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Learning from Consistently High Performing and Improving Schools for English Language Learners in Boston Public Schools

Rosann Tung
Center for Collaborative Education

Virginia Diez
Tufts University

Laurie Gagnon
Center for Collaborative Education

Miren Uriarte
University of Massachusetts Boston, miren.uriarte@umb.edu

Pamela Stazesky
Center for Collaborative Education

See next page for additional authors

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Authors

Rosann Tung, Virginia Diez, Laurie Gagnon, Miren Uriarte, Pamela Stazesky, Eileen de los Reyes, and Antonieta Bolomey



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Rosann Tung, Virginia Diez, Laurie Gagnon, Miren Uriarte, and Pamela Stazesky
with Eileen de los Reyes and Antonieta Bolomey

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This report, *Learning from Consistently High Performing and Improving Schools for English Language Learners in Boston Public Schools*, and its companion report, *Improving Educational Outcomes of English Language Learners in Schools and Programs in Boston Public Schools*, are part of a larger project, *Identifying Success in Schools and Programs for English Language Learners in Boston Public Schools*, commissioned by the Boston Public Schools as part of the process of change set in motion by the intervention of the state and the federal governments on behalf of Boston's English language learners. The project was conducted at the request of the Office for English Language Learners and is a collaboration among this Office, the Center for Collaborative Education, and the Mauricio Gastón Institute for Latino Community Development and Public Policy at the University of Massachusetts Boston. It was conducted under the leadership of principal investigators Milen Uriarte and Rosam Tung and by the following members of the research team: Michael Berardino, Jie Chen, Virginia Diez, Laurie Gagnon, Foye Kemp, Sarah Rustan, and Pamela Stazesky. This report and its companion report may be downloaded at www.cce.org and www.umb.edu/gastoninstitute.

The Research and Evaluation Team at the **Center for Collaborative Education** located in Boston, Massachusetts was established in 2000. Its mission is to conduct research to inform and influence educational policy and practice to improve equity and student achievement. Therefore, the team focuses on research studies and evaluations that are concerned with increasing educational access and opportunity for all students. To meet its goal of building the capacity of educational stakeholders to engage in the inquiry process, the team works collaboratively with clients to identify goals, determine purpose, and select appropriate data collection strategies, as well as decide on products that fit the audience and users.

The Mauricio Gastón Institute for Latino Community Development and Public Policy was established in 1989 at the University of Massachusetts Boston by the Massachusetts State Legislature at the behest of Latino community leaders and scholars in response to a need for improved understanding of the Latino experience in the Commonwealth. The mission of the Institute is to inform policy makers about issues vital to the state's growing Latino community and to provide this community with information and analysis necessary for effective participation in public policy development.

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**Learning from Consistently High Performing and Improving Schools
for English Language Learners in Boston Public Schools**

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CHAPTER

INTRODUCTION

This study is part of a collaborative project entitled *Identifying Success in Schools and Programs for English Language Learners in Boston Public Schools*. The companion to this report, entitled *Improving Educational Outcomes of English Language Learners in Schools and Programs in Boston Public Schools*, provides a comprehensive analysis of student-, program-, and school-level data from SY2006 to SY2009 to describe the trends in enrollment and educational outcomes for Boston's ELL students in those years.

This study follows up and extends the research published in 2009, which analyzed the enrollment and performance of BPS ELL students from SY2003 to SY2006 (Tung et al., 2009) and found (1) a decline in the identification of students as LEP and in their ELL program participation; (2) an increase in LEP student enrollment in special education programs; (3) substantial increases in dropout rates; and (4) large gaps in MCAS pass rates between LEP students and English proficient students. In the present study, the same enrollment and educational outcome indicators are examined, but new analyses are also presented.

A Contextual Information

Since SY1998, while the K-12 enrollment figures have remained relatively steady, the ELL population in the US has grown more than 50%.¹ A majority of ELL students are Spanish speakers, or low-income backgrounds, and enrolled in schools that provide few and inconsistent language learning services (Goldenberg, 2008).

In several states, including Massachusetts, the policy context for English language learners involved a shift to "English Only" instruction. Massachusetts voters in November 2002 passed Referendum Question 2 (now Chapter 386 of the Acts of 2002), which replaced Transitional Bilingual Education (TBE) with Sheltered English Immersion (SEI) as the predominant approach to educating ELL students in the state. The practical interpretation of this change to a native language restrictive policy by districts meant that instruction in students' first language (L1) disappeared virtually overnight in K-12 public schools that were teaching ELL students with bilingual education.

During the same year that SEI became the dominant mode of instruction, the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System tests became used for school, district, and state accountability under the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. The MCAS tests also became high-stakes tests for high school graduation. During the three years after Question 2 implementation and MCAS as a high-stakes accountability test, LEP identification, program participation, and outcomes plummeted (Tung et al., 2009).

Since those sobering findings were released, the Boston Public School district has undergone numerous programmatic and policy changes. The district hired a new Office of English Language Learners director as assistant superintendent in April 2009, following extensive data and document review by the U.S. Department of Justice and the U.S. Department of Education; the district agreed to remedy the deficiencies found in identifying, serving, and monitoring ELL students and in communicating about program options with families in a settlement agreement in October, 2010.²

Against this backdrop, and with the knowledge that many teachers and administrators within the Boston Public Schools are expert practitioners with ELL students and that many BPS ELL graduates succeed academically and professionally, we endeavored to identify schools in which ELL students were consistently performing better than predicted while controlling for the schools' demographics. We sought to study each one in enough depth to tell their stories of success, and to synthesize those findings into cross-cutting themes that would inform the district and beyond.

The new analyses are found both in *Improving Educational Outcomes of English Language Learners in Schools and Programs in Boston Public Schools* and in this study, which uses mixed methods to answer the following research questions:

- In which BPS schools were ELL students at intermediate to advanced English proficiency levels performing at a consistently high level or showing steady improvement during SY2006-SY2009?
- What were some of the organizational, cultural, instructional, professional development, and community engagement practices that the school staff attributed to their success with ELL students during SY2006-SY2009?

- Which of the organizational, cultural, instructional, professional development, and community engagement practices identified by school staff were shared among the selected schools? The remainder of this report describes how we answered these research questions, presents the four case studies, synthesizes themes from the four case studies, and provides conclusions and recommendations for district and school policy-makers and practitioners.

The purpose of this report is to inform the district and other schools not only about which schools were most successful during the study period, but also to share detailed information that may be disseminated widely so that staff in other schools may consider the lessons and practices for adaptation in their own schools.

B Methods³

To answer these research questions, quantitative and qualitative methods were used. The unit of analysis for this report is the school. This study uses the same four study years (SY2006-SY2009) and the longitudinal student-level data set constructed for *Improving Educational Outcomes for English Language Learners in the Boston Public Schools*. The companion report, to answer the first

question, using multiple linear regression to control for differences in student population across schools. To answer the second question, we chose a case study approach to develop deep, descriptive portraits of the practices in those schools that are likely to contribute to that success. Case studies were chosen because every school has different setting, history, context, student population, and community that contribute to its story of success with ELL students.

Finally, we analyzed the data across the individual case studies in order to identify common practices in these successful schools. The data were analyzed in relation to the literature-based ELL practices framework, while allowing for new insights and practices not found in the framework to emerge. We also analyzed the data across the four case studies, again in relation to the ELL practices framework, to strengthen or expand upon the research of others.

Theoretical Framework

A theoretical framework for the study was informed by a review of the literature on effective schools and on ELL best practices. The literature review focused on studies that described aspects of effective schools with a demonstrated correlation or causative link to ELL student outcomes. The best ELL practices identified in the framework guided the school-site data collection and data analysis (Appendix 2). The framework is organized into seven domains of effective school reform: (1) mission and vision; (2) school organization and decision-making; (3) instruction and curriculum; (4) assessment; (5) culture and climate; (6) professional development, and (7) community engagement. We expected that some of the practices and strategies identified in the case study schools would mirror those found in the literature to be correlated with attributes of effective schools for ELL students and also with strong ELL outcomes. In addition, we expected that other practices would not be represented in the literature and would provide findings for further investigation.

Identification and Selection of High Performing and Improving Schools for ELL Students at Intermediate to Advanced Levels of English Proficiency

To identify schools for the case studies, the research team used multiple linear regression to examine student performance while controlling for differences in student populations across schools, replicating the method of a 2005 MCREL study, "High Needs Schools – What Does it Take to Beat the Odds?" (MCREL, 2005). In the current study, we used student-level data to identify two different types of schools for their practices with ELL students using student-level data provided by BPS⁴ – those that were performing substantially higher and those that were showing steady improvement in outcomes when compared with other schools with similar proportions of students from low-income households and with limited English proficiency. These analyses were conducted separately for schools serving elementary and secondary grades.

In order to compare similar schools when examining outstanding outcomes, we chose three school-level demographic variables to control for a school's student body composition: (1) percentage low-income, (2) percentage LEP, and (3) percentage LEPs in first year in the U.S. To predict performance, we selected three outcome variables for ELL

students: promotion rates, MCAS proficiency rates in English Language Arts, and MCAS proficiency rates in Mathematics. Since we were focused on the outcomes of the ELL population, and a certain level of English proficiency is necessary for MCAS proficiency, we examined MCAS data for students who scored a 3 or 4 on the Massachusetts English Proficiency Assessment (MEPA),⁵ meaning they were approaching the highest English language development levels.

The regression equation allowed us to create groups of schools similar in demographic characteristics, but distinct in performance. We used the standardized residuals, which compare the observed performance of the school (e.g., the actual percentage of students promoted to the next grade) to the predicted performance, calculated based on the equation generated from the regression model, which took into account student population characteristics. Two schools were selected for consistent high performance in outcomes in ELA and Mathematics controlling for school demographic variables related to household income and English proficiency in each of

Table 1.1. Regression Equation Results, Proficiency Rates of MEPA 3 & 4 Students, SY2009

	ELA			Math		
	Observed Proficiency Rate	Predicted Proficiency Rate	Standardized Residual	Observed Proficiency Rate	Predicted Proficiency Rate	Standardized Residual
Joiah Quincy Elementary School	40.9%	17.6%	188	52.3%	24.2%	1.83
Sarah Greenwood K-8 School	41.7%	11.5%	243	50.0%	22.4%	1.80
David Ellis Elementary School	37.5%	8.6%	2.33	43.8%	18.0%	1.68
Excel High School	29.0%	17.5%	0.93	92.9%	34.8%	2.46

Table 1.2. Summary of Case Study Schools, SY2009

	Grades	Reason for Case Study	ELL Program Type	Major Home Language	% LEP	% Low Income
Joiah Quincy Elementary School	K-5	Consistently High Performing	SEL Language Specific	Chinese dialects	46%	78%
Sarah Greenwood K-8 School	K-8 (K-9 in case study)	Consistently High Performing	Two-Way Bilingual	Spanish	43%	90%
David Ellis Elementary School	K-5	Steadily Improving	SEL Language Specific	Spanish	29%	97%
Excel High School	9-12	Steadily Improving	SEL Language Specific	Vietnamese	23%	70%

the study years. Because our analysis revealed only two elementary schools performing at high levels in multiple areas (i.e., promotion, ELA, Mathematics) for at least three years, we conducted additional analyses to identify schools that were making substantial gains in outcomes over the four-year study period. These new analyses yielded two schools showing recent steady improvement in outcomes. In other words, each selected school's standardized residuals, which represent a measure of the differences between the actual and the predicted values of the outcome variable, were consistently greater than 0.75 standard deviations, an accepted cut point (Cronk & Fiedler, 1995), while each improving school's standardized residuals steadily increased, ending the study period with standardized residuals greater than 0.75 standard deviations. For example, in SY2009, each case study school's observed versus predicted proficiency rates on the MCAS are shown in the table below. These differences are also expressed in the standardized residuals so that the school's outcomes may be measured against those of other BPS schools.

While these analyses allow us to identify schools that were consistently high performing or steadily improving, other schools could also have been performing well or adequately. We observed many schools that were meeting expectations as shown by the multiple regression analyses. In summary, four BPS schools were identified for further study using qualitative methods, which are described in the next section.

Case Studies

A case study design was selected to capture the uniqueness of each school in a rich, in-depth portrait. Case studies seemed better suited for this task than other forms of qualitative inquiry because we wanted to conduct within-case analyses to identify and report themes and practices emerging within each specific school context first. As a second step, we conducted a cross-case analysis to identify shared practices at the schools during the study period, SY2006-SY2009. The case study method, however, presented some hurdles: data collection was conducted in the spring of 2011, after the end of the study period (SY2006-SY2009) and school leadership changed, resulting in loss of key archival data.

moved to an administrative position at the district level between the study period and the data collection period. In two of the schools, the change in principals was accompanied by teaching staff departures. As a result of these changes, archival data on school practices during the study period was not always available.

The study period, SY2006-SY2009, was one of intense change in Boston Public Schools. The district's response to the passage of Chapter 386 of the Massachusetts Laws of 2002, which replaced Transitional Bilingual Education with Sheltered English Immersion programs as the preferred modality for the education of ELL students, was only two years old. At an administrative level, a new Superintendent was recruited in 2007 and a new Assistant Superintendent for English Language Learners was hired in 2009. Following the study period, in 2009, changes initiated by the administration were capped by a civil rights investigation by the U.S. Department of Justice, which was settled in 2010, when the district agreed to redress violations of ELL students' civil rights. Simultaneously, there were also district changes in curricular and professional development programs.

To mitigate the effects of this limitation, one of the research team's first tasks was to recruit the former principals to participate in the study. In addition, during site visits, we reminded study participants to focus on effective practices with ELL students during the period between SY2006 and SY2009. Specific strategies to ensure that the portraits were accurate depictions of the schools during the study period included the following:

- Interviews were conducted primarily with school staff and former school staff who were at the school during the study period; interviews were reminded to tell us about the school during the study period
- Hallway and classroom observation data were used to corroborate rather than identify best ELL practices. No observation data were included in the case studies unless they were triangulated by interviews and/or documentation.
- We requested documentation from the study period, rather than from the data collection period. The availability of this documentation was uneven, but the documentation that appears in the case studies was all from the study period.
- Key school ELL leaders during the study period reviewed the case studies for accuracy, with the directive to check for reflecting SY2006-SY2009 activities and practices (LAI facilitators and former Principals).

Data Collection. Schools were advised of their selection for the current study by the Office of English Language Learners in Boston Public Schools. Prior to entering each school, a preliminary phone call and/or meeting was held with each school principal and relevant staff to familiarize them with the background to their school's identification, to discuss the selection of interviewees, and to share scheduling and logistical needs for the site visits. Researchers also used this initial meeting to clarify that the period under study was SY2006-SY2009 and that we needed to interview individuals who could speak about changes that took place at the school leading to success in those years.

The research team developed interview and observation protocols and a list of key documents from SY2006-SY2009 to collect from each case study school.⁵ The interview and observation protocols used the research-based theoretical framework of best ELL practices while allowing for other important dimensions in their ELL work to emerge through discussion during the semi-structured 45-60 minute interviews. The key documents collected ranged from the current school improvement plan to curricular materials to teacher schedules. In addition, we collected information from district staff and school leaders for background on the school. Two day site visits to each school were conducted by pairs of researchers. One researcher participated in all four site visits for triangulation of findings. All interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed. Each case study included the experiences and perceptions of multiple stakeholders, including families, graduates of the schools, administrators, and staff. Site visits typically included individual and group interviews with the Principal, other administrators and staff, the Instructional Leadership Team, SE and other teachers of ELL students, including regular education teachers, families of ELL students, and community partners. Additionally, the team conducted observations in ELL classrooms and some regular education classrooms. While retrospective case studies are challenging, in the interviews we asked specifically about events and activities during the study period.

Analysis of Individual Cases. We interpreted classroom and other school observations conservatively. If instructional strategies were consistently observed in multiple classrooms, we concluded that they had reached a level of sustainability over time. If the data from observations aligned with the interviews and documentation, we assumed that the work from the study period had carried over to the present day.

The purpose of analysis was to describe practices found at each school. Yin recommends treating each case study as a separate “experiment” leading to its own findings (Yin, 2009). We compared practices found in each school to the ELL practices framework to check for replication, which strengthened the framework. The same logic involved documenting practices that emerged across schools and were not in the framework for the purposes of expanding the ELL best practices framework using future research. Thus, we used the literature

base to analyze our findings, but we also allowed findings to inform potential modifications to the evidence base. In this way, we recognized the important contribution that experienced practitioners, in this case the staff from the case study schools, made to our understanding of best ELL practices. Analysis began with a full day meeting once the site visits were completed, for the researchers to discuss findings and identify patterns and differences across the sites. A primarily inductive approach was taken to analyzing the data collected in each school. Analysis began with the research team sharing observations from each school about practices and stances. Researchers used software for qualitative analysis to code interview transcripts. Codes documented the teachers’ and administrators’ beliefs and practices during the study period. We used open coding to extract key “themes” from the data, especially themes that explained the “how” and “why” of a school’s success. We also used the theoretical framework to code individual school practices that were shared during interviews. The codes and themes in the reports were shared and revised multiple times to monitor a level of consistency in “grain size” across the four case studies.

Triangulation involved hearing from multiple stakeholders about the same topics. In addition, because site visits involved pairs of researchers, including one researcher who participated in all four pairs, triangulation occurred by comparing findings between the two researchers. To a lesser extent, the use of documentation from the study period and observations from site visits further confirmed our findings.

Case studies were analyzed inductively, with a view toward reflecting how stakeholders told their schools’ story rather than trying to fit their descriptions to the ELL best practices framework categories. Using this approach allowed each school’s stories and voices to emerge. As a result of this analysis process, the individual case studies differ in level of detail purposefully. In Chapter VII, the cross-cutting findings are aligned to the framework. Draft case studies were shared with each Principal, former Principal, and primary case study contact for feedback and factual corrections before finalizing.

Synthesis Report. Once we coded each case study inductively, we proceeded to conduct comparisons across cases using two strategies. First, we analyzed findings deductively to compare them to the ELL practices framework developed in the beginning of the study. The codes and findings from each case study were reviewed using the expectation that some or all of the ELL best practices in the framework would have been found in the case study schools, since these were high performing or steadily improving schools for ELL students. Data from each school were mapped onto the ELL practices framework to identify which of the four schools exhibited each indicator, and to what extent. We created charts of shared practices among the schools, using the framework to identify practices for which there is strong empirical support in the literature, while allowing space for emerging practices that were not in the framework. Second, we also identified practices and strategies that were not found in the research-based framework, and reported them as emerging themes. This inductive strategy allowed us to showcase practices recurrent across schools during the study period that may have accounted for the school’s success as well. Both the indicators from the theoretical framework found in the four case study schools and practices and strategies that were identified in the four schools but not found in the framework are included and analyzed as cross-cutting themes for the report.

Limitations of Methods

One limitation to the methods for this study was the restriction to LEP students with MEPA Levels 3 and 4 in the multiple regression with MCAS proficiency as the outcome. This choice was necessary given the MCAS outcomes measure used – students at the lower MEPA levels by definition are not English proficient, and others’ analyses show that students at the lower MEPA levels are very unlikely to be proficient on an MCAS exam. Promotion rate for all LEP students at a school was included as a dependent variable; however, the schools identified for high promotion rates did not overlap with those identified for their high or improving MCAS proficiency rates. Therefore, the findings do not refer to all LEP students. Despite this limitation in case study selection, data collection was conducted for the whole school, including the practices and strategies used with LEP students at beginning and early intermediate English proficiency levels (MEPA Levels

1 and 2). In other words, the stories of success and cross-cutting themes should be viewed in light of the way these schools were identified – through the outcomes of their intermediate to advanced English proficiency students.

The study period for the companion report and for the data used to identify the case studies was SY2006-SY2009. However, the schools were identified and studied in SY2011. All schools’ change from year to year in their student populations, teaching staff, district policies, and leadership. In the case of all four case study schools, the school leader (Principal or Headmaster) during the study period had left the helm of the school between the end of SY2009 and SY2011. Three of the four schools had two changes in leadership during the two years between the end of the study period and this study’s data collection. As a result of these leadership and other staffing and policy changes, a limitation to this study is the delay between the data for the study period and the data collected from each school. While it is not possible to conduct retrospective case studies, in the interviews we asked specifically about events and activities during the study period. We also collected artifacts from the study period. In those interviews, we found that some of the practices that were in place during the study period were no longer present due to a combination of school staffing and leadership changes and district policy changes. We only report practices that were in place during the study period, as triangulated through multiple interviews.

