphasis she placed on knowing the political landscape before forging ahead with reform.

Key Policies and Strategies for Improving Instruction for ELLs

Alignment and standardization of curriculum and instruction across the district

The adoption of a common curriculum and the alignment of the ELL instructional program with this curriculum played a key role in the district's efforts to improve teaching and learning for ELLs. In the past, language support for ELLs consisted of removing them from classrooms and working with them in smaller groups for 45 to 150 minutes. However, the instruction ELLs received during this time was not necessarily monitored or aligned with the curriculum, thereby minimizing student access to the general curriculum. During the study period this pull-out approach was replaced with a push-in or self-contained model with ELL teachers working alongside content area teachers and using the many of the same instructional techniques.

In the early days of the new administration the district adopted a systemwide approach to language instruction—balanced literacy—that provided a common methodology for teaching literacy. (This approach was later replaced with the empowerment system now in place.) Previously, teachers of ELLs had struggled to identify appropriate curricular materials and to improve their practice with new techniques and strategies. The broader instructional approach was adopted throughout the district in 2003 and featured structured activities around listening and speaking and was more defined than what had been in place in the past.

The combination of curricular and instructional alignment was credited for having an important effect on ELL instruction because it articulated an instructional approach that had been missing before. More emphasis was placed on academic literacy—the ability to acquire content-specific vocabulary and construct meaning from academic texts—and on professional development. The program—balanced literacy—came under broad criticism from both outside and inside the district, but it helped provide a structure for ELLs that the district had earlier lacked.

Systemwide adoption and implementation of the Language Allocation Policy

The district's Language Allocation Policy (LAP) was another key component of the strategy for achieving instructional/curricular coherence. The LAP—a school-based plan for using English and native language instruction and developing academic proficiency in English—set guidelines across the city for determining the amount of time that ELLs should receive language instruction.

Focus group participants indicated that the instructional reforms were "completely and totally a change over past policy." Before the changes, instructional programming for ELLs varied from school to school. Afterwards, decisions regarding instruction for ELLs were based on a more systematic process of determining ELL academic needs. Schools were required to examine their programs and ensure that ELLs received mandated services and were being taught to a specified standard. Principals reported to the research team that LAP requirements made them more aware of the programming decisions needed for their specific ELL populations. And teachers reported that principals started visiting classrooms and checking to see that ELL initiatives were being consistently implemented.

By most accounts, the LAP was an effective tool for ensuring a more coherent approach to teaching ELLs. It also served as a vehicle for the central office to ensure greater accountability and provide support to schools. Training on the LAP became mandatory for principals and teachers of ELLs. Regional support staff helped schools adjust their LAP each year, and conducted regular walk-throughs at schools to ensure that all staff knew what the allocations were and were implementing them. These walk-throughs also allowed staff to determine which teachers needed additional professional development.

Support and oversight for implementation

The district provided significant support, monitoring, and enforcement of its new ELL policies and requirements. According to one interviewee, "Everything (in New York City) was a matter of follow-up. Nothing happened in isolation." The central office did not stop at the adoption of textbooks or ELL instructional programs. Each member of the central office ELL staff served as a liaison to one of the regions, providing oversight, capacity building, resource development and dissemination, program evaluation and monitoring, and technical assistance. At the school level, a multitiered network of support staff and supervisors provided site-based professional development and assistance to ELL teachers. This staffing structure helped translate the city's ELL instructional goals down to the local level and provide ongoing support, supervision, and training for those on the front lines. It was the regional staff that organized professional development and technical assistance for schools and implemented, monitored, and evaluated local initiatives. Teachers, in particular, identified this site-based support as the most effective element of the new ELL initiative. For example, ELL instructional specialists were on hand to demonstrate model lessons and provide hands-on training for teachers as they applied various ELL instructional strategies.

Each school also received an ELL toolkit from the central office with guidance on the kinds of instruction and services that were needed for different students. This toolkit included curriculum guides that explained the district's philosophical approach to instruction and how to implement its components, along with videos, planning and pacing guides, and professional resources on second language acquisition. To further clarify and support implementation of the district's policies, site-based staff received training developed by the central office on use of the toolkit. The district also offered in-service training to regional and local administrators. Each region then developed and submitted to the district its plan for rolling out the toolkit. Subsequent curriculum audits ensured that each school's instructional program was aligned to state standards and the district's philosophical approach.

High-quality professional development

New York City also benefited from an increased emphasis on professional development during this period. In 2003, the district adopted a professional development program built on the assumption that teachers of ELLs needed specialized training in how to develop literacy across the curriculum and how to support high need populations. Given the challenge of hiring highly quality teachers with expertise with ELLs, the professional development was useful in creating a prototype for instructional strategies and pacing techniques to ensure that teachers new to the district weren't left without guidance and support.

Implementing the new ELL programming demanded a considerable commitment of time and money. Professional development targeted not only ELL teachers but teachers across the curriculum, as well as principals and administrators. The alignment of professional development opportunities available to both ELL and mainstream teachers was an important element of the district's reform efforts. Equally important was the district's work to show principals and other school-based administrators what high-quality ELL instruction looked like and what to look for in classrooms. Principals were able to monitor staff to ensure that concepts and the instructional vision behind the district's professional development were being consistently applied at the classroom level.

Employing school-based accountability to change the culture of schools

The system's approach to accountability focused on raising student achievement and improving academic outcomes for students across the board. This enhanced accountability was also meant to promote transparency and collaboration. Because schools were directly responsible for raising the scores of ELLs, tracking and supporting these students became a shared responsibility—no longer just the job of ELL teachers. This increased accountability was accompanied by increased empowerment of schools and by a greater use of data and indicators to assess progress.

As improving ELL instruction became a broader mission, focus group participants recounted a push to build closer relationships across departments to build capacity at the central office and within schools. This collaboration was a carefully orchestrated strategy on the part of the district. Schools, teachers, and subject area departments were encouraged to work together, sharing common planning periods and attending joint trainings. At the classroom level, the instruction of ELLs became the joint responsibility of ELL teachers, subject area teachers, coaches, and the principal. This was a marked change from the time when ELLs and ELL teachers were isolated from others. The larger organization of the NYCDOE—with ELL and curriculum offices

positioned within the Division of Teaching and Learning—encouraged collaboration and included the needs of ELLs in all curricular and instructional policy discussions.

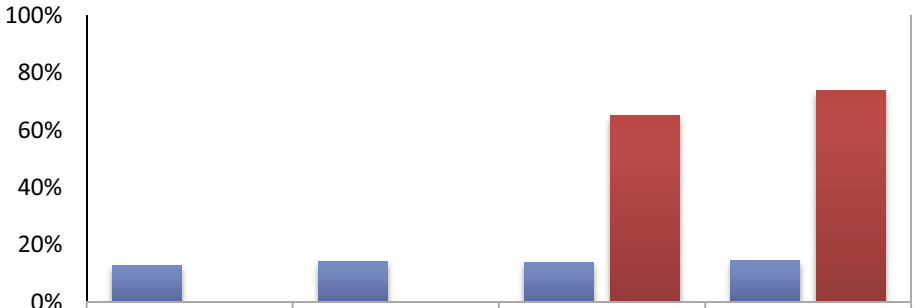
Expanded use of data and assessment

In New York City, the expanded availability of data mandated by NCLB was seen as an opportunity, and reform efforts deliberately built on the increased accessibility, amount, and types of student data available to educators. As finer-grained data were made available, the district developed a citywide performance management and accountability system that helped schools better diagnose ELL student needs and target instruction and academic interventions. District and school leaders recounted how during the study period they moved from using grade-level data to using more cohort and subgroup data, individual student data, and test item analysis. In addition, the district collected student data for both current and former ELLs, which offered an important picture of the longer-term achievement trends of ELLs who had exited the various language programs. This new emphasis on data pushed schools and teachers to know their subgroups better and to better analyze subgroup needs.