The fact that the data used to identify the case study schools were from SY2006 to SY2009, while data collection took place in SY2011, limited the conclusions that could be drawn. However, we specifically focused on the events and activities during the study period during interviews and in document collection. We interpreted classroom and other school observations conservatively. If instructional strategies were consistently observed in multiple classrooms, we concluded that they had reached a level of sustainability over time. If the data from observations aligned with the interviews and documentation, we assumed that the work from the study period had carried over to the present day. With this level of triangulation, despite not having observations from the study period, we deduced that the school’s investment during the study period was implemented and sustained.

Site visits were only two days, and they included 45 minute interviews and 15-30 minute observations. Additional data collection time for each school extended beyond the two site visit days, through email, phone calls, and in-person interviews with key individuals.

One limitation that emerged during the site visits was the lack of information available to staff about other groups of ELL students present at the school who were not part of the dominant group. As SEI Language Specific program schools and a Two Way Bilingual program school, there was a clear focus on each dominant ELL language group. However, there was little discussion about other ELL students and the services and programs that support them. Since the majority of these ELL students are likely at the higher levels of English proficiency and in regular education classrooms, the implications of this finding extend to the practices of regular education teachers in schools. With more explicit interview protocols, more data on these groups would have been collected.

In all of the case study schools, there had been one or more changes in leadership between the study period (SY2006-SY2009) and the data collection period (SY2011). Thus, some of the practices that were implemented during the study period had not been sustained and could not be observed during data collection. Given the difference between the study period for which these schools were identified as consistently high performing or steadily improving and the data collection period, even staff who were present in the school during the duration may have memories that are not entirely accurate, or perceptions of their own practices that are different from reality due to the context of the school and the district. This sort of recall bias could lead a study participant to report ELL practices in hindsight which may have been less developed or implemented than they report. Our efforts to take into account the possibility of recall bias include making sure more than one person told us the same information in separate interviews, phone calls, or emails. Comparison schools, such as those that were performing as predicted or lower than predicted, were not studied. Thus, some of the practices that emerged in the case study schools could also be found in those schools.

Finally, we did not identify or select any comparison schools to study (i.e., schools that were low-performing or performing as expected), because of the sensitive nature of being identified as a low performing school. Therefore we do not know if any of the practices identified in the case studies are also present in low performing/average schools. We acknowledge that our findings do not address the presence or absence of ELL best practices in those schools, or if they are present, whether certain ones or combinations of practices result in success.

¹ Data found at <http://www.ed.gov/els/updates/2009/08/09/0809.pdf>.

² Settlement agreement found in: <http://www.justice.gov/cv/44049/edu/documents/bostonsettle.pdf>.

³ For a full description of Methods, see Appendix 1.

⁴ Data included variables from the Massachusetts Student Information Management System (SIMS), Massachusetts English Proficiency Assessment (MEPA), and Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS).

⁵ MEPA scores from SY2006-SY2008 were reported as a performance level on a scale of 1 to 4. In 2009 performance levels were changed to a 1 to 5 scale. Using the MA DESE chart provided in the Guide to Understanding the 2009 Annual Measurable Achievement Objectives (AMAJO) Reports (December 2009), we converted April 2009 results back to a 1 to 4 scale to use for the creation of the dependent variables used in the multiple regressions for MCAS proficiency rates.

⁶ Interview and observation protocols are available upon request.



CHAPTER

LITERATURE REVIEW

A Developing a Framework of ELL Best Practices

A theoretical framework for the study was informed by a review of the literature on effective schools on ELL best practices. Just as the literature on school reform is vast, so is the literature on English language learner education. In order to bring the two strands of literature together into one theoretical framework, we searched for studies about the practices and conditions necessary for quality ELL education at the school level. While there is extensive literature on effective whole-school reform, there are fewer studies that focus on effective schools for ELL students, and even fewer that show a correlation or causative link between specific practices and ELL student outcomes.

However, others have attempted to identify attributes of schools that are effective for ELL students. Two major reviews of the research on best practices for ELL students guided our framework development. One, the National Literacy Panel (NLP), found fewer than 300 reports that were empirical and that focused on ELL students in K-12 schools (August & Shanahan, 2006). The other, published by the Center for Research on Education, Diversity, and Excellence (CREDE), reviewed 200 reports that were correlational or experimental in approach (Geneese, Lindholm-Leary, Saunders, & Christian, 2005). We were also guided by other reviewers who describe primary and secondary research that established ELL practices in light of student outcomes (August & Pease-Alvarez, 1996; Gersten et al., 2007; Goldenberg, 2008; Norris & Ortega, 2010; Jelliez & Waxman, 2005; Waxman, Padron, & Garcia, 2007).

One limitation of using stringent criteria (such as studies that show correlation or causation with student outcomes) to review the literature or to identify studies for the ELL practices framework is that it favors school practices that lend themselves to quasi-experimental or large randomized studies. These studies focus on easily quantifiable, standardized outcomes such as test scores. Another potential limitation of using an evidence-based framework is to end up with a purely confirmatory study – practices intended to raise test scores will result in high test scores. To avoid this pitfall, we kept protocols semi-structured to check for framework

indicators in operation in the schools, allowing for other topics to emerge. We also triangulated data collection in an effort to hear different perspectives on the same questions.

B ELL Best Practices Framework

The best ELL practices identified in the meta-analyses populated the theoretical framework for this study. The framework was organized into seven domains of effective school reform: (1) mission and vision; (2) school organization and decision-making; (3) instruction and curriculum; (4) assessment; (5) culture and climate; (6) professional development; and (7) community engagement. These seven domains are widely accepted and have been used by many researchers and practitioners at different administrative levels (local, district, state, federal) to both design and evaluate school quality and results, including School Quality Reviews for Boston Pilot schools, MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education Walkthrough protocols, and the Department of Justice collection of evidence (Buttram, 2007; Office of Educational Quality and Accountability and University of Massachusetts Donahue Institute, 2007; Office of English Language Learners, 2010; Renne Center, 2008; Shields & Miles, 2008; Tiedt & Reynolds, 2000; The Education Trust, 2005). We present the evidence-based best practices from the ELL framework by domain of school reform as an introduction and a theoretical context to the rest of this report, which includes the four individual case studies and an analysis of cross-cutting findings.

1. Mission and Vision

A school's "vision" is the core set of shared beliefs that reflect the school's values about what matters in education. A "mission" is a brief written statement of the school's belief systems that guides everyday school practice and decisions. High-performing schools have clear visions and missions that are communicated by the principal, aligned to standards, and set forth high expectations for student outcomes (Williams, Hakuta, & Haerfel, 2007).

2. School Organization

School organization for ELL education refers to the arrangement of students and faculty by grade, classroom, and program. School organization involves strategic and explicit definitions of roles and responsibilities and leadership opportunities for teachers and other staff. In successful schools, principals manage school reform based on their visions, delegate well, and empower others for responsibility for ELL education (Williams et al., 2007). The research evidence is strong on the importance of school organization in terms of how to group students by English proficiency levels, the teacher qualifications necessary for students at each English proficiency level, and the amount of time students should spend on English as a second language (August & Pease-Alvarez, 1996; Gersten et al., 2007).

3. Curriculum and Instruction

Studies and reviews of studies about the most effective curriculum for English language learners confirm that they should have access to the same core curriculum that all students receive, aligned with district and state standards and frameworks (August & Pease-Alvarez, 1996; Goldenberg, 2008; Williams et al., 2007). However, the curriculum must be modified and adapted to ELL students' range of knowledge, skills, and needs (August & Pease-Alvarez, 1996; Williams et al., 2007).

Some specific instructional strategies have an evidence base for improved outcomes, including: (1) having ELL students working with more fluent peers (Gersten et al., 2007); (2) practice decoding, comprehension, and spelling (August & Pease-Alvarez, 1996; Gersten et al., 2007); (3) more instructional conversations; and (4) more activity-based, collaborative learning to give students more opportunity to learn English. These effective instructional approaches work because they enhance self-confidence, promote communication skills, and provide more rich language experiences than whole-group instruction (August & Shanahan, 2006; Gersten et al., 2007; Waxman et al., 2007). Teachers applied small-group interventions to students at the same English proficiency levels who were struggling with reading (Gersten et al., 2007).

The research literature is also clear that bilingualism is positively correlated with academic achievement (Lindholm-Leary & Borsato, 2006). The use of L1 to teach L2 is correlated with higher achievement (Lindholm-Leary & Borsato, 2006). However, the

amount of L1, the length of time to use L1, and the ways in which to use L1 are to be further studied (August, Goldenberg, Saunders, & Dressler, 2010). There is specific evidence that learning in L1 can help students learn vocabulary, literacy, comprehension, and transfer of skills in L1 (August et al., 2010).

4. Assessment

The research literature confirms that the use of multiple assessments to drive instruction is linked to student achievement. Assessments of content and English proficiency are both necessary for effective ELL education (August & Pease-Alvarez, 1996). In particular, many studies support the notion that frequent, regular assessment of reading in particular is associated with early identification of ELL students who need reading interventions (Gersten et al., 2007). Higher performing schools reported frequent use of multiple types of assessments – from state to district to commercial to local assessments – to support and monitor individual students and to examine school-wide instructional issues (Williams et al., 2007). Clearly, an inquiry-minded approach at the student, classroom, and school levels has an evidence base for improved outcomes.

5. School Culture and Climate

The discussion of school culture and climate is diffuse and therefore requires some definitions for the purposes of this report. Culture is defined as "ways of living, shared behaviors, beliefs, customs, values, and ways of knowing that guide groups of people in their daily life and are transmitted from one generation to the next" (Turnbull & Pacheco, 2005). Climate, on the other hand, is defined as the "mood" or "attitude" of an organization. Climate is malleable over the course of daily events in schools and classrooms (Gruenert, 2008). This report's analysis of culture and climate addresses cultural competence, organizational culture, and school safety as aspects of culture and climate. Cultural competence in a school plays into the overall school culture and is defined as "the ability to recognize differences based on culture, language, race, ethnicity, and other aspects of individual identity and to respond to those differences positively and constructively" (Turnbull & Pacheco, 2005). Organizational school culture refers to the unwritten rules, expectations, shared beliefs, and practices that a group of people with a common organization develop over time.



CHAPTER

“A COMMUNITY SCHOOL AND LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT CENTER”: A CONSISTENTLY HIGH PERFORMING SCHOOL FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

The research base for teacher’s knowledge of how to modify instruction for ELL students is weak (Goldenberg, 2008). However, professional development on language learning, facilitating instructional conversations, adjusting instruction according to students’ oral English proficiency, and using content and language objectives in every class have some evidence in the literature (August & Pease-Alvarez, 1996; Goldenberg, 2008; Waxman et al., 2007).

7. Family and Community Engagement

The research evidence for community partnerships exists but is not strong (August & Pease-Alvarez, 1996). However, there is some evidence for schools partnering with culturally competent community-based organizations to support ELL students in counseling, college guidance, or academics (Waxman et al., 2007).

This short review of the ELL best practices found in schools serves to orient the reader to the chapters which follow. The individual case studies of consistently high performing and steadily improving BPS schools tell the stories of each school’s success with English language learners at the intermediate to advanced English proficiency levels (chapters III-VI), and many of these ELL best practices were demonstrated and implemented in their various settings and contexts. The findings which cut across the individual studies were analyzed deductively and organized according to this framework (Chapter VII).

Bilingual teachers can use their experiences of learning a second language to design better instruction because of their experiences (Tellez & Waxman, 2005). Teachers who are from the same culture as the ELL students in the school can design culturally relevant curriculum, choose reading material, activities, and content that connects to students’ lived experiences more readily, and as a result, make school more engaging to ELL students (August & Shanahan, 2006; Tellez & Waxman, 2005).

The research literature on cultural competence among school staff supports the incorporation of students’ culture and background curriculum and instruction (August & Pease-Alvarez, 1996; August & Shanahan, 2006; Waxman et al., 2007). However, the evidence does not rise to the level of experimental or quasi-experimental studies.

School safety is a key attribute of effective schools, and ELL scholars affirm the importance of this attribute in effective schools for language learners; Waxman et al. (2007) note that in safe schools, ELL students have better self-confidence and lower anxiety, and discrimination is explicitly addressed (August & Pease-Alvarez, 1996).

6. Professional Development and Collaborative Culture

Professional development for teachers may occur during the school day or outside of the school day. It may also be facilitated from within the school or outside the school. Professional development opportunities range from one-time workshops to courses to continuous work throughout a school year embedded within regularly scheduled meetings of teachers. Schools that have developed a collaborative culture experience professional learning on an ongoing basis.

The development of professional learning communities is strongly positively related to student achievement (Saunders, Goldenberg, & Gallimore, 2009; Waxman et al., 2007). Schools that use their meeting time to focus on instruction enhance ELL learning (Saunders et al., 2009). In addition, effective professional development includes practice of instructional changes with a coach or mentor supporting the teacher (August & Shanahan, 2006). Experts from outside the school can also help teachers to improve classroom practice (August & Shanahan, 2006).

A School Context

The Josiah Quincy Elementary School is a K-5 elementary school located in Chinatown, close to the center of Boston. During SY2009, the school served 829 students; 60% were native speakers of Chinese dialects and 46% were students of limited English proficiency (LEPs). In the school as a whole, 64% of students were Asian^a, 13% were Black, 13% were Latino, and 8% were White. Students are assigned to the school according to the BPS student assignment plan^b and the school is one of two BPS elementary schools with a Chinese-specific SEI program for LEP students.

Of the 334 (88%) LEP students who took the MEPA

The Quincy School uses student MEPA scores as well as classroom work to assess students' English language proficiency levels following district guides. ELL students are grouped by MEPA level into SEI classes at each grade level. As an elementary school, the SEI teachers have self-contained classrooms where they teach all subjects except the specialty classes. The two Language Acquisition team (LAT) facilitators, who are full-time SEI teachers, work closely with the administration to create class lists where there are models of stronger students for less strong students. A key to ELL student progress in language development is that approximately 90% of students stay at the school from K-5. As a rule, the school staffs MEPA Levels 1 and 2 classrooms with teachers who are certified in ESL. According to multiple interviewees, during the study period, the majority of teachers had also completed the 4-Category Trainings. The LAT facilitators reported that the school's goal has been to mainstream students by the end of third grade. Students who are at MEPA Level 4 or higher usually transition to a general education classroom, with

Table 3.1. Quincy School Enrollment Defined by Native Language, English Language Proficiency, and ELL Program Participation, SY2009

Language Proficiency	All Quincy (829)	
	Native English Speaker (NES) (289) (32%)	Native Speakers of Other Languages (NSOL) (540) (68%) ^a
English Proficient (EP)	451 (154%)	English Proficient (LEP) (378) (46%) ^b
NSOL-EP	(98)(12%)	FIEP (84) (10%)
Program Participation	Not in ELL Program (578) (70%)	Not in ELL Prog (127) (16%)
		In ELL Prog (251) (30%)

^a Native speakers of Chinese dialects were 89% of NSOL and native speakers of Spanish were 3% of NSOL. Other languages were all 1% or less of NSOL.

^b 344 (91% of LEP students) were native speakers of Chinese dialects.

Table 3.2. MEPA Levels of Quincy LEP Students by Grade, SY2009(April 2009 MEPA)

	MEPA Level 1	MEPA Level 2	MEPA Level 3	MEPA Level 4	MEPA Level 5
Kindergarten	39 (71%) ^a	-	31 (51%)	-	-
Grade 1	-	-	16 (28%)	-	-
Grade 2	-	-	25 (40%)	30 (48%)	-
Grade 3	-	-	45 (77%)	11 (17%)	-
Grade 4	-	-	24 (47%)	21 (41%)	-
Grade 5	-	-	17 (42%)	18 (44%)	-

^a Within the total is the percentage of all LEP students in the grade at the MEPA level.

^b In this chart, to better illustrate the trends in distribution, data is not reported for categories where n<10.

continued support of SEI teachers. In Grades K-3, there are consistently two SEI classes per grade, there is typically one SEI classroom in both fourth and fifth grade, though in some years there may be two per grade depending on the student needs.

During SY2009, there were 56.7 full-time equivalent (FTE) staff members at the Quincy School for a student-teacher ratio of 14.1 to one (BPS ratio was 12.8 to one). Eleven FTE teachers (19%) were teaching ELL-related assignments. Ninety-eight percent of all FTE teachers were licensed in their assigned position, which was the same as the district average, and 88% of core classes were taught by highly qualified teachers, a lower percentage than the district average of 96%. In terms of the racial make-up of the teaching staff, 41% of teachers were Asian, 14% were Black, 4% were Latino, and 41% were White.^c

Table 3.3. Selected Student Indicators, SY2009

	Quincy LEP %	Quincy EP %	BPS ES LEP %	BPS ES EP %
Low income (% Eligible for free/reduced-price lunch)	88.1%	69.0%	91.6%	77.4%
Mobility (% not in the same school for October and June)	4.2%	4.2%	9.8%	8.1%
Students with Disabilities	16.7%	12.0%	17.6%	20.1%

^a LEP = Limited English Proficiency; EP = English Proficient; BPS ES = Boston Public Elementary Schools

In SY2009, the percentage of students from low-income households was lower than BPS district rates for both students of limited English proficiency and those who are English proficient. For Quincy students of limited English proficiency the rate was only three percentage points lower (88.1% compared to 91.6% of LEPs in BPS) but 19 percentage points higher than English proficient students at Quincy (69.0%). At 4.2%, the mobility rate at Quincy for all students was considerably lower compared to BPS students of limited English proficiency (9.8%) and English proficient students (8.1%).

In terms of engagement outcomes, in SY2009 attendance at Quincy was 2.8 percentage points higher than BPS rates, and rates of suspension and grade retention were similar between Quincy and the BPS Elementary School average with students of limited English proficiency having slightly lower rates of suspension and higher grade retention

Table 3.4. Selected Student Outcomes, SY2009

	Number of Quincy LEP Students with Data	Quincy LEP %	Quincy EP %	BPS ES LEP %	BPS ES EP %
Median Attendance	378	98.9%	97.8%	96.1%	95.0%
Suspension	378	1.1%	2.9%	2.0%	3.3%
Retained in Grade	322	5.6%	2.8%	6.0%	4.1%
Passed ELA MCAS ^a	94	87.2%	96.9%	64.9%	80.0%
Proficient in ELA MCAS	94	38.3%	68.8%	13.3%	39.6%
Passed Math MCAS	95	86.3%	93.2%	61.8%	76.3%
Proficient in Math MCAS	95	48.4%	68.2%	17.8%	34.1%
Passed Science MCAS	43	72.1%	91.2%	45.1%	71.0%
Proficient in Science MCAS	43	14.0%	56.9%	5.3%	21.7%

^a LEP = Limited English Proficiency; EP = English Proficient; BPS ES = Boston Public Elementary Schools

^b Data for the English 10

^c MCAS data includes grades 3-5 for ELA and mathematics and grade 5 for science. While case study site selection looked at MCAS proficiency in ELA and mathematics only for students at MEPA Levels 3 and 4, here the purpose is to present outcomes for the school as a whole, thus we include all test takers as well as pass and proficiency rates.

rates compared to English proficient students. Academically, Quincy students performed relatively well on the MCAS tests compared to the BPS Elementary School averages, though many students still did not meet the benchmark for proficient. Pass and proficiency rates for Quincy students of limited English proficiency were lower compared to their Quincy English proficient counterparts, but generally higher when compared to BPS students of limited English proficiency and even those who were English proficient. The MCAS pass and proficiency rates for Quincy students of limited English proficiency were all more than 20 percentage points higher than BPS students of limited English proficiency with the exception of Science proficiency rates which were only 8.7 points higher. Compared to BPS English proficient students, Quincy students of limited English proficiency performed the same or better except on Science proficiency rates.

While the Quincy School had slightly favorable student indicators when compared to BPS in SY2009, our selection methods included controls for demographic variables. By using this method, the Quincy School emerged as a school with ELL student outcomes that were better than expected compared to schools with similar student bodies during SY2006-2009. The purpose of this study was to understand other non-quantifiable factors which may begin to explain the Quincy School's favorable outcomes. The character of the Quincy School is shaped by being a community school rooted in the Boston Chinese community. Chinese culture and language are integral to school programs. For example, in the course of study all students study Mandarin as a specialty class (e.g., art, physical education) and throughout the school Chinese history and culture are visible in the displays of student projects. External partnerships connect students, including ELL students, to multiple services and opportunities for support and enrichment during and beyond the school day as well as within and beyond the Boston Chinese community. Partners during SY2006-SY2009 which continue today range from those in the neighborhood, such as the Boston Chinatown Neighborhood Center (BCNC) and Chung Wah Academy afterschool programs and the Turfus Medical Center and Dental Clinic, to partners such as City Connects (formerly Boston Connects),¹⁶ which helps run the student support structures. Through the adjacent South Cove Health Center, a doctor conducts weekly health classes in the second grade classrooms, students perform in events at the clinic

(such as for Chinese New Year), and the school nurse also works closely with the clinic.

The former Principal retired in 2009 after leading the school for 10 years, and the current Principal was in his second year at the school at the time of the site visit. Though he has ideas of future directions for the school, he noted that the structures and culture of the school had not changed in any radical ways compared to the SY2006-2009 study period. The mission of the school has been consistent:

We seek to provide a challenging academic program that gives all students the means to meet high standards and achieve their best; to foster sound habits of mind and action, and to instill in our students such virtues as integrity, respect and self-discipline.

When the former Principal became the leader at the school in SY2000, the school already had a good reputation in the BPS district and in the community for having good outcomes compared to other district schools. She was from the Boston Chinese community and arrived eager to bring the school to the next level of success.

The whole reason I came back to the Quincy School (in 1999) was to show that we can have quality public education, and that we know how to do this.... It is too hard and too much for any one person to do, but we can do it together.... It has to be the whole school and the whole child.
—former Principal

The former Principal had a strong vision of educating the whole child and taking a whole-school approach to improving practice and ensuring that every student is being served well. She was the leader in 2002 when Question 2 was passed, which resulted in a switch from Transitional Bilingual Education (TBE) to Sheltered English Immersion (SEI).¹⁷ When asked what changed because of Question 2, she reflects:

We made minor adjustments to what we teach in compliance with Question 2, but not how we teach. We kept all of the bilingual teachers and eliminated the teaching of Chinese literacy. We continued to use Chinese to explain new concepts to students who need it to help them understand so they don't lose content as they learn English.... We also increased the teaching of Mandarin as a specialty to all students so that there is value added from the learning of the Chinese Language in the whole school.
—former Principal

The school's response to Question 2 illustrates a deliberate, mission-driven approach keeping student learning central when adapting to changing contexts – a theme present throughout this portrait of the Quincy School.

8 Key Themes in Success with Educating English Language Learners

Many of the themes that underlie the Quincy School's success with ELL students align with general best practices for any high performing school; however, the application of general best practices for educating ELL students also has unique characteristics. For example, developing high-functioning, robust professional learning communities will serve all schools well, but the content of the learning communities at Quincy focused on language development and academic language to meet the specific needs of the student population. The Principal communicated her vision for the school in concrete ways developed over time, beginning before the study period. The Principal's vision supported the building of sustainable teacher and school practices that successfully served English Language learners from SY2006-SY2009 and which continue to function and evolve today. Key themes include:

- A Community School with Understanding of the Whole Child
- Leadership for Collaboration with a Focus on Language Development
- Dedicated Teachers who Know What Works in the Classroom

Theme 1: A Community School with Understanding of the Whole Child

The Quincy School is a community school with cultural connections to the Chinatown community, a staff with significant Chinese cultural and linguistic ties, and a system of community-based, culturally proficient wrap-around services for children.¹² Chinese cultural ties directly affirm Chinese culture for students of Chinese descent and, for students of other backgrounds, expose them to a new culture. A comprehensive system of services is important for all students, and ELL students in particular benefit specifically from additional English as a Second Language (ESL) classes at the Boston Chinatown Neighborhood Center (BCNC) for both students and parents.

Support for Positive Cultural Identity Development

When speaking of culture, the current Principal says that in SY2011 all SEI teachers, all paraprofessionals, and four of five regular education teachers speak Cantonese and/or Mandarin. Though not all current faculty were at the school during SY2006-2009, only two or three teachers joined the faculty in SY2010 and SY2011 and thus the composition did not change drastically between the study period and site visit; the practices described here aim to represent the pedagogical approaches faculty have developed – and continue to develop – over the course of their teaching practice. For example in SY2009, the faculty composition reflected that the school places value on shared cultural background and experience: the school's proportion of Asian teachers (41.4%, compared to BPS 4.6%) mirrored the proportions of Asian students at Quincy (64%, compared to BPS 8.5%).

Teachers emphasized that it is important to get to know the students in order to determine what each student needs. Communication with teachers in the earlier grades is important in getting to know students and families. Next, assignments early in the year that help students tell their stories serve the multiple purposes of engagement, academic learning, and building relationships.

When asked what advice the group of experienced SEI teachers would give to a new SEI teacher, one teacher said:

First of all...you need to know the student's background, get to know them, and also, secondly, you need to give them a sense that they can trust you. Once they feel comfortable with you, of course they can trust you and you can learn more from them.

—SEI teacher

By asking questions and having the students share about themselves, the teacher has an opportunity to identify students' strengths and weaknesses and individual interests. Many teachers also draw upon their own experiences as English learners.

All the [SEI] teachers in our school do have the background experience of what the child is experiencing now, because we have all grown up that way. I learned my English this way... My parents didn't speak English at all... We truly have the experience of what the child is experiencing now.

—SEI teacher

Teachers of Chinese descent thus draw upon their own shared experience to add meaning to the cultural knowledge of the child. Chinese teachers share their instinctive cultural proficiency with colleagues who are not Chinese through collaboration, modeling, and acting as a resource. Chinese staff members also serve as models for students.

And for me to be able to go back and forth, and show them how valuable that is.... It absolutely helped kids learn, when they see the Principal can speak the language, and it's not so much that they can speak Chinese, but it's the notion that it's okay, that what you bring from home is valuable; it's just that you also need to learn the English language.

—former Principal

Since SY2003, all students also study Mandarin at least once a week.

[Chinese students learn about] their own culture, and the family feels that their culture is being acknowledged in the school.... And then, the school always tries to encourage other cultures to learn Chinese by offering maybe some basic Mandarin courses, and vice versa, by offering English to our second language learners, to our Chinese parents.

—current Principal

Language is a priority and the school makes it clear to parents that the school expects students to learn another culture through language and in turn, to appreciate and respect all other cultures.

Building Relationships with Families

Parents who were interviewed say they chose the school for a variety of reasons including the SEI program, the location, and because of the presence of the Chinese culture, which parents of Chinese descent want their children to know.

When we came here, we didn't know the American education system and how to choose a school. We live in Chinatown and this school is here near my house, so I chose this school.

—Immigrant parent of student in SEI program

There are Mandarin classes, which not many schools have, and they celebrate Chinese New Year and culture in this school. The kids have the opportunity to see it and feel it. I think that is most important....We are immigrants and we follow Chinese traditions in daily life and it's good for the kids to learn it in school as well. Parents don't always have the time or knowledge to teach children about Chinese history.

—Parent of Chinese-American Student

The SEI teachers and parents said that parents of ELL students feel comfortable and welcome at the school. Both partly attributed this good relationship to the strength of the school community and their ability to communicate in the Chinese dialects of their parent community. Teachers mentioned adjusting their scheduling to families' convenience—for example meeting on Mondays when many

restaurants are closed. They also call parents in the summer before school starts to ask the parents about their child's school experience the previous year. Speaking to a student's previous teachers also provides key information about both the student and the family.

Teachers work closely together, and we work closely with families... So I have full attendance on the parent-teacher conference, and that's why I know the kids so well. And when they move on, and when they move up, the teachers will come to us and say, 'Oh, this child needs this, this, this, and they have this kind of family issues.'

—SEI teacher

Teachers spoke knowledgeably about many Chinese ELL students' home values and practices. They demonstrated a keen awareness of parents' high expectations for their children's performance on the MCAS, while trying to educate them about other educational outcomes that may be more representative of their children's progress. One teacher reported giving high marks for effort, to show parents that low grades can be correlated with high effort when the tests are not appropriate for the student's level of English proficiency. Another strategy is using portfolios to show progress from term to term. This allays parents' anxiety that their children are not working hard enough.

Cross-grade communication among SEI teachers is important because teachers have developed relationships with families. Bilingual teachers can communicate with parents or grandparents who only speak a Chinese dialect. Additionally, many teachers give their home and cell phone numbers to families, a practice which contributes to trust and strong relationships.

For Chinese immigrant families who do not know the American education system well or at all, they like that the school is in Chinatown and provides a bridge through community connectors and Chinese language materials. Families who drop off their child in person are able to see teachers regularly. Short face-to-face communications, even if brief, contribute to strong relationships.

Parents speak of the school as a community school with afterschool programs, workshops for parents, and swimming lessons for students. According to parents and current administrators, the School Site

and Parent Councils are active and have representation from ELL families. The Parent Council works closely with the administration, the Instructional Leadership Team (ILT), and parents to plan events, activities, and programming at the school, including:

- Partnerships for Programming: Sports and Scholarships, Boy and Girl Scouts, afterschool programs, swimming lessons
- Academic Events for Families: open house, literacy and math nights, class publishing parties from Writers Workshop
- Social Events: Diversity Show, ice skating, hiking, circus, holiday celebrations, teacher appreciation, potluck dinner

These activities, which were operating during SY2006-SY2009, enhance programming at the school. Keep families informed about their child's progress, and create time for staff, families, and students to get to know each other. Translated materials and a monthly newsletter are key strategies for communication about upcoming activities and important information. Additionally, the Parent Council has conducted parent surveys to gauge interest in Parent Council activities and services and to find different means of communication for parents who are less involved. The school has offered parent workshops in the morning and evening on how parents can help students through storytelling, reading to kids, encouraging independent reading. There is also a course for parents of children who are native speakers of languages other than English about how to advocate for their children.

Community Partners Extend Academic Learning, Provide Enrichment, and Support Students' Social, Emotional, and Health Needs

Partnerships help the school connect students to a variety of services and opportunities ranging from academic support to experiences that help students explore their talents and gifts. Programs include the afterschool programs, such as Red Oak and Chung Wah, the Boston Chinatown Neighborhood Center (BCNC), Big Brothers and Big Sisters, swimming lessons, a girls group and tutors from Suffolk University. Due to language differences, school-based matches often work better for ELL students than some other off-site programs such as Big Brothers and Big Sisters, which do not have Cantonese or Mandarin speakers or resources for translators. Fortunately, Chinatown community organizations offer enrichment programming for Quincy

School students. Boston Chinatown Neighborhood Center (BCNC) is a well-established family-centered organization in the community, originally formed by parents and community leaders to have a voice in the design of the Quincy School complex in 1969 (Boston Chinatown Neighborhood Center, 2011).

Boston Chinatown Neighborhood Center is really great about creating programs specifically for English language learners. One of the directors has started a mentoring program between students at the upper school who were English language learners and had immigrated to the US in elementary school and paired them up with ... the fourth-graders recently immigrated to the United States who are still learning English.
— City Connects coordinator

The location of the school makes it possible to connect Chinese-speaking ELL students to programs where their native languages are being spoken because of the proximity of all these community resources.

As a community school, the building space has traditionally been shared with community programs. South Cove Health Center, a medical clinic that employs Mandarin, Cantonese, Vietnamese, and Taiwanese speaking health care workers, shares the building with the Quincy School. Serving the Chinatown community and beyond, the health center contributes to the Quincy School as a multi-service center for Chinese residents. During afterschool hours, two of the more than eight different afterschool programs in which Quincy students participate operate in the Quincy School building.

Chung Wah Academy. The founders' goal was to enhance the quality of life of the Chinatown community through education. Many immigrant parents need to work and thus need afterschool care for their children. The Chung Wah Academy provides academic support, especially with homework. The original idea when the organization began in 1999-2000 was to teach Chinese language and culture, but as they grew and also realized that students needed help with their homework, the Academy formed a partnership and moved to the Quincy School in SY2005. According to a representative, the key is to create a safe and nurturing environment that allows students

to focus. Many former and current Quincy staff work at the program, which provides continuity for students who attend the Quincy School during the regular school day. About 120 of the students at the Quincy School attend Chung Wah, which also offers classes on Saturday.

Red Oak (BCNC). The Red Oak afterschool program is one element of BCNC, which works with families to provide multiple services that connect all ages to appropriate services from preschool through adult education. Red Oak is an EEC licensed afterschool program for school aged students 5-13 that serves about 100 students, approximately 85 of whom are from the Quincy School and about 25% of whom are ELL students. The program uses a holistic approach, with time for activities that offer enrichment and build students' capacity work together as well as for homework and studying. The program aims to help ELL students in a number of ways by providing:

- Academic support that bridges school and homework, which especially supports parents who are working, in school or learning English themselves
 - A safe environment for children of working parents
 - Opportunities to practice through pairing of LEP students and stronger speakers
- Three or four group leaders, who are also mentioned by Quincy teachers, speak Cantonese or Mandarin, which is helpful in communicating with parents and working with students. The team discusses each individual student's academic and social progress, and they compare notes with teachers when they meet.

IN DEPTH:

Connecting Students and Families to Community Partners

The community partnerships of the Quincy School are maximized by working with another key partner, City Connects (formerly Boston Connects), which the school began working with at the start of SY2008, brings a systematic, evidence-based approach to student support. At the beginning of each school year, the two City Connects coordinators at Quincy guide all teachers through a whole class student by student review to identify the academic, social, emotional, and health needs of each individual student. During the review process, the teacher and City Connects coordinator designate a tier of either 1 (no risk), 2A, 2B, or 3 (intense risk). At the end of the year, the teachers and coordinators complete another whole-class review to see whether a student's risk assessment has changed.

Based on the review, each student has a support plan with a tailored mix of services and enrichment based on the needs of the student. Some elements of a student support plan are based at the school during the school day, such as student support teams, which also bring in community partners, such as consultants from Tufts Psychiatry, while others extend beyond the school day. According to an administrator, the process allows administrators to "take these concerns off teachers' plates" by providing additional support which helps teachers focus on teaching and learning. The City Connects coordinators also act as bridges for enrichment and support between the school, parents, and community organizations for afterschool and weekend programs. The coordinators maintain relationships with contact people from the different school-based and out-of-school organizations and, in turn, connect families to these agencies. Evaluation reports have shown that the approach is particularly effective for ELL students. For example, in literacy where ELL students exhibited the greatest literacy outcomes, ELL third graders at schools participating in City Connects achieved similar report card scores as already proficient students in non-City Connects schools (Boston College, 2009). Though not yet the topic of evaluation, one reason for the success of City Connects with ELL students may be that the intervention systematically addresses each child and for ELL students there may be more barriers in terms of language and culture that keep ELL students from accessing services and enrichment. The infrastructure of City Connects lowers these barriers by enabling trained coordinators to connect families and students to an array of supports from enrichment to finding an Asian counselor. This process ultimately helps students and family figure out "how to do school." City Connects, a Boston community partner, enhances Chinatown neighborhood and other community partners by connecting students to community opportunities.

Theme 2: Leadership for Collaboration with a Focus on Language Development

Over time, the teaching staff developed a deep understanding of language development and the development of academic language. To understand how the staff developed their understanding requires an exploration of both the process of shifting teachers' mindset about how they work together and the ways in which they gain content knowledge. More than just providing professional development, the Principal created structures and habits that made it safe for teachers to collaboratively examine their practice and apply their learning to improve their practice.

Whole-School Structures for Robust Professional Collaborative Culture

Key school structures including a representative Instructional Leadership Team (ILT) and grade-level meetings (GLMs) allowed for clear decision-making and communication during the study period. A complementary School Culture Committee has also been operating since around SY2006 to ensure a safe environment for students and teachers.

These structures helped the school build a professional collaborative culture which, in turn, allowed the school to engage in essential topics such as language development. Led by the Principal, in the years prior to and during the study period, the staff engaged in a cycle of learning about language acquisition and key instructional practices for differentiating instruction for both ELL and English proficient students. Relevant learning in a collaborative setting unified the school staff in adapting practice to align with the vision of educating the whole child.

As was the case during the study period, all teachers have planning and development time while their students have specialty classes (swimming, art, computers, science, and Mandarin). Once a week, common planning time is used for official Grade Level Meetings (GLMs), which include all SEI and general education teachers from the grade. The ILT shapes the agenda of the GLMs and there are clear lines of communication from the GLMs to the ILT. During GLMs teachers typically use protocols for Looking at Student Work (LSW), score writing work together, or look at writing prompts. Topics of discussion may include whether a piece of work should be scored at a 2 or a 3 on the writing rubric or what a prompt did or did not elicit and why. In some years, such as during the time teachers were undertaking and applying lessons from the 4-Category Trainings in SY2006 and SY2007, time was spent in study groups on a focus area such as topic development in writing.¹⁹

The ILT and GLMs became institutionalized structures which continue to guide the current work of the school.

[The grade teams] are telling [the ILT] that we need more time for teachers to look at our data, to analyze the data, to spend more time to come up with ideas of how to use our resources to make things work.... We want to spend time focusing on how to look at students' work and using the data. We also need to have more training on how to use different means to make the instruction [helpful to every] student.

—current Principal

In addition to GLMs, most teachers eat lunch together daily and plan lessons together during common planning time. The “open space” classroom design also gives teachers opportunities to interact during class periods. When new teachers arrive veteran teachers take on a “nurturing neighbor” role in offering support.

IN DEPTH:

Instructional Leadership to Engage Staff in Deep Examination of Practice

Creating Structures and Building Buy-in

Upon her arrival in 1999, the former Principal restructured the Instructional Leadership Team (ILT) to include two teachers from each grade level representing the bilingual (now SEI) special education, and specialists staff. The team focused on literacy, math, and their intersections, because even for math concepts, language acquisition plays a key role in comprehension for English language learners. The Principal led the ILT in looking at data and setting the agendas for the Grade Level Meetings (GLMs). She also facilitated GLMs with the ILT teachers until teachers were ready to proceed on their own.

Over time I built up professional development focusing on language development... for every single teacher, not just bilingual teachers... unless teachers are confident, and feel safe to examine and question, kids are not going to [learn]... I wanted there to be a child focus, a professional learning community, and shifting that culture is the most important piece. Without that, you cannot have people learn.

—former Principal

The goal was to have teachers who were intellectually engaged, understood how to go beyond superficial analysis of data and really look at student work, wanted to learn, and were not afraid to open up their practice (approximately three years).

Cultivating a Disposition for Teacher Learning

Through a partnership with Northeastern University's Urban Teacher Program, teachers earned vouchers for having a student teacher in their classrooms. Using all of the vouchers, three courses each in math and literacy were offered for graduate credit. After 80% of teachers participated, SEI and regular education teachers were open to participating in 4-category training.

I knew that before the state mandated the 4-Category training that all teachers need to have a deeper understanding of language development, regardless of what classroom they are in. So my vision and goal for the school has always been, "Wouldn't it be great if every single teacher has that understanding? ... And the best thing is that you have enough practices and structures across the whole school so that students are not confused and you don't lose learning time. And it took a long time to convince teachers that they need to let go, and look at what are some of what we call non-negotiables."

—former Principal

Quincy teachers and leadership continue to talk about the non-negotiables in their classrooms. These practices and others are discussed in depth in the Theme 3. Dedicated teachers Who Know What Works in the Classroom section.

Integrating Learning into Practice

The school leadership, structures, and culture all encouraged teacher learning and supported teachers in making changes to their practice as a result of their learning. The integration of theory (in formal professional development, graduate classes, and study groups) with practice (through collaboration during GLMs) allowed willing teachers to go deeper into the concepts and ask real questions about how students learn.

Categories 1, 2, and 4 of the 4-Category Training were offered to the whole staff around SY2005 and SY2006 through the services available from the BPS Office of English Language Learners. A majority of all teachers (~80% according to the former Principal) participated. Graduate credit was available for some components, which allowed the facilitators to push teachers to read the literature and reflect in writing on what they were learning and how it shaped their practice, in turn leading teachers deeper into the concepts. Teachers, the former Principal, and the provider of the trainings spoke of several key practices – many which are examples of practices recommended by the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) – they believe improved or shifted as a result.