This emphasis on data came directly from the top of the system. The ELL Director, in particular, was described as "a great consumer of data." She and other district leaders talked about how ELL reforms were strengthened by looking at data, particularly during periods when it did not show as much progress as desired.

**Figures 10 through 13 show NYCDOE demographic information, city and state fourth-grade ELL reading proficiency rates, and proficiency rates among ELLs, non-ELLs, and former ELLs within the district.

Figure 10
New York City Department of Education ELL and FRPL Enrollments
2002-2003 to 2005-2006

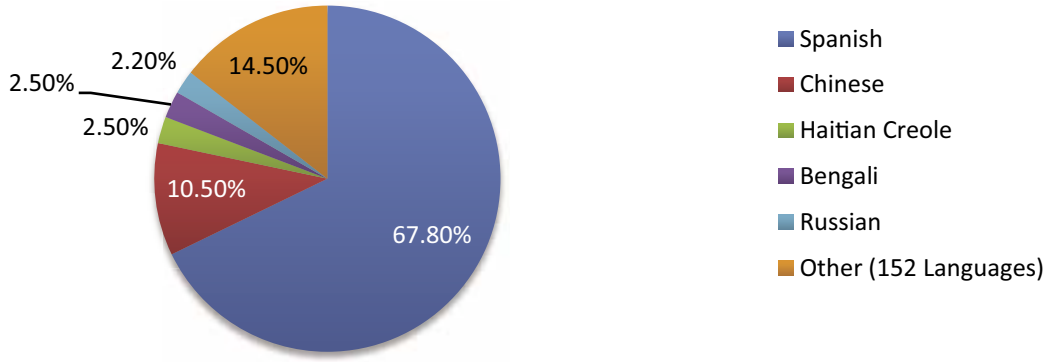


	2002-2003	2003-2004	2004-2005	2005-2006
ELL Enrollment	13%	14%	14%	15%
Free and Reduced-Priced Lunch	N/A*	N/A*	65%	74%
Total Enrollment	1,047,545	1,041,027	1,030,803	985,822

ELL Enrollment Free and Reduced-Priced Lunch

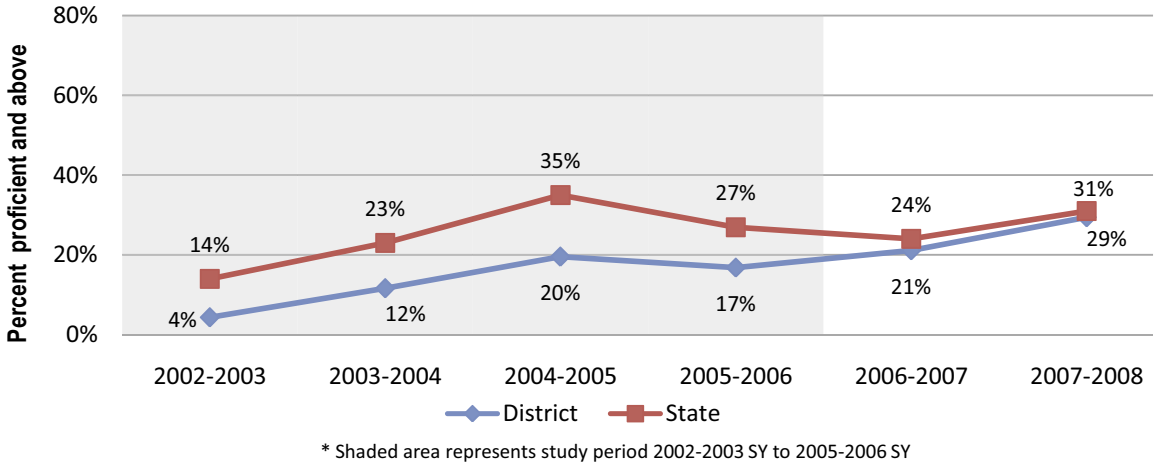
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics Common Core of Data
** FRPL Enrollment for 2002-2003 to 2003-2004 was not available.*

Figure 11
New York City Department of Education Top 5 ELL Home Languages
2004-2005



SOURCE: New York City Department of Education

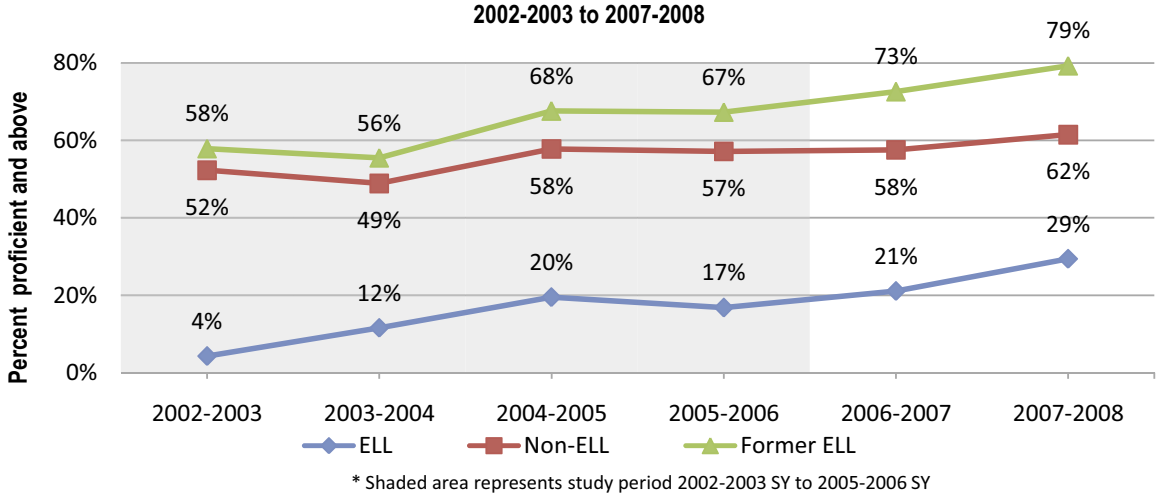
Figure 12
New York City Department of Education and New York State Public Schools
4th Grade English Language Arts ELL Proficiency Rates on State Test
2002-2003 to 2007-2008



* Shaded area represents study period 2002-2003 SY to 2005-2006 SY

SOURCE: New York Department of Education, Office of English Language Learners. Diverse Learners on the Road to Success: The Performance of New York City's English Language Learners, 2009

Figure 13
New York City Department of Education 4th Grade English Language Arts Proficiency Rates on State Test for ELLs, Former ELLs, and Non-ELLs 2002-2003 to 2007-2008



SOURCE: New York Department of Education, Office of English Language Learners. Diverse Learners on the Road to Success: The Performance of New York City's English Language Learners, 2009

District Snapshot: San Francisco Unified School District

District Context

The San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD) enrolls over 55,000 students—with English Language Learners (ELLs) representing over a quarter of this number. SFUSD serves 64 language groups, including five major Chinese dialects, Spanish, Filipino, Vietnamese, and Russian.

The historical and political context of educational reform in San Francisco is defined by numerous protracted legal battles, including a series of desegregation lawsuits that dominated national headlines for years. In particular, the San Francisco Chapter of the NAACP filed a lawsuit in 1978 challenging the achievement gap between African American and white students and the existence of segregated schools. The settlement of the NAACP lawsuit resulted in a court-ordered consent decree in 1983 mandating annual reports on the district's progress in closing the achievement gap. Unfortunately, the consent decree failed to include the Asian American and Latino communities that comprised the majority of ELLs in the district, an omission that meant that achievement trends among these students did not attract the same scrutiny as others.

Instead, the district's focus on ELLs came from the seminal court case, *Lau v. Nichols*, which was based in San Francisco and decided in 1974. In this case, the Supreme Court upheld the requirement that the district take affirmative steps to provide Limited English Proficient (LEP) students with equal access to general instructional programs. The case resulted in a master plan for the instruction of Chinese, Filipino and Spanish-speaking ELLs, as well as the establishment of a Bilingual Community Council (BCC) to help monitor ELL programs and services. Over the next 30 years, the district filed reports that listed intended program and services for ELLs, but provided little information on their implementation or impact on the academic attainment of ELLs, according to an investigation by the Bilingual Community Council. The BCC found a number of concerns and problems with ELL programs that resulted in continued court oversight and a requirement that SFUSD develop a new master plan to address flaws in ELL services.[9]

Setting the Stage for Reform

Unlike other districts profiled in this study, there was no marked shift at the outset of the study period toward districtwide, ELL-specific reform. The findings from the BCC investigation were corroborated by school and district staff, who recounted that during the study period, there was no specific plan for addressing the academic needs of ELLs. But the period was marked by a change in direction and philosophy that worked to improve ELL instruction indirectly.

Instead, what SFUSD did was to begin pursuing educational reforms that focused considerable energy and resources on the district's lowest-performing, highest-need schools. These reforms were supported by a newly instituted "weighted student formula" that had resources following students from school to school based on those students' needs. This focus on data-driven instructional planning and resource allocation appears to have benefited many ELLs.

Key Policies and Strategies for Improving Instruction for ELLs

Increased resources and accountability systems for a subgroup of schools through the STAR schools initiative

The district's Students and Teachers Achieving Results (STAR) initiative was designed to better support low-performing schools through professional development and close monitoring of schoolwide improvement. In much the same way as other study districts sought to ramp up central-office supports for schools systemwide, SFUSD provided this subgroup of schools with additional personnel and support for instructional improvement. STAR schools, for example, received instructional reform facilitators (IRFs) assigned to work with school-based staff to examine data, review instructional practices, and focus on instructional delivery. STAR school teachers and staff received targeted professional development and principals attended leadership-development workshops to help them become instructional leaders. The implementation of reforms at STAR schools was also closely monitored through ongoing reviews of programming and school walk-throughs.

Although ELL instructional improvement was not an explicit focus of the STAR Schools Initiative, the schools reported data to the district by subgroup for African-American, Latino, and English Language Learners that showed that achievement scores among ELLs at these underperforming schools improved across the board. And staff recounted that schools in which strong ELL teachers were involved in school-site teams were able to develop overall academic plans with well-defined components for ELLs.

Implementation of a managed instructional program (Reading First)

The federally funded Reading First program was implemented in 18 of the 20 STAR Schools of the district, providing additional resources, professional development, and reading coaches. Perhaps more importantly, Reading First provided structure and consistency in reading instruction across the participating schools. Key components included a required instructional block in reading, district-adopted instructional materials, and research-based practices for teaching literacy.

While Reading First itself was not a program specifically designed for ELLs, the district made its own modifications to ensure that it was relevant to ELLs. For example, SFUSD changed the emphasis of the state's Reading First professional development component to include a focus on providing ELLs with full access to the general education curriculum.

Data-driven accountability and planning

Largely due to the consent decree, SFUSD had a long history of tracking student achievement. The district was expected to monitor student progress based on a number of indicators and to track changes in the achievement gap between African American and white students. The district continually analyzed achievement data to focus resources and support on areas of greatest need. Each school was required to develop an academic plan to address student needs based on trend data and performance targets that each school had to meet. Struggling schools received additional resources to improve, but they were eventually reconstituted if scores did not increase and progress was not made in narrowing achievement gaps.

At the same time, the central office boosted its supports in data analysis, academic planning, and budgeting during the study period. The district held quarterly professional development institutes for teachers, administrators and other staff during the study period to hone their data-analysis and data-driven decision-making skills. In 2003, principals received professional development on how to interpret school-level data, present it to parents and communities, and make better instructional and budgeting decisions.

Teachers also received professional development on how to review achievement data to identify student needs.

In addition, coaches and IRFs were available at low-performing schools through the STAR Schools Initiative and Reading First to meet with every grade-level group to help analyze data and target students for the upcoming instructional period. Grade-level teachers were also given common planning times once or twice a week to work together on lesson planning and data analysis while their students were in enrichment classes.

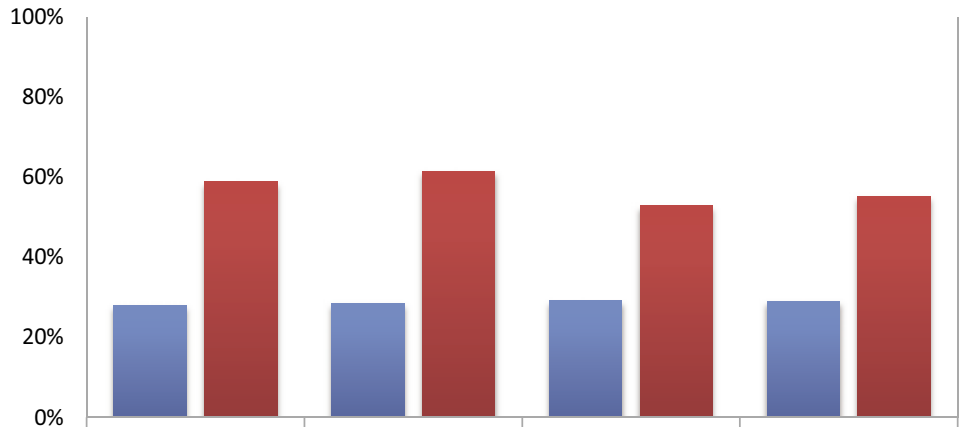
Building teacher capacity to support ELLs through a focus on English language development

Despite what staff perceived as inconsistencies in the central office's approach to ELL instructional programs, there was a consistent focus on providing teachers with the skills to support English language development (ELD) among ELLs. For example, the Office of Teaching and Learning provided professional development for ELD teachers that featured the same early reading concepts being presented to general education teachers. SFUSD also provided extensive vocabulary workshops during the study period to educate teachers about the three tiers of vocabulary acquisition and how vocabulary development differed for ELLs and students receiving special education. Every elementary school had two lead teachers responsible for sharing strategies with their school's staff as part of staff meeting agendas. These lead teachers worked with the IRFs located in STAR schools, although interviewees indicated that the quality of the work sometimes varied across schools.

During the study period, the district also made a special effort to increase the number of teachers certified and trained in ELD. Staff indicated that this effort was focused on schools that had high numbers of ELLs. The district also supported a major effort to have all teachers certified in Cross-Cultural, Language, and Academic Development (CLAD), and obtained union support for ensuring that CLAD-certified teachers were not laid off first during budget cuts. While the CLAD training received mixed reviews from teachers interviewed, the assurance of retaining CLAD-certified teachers indicated that the district sought and was able to work with the teachers' union to maintain its investment in staff capacity even while reducing staff.

**Figures 14 through 17 show SFUSD demographic information and fourth grade ELL reading proficiency rates and compares STAR and non-STAR schools within the district.

Figure 14
San Francisco Unified School District ELL and FRPL Enrollments
2002-2003 to 2005-2006



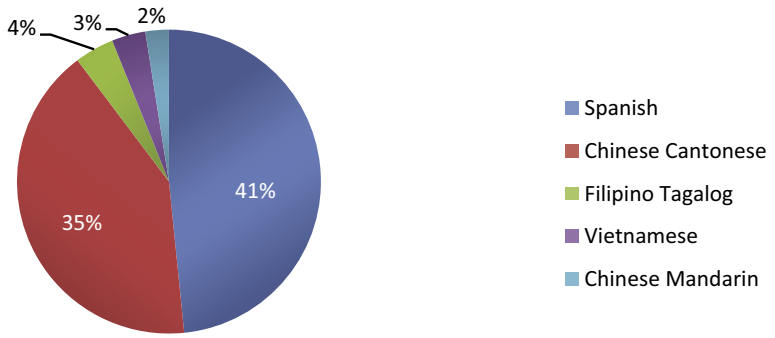
	2002-2003	2003-2004	2004-2005	2005-2006
ELL Enrollment	28%	28%	29%	29%
Free and Reduced-Priced Lunch	59%	61%	53%	55%
Total Enrollment	58,216	57,805	57,144	56,236