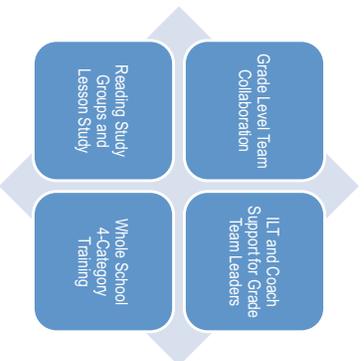


Figure 3.1. Matrix of Professional Development and Collaboration

Developing Higher Order Thinking and Literacy

- Going beyond thinking of literacy as the component parts of reading, speaking, listening, and writing to integrating the “big themes” of literacy (questioning, understanding, thinking, and generating ideas) across content areas
- Questioning strategies to guide student learning and engage students in inquiry

Effective Instructional Planning and Practice

- Teaching language and content together, focusing both on the content areas as well as the structures of the English language, rather than “dumbing down” content
- Structuring lessons with clear objectives to clarify, not simplifying curriculum

Nuances of Language Development and Development of Academic Language

- Exploring the roles of background and prior knowledge
- Examining little words, such as “any” and “many” that control for inference

Some teachers also note that although some of the practices were already part of their repertoire, the time and space to review best practices and reflect during GLM time furthered their understanding and ability to implement those practices. The ILT plays a continued role in maintaining a sustained focus on key practices. During SY2006-SY2009, for example, the ILT conducted learning walks at all grade levels, where members of the ILT observed classrooms together and discussed what they saw, to identify and share best practices. One result was renewed focus on increasing the use of academic language to support vocabulary development.

IN DEPTH:

Sample School Professional Development Plan (Quincy Elementary School Archive 2003)

The following is the list of focus areas from the Quincy School’s professional development calendar included in the SY2004 Whole School Improvement Plan (WSIP). Grouping structures ranged from whole school to grade level teams to other teacher groups and were facilitated by coaches, bilingual and general education teachers, the Principal, and ILT members. According to multiple members of the Quincy staff, work done in the years prior to SY2006-2009 laid the foundation for the school’s practices in educating ELL and non-ELL students.

- Effective mini-lessons on reading strategies that deepen thinking and promote understanding
- Vocabulary development
- Integrating the SIOP framework with workshop teaching
- Problem solving inquiry group (math priority 1)
- Priority 1, 2,3 WSIP: Focus on Math
- Priority 1, 2, 3 WSIP: Integration of workshop teaching and SIOP

Theme 3: Dedicated Teachers Who Know What Works in the Classroom

The understanding of language development, academic language, and the elements of literacy developed through professional learning were manifest in the classroom and school culture. Quinry staff¹⁴ often expressed that much of good SE/ESL teaching for EL students is simply good practice: having clear objectives and expectations, pre-teaching, creating time for academic talk, exposure to rich literature, using all four modalities, and providing visuals. Teachers make the effort to know their students and figure out the ways each student learns best.

Within the paradigm of considering the needs of the individual child, there were specific practices that supported EL students. Moreover, several Quinry staff pointed out that in an urban school, “good teaching for EL students is good teaching for all,” because of the high number of low-income students who are native English speakers, but still lack exposure to and practice with academic language. For example, while oral language development is a key focus for EL students in early grades, native English speakers also benefited from focused attention on oral academic language, which prepared students for writing. The Readers and Writers’ Workshop model created opportunities to both elicit student ideas and model how those ideas translate into academic language. Through our on-site data collection, in which 14 classroom observations were conducted in Spring 2011, we noted that many of the instructional practices for EL students described in our interviews were still prominent in most classrooms – not only SEI classrooms predominantly for EL students but also general education/special education classrooms with fewer EL students. In this section we focus on practices that were mentioned multiple times and in a combination of at least two of the following. In interviews about SY2006-SY2009, in professional development documents from before and during the study period, and in SY2011 observations.

High Expectations through Common Curriculum and Pedagogy

At each grade level, Quinry students learn the same curriculum. The units have common objectives and vocabulary and all students experience rich literature, no matter what their reading levels. The curriculum is typically also organized by themes (i.e., at the Kindergarten level: going to school,

community, etc.) which are aligned to what the general education classrooms do, though SEI teachers might choose different books. Key practices such as turn and talk and oral storytelling allow student at all levels to engage.

The Workshop model of teaching is used in all grades and classrooms, including SEI classrooms. The model provides a common approach to pedagogy and creates a focus on writing. The model involves a cycle of a 15-minute mini-lesson on the rug, small-group assignment or discussion, independent work, large-group time to present to peers and get feedback/critique, and revision. As one teacher said, “students need to read their own writing.” Regardless of a student’s level, students have to apply the same literacy strategies, though there are modifications for students at early English proficiency levels. For example, while storytelling might start in Chinese and with drawing, the key is that students tell their own story and then start to write in English. Interviews report that the model benefits EL students by providing more time to interact using English. The teacher can observe responses of students and give additional classes to those who need it. Additionally, other classes or parents are often invited to publishing parties (–monthly) for student books, papers, and journals. In the curriculum and workshop model, teachers create constant exposure and opportunities for students to use, see, and write with academic language. A set of “non-negotiable” practices expected across classrooms are agreed upon by the staff. These include:

- Readers and Writers workshop notebook or folder
- Math notebook (and use of TERC curriculum)
- Fresh anchor charts with daily read-alouds
- Published work
- Classroom rug area
- Word walls

As grade level teams work to design their own curriculum and lessons, they develop the capacity of their own team members to share common practices.

IN DEPTH: Teacher Reflection on the Collaborative Lesson Planning (Office of English Language Learners Archive, undated)

“...just as we have been speaking of the importance to give students time to practice what we want them to learn, it was such a rewarding experience to practice creating lessons as a grade level team. Sitting together, we realized how important the language included in the lessons was in order for students to follow along clearly. We kept stopping ourselves to ask the following questions:

1. Is the language included explicit enough?
2. Have we thought about what types of visual artifacts we could include to further explain vocabulary being taught?
3. If the instructions and language is explicit for English Language Learners, are we “dumbing” down for the more proficient students?

Having this time to plan was so valuable. How can we create more planning time like this more consistently throughout the school year?”

Flexibility to Scaffold and Differentiate within the Shared Framework

When speaking about best practices for teaching EL students, the teachers spoke about the importance of flexibility. The teacher’s role is to determine what each student needs to access the curriculum and to then provide those supports. The process begins with pre-testing or using data to determine a student’s reading level and fluency and then place the student into the appropriate group. While still working from within the established framework, it is important to go from the students’ level and interest and move on from there. As one SEI teacher said, “Whatever curriculum we get, it doesn’t matter, as long as we can adapt and scaffold, we’ll teach the standards in the frameworks. Our end goal is clear.”

In all classes, the goal is to address the students’ level by scaffolding. Teachers are cognizant of the students’ MEPA levels and differentiate appropriately. Teachers report that there is relatively more modeling and guided exploration and less independent work in the SEI classrooms, which they know from sharing practice in Grade Level Meetings. For example, in one assignment, students at lower MEPA levels might copy a definition, while students at higher MEPA levels would be expected to put it into their own words, however within the lesson all students would be expected to make connections to their own ideas. To support EL students in expressing their own ideas, SEI classes tend to use more graphic organizers to help students show and organize what they know. Teachers report that activities using physical movement also help many EL students learn and that simple songs with rhythms, repetition (with he, she, for example), and pictures are all key strategies at early English proficiency levels.

Classes typically have a dynamic range of English proficiency levels. No matter what the levels of the students are, everyone has a task and the expectation of all is the same. The level of their work may depend on where they are, but they are expected to grow and learn.

One thing I feel makes our program so successful is we have the flexibility to go from where the kids need... If the kids can start writing, I let them do the writing. They can read? Go ahead and read. But for those kids who are still learning the [alphabet], fine, we'll do the same book, but they have to identify the letters in that text by looking at the pictures. I mean, this is the flexibility that we all have. It's the same thing with the Writers' and the Readers' Workshop. I'm doing it my way.
 —SEI Teacher

There is an element of trial and error in figuring out what works with an individual or group of students. Teachers draw upon their experience and that of their colleagues in choosing from an array of practices that they use in their classrooms. For example, at lower English proficiency levels, typically in the early grades, repetition to internalize patterns in the English language is a key strategy. By chanting songs in a kindergarten class, students who may not even be familiar with the concept of the alphabet learn phonics.

At all levels of English proficiency, teachers focus on creating context for student understanding and skill development. Teachers remind themselves to assume students are learning something for the first time and design lessons to build students' background knowledge. Scaffolding applies to the building of content knowledge as well as to teaching key skills – such as writing, a skill which is often the last to come both for EL students and native English speakers. For example, writing a biography of a famous American starts with a chart for gathering information, a prompt to write two sentences then a paragraph and then by the end students build to writing a three-paragraph biography.

Lessons consistently engage all senses and include visuals, sound, hands-on activities, and movement. In classrooms labeled posters and word walls reinforce the use of academic language. Lessons are also structured to allow time for students to access the material in all language modes: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Reading strategies by grade, questioning techniques, and models of peer interaction such as turn and talk and pair work are used consistently across classrooms.

Strategic Use of Students' First Language and Culture

The Quincy School succeeds in making the climate, curriculum, and community gatherings to be culturally relevant for Chinese students. The school building is replete with Chinese themes, from greenery to lighting to artifacts from school plays decorating the principal's office. Chinese festival and cultural celebrations such as Fall Feast and Chinese New Year are celebrated with families and assemblies throughout the year.

As noted in the example of using Chinese storytelling to help an early ELP student express ideas that lead to writing, Chinese is used strategically to build bridges to English language development and literacy. Teachers said it is helpful to know Chinese language and culture when trying to understand why a student might express an idea in a certain way.¹⁵

By third grade, most EL students have reached some level of English fluency, though Chinese language is still used to define terms when appropriate. One teacher gave an example from a past class nearing proficiency.

One year, we're doing writing on, "What is your favorite ice cream? Do you like to eat garlic ice cream?" My entire class raised their hand. Then translation is needed, because I know that they only hear ice cream, they didn't hear garlic... When I say "Garlic" in Chinese, ... they say, "Ewww!" ... It seems like an everyday word, but if you are a second language learner, what do you know about garlic? No one ever used the word garlic in the school or at home. So that a situation like this, we do not say, "Okay, let's go pick up the dictionary." Right away, we just translate it. It really helps save so much time. I knew, "Okay, you misunderstood that. That's not what I mean. This is what I meant in Chinese."
 —SEI Teacher

Teachers emphasized that vocabulary development through decoding context clues is also an important skill, but it is best when used with certain vocabulary in the appropriate situation.

IN DEPTH:

Teacher Reflection on Building Academic Language (Office of English Language Learners Archive, undated)

"Just this past year, I have gotten better at schema building. This strategy is crucial for language development for English Language Learners. Schema building provides the appropriate academic or formal vocabulary that the students are struggling to grasp and retain. Using their native language English Language Learners can often explain in great detail what is happening in a given situation or summarize their thoughts, however, these students are using language and vocabulary that is familiar and accessible to them. As a teacher, giving them the "replacement" vocabulary brings students vocabulary from a tier one to a tier two. Every time a child shares information in class, a teacher has the opportunity to create a meaningful conversation and learning opportunity to increase and develop their language. When my students are sharing out information in class, I use this time to paraphrase their responses and then record it on an anchor chart, but written in academic language. This way, the students' thinking is still present, yet it is transformed into grade level appropriate language."

Conclusions and Lessons for Other Schools

Case studies have the advantages of providing multiple perspectives on a context or organization, rich description of practice, and information for discussion and learning. The story of the Quincy School is unique to Quincy because of its location, history, players, and circumstances. However, this case study described practices that may be "tried on" by other schools through adaptation and refinement to their own contexts. The key practices identified in this in depth analysis of the qualitative data collected from the school include:

The school is integrated into the surrounding community and staff understand students' culture

Situated in the Chinatown community, the Quincy School's significant proportion of staff of Chinese descent supports the positive cultural identity of Chinese students. As an SEI Language Specific school, Quincy Chinese teachers can draw upon their own experiences and knowledge of Chinese language to accelerate students' acquisition of literacy in the English language. The school also

has the advantage of being a resource for Chinese families. The cultural competence found in this school has implications for other schools:

- An SEI Language Specific program may focus more resources on understanding one culture and language
- An SEI Language Specific program, implemented with quality, allows students and teachers that are from the same culture and speak the same language to use L1 strategically without hindering the acquisition of English
- Understanding the major language groups and their educational expectations, both from the families and of the schools, is important to tailoring SEI programs to student needs.

School leadership had both long-term vision and the capacity to build buy-in among the staff

The groundwork for the school's success for ELL students took leadership with a clear mission and vision and an understanding that change takes time and teamwork. While the teachers at the Quincy School have always been dedicated, the commitment to working together to learn and implement new practices and instructional approaches elevated the level of practice. Implications of these findings for school leaders include:

- The patience and planning it takes to build the buy-in for a culture of high academic expectations for all
- Qualified SE and general education teachers who deeply understand language development and the development of academic language through category training and the follow-up support to implement key practices
- Commitment to professional development structures such as grade level teams and the time to build teacher capacity

Teachers were provided support to put professional learning into practice

The interviews provided a lens into the development of ELL instructional practices over time, and the SY2011 observations confirmed what teachers and administrators said about the thought put into the consistency of instruction across classrooms and over time. In addition, they use evidence-based classroom strategies for ELL students such as variety of teaching modes, student groupings, visuals, explicit vocabulary development, and clear classroom routines and procedures to ensure language acquisition. This school's consistent implementation of high-quality instructional practices for ELL students has implications for other schools:

- School leaders need to be systematic about combining high quality, focused professional development with the time, space, and incentive for teachers to collaborate around how to put their learning into practice
- Key content areas include high-quality instructional practices to support language development and the development of academic language

- A list of “non-negotiable” practices agreed upon by the Principal, LT, and teachers
- Aligned curriculum for ELL students and general education students along with collaboration time to plan lessons.

The school staff made a commitment to educate the whole child

An education for ELL students and other students should go beyond academics and include social support services, and opportunities for enrichment. School partners such as Chung Wah Academy, Red Oak, Boston Chinatown Neighborhood Center, City Connects, Tufts Medical Center, and the South Cove Health Center support teachers in considering each child's individual needs. Afterschool programs and partnerships to bring outside organizations into the classroom and school space help create an environment where ELL students and other students, along with their families, can access academic support, adult learning opportunities, physical and mental health services, and engaging extracurricular experiences. Implications of these findings include:

- The community school model works because it provides partnerships that are neighborhood-based, of easy geographical and linguistic access. At the same time, the extension of partnerships beyond the immediate geographic proximity opens up opportunities for afterschool clubs and activities beyond academic support.
- Opportunities for ELL students that are integrated with the school curriculum through communication with academic teachers can extend academic learning.
- The staff or networking capacity to identify afterschool and summer learning opportunities that are of interest to ELL students can be important.
- Parent involvement in creating opportunities for socializing and outreach to families can advance the school's mission.

In summary, this case study of the Quincy School illustrates the key elements in one school's journey to creating a school culture and institutionalized practices and structures that support continuous learning for teachers and promote high achievement for its ELL students. The vision, commitment, and hard work, led by strong leaders, resulted in the school being identified as the one of two elementary schools in Boston consistently performing at higher than average levels with its ELL students.

⁷ Most of the Asian community at Quincy is of Chinese descent. “Asian” is used to be consistent with the race categories of the BPS data used for the study.

⁸ Under Boston's student assignment plan, the city is divided into three geographic “zones” (East, West, and North) for elementary and middle schools. Students may apply for schools in the zone in which they live; schools in other zones if the schools are within their “walk zone”; and K-8 schools city wide. The assignment algorithm prioritizes applicants within a one mile “walk zone” for elementary schools and entry for siblings of current students.

⁹ The data on teacher qualifications come from the MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (http://profiles.doc.mass.edu/state_report/teacher-data.aspx).

¹⁰ The Quincy School has worked with City Connects since SY2006. In SY2012, fifteen Boston Public Schools and six Springfield Public Schools are using the City Connects model of student support, which was developed at Boston College.

¹¹ Question 2 in Massachusetts was part of the U.S. English movement that spearheaded successful ballot referendum initiatives in different states under the slogan “English for the children.” Referendum Question 2 was adopted by voters in Massachusetts in November 2002. It became law as Chapter 386 of the Acts of 2002 and was implemented in September 2003. In Massachusetts, transitional bilingual education (TBE) programs were overwhelmingly replaced with sheltered English immersion (SEI) programs whose main purpose is to teach English language acquisition and content instruction at the same time, with the goal of transitioning English Language Learners into regular programs after one year.

¹² The key themes of this analysis reflect the practices occurring during SY2006-2009, though the analysis is based upon interview and other data collected in SY2011. When multiple sources of data – including interviews with current staff members who were already at the school during SY2006-2009, documents from the study period, the interview with the retired Principal from SY1999-2009, and observations conducted in SY2011 – indicate that current practice is consistent with practice during SY2006-2009, the present tense is used.

¹³ In the past, the staff has used the Collaborative Coaching and Learning (CCL) model in study groups. CCL was a Boston Plan for Excellence initiative which began in the early 2000s. (for more information see <http://www.bpc.org/schools/ccl>). By SY2011, CCL coaches were no longer supported because of budget decisions.

¹⁴ The Quincy School staff members are hired according to district policies. In BPS, applicants are able to apply to posted positions in specific schools and subject areas. The application and hiring process is centralized, though principals (and in some cases, a school leadership or hiring committee) typically have input once district eligibility requirements are met.

¹⁵ The importance of students' native language applies not only to students who speak Chinese according to the current Principal. As the population has recently changed, with more Latino students enrolling at the school, at least one teacher who speaks Spanish has been hired.



CHAPTER

IV.

“TENGO UN SUEÑO/ HAVE A DREAM”: A CONSISTENTLY HIGH PERFORMING SCHOOL FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

A School Context

The Sarah Greenwood School (SGS) is a pre-K-8 school in Dorchester dating back to the turn of the twentieth century. During SY2009, this small school served 390 students, of whom 55% were native speakers of Spanish and 43% were students of limited English proficiency (LEP). In the school as a whole, 67% of students were Latino, 29% were Black, and 2% each were White or Multiracial. Students are assigned to the school according to the BPS student assignment plan,¹⁶ and the school is one of three BPS schools categorized as Two-Way Bilingual Program schools.

Of the 145 (66%) LEP students who took the MEPA in April 2009, 17 (12%) students were at MEPA Level 1, 11 (7%) were at MEPA Level 2, 45 (31%) were at MEPA Level 3, 58 (40%) were at MEPA Level 4, and 14 (10%) were at MEPA Level 5. Over half of the second grade students had progressed to MEPA Level 4, and in fourth grade, over 90% were at MEPA Level 4 or higher.

During SY2009, there were 29.2 full-time equivalent (FTE) staff members at the Sarah Greenwood for a student-teacher ratio of 13.3 to one (BPS ratio

is 12.8 to one). Eighteen FTE teachers (62% were teaching in ELL-related assignments. Eighty-three percent were licensed in their assigned position, which is 15% lower than the district average (98%), and 73% of core classes were taught by highly qualified teachers, which is also lower than the district average of 96%. In terms of the racial make-up of the teaching staff, 45% of teachers were White, 31% were Latino, and 24% were Black.¹⁷

In SY2009, the percentage of students from low-income households was higher than BPS district rates for both students of limited English proficiency (by 3%) and those who were English proficient (by 8.2%). The mobility rates were approximately four percentage points lower for SGS students than BPS. A smaller proportion of SGS LEP students had disabilities compared to BPS LEP students, while the rate for EP students was almost the same as BPS.

Table 4.1. Sarah Greenwood School Enrollment Defined by Native Language and English Language Proficiency, SY2009

Total	All Sarah Greenwood ^a (380)	Native Speakers of Other Languages (NSOL) (224) (57.4%) ^b
Native Language	Native English Speaker (NES) (186) (42.5%)	English Proficient (EP) (222) (65.9%)
Language Proficiency	NES	NSOL-EP (28) (7%) NSOL-FLEP (30) (8%) English Proficient (LEP) (186) (43.1%) ^c

^a Though the focus of the study is on the elementary grades, for context, we use enrollment numbers for the whole K-8 school. Native speakers of Spanish were 86% of NSOLs. Other languages were all 1% or less of NSOL.
^b The (86% of LEPs) were native speakers of Spanish. Since the whole school is categorized as a Two-Way Bilingual school, all LEP students (and EP students) are in a program designated as an ELL program.