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics Common Core of Data

District Snapshot: San Francisco Unified School District Endnote

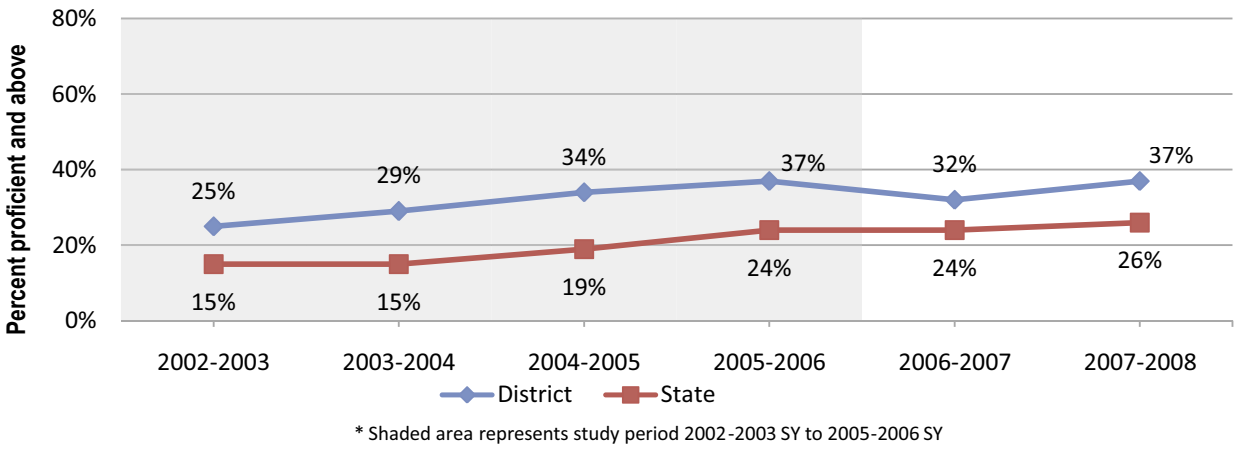
[9] SFUSD developed the updated master plan adopted by the Board in September of 2008.

Figure 15
San Francisco Unified School District Top 5 ELL Home Languages
2004-2005



SOURCE: San Francisco Unified School District

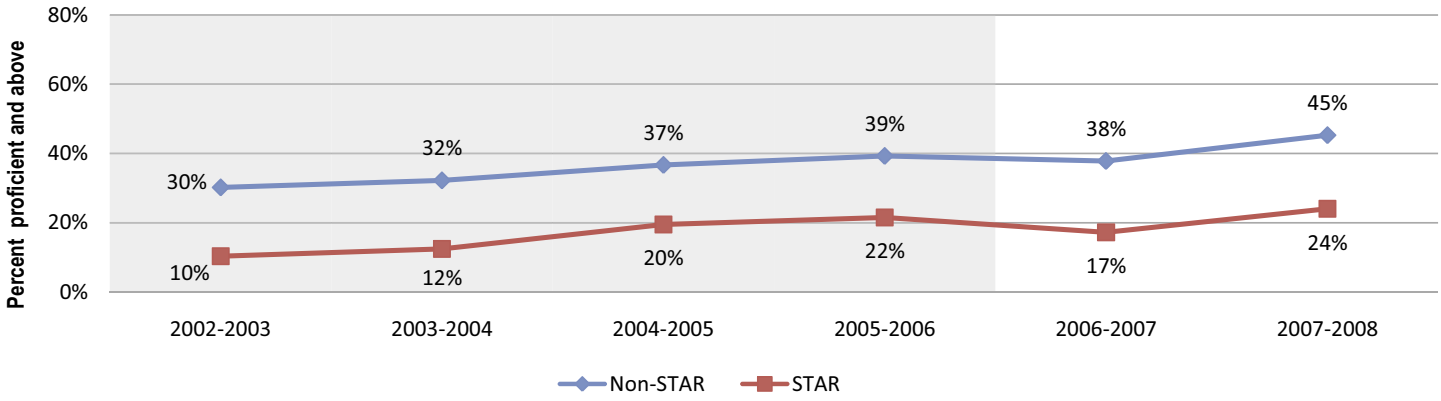
Figure 16
San Francisco Unified School District and California State Public Schools 4th Grade Reading ELL Proficiency Rates on State Test
2002-2003 to 2007-2008



* Shaded area represents study period 2002-2003 SY to 2005-2006 SY

SOURCE: San Francisco Unified School District

Figure 17
San Francisco Unified School District 4th Grade Reading ELL Proficiency Rates on State Test for STAR and Non-STAR Schools
2002-2003 to 2007-2008



* Shaded area represents study period 2002-2003 SY to 2005-2006 SY

SOURCE: San Francisco Unified School District

District Snapshot: St. Paul Public Schools

District Context

St. Paul Public Schools (SPPS) is a diverse district serving the largest number of English language learners in Minnesota. In 2005-2006, approximately 17,100 students—or 42 percent of the district's enrollment—were classified as ELLs. The influx of large numbers of Hmong (an Asian ethnic group from Southeast Asia) has played a particularly important role in shaping the St. Paul community. St Paul experienced two major waves of Hmong immigration—the first at the end of the Vietnam War and the second during the 1990s, when Thailand closed its refugee camps. As a result, Hmong students now comprise the majority of ELLs in the district, followed by Spanish speakers.

Despite the large number of ELLs in the district, there was little consistency, clarity, or authority in the district's approach to the instruction of ELLs prior to 1999. District staff reported that little attention or resources were dedicated to meeting the needs of these students and that ELL issues were simply "not on the radar screen." Resources allocated to meeting the needs of ELLs were treated as fungible dollars that could be redirected to serve general education priorities. SPPS did not even have an ELL director position until 1996, and once it created the position, the role the district first envisioned for this office was focused primarily on overseeing ELL placement decisions and supervising other compliance-related processes.

The lack of attention to ELL needs was reflected in the striking separation of ELLs from mainstream classrooms, school resources, and the core curriculum. In the years leading up to 1999, most ELLs spent their first two years in the school system at TESOL centers (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages). The TESOL centers—located on the campuses of various schools throughout the district—were generally housed in portable structures and kept completely separate from other school campus. The test scores of ELLs in the TESOL centers, moreover, were not included with the rest of the schools. In addition, there were insufficient numbers of teachers to adequately staff these TESOL centers, and the centers housed some of the weakest teachers in the system.

After two years in the TESOL centers, students would be moved to their neighborhood schools—typically on different campuses than the TESOL centers—and placed into regular education classrooms. At that point, the support they received was limited to 30- to 45-minutes of English as a Second Language (ESL) pullout sessions taught by an ESL teacher.

Setting the Stage for Reform

ELL reform in St. Paul was part of a larger, systemic effort to improve the instructional program through the alignment of services and the integration of academic programs. Crucial to bringing this effort to bear on the district's ELL program was the selection of a strong superintendent and the appointment and empowerment of a strong ELL director. Virtually every teacher, principal, and district staff member interviewed confirmed that the driving forces behind the changes in the district's ELL strategy were the superintendent and ELL director, who developed a clear vision for ELL reform and aggressively advanced this vision throughout the study period. Importantly, the ELL director benefited from the support of the superintendent, who backed her up in the steps she took and often came to her defense on controversial decisions. In this way, the ELL director was given a broad mandate to improve ELL programming in the district as called for in the district's comprehensive reform plan, and through her appointment and leadership the district ushered in a period of meaningful instructional reform for ELLs.

One of the first steps the director took was a careful examination of district funding to search out and reallocate ELL resources that were not being used to directly support ELL student needs. It became clear that funds allocated to schools to support ELL instruction and services were being diverted from the ELL program to support other school priorities. The ELL director vigorously pursued these budget issues and worked to ensure ELL resources were allocated appropriately. This dramatically increased the amount of available resources—resources that were instrumental in supporting the district's ambitious new ELL reform agenda, including teacher training and additional hiring that was necessary to support the implementation of a new instructional model.

Key Policies and Strategies for Improving Instruction for ELLs

The establishment of "Language Academies" and the collaborative model of instruction

At the outset of reform, the ELL office focused on dismantling the TESOL centers, integrating ELLs into mainstream classrooms, and ensuring equal access to a common curriculum. Ironically, many had seen the TESOL centers as a positive innovation in the school district. Prior to their existence there had been even fewer supports for ELLs, as they were simply placed into mainstream classrooms without much support. Nevertheless, dismantling the TESOL centers, integrating ELLs into mainstream classrooms, and providing them with access to the academic core—this time with the appropriate supports—became the highest priorities for ELL reform.

Behind this push to integrate ELLs into mainstream classrooms was the adoption of a new districtwide approach to ELL instruction—the Language Academy—featuring a collaborative model of teaching. With this new collaborative model, ELLs and general education students were taught in the same classroom, with ELL teachers working together with general education teachers to teach the students. Typically, there were about 18 students per classroom, eight of whom were ELLs. The ELL teacher would work across two classrooms in collaboration with the general education teacher in each classroom. The idea was that, rather than pulling ELLs out of class to get language support, both ELLs and general education students would benefit from being taught together.

The collaborative model was adopted through a staggered process. Teachers for the first five TESOL centers were carefully recruited, drawing from the district's strongest teachers and most supportive principals. Over the course of the study period the district expanded the collaborative model to the remaining TESOL sites. In the interim, the ELL department increased the number of staff so that each TESOL center gained an ESL teacher, a general education teacher, and two bilingual assistants, each of whom would speak a different language.

A heavy emphasis on professional development as a means of supporting collaboration

From the outset, the ELL department planned a program to build "true" collaboration between ELL and general education teachers and to avoid the potential for putting teachers in a collaborative structure without models and skills to take full advantage of the opportunity.

At the heart of the district's strategy for rolling out their reforms was a heavy emphasis on joint training of ESL and general education teachers in specific instructional techniques and strategies. Aside from the training on instructional techniques, specific training was offered on strategies for teacher collaboration. The district partnered with a university researcher specializing in collaboration between general education and special education teachers and stu-

dents. The ELL department further raised the support levels for teachers by instituting a program of site visits, having teams of ELL and mainstream teachers visit partner schools to observe instruction, offer feedback, and apply new information to help their own programs grow and improve. Over time, teacher training in the collaborative model became mandatory.

Clear guidance, support, and oversight for implementation

A defining characteristic of the ELL reform strategy in St. Paul was an emphasis on monitoring and support for program implementation. The district's ELL leadership pursued a number of aggressive strategies to ensure that the collaborative model was implemented with fidelity throughout the district. The department established clear guidelines and expectations for implementation and results, and provided implementation support in the form of teachers on special assignment (TOSAs) as well as support from the ELL department itself. The TOSAs—referred to as the "eyes and ears" of the ELL office—served as liaisons between the school and the district. Each school site was assigned a TOSA, and each TOSA worked with approximately 10 schools. The TOSAs provided information and coaching on the collaborative model, conducted presentations to staff members, facilitated meetings, and worked with school personnel to create professional development activities.

Importantly, TOSAs also provided feedback to the central office regarding the implementation process and challenges at each site, and the central office took a strong role in acting on this information to support implementation at the school level. The ELL director made sure she was frequently seen at schools and professional development sessions, visiting sites to ensure she had full buy-in from teachers, principals, and administrators and listening to and resolving concerns. She was in frequent communication with TOSAs as well as with school leaders and was quick to reinforce expectations with teachers or principals regarding program implementation. In short, building-level staff knew that the central office was paying close attention to the degree to which the models were being implemented at their sites.

The removal of weak teachers

To address the pervasive issue of low teacher quality, the ELL director developed a rubric for evaluating teachers and worked with principals to clarify expectations and align practice to the district's vision of collaborative teaching and improved student achievement. The district's approach was one of constant evaluation. Principals observed classrooms and evaluated them using the metric. The ELL director also spent a great deal of time observing classrooms personally, using the metric to evaluate teachers and giving feedback to both teachers and administrators.

This support for school-level determinations of teacher adequacy was clearly valuable. By the 2005-2006 school year, some 71 ELL teachers had been removed from the classroom. Interestingly, the ELL department did not get much resistance from the teachers' union or the board of education. As far as they were concerned, the dismissals came out of a process with clear, transparent, objective criteria that were available to teachers, principals, and other key stakeholders, and the rules regarding dismissals were strictly followed. Additionally, the ELL director met individually with many teachers who were ready to move to another career better suited to their interests and skills.

At the same time these teachers were being taken out of the system, the ELL department was working feverishly to recruit and hire more qualified ELL teachers. Over the course of the study period, SPPS hired approximately 120 new ELL teachers. Importantly, the hiring process was aligned with the district program. For instance, it included a questionnaire asking candidates about their willingness to work collaboratively with other teachers. Of those new hires, only seven had left the district as of 2008.

Employing school-based accountability to change the culture of schools

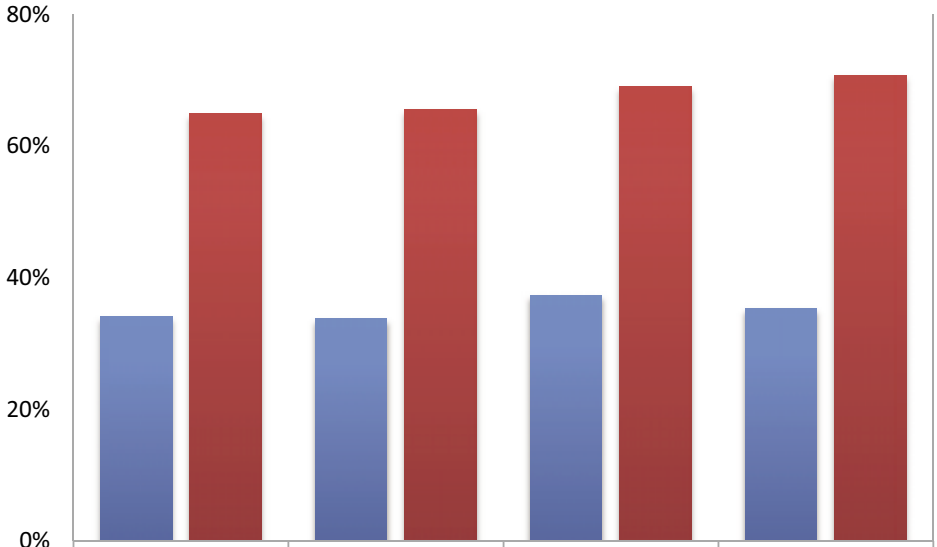
Through increased accountability pressures, the district promoted collaboration, transparency, and support for ELL reform at school sites. Prior to the study period, focus group participants reported that there had been an extremely narrow perception of ownership and responsibility for ELLs. Mainstream teachers were not prepared or expected to address the learning needs of ELLs. ELLs were "other people's kids," so responsibility was relegated to the ESL teachers assigned to them. This culture was reinforced by the separation of ELLs from the general population and the exclusion of ELL scores in school achievement results.

Both NCLB and a new district focus on accountability helped transform this culture of compartmentalization to one of inclusion. Interviewees recounted how the superintendent began to put schools on probation for their overall performance, which was "unheard of" in the St. Paul community at the time. This broad-based accountability brought

with it a tangible shift in the roles and mindset of teachers and administrators alike. Supporting these students became a shared charge—no longer just the job of ELL teachers but the responsibility of the principal and the whole school staff. Principals were encouraged to become instructional leaders and visit classrooms to observe and evaluate the extent to which teachers were implementing the new collaborative teaching model. This helped dissolve the silo mentality of teachers working in isolation behind closed doors. During the study period, teachers reported working more with school administrators as well as with their peers, sharing resources and experiences, and visiting each other's classrooms.