Table 4.2. Selected Student Indicators, SY2009^a

	SGS LEP %	SGS EP %	BPS ES LEP %	BPS ES EP %
Low Income (% Eligible for free/reduced-price lunch)	94.6%	85.6%	91.6%	77.4%
Mobility (% not in the same school for October and June)	6.0%	3.6%	9.8%	8.1%
Students with Disabilities	13.7%	21.2%	17.6%	20.1%

^a LEP = Limited English Proficiency; EP = English Proficient; BPS ES = Boston Public Elementary Schools

Table 4.3. Selected Student Outcomes, SY2009

	Number of SGS LEP Students with Data	SGS LEP %	SGS EP %	BPS ES LEP %	BPS ES EP %
Median Attendance	188	93.9%	95.6%	96.1%	98%
Suspension	188	4.8%	6.3%	2.0%	3.3%
Retained in Grade	139	1.4%	2.1%	6.0%	4.1%
Passed ELA MCAS ^a	39	92.3%	93.2%	64.9%	80.0%
Proficient in ELA MCAS		38.5%	63.1%	13.3%	39.6%
Passed Math MCAS	39	82.1%	76.7%	61.8%	76.3%
Proficient in Math MCAS		46.2%	37.9%	17.8%	34.1%
Passed Science MCAS		60.0%	77.4%	45.1%	72.0%
Proficient in Science MCAS	10	40.0%	15.1%	5.3%	21.7%

^a LEP = Limited English Proficiency; EP = English Proficient; BPS ES = Boston Public Elementary Schools
^b Data for this cell is not available
^c Data includes grades 3-5 for ELA and mathematics and grade 5 for science. While case study site selection looked at MCAS scores for ELA and mathematics for students in LEP and EP, the purpose is to present outcomes for the school as a whole, thus we include all test takers as well as pass and proficiency rates.

In terms of engagement outcomes, attendance at SGS is 2.2% lower than BPS rates for ELL students and almost the same for EP students, rates of suspension about 3% higher than rates for BPS LEP and EP students respectively, and grade retention rates are slightly lower at SGS. Academically, SGS students perform well on the MCAS tests compared to BPS students. In ELA, pass rates for SGS LEP students are almost the same compared to their SGS EP counterparts, though a higher proportion of SGS EP students are proficient. Compared to BPS, however, the proficiency rate is nearly three times that of BPS LEP students and almost the same as BPS EP students. The MCAS Mathematics pass and proficiency rates for SGS LEP students are higher than SGS EP students as well as BPS LEP and EP students. In Science, SGS LEP students also perform well, though relatively small numbers mean patterns could fluctuate due to individual differences.

At the time of data collection, the school appeared to be in a state of transition. Only nine of the teachers who had been employed at the school during the study period (SY2006-5-2009) were still working there. The Principal during the study period retired after 21 years in 2010, but still emerged as a strong presence in interviews with staff.¹⁸ Her strong vision is represented by the school's mission statement for 2006-2009, which referred to "each child as an individual" and to the need for practitioners to take a holistic view of children. The school mission also highlighted safety, literacy, the belief

that all children could and would learn, cooperation among teachers, as well as collaboration with families and community.

Our mission is to make our school a safe learning environment and to allow our students to grow in directions that will educate and prepare them for life. We seek to produce literate and socially healthy students who are valuable to the community and the world. We view each child as an individual in a holistic manner. Each child can and will learn. As professionals our mission is to open our hearts and our minds, to work together as a cooperative team, and to promote parent and community collaboration.

"All our students are language learners" is one of the first statements we heard upon touring the school, shortly after being handed a fact sheet on school demographics, with students' race, gender, and age presented in charts with a brief statement at the bottom that "English is not the first language for 58% of our students." During interviews, teachers and administrators distinguished between "bilingual" and "monolingual" students. The term "bilingual" refers to students who arrive in school speaking a home language other than English – mostly Spanish – and who cannot access classroom work in English. "Monolingual" is a

designation used for native speakers of English. In brief, although school staff talk about all students as language learners, a distinction is still made between sub-groups, which are labeled as monolingual, bilingual, and also special education.

Throughout the remainder of this study, we highlight many practices vis-à-vis ELL students that incorporate the values expressed in this mission statement. First, we identify key themes that explain the school's success with ELL students from the point of view of the school staff. In the conclusion, we incorporate our own analysis and compare the themes to existing empirical evidence and expert recommendations.

B Key Themes in Success with Educating English Language Learners

When the former Principal arrived at the Sarah Greenwood in 1989, the school used Transitional Bilingual Education (TBE) as the language program for its English language learners. Under the leadership of the former Principal, the Sarah Greenwood transitioned from TBE to a dual language program. Members of the school staff use the term "dual language" synonymously with other commonly used designations such as Two-Way Immersion or the preferred BPS term, "Two-Way Bilingual Program." Currently, BPS defines a Two-Way Bilingual Program here:

In this program, there are critical masses of English language learners who represent the same primary language and who are in the same grade... Two-way begins in Kindergarten, where students are instructed 90% of the time in a language in which they are fluent in English 10% of the time. By third grade, the languages of instruction are 50% in English and 50% in the native language and continue as a 50-50 model through the fifth grade, at which time students transfer to secondary schools.

—Office of English Language Learners, Boston Public Schools

The school's change in language program was guided by a vision to provide equal educational opportunity for all students. The transition was

completed before SY2006 at which point the Sarah Greenwood was one of three Two-Way Bilingual Program schools in Boston. The first theme describes the strategies used to build equity among students and teachers at the school through this ELL program model. The title of this study, a Spanish translation of a verse from Martin Luther King's "I have a dream" speech, illustrates the school's strong commitment to valuing all students' identities. In the second theme, we portray the importance given to collaborative work among adults for student success. Collaboration was and has remained a prevailing modus operandi at the school. The third theme illustrates what the school knew about its students and what it did to address their academic needs, along with non-academic issues that might diminish their readiness to learn.

Theme 1: Parity for "Bilingual" Students and Teachers

In the 1980's, as in other Boston public schools, ELL students assigned to the building were placed in a Transitional Bilingual Education (TBE) program. TBE separated ELL students from native English speakers, at least in the first few years, to enable ELL students to learn content in their native language (Spanish) at the same time that they received instruction in English as a Second Language (ESL). When students became proficient in English, they were moved to regular education classrooms where they continued to learn solely in English. Although this program worked well at some schools, at the Sarah Greenwood teachers reported that standardized test scores were low. Thus, in 1989, the former Principal was recruited to spearhead the school through a process of reform that would improve performance significantly. Indeed, in SY2006 the Sarah Greenwood won a "School on the Move" award from EdVestors for continuous improvement of student outcomes.

In re-designing the Sarah Greenwood's language program from TBE to Two-Way Bilingual, teachers and administrators shunned any form of student segregation, including by language, in order to avoid possible inequities in learning opportunities for student sub-groups within the school. Not only did staff reject the TBE model, but they also rejected the district's strong endorsement of Sheltered English Immersion (SEI) after the passage of Referendum Question 2 in 2002, which eliminated TBE.

It's easy for the mainstream to say, "That's for bilingual students. We put a sign up – SEI classes over there." But those kids are going to lose out because they're not part of the mainstream where everything's happening.
– Former Principal

Instead, the Sarah Greenwood gradually, and in order to fit the specific needs of its students, developed a Two-Way Bilingual Program which was accepted under the new language policy provisions adopted when Question 2 passed.

The Center for Applied Linguistics, a nonprofit that provides information, tools, and resources to improve educators' understanding of language and culture, categorizes components of "Two-Way Bilingual Education" into four domains: integration, instruction, population, and program duration (Center for Applied Linguistics, 2011). Integration is defined as the practice of teaching "language-minority" and "language-majority" students together at least 60% of instructional time (ideally more) at all grade levels. Two-Way instruction means that all students receive instruction in English and the partner language at least 50% at all grade levels. The population component of a Two-Way Bilingual program requires that there be a balance of language-minority and language-majority students. Finally, a two-Way Bilingual program should begin in pre-K, kindergarten or first grade and run for at least five years. The language program at the Sarah Greenwood meets integration and population criteria clearly. English language learners and English proficient students are integrated in the same classrooms in roughly equal numbers throughout their schooling.

One of the main purposes of the dual language program was to create a safe climate for learning for all students at the school, particularly for Spanish-speakers who had been banned from speaking their home language prior to the arrival of the new Principal. Instead of pursuing this implicit message that Spanish was a deficit, the school adopted a strength-based model that presented Spanish as an asset – thus the designation of EL students as "bilingual" – and a resource for learning English. In this way, the school set the ground for EL students to develop positive identities connected to their family and cultural roots. At the same time that Spanish was instituted as a language of instruction, the school highlighted the rich traditions of African-

American students, some of which were visible at the time we toured the school. "Tengo un sueño," began the translation into Spanish of a paragraph from Martin Luther King's "I have a dream" speech from the door of the Spanish specialists classroom. Finally, teachers repeatedly mentioned the spirit of inclusion, and of the collaboration they observed among native Spanish speakers and native English speakers as they helped each other learn the language they did not know.

It was beautiful to watch the relationship among monolingual and bilingual students as they helped each other with the language they knew best.
– Teacher

Historically, the Sarah Greenwood adopted Two-Way Bilingual as a program that normalized the use of Spanish and that set the grounds for developing a multicultural school that welcomed and reconciled the learning interests of all students. Not only were all students allowed to speak their native languages socially, but all received formal instruction in Spanish.

We wanted children to be able to talk in whatever language they were comfortable. It was important that everybody felt that they were going to be part of that community too – that everybody could become bilingual in the school. So that's how the Two-Way Bilingual program started.
– Former Principal

During SY2006-SY2009, a bilingual teacher was assigned to each grade level, one who spoke English and Spanish fluently. Literacy and numeracy instruction in English and Spanish were provided to all students in the early elementary grades (K-1). The EL students in these grades were all at MEPA Levels 1, 2, and 3. After early elementary, as students moved up to the second and third grades, these EL students were at MEPA Levels 3, 4, and 5. The focus was on building students' capacity to learn in English. Indeed, school staff attributed their success to the adoption of the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP). Originally developed as a classroom observation tool, SIOP has become a widely used, evidence-based model for sheltering content instruction for English language learners (Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2004).

AUTHOR'S NOTE: "All Students Are Language Learners"

When asked to identify the specific needs of EL students, school leaders and teachers default to the statement "All students are language learners." The use of "all" infuses a measure of equality among the two predominant student sub-groups at the school – African-American students and Spanish-speaking English language learners – and normalizes language learning as a universal task. However, reference to "all" students as language learners can hide sub-group patterns that are best identified and addressed when disaggregated (Pollock, 2004).

The school has excelled at highlighting the strengths of EL students, but remains silent about the traditions behind African-American English (AAE), a specific kind of vernacular English (some call it a dialect, others a language) with its own lexicon, syntax, phonology, speech events, and supporting scholarly literature (Green, 2002). Instead, staff mentions of the Sarah Greenwood's specific brand of dual language program end with a comment that the school adapted to its students' needs—i.e., the needs of two linguistic minorities. We also heard recurring references to the value of the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) for all students because of the early introduction of "academic" English. This conversation obscures the different needs of the school's two largest student sub-groups when learning Standard American English, and the conditions under which what works for one subgroup works for all. Distinguishing more explicitly between the needs of ELs and of speakers of AAE, and developing an understanding of why and how an instructional approach is effective with both sets of needs, may help schools create systematic strategies for dealing with different patterns of language learning needs in their student bodies.

I tend to be holistic, so that nothing happening in this school is just thinking about one section of the school. If it's a good teaching strategy, it's a good teaching strategy for everyone. So even when we're looking at the SIOP [we think] the SIOP is also good for monolingual students.
– Former Principal

From a structural perspective, the adoption of Two-Way Bilingual program resulted in the equal distribution of resources among all students at the school, ranging from classroom space to highly qualified teachers, paraprofessionals, classroom materials, field trips, and in-service training. During SY2006-SY2009, each school staff member at all levels of school organization was responsible for all students. The adult organizational structure reflected this priority as well. The school's instructional leadership team (ILT) included the Principal and the LAT facilitator, both seasoned bilingual educators, as well as ESL and regular classroom teachers. An ESL-certified teacher collaborated with a regular education teacher in each grade level to provide native English speakers and English language learners with exposure to their home language (L1) and to the second language (L2).

Over time, school staff reported adaptations made to the Two-Way Bilingual Program in response to emerging challenges. For example, the students' Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) performance after its introduction in 1999 indicated that students needed increased exposure to English. Furthermore, as ESL-trained teachers retired or departed, the school had difficulty finding highly qualified replacements, which in turn created challenges for the continuation of the Two-Way Bilingual Program. By the former Principal's own account, when faced with a choice between a highly qualified regular education and a less-qualified bilingual teacher, the school favored the highly qualified teacher. Another challenge to the school's Two-Way Bilingual Program was the tendency of students who were achievers to leave the school after the third grade to attend schools with Advanced Work Classes (AWC3). When departing bilingual students were replaced with monolingual students in the fourth grade, the new monolingual students did not have sufficient Spanish-language skills to continue in Two-Way Bilingual classes. Unlike the earlier grades, which had roughly equal numbers

of ELL students and native English speakers, the school's fourth and fifth grades typically enrolled fewer ELL students than native English speakers. In brief, the former Principal of the Sarah Greenwood attributes the school's success with ELL students to the successful development of an "error-free" learning community. This safety for learning was also reflected in a sense of trust and camaraderie that changed the culture of the school to this day.

Theme 2: Change is Collaborative and It Starts with Adults

When the former Principal entered the school, she reports, she found a staff divided. Teachers were working in isolation, with scarce support. There was a climate of distrust, coupled with low student expectations. From the outset, the former Principal was determined to change this based on two general principles: change starts with adults, and teacher buy-in is built through genuine collaboration, not top-down direction. Thus, the former Principal firmly set the stage for adult collaboration for the benefit of students. The school did not have specialized structures (such as SEL classrooms, or ESL pull-out) to support the needs of ELL students. Rather, the presence of a Principal and of an LAT-facilitator who were Spanish-speakers, who had been ELL students themselves, and who had received extensive training in language development, provided a structure to identify and address the needs of ELL students. Bilingual teachers also were involved at all levels of school organization. A crucial piece in the reform of the Sarah Greenwood was creating support structures conducive to transforming a culture of isolation into a culture of collaboration, including (1) personally leading teacher study groups and modeling behaviors the Principal expected teachers to adopt; (2) using school organization to facilitate collaboration; and (3) using professional development models such as teacher study groups and Collaborative Coaching Learning (CCL) cycles to encourage experimentation and reflection.

One of the former Principal's reform strategies was to model the behaviors she expected her teachers to adopt. For example, when children presented behavior problems, she modeled curiosity about what might be causing those behaviors rather than adopting a judgmental attitude. One teacher observed the former Principal working with an ELL student, and it changed her attitude toward ELL

students in general. Indeed, explicit reference in the school mission to the fact that "all students can and will learn" serves as evidence that this belief was not taken for granted. Modeling extended also to learning behaviors. Rather than mandating changes from above, instructional leaders took it upon themselves to work collaboratively with teachers in study groups, not just to design instruction, but also to help them select and prepare new materials, especially bilingual materials. This modeling approach was also used by in-house and outside coaches who came to the school and demonstrated teaching strategies in the classroom.

Collaboration was facilitated also by school organization, from the Instructional Leadership Team (ILT) to grade level team meetings (GLMTs), student support team (SST), and teacher study groups. In SY2006, the Sarah Greenwood ILT was large,¹⁹ including representatives of different levels of instruction, different subgroups of learners (ELL students, native English speakers, special education students), and different curriculum content areas. Members of the ILT used (multi) grade level team meetings, and teacher study groups to share information and hear feedback. Grade level teams were organized by grade span (K-2, first and second grade, third and fourth grades, fifth grade, and middle grades). One of the advantages of this cross-grade structure is to allow teachers to discuss student performance across grade levels, and to brainstorm support strategies that can be sustained from one year to the next.

.... and I have information from the prior year. And I can see that they've been having problems before, I will ask, "How long have they had that problem? And what did you do to help them?"
—Teacher

Teachers and administrators reported that the current structure of student support teams (SSTs) was also in place during SY2006-2009, and that they included teachers, students, parents, and a counselor or special needs coordinator if the student had one. These teams met monthly and served as a supervisory structure to ensure that teachers and students stayed on a plan to work on a range of issues, from academic to emotional²⁰ to family issues. Also in place at the time were Teacher Study Groups, which consisted of groups of six to eight staff members, working across disciplines and

grades in collaborative professional development. TSGs met once a week during common planning time while specialists covered their classrooms during union-approved professional development time (Edwards, 2006). They were the primary vehicle for Collaborative Coaching and Learning (CCL) cycles. All school staff participated in study groups, initially facilitated by coaches, the Principal and the LAT facilitator, eventually this responsibility was transferred to teachers, generating leadership opportunities, and greater buy-in to reform efforts.

Teachers report that study groups and CCL cycles were at the root of school change. CCL was an instructional coaching model developed by Boston Plan for Excellence that the district launched in SY2002. The program was based on the premise that the best professional development is "sustained, collaborative, and connected to classroom practice" (Boston Plan for Excellence, 2003). Boston Plan for Excellence describes a CCL cycle as a six- to eight-week period in which a team of teachers and an instructional coach work together. Each cycle has three main components. Teams meet to review and discuss readings and relate them to classroom practice. Classrooms become lab sites where participants take turns demonstrating lessons and analyzing their effects on students during a debriefing meeting. Coaches provide one-on-one support to teachers when they are in the process of implementing new practices.

The former Principal remembers that one of the first school-wide study subjects was inference and higher order thinking skills. When she asked the staff to define inference, she realized there was no consensus on the meaning of this term and how to teach it. Immediately, teacher study groups ordered best practices literature to understand inference, or rather, as they found out, different kinds of inference, how to teach it, and how to assess it. Teaching of inference went beyond the realm of literacy, reading and writing. Math and science teachers also adopted instructional practices to promote it in their classroom. Indeed, math instruction was overhauled in 2007 when the school brought in a Robotics and Engineering program developed by the Tufts Center for Engineering Education and Outreach with the purpose of building higher order thinking skills, in addition to math skills.

In addition to developing inquiry and assessment-based practice, Sarah Greenwood teachers attributed the collaborative climate of the school to CCL cycles. By turning their school into a "lab

site," teachers worked with coaches (both in-house and external) who trained the teachers, encouraged them to try new teaching strategies, and also encouraged them to observe and be observed by colleagues and coaches for constructive feedback.

A specialist: ... would come in and we would work on a specific skill each week for the month. And then she would come in at the end of the month and come observe us and see how she could help us...

It was tied to our practice. If we had a problem, we could say, "Listen, I tried X, Y and Z; it's not working. I tried it this way, I tried it that way. Can you come in and help?" She would also do modeling.... "Okay, we'll try this." And we'd come back and talk about it.

We'd plan for the whole year, the books we were going to use, the curriculum, everything. We'd just map it all out with her.

So if we were all here and the students were here, I might teach a lesson or somebody else might teach a lesson, and then we would debrief and we would talk about the lesson and how it went. We'd have goals ahead of time of what we wanted to look for. So it was basically peer observation and watching. I found it to be very helpful.

Teacher reflections about CCL cycles

One example of work done in TSGs was related to a curriculum gap identified when students were not performing well on the MCAS. The gap was in the fifth grade math curriculum, and was closed by changing the curriculum sequencing so that units from sixth grade math were moved to the fifth grade. In other instances, science and ELA teachers collaborated to provide writing opportunities across the curriculum.

In brief, the Sarah Greenwood School's success with ELL students is attributed to the successful development of an "error-free" learning community, together with a sense of trust and camaraderie that changed the culture of the school to this day.

I don't know if you can snapshot the comfort level that we have within the staff ... that sense of ease that we can talk to each other. And if it's a bad day, I think, "Okay, what do I do?" And I just don't have to wait... I can go to anybody. And I think that sense of community that we have in here, it really helps. And I think the students notice that they can recognize that. And I don't think – if we didn't have that comfort between each other, I don't think it would have gone, it could go over to the students in the way that I teach.

—Teacher

Theme 3: We Know Our Students Well and Support Them

In the previous section, we discussed relationships among adults as the first step toward change.

This theme captures what it took for the school to sustain high expectations for all, with as much of a focus on ELL students as possible, given that the inclusive nature of classroom assignment and instruction made it hard to distinguish what worked for ELL students from what worked for all students. As mentioned previously, CCL cycles' emphasis on inquiry created the foundation for the development of data-driven instructional design. One such effort that is widely remembered in the school has to do with improving higher order thinking skills, inference in particular. The Principal remembered that the need for a focus on inference was identified during a late-summer three-day professional development retreat that the school conducts yearly to review student assessment data, identify strengths and weaknesses, and set instructional priorities for the upcoming school year.