** Figures 18 through 21 show SPPS demographic information and third grade ELL reading proficiency rates comparing the district with the state.

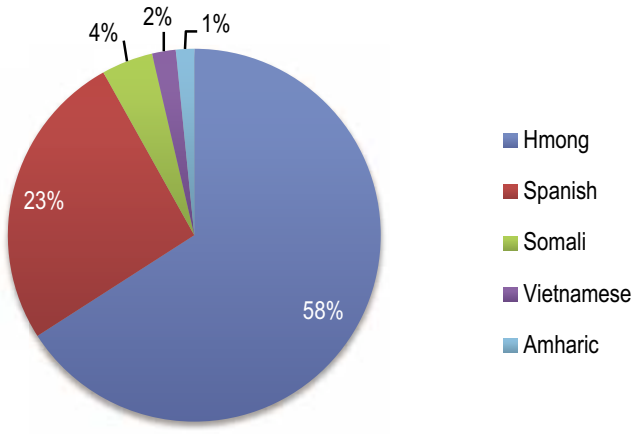
Figure 18
St. Paul Public Schools ELL and FRPL Enrollments
2002-2003 to 2005-2006



	2002-2003	2003-2004	2004-2005	2005-2006
ELL Enrollment	34%	34%	37%	35%
Free and Reduced-Priced Lunch	65%	66%	69%	71%
Total Enrollment	43,923	42,510	41,119	41,267

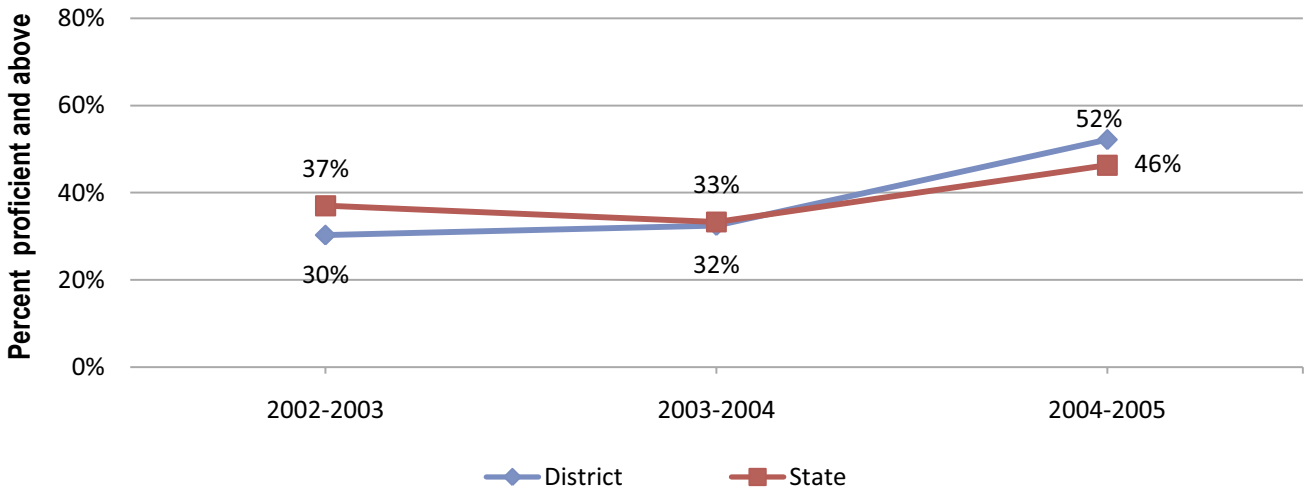
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics Common Core of Data

Figure 19
St. Paul Public Schools Top 5 ELL Home Languages
2004 - 2005



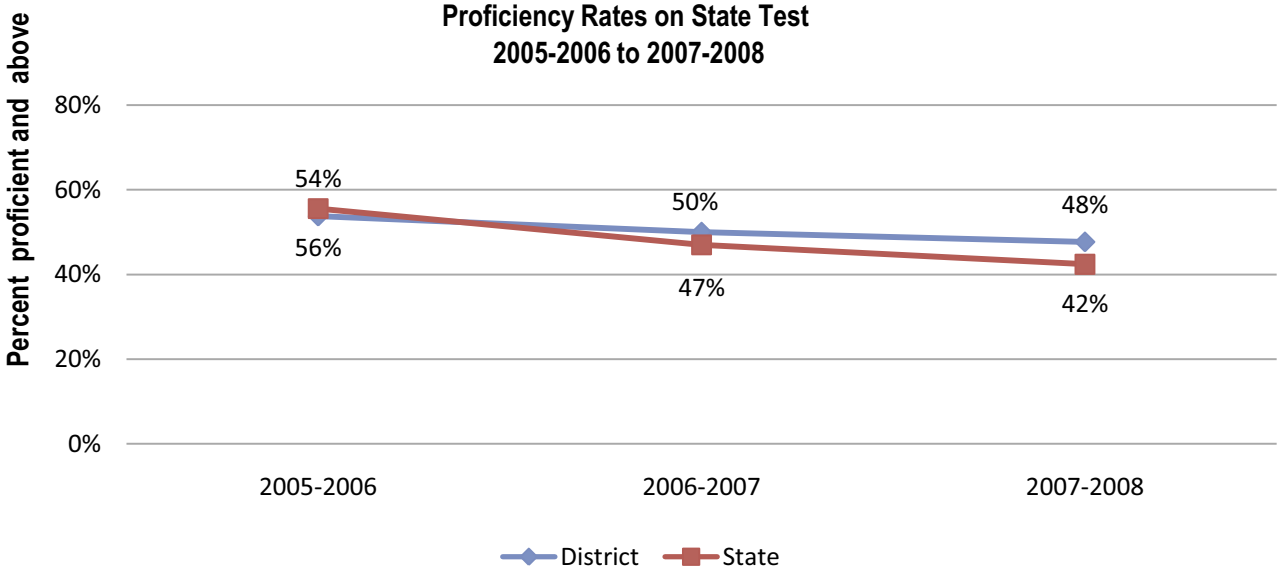
SOURCE: St. Paul Public Schools

Figure 20
St. Paul Public Schools and Minnesota State Public Schools 3rd Grade Reading
ELL Proficiency Rates on State Test
2002-2003 to 2004-2005



SOURCE: Minnesota Department of Education, MCA results 2002-2003 to 2004-2005.

Figure 21
St. Paul Public Schools and Minnesota State Public Schools 3rd grade Reading ELL Proficiency Rates on State Test
2005-2006 to 2007-2008



SOURCE: Minnesota Department of Education, MCA II results, 2005-2006 to 2007-2008.

District Snapshot: Comparison Districts A and B

District Context

Comparison District A

A key factor in Comparison District A was the significant decline in student enrollment over the study period. In addition to a decline in citywide population, an open enrollment policy at the state level allowing students to enroll in other districts and a flourishing charter school movement drained sizable numbers of students from the district.

This decline in student enrollment resulted in substantial staff and budget cuts and drove a sense of limited and unstable funding for ELL programs. The perception of insufficient funding for the district in general and for ELL programming in particular was exacerbated by an erroneous district assumption that instruction for ELLs could be supported only by ELL-specific funding, such as that provided by state and federal categorical grants. These funding sources supported supplementary staff and services, but they could not support the entire instructional program for ELLs. District staff members did not see the general operating fund as the "first source" of support for ELL programs, nor was the federal Title I program seen as a source of support. Both funding streams were devoted therefore to other priorities before being used to support ELL programming.

Another important dynamic the district faced was a contentious, politically charged environment where racial politics appeared to trump language-related issues. The school board in District A focused considerable attention on the achievement gap between African American and white students to the exclusion of recognizing the achievement discrepancies between ELLs and non-ELL students. ELLs were not viewed as part of the same struggle for equity and opportunity. Even though ELLs constituted nearly a quarter of the total student enrollment, the school district was not seen as affording the ELL community a voice, and the board had not insisted on the same level of scrutiny of ELL programs and achievement.

Finally, District A experienced considerable turnover in district leadership both before and throughout the study period, leading to instability in the overall direction of instruction and reform.

Comparison District B

While District B experienced slightly less turnover of district staff and leadership than Comparison District A during the study period, it did experience the same shifting priorities and inconsistency of reform efforts. It was also uniformly described as a politically charged, contentious environment. The district and the community saw themselves as

being pitted against each other and decisions were seen as being made politically rather than being informed by any districtwide instructional vision or reform agenda.

In the years leading up to the study period, the district was operating under a compliance agreement with the state—the result of a law-suit brought by members of the community for failing to provide adequate services and instruction for ELLs. This compliance agreement set guidelines in 15 areas, including certification of teachers, deployment of bilingual instruction aides, the provision of English language development instruction, identification of ELLs, and the monitoring of student progress. By most accounts, before this compliance agreement, there was no monitoring and no system in place to support ELLs. However, the compliance agreement was seen by many observers mainly as an administrative policing effort. In fact, the main role of the ELL office during this time was to ensure compliance at school sites—not to set policy or support ELL programming at schools. A support staff of 15 from this office was charged with overseeing the ELL instructional program in schools. But, they had no time to support teachers and served solely as monitors, earning them the nickname the "LEP Police."

When the compliance agreement expired, the external pressure to observe the letter of the law subsided but the compliance mindset endured. The ELL department staff acknowledged that, because the ELL department had been focused on compliance, they were not well equipped to look at the quality of instructional programming or at core issues of teaching and learning. In sum, the compliance agreement was seen as stretching the district "like a rubber band," but when it snapped back it resulted in a lack of focus coherence, accountability, and reform press that defined the study period.[10]

Limiting Factors in the Districts' ELL Programs

Both districts lacked a coherent vision and strategy for the instruction of ELLs systemwide.

Through discussions with leadership and staff at all levels, it was clear that neither district effectively articulated or communicated a vision for the kinds of instructional programming they would pursue on behalf of ELLs. There was no districtwide blueprint for ELL instruction and services, little backing from district leadership, and no real authority in the ELL office to guide school sites in their implementation of effective programs. Moreover, the districts' ELL programs did not appear to be grounded in research—or even on a general consensus about how to develop academic literacy among students—and did not include a clear articulation of the resources or training needed to raise performance.

Both districts appeared to treat the instruction of ELLs more as a compliance issue than as an academic imperative. In District A, for example, the central office devoted considerable energy to the identification of ELLs, assessment and placement issues, and the appropriate expenditures of state and federal ELL dollars, but there was little monitoring and evaluation of instructional programs and little tracking of ELLs once they left the bilingual program. In District B, oversight of teaching and learning for ELLs amounted to little more than a series of guidelines and practices carried over from the compliance agreement period, but with no meaningful oversight or enforcement.

In fact, ELL instruction often became secondary to other district- and site-based priorities. For example, it was reported that ELLs in District A were sometimes used to integrate schools, or they were bused to schools with declining enrollment in order to prevent school closures, without regard to a school's capacity to provide appropriate instruction or services for them.

Schools were not provided with the necessary tools, support, or oversight from the central office to support ELL instruction.

The lack of a coherent vision for ELL instruction, coupled with both districts' long held traditions of site-based management, resulted in systems that devolved most instructional responsibilities to individual schools. There was a widely expressed feeling that schools were "on their own" with no clear articulation of how best to teach ELLs and no system to monitor the implementation of adopted programs. Principals generally didn't hear from the central office throughout the school year, and expressed frustration with the glaring lack of support or guidance from the district on how to work with ELLs.

Comparison District A's ELL program manual provided a comprehensive synopsis of the legal history and foundations for bilingual education in the district, articulates the rights of ELLs, and provides general descriptions of instructional models, but fails to unpack these general statements into more actionable models or suggested instructional practices. Without solid knowledge of second-language acquisition programming, principals reported that the manual

provided insufficient guidance to mount or sustain a quality program. Comparison District B, meanwhile, devised an "English Learner Master Plan" (a large binder with various information on educating ELLs), but by most accounts this "Master Plan" lacked "planning." There was little orientation provided at the school level on how to implement the procedures outlined and no monitoring of implementation.

This lack of planning and oversight led to a lack of consistency in the curriculum, instruction, and services available to ELLs across each district. ELL programming decisions were primarily a function of the personal judgment and leadership capabilities of school leaders, the varying priorities of communities, and access to resources or categorical grants—leaving the quality of programming to vary across the district. Conversations with school-level staff revealed that there were a number of promising programs and initiatives being pursued at various school sites. However, these programs were not always supported by the district and not adopted districtwide.

Such programmatic fragmentation led to inadequate planning, low expectations for children, and little accountability for results. The schools' relative freedom in operating their site-based programs was not coupled, moreover, with clear accountability for the educational outcomes of students or consequences if students did not progress. Neither district had the structural components necessary to exact accountability for ELL results (such as regular data reporting on ELLs, stable ELL office leadership, or school board advocacy). Nor was there strong internal or external political pressure to examine ELL performance in the district.

The instructional program for ELLs was not aligned to the core curriculum and was not responsive to the language development needs of ELLs.

ELL instruction in both comparison districts was largely approached as supplemental—not integrated into the core curriculum and not monitored to ensure consistency with districtwide instructional standards. The ELL program manual in District A provided a checklist of "vital components" needed to enhance ELL achievement, but the list lacked an in-depth description of what these components meant or how they could be used in alignment with the district's general curriculum. The manual makes reference to a minimum 45-minute daily block for teaching literacy skills to ELLs at the high school level and a 45- to 90-minute block at the elementary school level, but does not indicate what should be included in the block. In District B, the requirement was 30 to 60 minutes of instruction in English language development (ELD), but again, the district did not communicate what was to be done with it. Schools in both districts ended up adopting different approaches to the time allotted for specialized language support, how to divide up the different kinds of ELLs, and which teachers would provide the instruction. By most accounts, this requirement of 30, 45, or even 90 minutes a day was not effective in meeting ELL needs and resulted mainly in ELLs missing out on access to the core curriculum. But again, owing to a focus on compliance, the quality and standard of instruction was not a priority.

Even in mainstream classrooms in both comparison districts, there was no system in place for ensuring ELLs were being taught to the same standards as other students. ELL program staff members were not integrally involved in the selection of new programs or materials. As a result, adopted materials and programs did not necessarily take into account the language acquisition needs of ELLs (or of general education students, for that matter) and did not specify how various program components could be customized in schools with sizable numbers of ELLs. General education teachers were rarely equipped with specialized training in English language development strategies or differentiated instruction. In District A, for example, the literacy program that was used to strengthen fluency was not appropriate for ELLs and did not address comprehension problems. The ELL Office reported that it made several attempts to provide accommodations and to supplement the programs with materials to boost comprehension for ELLs to no avail. If the district found that the publisher of a reading series had a Spanish version, teachers were required its use it even when the program was not a good fit for ELLs. Teachers in District B also reported that the available textbooks driving instruction were inadequate for meeting ELL student needs. In sum, the instructional needs of this population appeared to have been an afterthought, and the result, according to school-level staff interviewed by the team, was that there were scarce materials, training, and strategies that could be used to raise the achievement of these students.

The districts did not systematically collect and analyze ELL assessment data to track student achievement or measure program effectiveness.

There was no clear strategy in either comparison district for tracking ELL achievement or making student assessment data available to schools and teachers in a meaningful or timely way. Both districts had benchmark testing systems

during the study period that could have provided potentially useful information on ELL student progress and program effectiveness. However, it sometimes took months for the results of these assessments to become available to teachers. The data reporting systems in these districts were repeatedly described as inaccessible and unreliable. Moreover, teachers didn't have access to data showing patterns of student achievement or progress on critical standards, subject strands, or specific test questions, so the data could not always be used to target instruction or offer struggling students specialized support. Additionally, neither district—at the time—maintained a comprehensive data base of ELL scores on these assessments disaggregated by program, proficiency levels, or years in program.