The assessment of student progress on inference helped establish regular in-house mechanisms for measuring student progress in other skills and content areas throughout the year. For example, the school decided to focus on improving the first grade as a first step toward whole-school reform. Traditionally, the early elementary program (K-1, K-2, 1) has been strong in order to give students a head start. In the first grade, students were monitored closely to determine which Fountas and Pinnell Levelled Books (available in English and Spanish) they were reading, and what kinds of inference were

developed through those readings. Monitoring took the form of teacher running records. Today, the focus on inference is instituted as an area for ongoing improvement and as "good teaching" that moves beyond basic reading and vocabulary instruction.

I think one of the biggest things that we've found, pretty much across grade levels and subject matter is that we need our students to get better higher order thinking skills. So they're pretty consistent and pretty proficient at answering basic skills, demonstrating what that kind of evidence sort of makes them, like reading comprehension. But we need them to go further than that, to be able to synthesize more information, evaluate many pieces of information, and then make an inference from it.

—LIT member

Another example of the school's ability to respond to individual student needs was the use of formative and summative assessment data. According to interviews, assessment drove instruction during the study period. SY2006-SY2009. The Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA), the Stanford Reading Inventory (SRI), writing samples, teacher-constructed math tests, MEPA, MELA-O, and MCAS were all used to inform instruction. Teachers disaggregated student scores on these measures by race, and also by language status. Item analysis report summaries on the Spring MCAS scores were used to predict which students might not attain grade level skills the following year.

These report summaries were examined annually, at a three-day in-service institute held in late August to examine student data and prepare for the upcoming year. One year, the school identified questions in the fifth grade MCAS that were not covered by district math curriculum and pacing guide until the sixth grade. This gap was addressed through changes in sequencing.

"Push the Mainstream to Accommodate"

The former Principal came to the Sarah Greenwood as a seasoned educator and native Spanish speaker whose experiences

learning and teaching English as a second language, as well as her extensive academic training, informed decisions she made as leader of the Sarah Greenwood. In addition, her personal and professional experiences "helped us push ... always guided by the data." "Pushing" as a strategy to attain school reform goals was mentioned several times in the study. Pushing refers to shifting the school from a deficit to a strength-based paradigm; to re-assigning bilingual and monolingual students of the same grade level to contiguous classrooms after bilingual students had been relegated to a Transitional Bilingual Education program in a separate part of the building for years; to strongly encouraging previously estranged bilingual and monolingual teachers to work together, at first by having to share common planning time; to closely examining student data to develop and implement changes in instruction; and to leading teacher study groups in order to support teachers' changes in curriculum and instruction. All of these changes took place prior to the study years, and laid the foundation for success in that period.

When asked about instruction that worked for ELL students, most staff members at the school speak about the Sheltered Immersion Observation Protocol (SIOP) and Readers and Writers Workshop as good instructional models for all students. Teachers reported liking the scaffolding provided by Readers and Writers' Workshop for teaching literacy – i.e., reading the story, asking questions, going back to the story, and re-reading it a couple of days later. This structure was found to give K-5 youngsters comfort and control over their learning. As they gradually took on more responsibility for learning independently or in small groups, under the supervision of a paraprofessional, teachers worked closely with small groups of students who needed additional support.

The SIOP, on the other hand, facilitated the sheltering of content accompanied with language instruction. Like Readers' and Writers' Workshop, this instructional approach was found to be useful not only for ELL students, but for all students at the school, as was the early introduction of academic language. Many instructional strategies endorsed by the SIOP were observable during classroom visits, including: clear posting of language objectives in relation to curriculum frameworks, the use of Spanish for clarification, and the multimodal presentation of vocabulary and new concepts. In accordance with SIOP, teachers were observed presenting vocabulary through bilingual songs in early elementary grades. By the time we observed classrooms, the school had acquired Smartboards and Rod Jourches that were designed to provide access to the Internet on large screens, thus opening up a wealth of visual resources. These resources were not available during the study period, which implied that the responsibility of designing and/or finding already-made visual and audio materials rested mainly on teachers.

In interviews with current teachers, they discussed the challenges they experience today teaching academic vocabulary, especially abstract words such as "heirloom," "survival," "blindness," and "homeless people." A first grade teacher was observed introducing the concept "tradition" with visual representations of different cultural celebrations, and by engaging students in a conversation about their own family traditions, such as birthday celebrations. Another teacher reported teaching the term "weather conditions" by depicting different kinds of weather, and using the more abstract term "conditions" to encompass all. Teachers also

reported using mini-lessons to introduce topics that may not be familiar to students, such as the life of Helen Keller, prior to engaging in literacy activities involving her life. Although these reports are contemporary, they are examples of practices recommended by the SIOE.

For students who were identified as academically behind through teacher observation or an assessment instrument, the school offered three structures for additional academic support: (1) support during the school day; (2) extended learning time; and (3) student support teams (SST). In addition, practices of family engagement supported their achievement.

School Day Support

The former Principal arranged the school schedule to provide students with maximum opportunities for academic support during the school day. During school support was, and continues to be, provided through slight modifications of the schedule, whereby students are pulled out during selected times and matched with a qualified teacher or specialist to work on specific needs. The schedule was modified slightly in order to avoid interferences with ELA or math classes. Sessions would occur in small time blocks, such as fifteen minutes during lunch or the last ten minutes of a specialty class.

Extended Learning Time

To supplement interventions during the school day, the school provided afterschool support. Current administrators estimate that about 30% of all students were identified for reinforcement in math and English for afterschool support, and about two thirds of that number or 20% of students actually enrolled in programs. Some areas that teachers currently recognize as requiring academic reinforcement are (a) literacy, specifically communicating ideas and reading comprehension, (b) higher order thinking skills, (c) math, and (d) MCAS preparation. Teachers reported that, currently, a majority if not all students in afterschool reading, math, and MCAS preparation were ELL students.

Students who could attend before- and afterschool support received grade-specific math and reading tutoring from the school's teachers. Examples of out-of-school time support included "Guided Reading," "Knowing Math," and "Soar to Success," a direct teaching program focused on reading strategies such as visualization, reflection, and making connections (Edvestors, 2006). Participat-

ing students therefore received a "double dose" of instruction. Afterschool instruction was supervised by a member of the LT to ensure continuity with materials covered in class that day. Students were moved in and out of afterschool tutoring as needed.

Student Support Teams

During the study period, the school had student support teams (SST), or "safety nets," for those who needed support beyond the extended learning time offered during, before, and after the school day. SSTs were, and still are, a multi-disciplinary group of specialists including an administrator, a special educator, an occupational therapist, a counselor (if relevant), and a bilingual teacher. SSTs met once a week, to assess student progress, student by student. Student referrals to SST can be initiated by LT members based on formative or summative assessment results, or by teachers when they observe that in class and extended-day support systems have not been effective.

Support for the Whole Student Involves

Support for Home Life

The school sees students holistically, as proclaimed in the mission statement. This perspective means that there is an understanding that a student's life outside the classroom and beyond the school impact academic performance. "We know our students well" is an often-heard expression at the school in reference not only to students' academic skills, but also to the students' family context, socio-emotional health, and extracurricular needs. Knowing that each student's academic performance is impacted by non-academic developmental needs within and beyond the classroom and the school, the Sarah Greenwood reaches out to families to learn about needs for economic and/or socio-emotional support related to poverty, immigration, and neighborhood safety. For example, during home visits conducted prior to the start of the school year, members of the staff identified and tried to meet material needs. In one case, a teacher reported providing an extra mattress to a family whose school-age child was sleeping on the floor. Parents also reported this sense of non-judgmental collaboration between school and home that developed as a result of these actions.

In addition, family involvement practices included elements of parent education for their children's success in literacy. The former Principal spoke about the importance of interacting with mothers, and focused on pointing out to them ways to rein-

force their young children's initial experimentations with writing. Knowing that mothers were likely to dismiss their children's doodling as not "real" writing, the Principal would explain to them the need for positive reinforcement that would build their child's confidence and interest in writing. She also encouraged parents to ask questions to their children about a book they were reading, even if the parent was not reading with the child.

During SY2006-SY2009, the school staff proactively reached out to all families and provided resources and support to parents, some of whom were burdened with child and work responsibilities. Family engagement in schooling was facilitated through home visits, breakfast clubs, Friends of the Families, and other activities. The current school librarian was, and still is, in charge of translating all materials to Spanish. Currently, paraprofessionals take responsibility for calling and visiting families. Then as now, parents had access to their teachers' cell phone numbers.

In terms of family involvement in education, not all parents were expected to be involved in the same ways, especially parents of ELL students. One current teacher spoke eloquently of "differentiating" interactions with families, just as they differentiated instruction within the classroom.

The more I think about it, it's kind of like differentiating instruction within the students. You have to differentiate instruction with the parents...So for the parents you haven't contacted, you send home notices, you send home ideas for things to help their children at home. You have different projects like we said. We did like a timeline where they set up and made pictures and the parents helped them to write a timeline of their lives.
—Early elementary teacher

This particular teacher created an opportunity for parents who were less involved to help their children work on a project about their lives. This subject did not require prior knowledge and gave parents an opportunity to be involved in an educational activity with their children on their own schedule.

C Conclusions and Lessons for Other Schools

The theoretical framework that guided our research focused exclusively on domains of school practice in the education of ELL students for which there is enough empirical support to be considered "evidence-based." However, as we became familiar with the school, it became clear that some of the practices we were observing were best practices for schools in general, not just for ELL students. It was beyond the scope of this study to be guided by such a broad framework. The practices, however, are documented for the purposes of the cross-cutting analysis – i.e., to compare them with other study schools and determine whether they were shared practices.

Modeling and collaboration were effective tools for institutional change

The success of the Sarah Greenwood rests on a story of change that broke down divisions to create inclusive classrooms and cross-grade level teams. The Principals' own life experiences were key in formulating and implementing a vision of equity. One important premise of change described in this study is that change is collaborative and starts with adults. Effective schools for ELL students have been found to have Principals like the Sarah Greenwoods, who share decision-making responsibility with the school community, assume the role of guiding and supporting staff through changes, serve as a stabilizing force that creates a sense of safety in taking risks for school improvement, focus on continuous improvement, and support and develop teachers of ELL students (Waxman et al., 2007). Thus, this case study confirms the importance of collaboration for achieving institutional change for ELL students.

ELL students benefited from being in schools with standards-based learning outcomes and clear expectations

The Sarah Greenwood's Principal instilled in the school a vision of high expectations for all students, and used the same performance benchmarks for ELL students as for native English speakers. ELL below-grade-level performance was not seen as "normal" and as something that would resolve itself with increased language proficiency. The learning objectives were standards aligned; the teachers developed instructional approaches and support structures to assist all students to reach those objectives. These findings replicate those of a California evaluation of 237 schools (Williams et al., 2007) included in our theoretical framework. It should be noted though, that ELL students participated in large numbers in extended day instruction that was targeted and aligned with daytime curriculum. This suggests that ELL students may require out-of-school-time support in order to keep up with standards-based instruction.

Using data-driven inquiry to improve instruction led to better student performance

The school's focus on setting in the case of ELL students, (Williams et al., 2007) found that using assessment data to improve student achievement and instruction led to higher outcomes. The Sarah Greenwood used itemized analysis of student responses on the ELA and Math subtests of the MCAS to determine learning objectives for ELL students. This data-inquiry based approach supported an inclusive school organization that gave voice to teachers of ELL students in the Instructional Leadership Team, grade level teams, student support teams, and teacher study groups.

Cultural understanding and validation were necessary supports for the whole student.

When staff at the Sarah Greenwood spoke of knowing their students, they did not just mean in terms of their academic outcomes, but rather holistically, including the cultural communities they came from, the kinds of stressors they faced daily, and their home languages. The fact that students and their parents could speak their home language at school, not only among themselves, but also with their teachers was advantageous. Understanding parents' cultural practices around parenting was also valuable, as it enabled teachers and administrators to highlight cultural practices that were inconsistent with school practices, such as criticism, and recommending alternatives, such as encouragement to build confidence and self-esteem. The use of Spanish in classrooms and hallways, among teachers and administrators, among students, and between teachers and parents created a climate where Spanish ability and the various cultural backgrounds of ELL students were valued. Indeed validating students' ethnic identity has been recommended as an effective practice by experts on ELL education with a focus on Latino ELL students (Tellez & Waxman, 2005).

The school visit also confirmed that the Sarah Greenwood practiced a number of evidence-based strategies for family engagement, including (a) school and teachers reach out to parents through their language and culture, (b) school hires bilingual personnel who are available to speak with parents when they come to school, (c) school uses a variety of strategies to communicate with parents, and (d) school offers a variety of formal events to communicate with parents (Delgado-Gaitan, 2004).

Teachers liked on-going, in-house professional development, and training on formative use of data

Repeatedly, teachers praised Collaborative Coaching and Learning (CCL) cycles for targeting the specific skills they needed to build, and for creating a culture of trust and collaboration. They also preferred having in-house math and LAR coaches, as they could provide ongoing support, when questions arose about classroom practices that were not working. Also, the relationship of trust that developed with in-house coaches facilitated help-seeking for teachers.

Professional development practices similar to those that the Sarah Greenwood engaged in during SY2006-SY2009 were highly recommended in a recent Practice Guide issued by the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences (IES) (Gersten et al., 2007). The practices included: (1) training teachers to use formative assessment to guide instruction; (2) training teachers and other specialists to effectively deliver small-group instruction for ELL students who fall behind; and (3) training teachers to teach academic English starting in the early grades. In addition, grade level team meetings were focused on examining instruction and student learning with the support of the LIT and the Principal (Saunders et al., 2009).

In conclusion, the Sarah Greenwood's success in SY2006-SY2009 was the result of a process of comprehensive reform brought about by a Principal who intentionally adopted a collaborative leadership style that spread buy-in for change school-wide. Teachers' empowerment and dedication to data-driven assessment and instructional design, the spirit of collaboration created through strong professional development models, and the school's efforts to reach out to the community created the conditions for academic success for ELL students, and all students.

¹⁴ Under Boston's student assignment plan, the city is divided into three geographic "zones" (East, West, and North) for elementary and middle schools. Students may apply for schools in the zone in which they live, schools in other zones if the schools are within their "walk zone", and K-8 schools citywide. The assignment algorithm prioritizes applicants within a one mile "walk zone" for elementary schools and entry for siblings of current students.

¹⁷ The data on teacher qualifications come from the MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (http://profiles.doc.mass.edu/state_report/teacherdata.aspx).

¹⁸ The Interim Principal, a 21-year school veteran who held positions of increasing responsibility, from teacher to assistant Principal, led the school for two school years following the Principal's departure. A new permanent Principal was appointed to lead the school starting SY2012.

¹⁹ During SY2006 it had ten members (EAs/Vs), 2006).

²⁰ Counselors do not have Spanish speaking ability currently, which limits support for ELL students to those who are MEPs Levels 3 and 4.



CHAPTER

V.

“A PERFECT STORM”: A STEADILY IMPROVING SCHOOL FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

A School Context

The Ellis Elementary School is a K-5 elementary school located in the Roxbury section of Boston. During SY2009, the school served 328 students; 35% were native speakers of Spanish and 40% were students of limited English proficiency (LEP). In the school as a whole, 55.5% of students were Latino, 40.5% were Black, 2% were White, and 2% were multi-racial, Asian, or Native American. Students are assigned to the school according to the BPS student assignment plan,²² and the school is one of 19 BPS elementary schools with a Spanish-specific SEI program for LEP students.

Of the 78 LEP students (81% of all LEPs) who took the MEPA in April 2009, 12.8% were at MEPA Level 1, 9% were at MEPA Level 2, 21.8% were at MEPA Level 3, 38.5% were at MEPA Level 4, and 17.9% were at MEPA Level 5. LEP students at each grade level spanned the range of MEPA levels.

During SY2009, there were 29.1 full-time equivalent (FTE) staff members at the Ellis School for a student-teacher ratio of 10.9 to 1 (BPS ratio is 12.8 to 1). Five FTE teachers (17%) were teaching ELL-related assignments. One hundred percent of teachers were licensed in their assigned position and 100% of core classes were taught by highly qualified teachers; both figures are slightly higher than the district averages of 98% and 96%, respectively. In terms of the racial make-up of the teaching staff, 37% of teachers were White, 34% were Black, 24% were Latino, 3% were Native American, and 2% were Asian.²²

In SY2009, the percentage of students from low-income households was higher than BPS district rates for both students of limited English proficiency and those who are English proficient. For Ellis students of limited English proficiency, the rate was six percentage points higher while for English proficient students, it was more than 20 percentage points higher. The mobility rate at Ellis was higher for both LEP students (15.6%) and EP students (12.9%) compared to BPS LEP students (9.8%) and EP students (8.1%).

In terms of engagement outcomes, attendance rates at Ellis were slightly lower than BPS rates, and rates of suspension and grade retention at Ellis were lower for students of limited English proficiency, while higher for English proficient students. Academically, Ellis students performed well on

Table 5.1. Ellis Elementary School Enrollment Defined by Native Language, English Language Proficiency, and ELL Program Participation, SY2009

Total	Native English Speaker (NES) (197) (60%)	All Ellis (328)	Native Speakers of Other Languages (NSOL) (131) (40%) ^a
Language Proficiency	English Proficient (EP) (232) (71%)	NSOL-EP (25) (8%)	FLEP (10) (3%)
Program Participation	NES	Not in ELL Program (232) (71%)	Not in ELL Prog (27) (8%)
			English Proficient (LEP) (96) (29%) ^b
			In ELL Prog (89) (27%) ^b

^a Native speakers of Spanish were 87% of NSOL. Other languages including Haitian Creole and Cape Verdean were 1% or less

^b 94 (87.5% of LEPs) were native speakers of Spanish

Table 5.2. Selected Student Indicators, SY2009^a

	Ellis LEP %	Ellis EP %	BPS ES LEP %	BPS ES EP %
Low Income (% Eligible for free/reduced-price lunch)	97.9%	96.1%	91.6%	77.4%
Mobility (% not in the same school for October and June)	15.6%	12.9%	9.8%	8.1%
Students with Disabilities	10.4%	17.2%	17.6%	20.1%

^aLEP = Limited English Proficiency; EP = English Proficient; BPS ES = Boston Public Elementary Schools

Table 5.3. Selected Student Outcomes, SY2009

	Number of ELLs LEP Students with Data	Ellis LEP %	Ellis EP %	BPS ES LEP %	BPS ES EP %
Median Attendance	96	94.4%	91.7%	96.1%	95.0%
Suspension	96	0%	5.2%	2.0%	3.3%
Retained in Grade	69	5.8% ^a	6.7%	6.0%	4.1%
Passed ELA/MCAS ^b	17	100%	84.4%	64.9%	80.0%
Proficient in ELA/MCAS		35.3% ^b	42.2%	13.3%	39.6%
Passed Math MCAS	17	82.4%	96.8%	61.8%	76.3%
Proficient in Math MCAS		41.2% ^b	55.5%	17.8%	34.1%
Passed Science MCAS	4 ^c	4 ^c	90.0%	45.1%	72.0%
Proficient in Science MCAS	4 ^c	4 ^c	36.1%	5.3%	21.7%

^a LEP = Limited English Proficiency; EP = English Proficient; BPS ES = Boston Public Elementary Schools

^b Data for this cell is n<10.

^c MCAS data includes grades 3-5 for ELA and mathematics and grade 5 for science. While case study site selection looked at MCAS proficiency in ELA and mathematics only for students at MEPA levels 3 and 4, here the purpose is to present outcomes for the scores as a whole, thus we used the lowest test takers as well as pass and proficiency rates.

^d Data not reported for categories where n=0.

the MCAS tests, though relatively small numbers suggest caution in interpreting these results since patterns could fluctuate due to individual differences. Pass and proficiency rates for Ellis LEP students are mostly lower compared to their EP counterparts, but higher when compared to BPS LEP students. Except for the MCAS ELA proficiency rate, Ellis LEP students also scored higher than BPS EP students.

During the period in which this school showed the steady improvement with ELL students that led to its identification in this project, the Principal at the time had begun his tenure as Principal in SY1990, after being a bilingual teacher in the Boston Public Schools for fifteen years. He himself was an English language learner who is bilingual in Spanish and English.