In the absence of solid benchmark test data, both districts relied on classroom assessments of ELL progress—processes which were neither reliable nor monitored. The ELL program manual in District A indicted that ELLs should be assessed, preferably using authentic assessments, and students should have their performance monitored on a "variety of measures." However, the manual provided minimal guidance on the use of assessments and left most, if not all, decisions to the principals about how to use assessment data to inform decisions, when to use interventions, and how to decide on professional development. The measures for tracking progress were therefore inconsistently applied from school to school.

District B, meanwhile, relied on samples of ELL student work collected and filed in blue folders to track ELL achievement and progress. The blue folders were a holdover from the compliance agreement that, according to district and school staff alike, quickly became just another bureaucratic hoop to jump through. The folder on file for each ELL student contained examples of student work and a rubric for tracking a child's progress and determining their English language development (ELD) level. However, there was no training on how to evaluate student work or how to interpret the ELD rubric. Furthermore, there were no solid data indicating what the students were expected to do at each level. The inherently subjective nature of determining ELD levels and assessing student work thus meant there was little consistency in monitoring student progress.

Constant turnover of district leaders and staff resulted in a lack of consistent leadership and vision for ELL programming.

While high turnover among district administrators is a reality in large urban school systems, it was a particularly persistent challenge in Comparison Districts A and B. During the study period alone, for example, District A had three different superintendents and three different directors of the ELL office. Each leader brought a different philosophy and agenda, making it nearly impossible to implement or sustain a coherent instructional program. Staff came and went, policies were revised, and management structures overhauled. As these administrative changes made their way down the district's organizational food chain, programs not considered critical to the district's new mission—often including ELL programs—were neglected.

In many respects, the changes in district administration were symptomatic of the lack of consensus on the school board about what direction the district was taking or what kind of leadership it wanted. According to interviewees in both districts, none of the senior administrators during the study period had strong instructional backgrounds or were focused on what was happening in classrooms. This signaled to district and school staff members a lack of emphasis on instructional quality.

The ELL office lacked the capacity and authority to establish instructional programs and procedures and to support schools.

The ELL offices in both districts during the study period lacked the authority and resources to take strong leadership roles on ELL issues. With limited influence at the school or district level, the ELL program director was not empowered to visit school sites to monitor or enforce implementation of ELL initiatives or to provide direct assistance to principals in examining instructional practices for ELLs. In District A, ELL office staff cited a critical lack of stable leadership between 2000 and 2006. Such discontinuity in leadership made collaboration with other departments difficult and created a "crisis of confidence" in the sense that the office was not known for consistent direction or adequate program support. The ELL office did develop a manual for ELL programs, but it provided limited technical assistance

or training on it. For teachers and other school-level staff, the limited exposure to the ELL program manual appeared to confirm their sense that the ELL office was incapable of providing any meaningful guidance and support.

The ELL office in District B also suffered from a narrow mandate that limited its role in setting and implementing ELL instructional policy. The role of the ELL office under the compliance agreement had been to ensure observance of legal requirements at school sites, but once the compliance agreement expired the ELL office was left marginalized and isolated. Although the ELL director position had been upgraded to an assistant superintendent level, the office itself was relegated to the role of support. Staff members were available when teachers or school administrators were interested but lacked the power to set or enforce instructional guidelines.

The resources and professional development opportunities available to teachers during the study period were not consistent or sustained.

Much like their ELL instructional programming during this time, the comparison districts did not support consistent, systemwide programs of professional development for teachers of ELLs. Outside of a minimal requirement, professional development remained largely voluntary and varied from school to school. Most professional development opportunities that were available did not integrate ELL-specific content or strategies into their offerings, and there was no concerted effort to ensure that ELL teachers were included in the professional development that existed for "mainstream" teachers. In fact, on some districtwide professional development days ELL teachers in District A were reportedly asked to stay behind to tend to school needs while other teachers went to training.

Depending on different funding sources, some promising professional development opportunities were available at different points in each district. For example, in District A the ELL office managed to obtain external funding to provide Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) training at the high school level for content area teachers, resulting in over 200 teachers being trained over a three-year period. SIOP training was well received, but the district halted its expansion to more schools and principals reportedly due to the lack of buy-in among school administrators and district supervisors. Similarly, District B offered vocabulary training for two years that involved equipping teams of principals and teachers with skills for building academic vocabulary among ELLs. But this training was optional and teachers reported receiving little follow-up support—beyond a handbook—or oversight to see if they were implementing the strategies effectively in their classrooms.

The role of instructional support staff for ELLs was not clarified or overseen at the school level.

While both districts had policies providing schools with ELL instructional support staff, principals were given little guidance on how such staff members were to be allocated, managed, or trained. As a result, these aides were not strategically deployed in the schools to provide instructional support to ELLs. In District A, for example, the job description of a bilingual educational aide emphasized their role as translators and made vague references to assisting, collaborating, and supporting the implementation of ELL programs, but there was no direct mention of instructional support to ELLs. Consequently, they were often used at the discretion of school leadership or general education teachers. For example, educational aides were pulled away from classrooms without much prior notice to monitor school lunches, translate school documents and interpret for school staff, and perform other non-instructional support activities. In addition, there was no set procedure or requirement governing the training and resources available to these bilingual educational aides, and it was reported that most received little to no relevant professional development.

Similarly, District B also provided little oversight regarding their ELL support staff—called bilingual instructional aides or BIAs. This, too, was a holdover from the compliance agreement. ELLs at lower levels of English language development were supposed to have access to a BIA for additional support in their native language. However, decisions governing the implementation of this ELL program component were left to school sites. This led to a patchwork of different practices in terms of how BIAs were assigned to classrooms and what role they played within a school. As in District A, some schools ended up using their BIAs as administrative assistants. "As a district, we really moved away from the original intent of bilingual aides," reported one principal. The lack of qualified BIAs was also a major problem for District B. The BIA position was a part-time job, pay was low, and they often didn't receive sufficient training and support to be effective. As a result, many BIAs left and positions often remained unfilled.

Accountability for ELL achievement was concentrated in the hands of ELL office staff and teachers, with little support or collaboration across departments at the school or district level.

Unlike the experiences of the other case study districts, the availability of disaggregated data did not promote collaboration or shared accountability in the comparison districts. Staff members interviewed indicated that although NCLB-mandated disaggregation of test scores showed low achievement among ELLs, the data did not motivate principals or others to seek ways to work together to improve ELL instruction—though it may have unintentionally encouraged some principals to move ELLs out of their schools to avoid NCLB sanctions. Instead, there was an assumption that the ELL department and ELL teachers were responsible for ELLs regardless of what curriculum was in place or that they didn't have access to training or resources. "We were told point blank we were the reason ELLs weren't learning," said one staff member in District B.

This same unsupportive culture existed in both districts. As a result of the secondary role assigned to the office of ELLs and the compartmentalized structures of each central office, there was little collaboration or sense of shared mission between departments. In fact, there was often an unspoken battle between the ELL and English language arts departments in District A, which were seen as having completely separate responsibilities.

This lack of collaboration at the central office trickled down. At the school level, there were little conversations or work concerning how to meet ELL student needs throughout the day and across the curriculum. There was also not a lot of pooling of knowledge or resources among schools, leading to the duplication of work and services from site to site. Where relationships did exist, they were informal.

The need for and value of collaboration to support ELLs was further confounded in District A by increased ELL isolation and ethnic-centered schools. ELLs in this district were concentrated in certain areas of the city, leading to vastly uneven numbers of ELLs from school to school. In addition, as new groups of refugees arrived, the district opened newcomer centers to centralize services. Unfortunately, the district has yet to provide a clear direction about how to balance the programmatic benefits of grouping ELLs and refugee students against the negative effects of ethnic/racial segregation.

District Snapshot: Comparison Districts A and B Endnote

[10] At the time of the writing of this report, District B, in particular, had engaged in a notable review and taken steps to reform its ELL programs.

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