During his tenure, the mission of the Ellis School was developed to read:

The David A. Ellis community – students, staff, parents, neighborhoods, agencies, universities, and business partners – will provide an effective and enriched education in a safe and supportive environment focused on strong skill development and preparation for productive and responsible membership in society. (Ellis Elementary School, 2006)

The Ellis School underwent a dramatic demographic change from the time the former Principal started, when the school was 81% African American, to now, when more than half of the students are Latino. The former Principal reports that there were historical tensions between Black and Latino groups at the school, and that while he always made ELL education a priority, it became easier to support the needs of bilingual students when there was a critical mass of native Spanish speakers at the school. This case study describes the “perfect storm” that developed when he brought in a human resource – the LAT Facilitator – whose views for educating ELL students aligned with his, and with those of the math coach, as they would find out. This strong alignment of views about what would work with ELL students, coupled with teachers’ strong desire

to improve their own ELL instruction, created the conditions for a transformation that, like a perfect storm, in a short period of time would change ELL education at the Ellis for the better.

The school has experienced two leadership changes since the former Principal left after SY2009.²⁹ As a result of differing commitments and visions, some of the ELL-related practices that were implemented, as well as some of the key staff responsible for facilitating those practices during that period, are no longer evident at the school.³⁰

B Key Themes in Success with Educating English Language Learners

As a Language Specific SEI program school, Ellis Elementary uses student MEPA scores as well as classroom work to assess students’ English language proficiency levels. As an elementary school, the SEI teachers have self-contained classrooms where they teach all subjects except the specials. Currently at each grade level, there is one SEI classroom with students at MEPA Levels 1-3. The current BPS policy is that students who reach MEPA Levels 4 and 5 are to be transitioned to regular education classrooms. At the time of the study, the LAT Facilitator, math coach, and classroom teachers carefully considered this transition through discussions that took into account all available data and socio-emotional needs of each specific student. They reported that if students were not deemed ready to move to regular education, they were kept in SEI classrooms, which were usually smaller in size and had extra academic support from the LAT Facilitator two or three times a week.

In our case study of the Ellis, we found three themes from our interviews, observations, and document review which multiple stakeholders credited for the school’s improvement with ELL education. We found that the leadership for ELL education in the school included the Principal, LAT Facilitator, and math coach, who built the capacity of both SEI and regular education teachers through coaching, modeling, and learning. The major focus of data-based inquiry, professional development, and coaching was improving instruction, particularly in reading and writing. Finally, we found that through this focused work across the faculty, a culture of professional collaboration developed leading to a sense of collective efficacy. These key themes are described in more detail under the headings:

- The Principal Created Conditions for “a Perfect Storm”
- “What is the Small, High Leverage Thing that would give us the Biggest Bang for our Buck?”
- Collective Efficacy

Theme 1: The Principal Created Conditions for “a Perfect Storm”

We use the term Perfect Storm to refer to the purposeful recruitment and deployment of resources for the benefit of ELL students. The Principal during SY2006-SY2009 had been an English language learner in the Boston Public Schools, and had many years of experience as a bilingual teacher before becoming a principal, all of which shaped his vision for the school. That vision was one of equity for English language learners, which he constructed as providing resources based on teachers’ needs, rather than through a mathematical formula. His views about equity were shaped when, as a teacher, he experienced that equality of resources was not enough to teach ELL students; he needed more resources than regular education teachers, and had to work extra time to provide them.

I came in to the job with the perspective of trying to make sure that English language learners not only were represented in all aspects of the school, that in particular we were making sure that they were getting equal access to curriculum.

–former/Principal

The Principal during the study period possessed two key leadership traits which supported the transformation of ELL education at the Ellis: vision and trust in his staff. His vision was that English language learners would achieve at the same level as native English speakers, which they were not doing at the time that he took over leadership of the school in SY1990. His vision for ELL students was that his staff would see the academic potential of ELL students and help them realize it. At the time, this vision required a change in attitudes and perceptions about ELL students among staff.

A mindset ... that when you look at a student, you don't see [him/her] with a deficit, you see [him/her] with his/her potential, and you look at each individual in that way, that [his/her] can move forward.

It was important for me, when I did my alignment, that the teacher teams were comprised of not just regular ed but also bilingual ed teachers on the same team.

Because the teaching staff did not have the knowledge, skills, or collaborative habit required for excellent ELI instruction, former Principal needed to create changes in attitudes and teaching practice. He brought resources to the school, in the forms of professional development and staffing that would address these needed changes.

I realized that we had a lot of English language learners in the regular ed classrooms, which made all classrooms English learning classrooms...

I needed to find a way to let them understand that dynamic, and what it is that's required of them. And so, we did a significant part of our 18 hours [of professional development] just understanding SIOP. The teachers started to realize that they had a responsibility for those students, and as we learned that, we realized that it was not good instruction for English language learners, it was good instruction for everybody. So that was the foundation of it.

We had a principal at the time who was not necessarily satisfied. In my opinion, with some of the things that he was seeing, and needed the support. So he was open to, "We need something here."

Thus, the former Principal's vision included integrating not only the English language learners but also their teachers with the regular education staff. For this purpose, he created structures that facilitated collaboration between teachers of ELL students and regular education teachers. For example, he changed the structure of the teacher teams. At the same time, he realized that all teachers in the building needed training to teach ELL students, not just for the sake of ELL students but for the sake of all students. He then created necessary opportunities for professional development of all teachers in the building.

At the same time, the Principal recognized the need to delegate and empower teachers, and for that purpose he turned to two key staff: the LAT facilitator and the math coach.

Instructional Coaches Were Given Responsibility for Empowering Teachers

The LAT facilitator was hired in SY2007 as an ESL teacher, the only licensed ESL and 4-Category trained teacher in the building (some teachers had training in Categories 1, 2, and 3 but not in ESL). A trilingual English language learner herself, she had experience as an ESL teacher in a Two-Way Bilingual Immersion school with a majority of Spanish-speaking ELL students in California. The ESL teacher/LAT facilitator experienced a similar transition when a restrictive language policy passed in California a few years earlier. This experience made her an ideal

candidate for the Ellis School. She was knowledgeable about sheltering English for content lessons and had worked with a highly qualified Elementary ESL mentor teacher herself, as part of a teacher education program in California. When she came to the Ellis, she was not only a dedicated teacher, but also was willing to work with other teachers. She described her role as LAT facilitator at Ellis as "a little bit of everything," including mentoring, coaching, collaborating with teachers, and compliance. One SEI teacher remembers that she introduced to her the concept of differentiating instruction based on students' English proficiency levels.

In addition to the four-category SEI training, he understood the value of having a full-time math coach to support teachers. He creatively used his budget to fund that position at a time when the position was only funded to be part time. The Principal also knew that some of the ELL teaching and learning expertise would need to come from outside the building. He was a leader who was not afraid to acknowledge the limits of his own ability to directly lead that change, encouraged applications to bring in additional resources, and identified strong teachers of ELL students who could become teacher leaders.

The math coach, who had been at the school since 2004, supported teachers by working with individual struggling students, with small groups of students on specific skills, and co-teaching mini-lessons in classrooms. She had a general knowledge of all the students in the school, not just ELL students, as well as teachers' strengths and weaknesses. The former Principal early on recognized her value to his leadership team and empowered her to take on ELI leadership.

Instructional Coaches Were Given Responsibility for Empowering Teachers

In SY2007, Category 2 training was offered through Teach First, which the LAT facilitated with two other in-house category-trained teachers. In SY2008, she was formally designated as LAT facilitator and began to convene regular meetings of the SEI teachers as the Language Acquisition team. She continued to meet one-on-one with all teachers of ELL students, including regular education teachers, to review progress for every ELL student. During SY2008, the LAT facilitator was working one hour a day in K1 and K2 SEI classrooms and ten hours a week for Grades 1-5 SEI classrooms. Through their time and conversations together, the LAT facilitator and math coach developed awareness not only of

teachers' learning needs, but also of their own. In June 2007, they applied for training that would bring in an external facilitator of data-driven inquiry work (described below) based on a participatory model of school reform. Thus grew a cohesive approach between the LAT facilitator, the math coach, and teachers as critical partners. These two coaches became key leaders of a process of change for ELL students and their teachers at the school. They "broke the barrier into the classrooms" (SEI teacher) to start the conversations about improving ELL teaching and learning.

A key factor in the coaches' ability to work closely with teachers and build leadership for ELL students was the Principal's trust in their decisions. Because the math coach had been at the school for a number of years, there was already a trusting relationship between her and the Principal. He trusted her content knowledge and her skill as a professional developer.

It is not a very common experience to have a Principal who wants to be transparent about what they know, what they don't know, and how they can be supportive.

Having those eyes and ears for the Principal was very positive, and then using that information to do a little bit more purposeful planning around professional development, around how to deploy my time, about how to identify general school needs, but also grade level needs, [supported the Principal].

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In time, the coaches made decisions each year on how to spend their time, whether in a classroom with a struggling teacher for ESL time, convening inquiry team meetings, providing mentoring or professional development, collecting and analyzing data, or meeting with families.

Coaches Were Catalysts For Improving SEI Teaching And Learning

Not only did the coaches have the former Principals' trust and authority over key decisions about how they spent their time, they also built teachers' trust in the benefits of peer collaboration around curriculum and instruction. One SEI teacher described the LAT facilitator's role as coaching her through lesson planning and modeling instruction in the classroom until she adopted new practices and was ready to use them independently:

I would credit [the LAT facilitator] as the one who taught me what to do.... So every day during my ESL time, my kids and I worked with her, and she would model lessons, and then we would break the kids up. So I would be learning from her, and then we would divide the children to differentiate the instruction. We would plan together, and over time, I would do more of the instruction, but we would still meet to plan. And I guess after a couple of months, I was more on my own with the kids and she was doing other things, but we would still meet to plan.

—SEI teacher

A major accomplishment for the school was its retention of highly qualified staff and their teaching assignments. While some teachers were more amenable than others to working with the LAT facilitator and math coach, with time most came to tap into their expertise for improving instruction. During the study period, most of the staff was trained in Categories 1, 2, and 3. As evidence of the mindset of ongoing learning at the school, several teachers discussed the professional development that they felt would be most helpful to them in improving their teaching of ELL students. Teachers whose training had been more heavily focused on ELA expressed an interest in a math focus. At the same time, one regular education teacher wanted exemplars of sheltered English instruction:

I would love to see videotapes, like an exemplar classroom, [for example] a first grade classroom with 22 kids, and they have six ELL students. Just watching what that teacher does with the unit, and how she reaches the ELL students.

—Regular education teacher

The LAT facilitator suggested that while the district has focused on “wide instead of deep” professional development in the four categories of sheltered English instruction, a site-based mentoring program would ensure that professional development learning were translated into classroom practice.

The former Principal recognized that professional development, data-based inquiry, and instructional change would require extra time from teachers. To meet this need, he created incentives and ways of compensating teachers for their dedication and commitment, a process he called “a dance.” Perhaps one of his most powerful levers was to show success with ELL students and with all students at one grade level. When, in the second year of SAM, data showed that all third grade student outcomes had improved, fourth grade teachers jumped on board with reform efforts.

We had some success to show them.

The fact that none of our third graders, not even one, including the special Ed students, was at a level one [Warning] in the previous year's MCAS, gave the fourth grade teachers a little [pause]. So that even though they recognized that it was a lot more work, there was a payoff.

—Former Principal

Thus, in the second year of SAM implementation, the team worked with the same cohort of students which included ELL students, now in the fourth grade.²⁵

Theme 2: “What is the Small, High Leverage Thing That Would Give Us the Biggest Bang for Our Buck?”

The first theme established that, during the study years, the school had in place both a Principal and highly qualified coaches who were dedicated to training and empowering teachers to improve ELL education. In addition, in SY2008, the school gained access to external coaching and facilitation of data-based inquiry by applying and winning a grant by the Carnegie Corporation to work with a facilitator from the Scaffolded Apprenticeship Model (SAM), a program that originated at the City University of New York (CUNY)²⁶ and was being implemented in several Boston Public Schools by staff at the Boston Plan for Excellence (BPE), an intermediary organization in Boston. The SAM model involved analysis of student-level data, including student work, by grade. SAM provided resources such as the inquiry framework, data spreadsheets, guiding questions, ways of identifying patterns in data, ways of focusing on specific groups of students, templates for intervention plans, and follow-up accountability processes to keep the SAM team at the school focused on their inquiry questions and “on the students moving forward” (SAM team member).

This model's approach to school reform is based on changing the role of principals from school leaders to leaders of capacity development at the school. The SAM team of leaders thus created becomes responsible and accountable for the use of data-based inquiry cycles to lead school improvement. The former Principal acknowledges experiencing some discomfort at being a member of a collaborative team (rather than the leader making the decisions), but he trusted that the process that he brought in with SAM would result in improvement for ELL students.

It became, as I said, not just the coaches, but it became the SAM team plus the third grade teachers.... It could not work for a principal that had a big ego. At first it was a little bit hard, but as I started to release more and more, it became easier to be just one member of a team.... The more people trusted me in the process and I trusted them in the process, it was all of us putting everything on the table, and the sole focus was: how do we

improve instruction for our students, and how do our students gain the skills that they need to be successful students?

—Former Principal

With a consistent external SAM facilitator from BPE, the team systematically examined student literacy achievement at the third and fourth grade levels in SY2009, and began the process of looking at whole-school literacy data that year. Progress was reported quarterly in a newsletter to the Principal and ELL staff. The team looked at the district-based assessments (Stanford Reading Inventory (SRI) and Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA), and found that they were not predictive of MCAS performance. They also identified areas in which the current assessments did not give enough information about student skills; they then developed new assessments that were more valid indicators of those skills.

The MCAS didn't necessarily tell us the clear picture of those students. We weren't sure they could read the texts, so we had to do running records. How can you look at a multiple choice answer if you're not even sure they're reading the sentence?

—SAM team member

Through analysis of multiple data sources, SAM team members found that student performance on different assessments, the Formative Assessments of Student Thinking in Reading (FAST-TR) and Open Responses, predicted proficiency on subsets of the MCAS.

Another finding of the SAM team was that ELL achievement in the early elementary grades (Grades K-2) was strong, but that in the late elementary grades (Grades 3-5), outcomes declined. Specifically, in SY2007 “the MCAS scores of every single ELL student had gone down from third to fourth grade and from fourth to fifth grade” (SAM team member). This observation gave the team a focus on the upper grade SEI classrooms. Specifically, they decided that they would focus on third grade and fourth grade students which included a group of ELL students for the two years of the grant:

So we focused on the third grade, and out of that work we began to identify what students needed, how the artifacts that were developing in the classrooms were actually showing us where their needs were.
— Math coach

Student achievement in the upper elementary grades at Ellis did improve during the SAM years as demonstrated by the school's identification as a case study school for this project.²⁷ The former principal reflected on SAM and its results:

It was through the lens of looking at students, especially students that we were so concerned with, and as they started showing through our ongoing assessment that they were getting the skills, we started feeling a little bit better and a little bit better. And by the time that MCAS came out, that group had scored so well. They had outperformed regular ed students.
— Former Principal

With the support of the LAT facilitator and math coach, school staff became more comfortable with discussing the needs of ELL students, the tools that work best with ELL students, and the instructional modifications that were needed in their classrooms:

You have to understand, at [each English proficiency] level, what writing looks like, what reading looks like... And I think when you know that, you know how to create certain strategies and scaffold them, layer them bit by bit, to get ELL students to the next step. So, let's say you have an ELL and a non-ELL. They both need to get to Point B. This non-ELL may be able to just take two steps. That ELL may need to take four or five steps to get to that Level B. That is the difference.
— LAT Facilitator

The coaches therefore supported teachers in differentiating and enhancing their literacy strategies for ELL students.

Reading

A common theme in the instructional strategies that the teachers incorporated throughout their lessons was repetition, in both reading and writing. For example, in order to foster students' love of reading and their reading comprehension, teachers found that reading favorite stories aloud assisted the ELL students to engage with text, understand vocabulary, and access the information in the story.

I found that... [students] really wanted to repeat reading favorite stories... They love to listen to stories.... When you're reading aloud, you're modeling fluency, you're modeling how to figure out certain words, talking to them about the text, engaging in the text... You can also do a read-aloud for a particular lesson, where you upload the vocabulary that the kids may find confusing first, and then do the picture walk, so that especially you [MEPAL levels 1 and 2] can also follow. I've always found that once you have built that background for them, before reading the story, they're able to access the information in the read-aloud and really enjoy it, and they learn a lot of vocabulary, as well. So, read-alouds have been very, very successful.
— LAT Facilitator

Vocabulary development supports ELL students in comprehending text just beyond their language ability level. During the study period, the coaches reported helping teachers become more aware of using cognates, or words that have a common etymology. Since Spanish and English have many cognates, students were taught to "successfully use metacognitive strategies to figure out the meanings of readings of harder literature by focusing in on cognates" (LAT facilitator). For words that teachers know are difficult or new for ELL students, teachers focused on the common vocabulary that all students needed to use, while acknowledging that "the ways that they are producing language and the depth that they are using vocabulary might change based on their English language development level" (SEI teacher).

During the study period, another instructional strategy that teachers began to employ repeatedly

to improve reading comprehension was for student to write "self-monitoring notes" in which they asked themselves after every paragraph what the paragraph's main idea was.

Writing

In writing, repetition was also used to support students in their learning, specifically writing in response to literature. During the study period, students were encouraged to respond to Open Response prompts in complete sentences, because doing so reinforced academic language. By asking students to complete an open response writing task each time they read a piece of literature, "they're only going to get better at it if they have more practice doing the same thing" (LAT facilitator).

And without fail, every time we read something, they had to do an open response. They would get immediate feedback from me or their classroom teacher, saying, "Did you give an example? Did you elaborate on that?" And that helped them as they were reading to focus in on certain details.
— LAT Facilitator

Beyond writing complete sentences in open responses, there was a focus on teaching students to write paragraphs. The third, fourth, and fifth grade SEI classrooms in the school used the hamburger model of paragraph writing, in which the buns represent the topic sentence or introduction and the conclusion. The burger, cheese, and lettuce represent the details of the topic. Students learned that they could stack the burger in various ways, but they always needed the two buns. As part of this model, teachers were encouraged to have their ELL students repeatedly provide the details, or evidence sections, as a way for students to practice writing using this structure.

The LAT facilitator noticed that ELL students had difficulty coming up with words to use in their writing. An instructional strategy that she used was shared writing, in which the students, the teacher, and the LAT Facilitator wrote a whole piece together. In doing so, the LAT facilitator modeled identifying words for sentences.



Why were Cinderella's stepsisters mean to her?

An instructional strategy that some SEI teachers at the Ellis ES used to support ELL students was to provide students with a sentence-by-sentence template, with the rationale that "if we can remove one layer of things that they have to think about, they are able to show more of what they really know" (LAT facilitator).

With a prompt such as "Why were Cinderella's stepsisters mean to her?" the template gave sentence starters:

I am writing about why Cinderella's stepsisters were mean to her. One example of how Cinderella's stepsisters were mean to her was _____. I found _____ on page _____. It said "_____." Another example of how Cinderella's stepsisters were mean to her was on page _____. It said, "_____."

While some teachers were initially resistant to using the template with sentence starters, the LAT facilitator explained that students would not, as skeptical teachers predicted, come to rely on the template in a formulaic way. Providing the structure of the paragraph for the students allowed students to focus on the content of their answers rather than the organization.

They could see how I came up with words. We came up with word banks because they sometimes have a hard time figuring out which words to choose and how to create their sentences.
—LAT Facilitator

In addition to modeling writing, the LAT facilitator also modeled the revision process with each of her students by thinking aloud and revising a paragraph from the students' writing piece while the teacher and student watched. After the think-aloud, both teachers and students took responsibility for discussing the writing and continue to conference.

Assessment

After using several assessment tools, the LAT facilitator identified FASTR (Formative Assessments of Student Thinking in Reading) to predict outcomes on the MCAS ELA subject for ELL students. The SAM team trained teachers to use the FASTR and gave teachers responsibility for developing instructional strategies relevant to the target skills. Teachers might then work with a coach on a CCL cycle to develop teaching strategies. One such strategy was "Stop and Think," a step-by-step process of reading behaviors that helped build comprehension skills. In Grade 3, for example, this process was spelled out as the following steps: self-correct; pause to process meaning; re-read to consolidate meaning; adjust reading pace according to text difficulty; use word parts, prefixes, suffixes to pronounce longer words; stop/think – use context clues to figure out meaning of unknown words; and use high-frequency words accurately to gain reading momentum. Teachers charted each student's progress along this continuum of sub-skills, through a process on instruction – assessment – student feedback until students mastered the desired skill. Once the desired reading skills were attained, the scaffolding was removed. At the same time, the SAM team facilitator would work with teachers to help them reflect how their own assessments were working and to modify them in the future. This process enabled teachers and students to develop a sense of mastery as they moved along a continuum toward skill mastery.

In summary, the SAM team changed the way teachers thought about how to look at data and how to think about instructional change. This change might not have emerged organically. One team

member articulated this training as helping her to re-frame her practice for ELL success:

What patterns do you see?... What's the small thing that's very high leverage that we can focus on, and that would really give us the biggest bang for our buck? It made us think in a different way, and look at patterns within the data, and focus in on a group of kids. That was different.
—SAM team member

Theme 3: Collective Efficacy

We were all on the same page, working to make sure that they all succeeded.
—SET teacher

A Collaborative Culture Among Instructional Staff

Collective efficacy is the perception of teachers in a school that the efforts of the faculty as a whole will have a positive effect on student learning (Goddard, Hoy, & Woolfolk-Hoy, 2000). At the Ellis, collective efficacy developed slowly, almost as a conversation, first among the two coaches, then with the SAM team, and always with teachers. The SAM team was trained to include teachers as partners in school reform, which contributed to the development of a sense of collective efficacy at the school.

The SAM team members were the spokes that were starting to turn the wheels, but as the teachers now started to see the usefulness of it, then they were able to move back and operate from a distance. Just as this worked as Principal, I was able to move back and give support
—Former Principal

The SAM team also was charged with the responsibility of sharing their learning with other staff members through grade level team meetings. The structure and regularity of the SAM team meetings brought a change to teachers' practice, to focus on data, whereas in the past, data had never been systematically analyzed.

The two years of consistent thinking, meeting every week, more than once a week sometimes.... I think one of the best things about SAM was that it gave one voice to a whole group of people, and that voice was coming in clear.
—SAM team member

Another team member reflected that instead of thinking about improving student learning by content area, she began to think of the school more holistically, as a system in which learning and decision-making all affect student performance:

It's not specifically about math or literacy. It's really about the system in which those two fields have been developed for the students. We looked at our system very closely, how decisions were made, what impacted what.
—Math coach

Another role of the SAM team was to move adult conversations to a level of discomfort which signifies growth and change. A SAM team member acknowledged that sometimes the work with the rest of the staff was not easy:

We were making changes and stepping on people's toes and pushing the envelope a little bit, and bringing the conversation to a point that made a lot of people uncomfortable.
—SAM team member

An important mechanism for expanding the conversation on school improvement was the Collaborative Coaching and Learning (CCL) model (Neufeld & Roper, 2002). CCL was a professional development program available throughout the district during the study period.²⁸ CCL consisted of cycles of coaching, collaboration, and learning, facilitated by school-based coaches, or outside experts. At the Ellis, the coaches were the LAT facilitator and the math coach. Teachers found CCL extremely helpful to share and learn best practices from their colleagues. CCL provided opportunities for coaches to conduct classroom observations, to mentor teachers one-on-one, to facilitate looking-at-student-work sessions, and to share best practices with ELL students. In-service professional development of this kind took time and effort to build. Teachers were not prepared to trust coaches immediately, or to let them into their classrooms at first. However,

for those teachers who opened their classrooms, the conversation led to a sense of community and a climate of trust and collaboration at the school.

When asked to reflect on professional development that worked, teachers referred to one-on-one mentoring as a favored modality because it gave them opportunities to discuss their own practices, concretely, with a trained and trusted outsider. On their part, coaches remembered entering classrooms with an attitude of respect and inquiry. As described previously, the SAM program was predicated on the inclusion of teachers in the process of mapping student performance, setting learning goals, and following student progress, so coaching was an essential mechanism for creating teacher buy-in to SAM principles. In order to implement SAM, coaches refined the practice of asking "good" questions in order to produce the learning and change desired. This approach to teaching as inquiry, rather than judgment, was essential to gain teachers' trust. Classroom observations were prefaced with statements that clarified the role of the coach as a mirror, and not as an evaluator whose purpose was telling teachers what to do. Indeed, teachers became key partners in the school's improvement, given their privileged position to observe performance in the classroom and to identify learning issues as they emerged. Coaches, on the other hand, modeled collaboration through their work as members of the SAM team.

Coaches also supported teachers to use specific "habits of mind" or ways of approaching learning and instruction. In looking at student work during team meetings, for example, teachers were coached to ask questions such as, "What does this student know? What should this student learn next? How am I going to assess whether learning has occurred?" Once this approach to the design of instruction became normalized throughout the school, it was possible to have a common conversation, and to speak with one voice about instruction and assessment. The resulting sense of excitement and cohesion is conveyed in these teacher statements:

The level of the conversation in that room had shifted. It was just beautiful.

During that time, there was a collaborative effort between the Principal and the staff, with a common agenda.



CHAPTER

VI.

“A HAVEN FOR VIETNAMESE NEWCOMERS”: A STEADILY IMPROVING SCHOOL FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

A School Context

Excel High School is one of three small high schools located in the South Boston Educational Complex, created in SY2004 from the former South Boston High School during the district-wide effort to create smaller, more personalized high schools within Boston as a strategy for improved student achievement. In SY2009, the school served 408 students, 26% of whom were native speakers of Vietnamese and 23% of whom were students of limited English proficiency. In the school as a whole, 34.6% of students were Black, 29.2% were Asian, 18.6% were Latino, and 16.7% were White. The school is the only high school with a Vietnamese SEI program, so many newcomer Vietnamese students learning English are automatically assigned to this school, especially if they have already learned some English.²⁹ During SY2009, there were 26 full-time equivalent (FTE) staff members at Excel HS for a student-teacher ratio of 14.1 to one (BPS ratio is 12.8 to one). Four FTE teachers (15%) were teaching in ELL-related assignments. All teachers were licensed

in their assigned position and 94.3% of core classes were taught by highly qualified teachers. In terms of the racial make-up of the teaching staff, 62% of the teachers were White, 19% were Black, 15% were Asian, and 4% were Latino.³⁰ In comparison to the Boston high school population, the students at Excel HS report lower rates of eligibility for free or reduced price lunch, a proxy for family income. Excel's LEP students have higher rates of school mobility than the district average, although its English proficient students have lower rates of mobility than the district average.³¹ Given the slightly lower rates of eligibility for free or reduced price lunch compared to the district average, it is reasonable to wonder whether or not the improving MCAS outcomes of Excel HS are due to the student population being more advantaged. However, one advantage of multiple regression is that the equations controlled for the proportion of low-income students and the proportion of LEP students each year in each school. Thus, the finding that Excel HS had steadily improving outcomes for LEP students at MEPA Levels 3 and 4 included

Table 6.1. Excel High School Enrollment Defined by Native Language, English Language Proficiency, and ELL Program Participation, SY2009

Total	Native English Speaker (NES) (215) (53%)	All Excel (408)	Native Speakers of Other Languages (NSOL) (193) (47%) ^a
Language	English Proficient (EP) (316) (77%)		
Language Proficiency	NES	NSOL-EP (71) (17%)	FLEP (30) (7%)
Program Participation	Not in ELL Program (316) (77%)		English Proficient (LEP) (92) (23%) ^b
			In ELL Prog (77) (19%) ^c

^a Native speakers of Vietnamese were 54% of NSOL and native speakers of other languages were Spanish 22%, Cape Verdean 9%, Haitian Creole 6%, and Chinese 3%.
^b 9% of all LEP students are native speakers of Vietnamese.
^c 15.4% of all students have LEP students not in an ELL program.

Table 6.2. Selected Student Indicators, SY2009^a

	Excel LEP %	Excel EP %	BPS HS LEP %	BPS HS EP %
Low Income (% Eligible for free/reduced-price lunch)	87.0%	64.6%	91.6%	77.4%
Mobility (% not in the same school for October and June)	21.7%	3.2%	9.8%	8.1%
Students with Disabilities	8.7%	19.6%	14.7%	17.7%

^a LEP = Limited English Proficiency; EP = English Proficient; BPS HS = Boston Public High Schools

Table 6.3. Selected Student Outcomes, SY2009

	Number of Excel LEP Students with Data	Excel LEP %	Excel EP %	BPS HS LEP %	BPS HS EP %
Median Attendance Rate	94	95.0%	92.2%	92.5%	92.8%
Suspension Rate	92	9.8%	14.8%	2.9%	6.4%
Retained in Grade	60	13.8% ^a	9.2%	20.9%	10.3%
Dropout Rate	94	1.1% ^a	11.5%	6.6%	7.2%
Passed ELA MCAS ^b	29	93.1%	95.8%	72.6%	95.2%
Proficient in ELA MCAS		31.0%	67.6%	17.3%	72.6%
Passed Math MCAS	31	100%	87.3%	76.3%	89.7%
Proficient in Math MCAS		93.5%	60.6%	49.0%	65.6%
Passed Science MCAS		93.1%	89.2%	59.2%	82.4%
Proficient in Science MCAS	29	62.1%	35.1%	14.3%	36.7%

^a Data for this cell is n=0.

^b While case study site selection looked at MCAS proficiency in ELA and mathematics only for students at MEPA Levels 3 and 4, here the purpose is to present outcomes for the school as a whole, thus we include all test takers as well as pass and proficiency rates.

controlling for the student population; the school stood out among BPS schools taking into account its student population.

Excel EP and LEP student suspension rates were higher than the respective district high school averages. Academically, Excel LEP students posted SY2009 MCAS pass rates and proficiency rates in ELA, Math, and Science that were substantially higher than the district LEP average. Meanwhile, Excel English proficient students posted pass rates that were close to the district EP average and proficiency rates that were slightly lower than the district EP average for all subjects.

The mission of Excel HS, approved in 2007 (Renne Center, 2008), is “to foster academic achievement and creative expression. Excel HS seeks to cultivate well-rounded students who are prepared for success in college and careers, and to be productive members of a culturally diverse society” (Excel High School, 2010). According to the former Principal, the mission statement, “reflects the unconfessed priorities of Excel HS ... getting their students ready for college and careers in a culturally diverse community.” The school also has a definition of rigor in the faculty and staff handbook (Excel High School, 2010) and on the hallway walls, developed under the former Principal’s leadership. Academic rigor at Excel HS is defined as “the goal of helping students develop the capacity to understand content that is complex, ambiguous, thought-provoking, and

personal or emotionally challenging. Rigor must be found in three of the following areas: Content, instruction, and assessment. A complete rigorous experience must include: high expectations, high relevance, and appropriate support – higher student engagement and learning.” (Excel High School, 2010). High expectations are characterized by standards aligned, challenging curriculum, engagement in higher order skills, and student independence and responsibility.

8 Key Themes in Success with Educating English Language Learners

The data collected for Excel HS were analyzed to identify key practices that the stakeholders considered correlated with EL improvement during the study years. While the practices and strategies that were identified are not considered causative, due to the multiple reports from multiple sources, they were considered informative to describe in detail in this case study. We found that within the school, clearly defined leadership and a vision for EL students were prominent. Through this strong leadership and communication of the vision, curriculum and instruction were of high quality and incorporated evidence-based strategies associated with EL success. Key staff at the school promoted and implemented out-of-school time opportunities, which provided EL students with opportunities

to interact with English-fluent peers. Finally, the school culture embraced the Vietnamese students’ culture, language, and perspectives on education. These four key practices are described in more detail below:

- Leadership for EL Students
- Quality Curriculum and Instruction for EL Students
- Out-of-School Time Enrichment for EL Students
- School Culture a Safe Learning Haven for EL Students

Theme 1: Leadership for EL Students

Both the former Principal and the LAT facilitator played key roles in the improvement of EL education at Excel HS. The former Principal had a vision and plan for developing school-wide responsibility for EL students, and the LAT facilitator led its operationalization.

Principal Vision for the School

The Principal during the study period had a strong vision of all students reaching college readiness, regardless of subgroup such as EL or SPED. She was unwavering in her high expectations of student achievement, according to staff interviewed.²² Largely due to her leadership in transforming the school from a chronically underperforming school into an achieving school within a period of a few years, the school was awarded the 2007 Thomas W. Payzant “School on the Move” Prize and \$80,000. The story of the school’s turnaround is captured in a case study published the following year (Renne Center, 2008).

When the former Principal arrived at the school in SY2005, teachers of EL students worked and met separately from other teachers. After a period of “learning the school,” in which she observed and listened to the staff and students (Renne Center, 2008), she restructured the school so that all teachers were working together. Rather than have EL teachers from their own department, they joined the subject departments, thus working more closely with regular education teachers of their subject. This organization helped to shift the responsibility for the education of EL students to all teachers rather than just EL teachers. The same reorganization happened for special education teachers at the school. As a result, teachers were less isolated and collaboration increased. The former Principal articu-

lates the advantages to instruction of her vision for teacher collaboration:

The interaction of SE/IE/SL teachers, regular education teachers and special education teachers made the entire faculty and staff aware of the different cultures, learning styles, and needs that the Excel community of learners had and the impact of the way teachers teach.
 – former Principal

With this school organization, all teachers, not just SEI and ESL teachers, considered themselves responsible for EL success. One way in which the school staff became unified in its vision of high expectations was the school structure of a representative Instructional Leadership Team (ILT)²³ and subject teams, which allowed for bi-directional decision-making and communication.

I think we've been fairly successful in terms of top-down, bottom-up communication ... from the administration to the ILT to our departments (who meet during common planning time) ... to the classroom. Those policies are communicated clearly, and then any concerns that we have from the teacher and classroom go back to the CPT meetings, ILT, administration ... and school site council. So our policies are established with everyone's ideas in mind.
 – Instructional Leadership Team member

The former Principal organized the schedule so teachers would have department meetings weekly, where they “engaged purposefully with colleagues to enhance curriculum alignment and rigor, establish consistent expectations, and share ideas and strategies” (former Principal).

The former Principal also reported emphasizing data-based decision-making regarding Whole School Improvement. Collaboratively, she led staff to analyze formative and summative assessment data, prioritize areas of weakness, and set measurable annual goals. These goals were aligned with student learning objectives, which drove teacher curriculum and instruction decisions.

LAT Facilitator Operationalizing the Principal's Vision

The district has had a position called Language Assessment Team Leader since the beginning of the study period (Boston Teachers Union, 2006). The districts' current job description for this position, now called Language Acquisition Team Facilitator (LAT facilitator), includes responsibilities such as support and facilitation of teacher instruction, collaboration, and professional development for ESL and SEI implementation since the study period (Office of English Language Learners, 2010). The LAT facilitator in each building is also responsible for the school's compliance with all BPS, Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), and federal policies and administrative directions pertaining to ELL students. The LAT facilitator serves as a liaison between the district Office of English Language Learners and the school.

Excel HSS Language Acquisition Team (LAT) facilitator was an English as a Second-Language (ESL) teacher at the school starting in SY2008. She has been the LAT facilitator since SY2010, although she voluntarily performed many of the duties of the role prior to taking it on formally. During the study period, she worked collaboratively with the school's Student Development Counselor and other ESL teacher as a team during an eighteen-month period when the school did not have a designated LAT facilitator due to a retirement. At Excel HS, the LAT facilitator role is for a teacher, with a stipend and partial release from teaching. She still has teaching duties, including ESL for students at the intermediate level of English language development and French, and teaches afterschool credit recovery, art, and French courses, also for a stipend. According to the LAT facilitator, her role took much more time than was allotted through relief of prep and duties. The LAT facilitator was responsible for all aspects of English learner education from entry to exit, including student intake, assessment, ELD level assignment, course assignment and scheduling with the Student Development Counselor and Registrar, transition into mainstream, and monitoring of FLEP students. During the study period, she performed these LAT facilitator and teaching responsibilities simultaneously.

For every new LEP student who arrived at Excel, the LAT facilitator took the lead on the administrative paperwork, which included identification of an English language development (ELD) level, analysis of

data coming from the child's previous school (if any) and the newcomer assessment center, and letters for and meetings with parents. Much of this paperwork needed to be completed within 30 days of the student's entrance. The LAT facilitator was also responsible for representing the school at tri-annual meetings the BPS Office of English Language Learners to learn about new guidance and policies from the district and implement them.

ELL students were assigned English Language Development (ELD) levels based on the Massachusetts English Proficiency Assessment (MEPA, Massachusetts English Language Assessment-Oral (MELA-O), and teacher input using district guides. The Language Acquisition Team (LAT) facilitator worked with the Student Development Counselor to group ELL students according to the MEPA levels with the appropriately licensed teachers. Many ELL students at Excel HS are new arrivals to the United States and to Boston Public Schools. ELL students were grouped by MEPA level and received ESL instruction at least two hours per day. For the Spring 2009 MEPA administration, 44% of LEPs were at MEPA Level 3, 17% were at MEPA Level 4, and 31% were at MEPA Level 5. The remaining 8% were at MEPA Levels 1 and 2. Despite the fact that many ELL students at Excel HS are newcomers, there were so few students by Spring at MEPA levels 1 and 2 because according to the LAT facilitator, it is rare for a student to spend a year at Level 1. They tend to move more quickly through the first two levels. At Level 3, students spent more time (hence, the greater proportion of students at level 3) because academic, grammatically complex language emerges at that point.

During the study period, there were ESL classes at two levels. Students at the lowest MEPA levels met with their ESL teacher for three periods per day. Students at the intermediate MEPA levels met with their ESL teacher for two periods per day. The school has since added a third ESL teacher so that students are grouped into MEPA level 1, 2, and 3 with separate ESL teachers. During the study period, and at present, ESL-licensed teachers taught all of the ELL students through MEPA Level 3 and almost all of the other teachers in the building had completed 4-Category training.

ELL students were taught math and science by SEI teachers who are bilingual in English and Vietnamese and are veteran teachers at the school. Students at the higher MEPA levels took courses in

regular education. Thus, students at lower MEPA levels were separate from the rest of the school except during lunch, gym, and other specials. However, as they progressed in English proficiency to the higher MEPA levels (4 and 5), they rapidly entered regular classrooms, and in fact some moved directly to AP classes in eleventh and twelfth grades. While still learning English, these students were closely monitored in their regular and AP classes for progress in English proficiency.

As part of providing the appropriate services to each ELL student, the LAT facilitator convened meetings with school staff to adjust students' ELD levels based not only on the Massachusetts English Proficiency Assessment (MEPA) scores but also on teacher feedback and reporting. She also scheduled meetings with ELL parents and guardians each year to share ELD levels and course placements after MEPA scores are released.

As an example of the level of detailed knowledge about the students and the individual attention required, the two-year FLEP monitoring process included the following for each student:

*After each marking period, I get...
their report cards and identify any students who have a C-minus or less.
In two or more classes, or in the same class for two consecutive terms. And then I interview the teachers, to see if it's a language issue or if it's another issue, to [determine] if they have to go back into the ESL program or have some extra supports.
—LAT facilitator*

In addition to FLEP monitoring, for each marking period, the LAT facilitator also conducted a thorough monitoring of each ELL who was in a regular education class, which was most of the MEPA level 4 and 5 students. For any child who had received low grades in two or more classes, she interviewed the teachers to figure out why the student was not doing well. She also had the skills and knowledge to identify and make available the best resources and interventions for each transitioning and/or struggling child.

Clearly, one school leader knowing the academic needs of each ELL student, understanding how to change course schedules mid-term based on their needs, conducting curriculum reviews, and pulling together resources for students and teachers took

the Principal's vision to the next level, resulting in nimble and responsive school culture and instruction for each ELL student.

LAT Facilitator Providing Whole Staff Professional Development

According to the Acting Principal, one reason for the school's "story of success" is the LAT facilitator, who "knows more than you can possibly know about ELL students and is a trainer herself." As an in-house professional developer, she conducted full-staff professional development during the study period, which built the capacity of all teachers, not just the ELL teachers, to meet the needs of ELL students in their classrooms. Two examples of professional development offered during the study years were 4-Category and language objectives training.

4-Category Training. The former Principal had a long-term vision of building capacity among all of the school's adults, rather than a small group of teachers and administrators, to teach ELL students. Therefore, she ensured that each year all staff would receive ELL-related professional development. During the study period, the LAT facilitator provided training for the school staff to shelter content instruction for ELL students. This in-house Category training (Categories 1, 3, and 4) made it possible for the LAT facilitator to tailor the professional development offering based on what she knew about the student population and teachers' commitment.

*The Category training was key for dealing with ELL students. The best training was with the LAT facilitator, because she knows us and she knows the school. This school was ahead of the curve relative to other BPS schools because the old Principal pushed training the whole school. They all felt in it together.
—ELL teacher*

The push for 4-Category training came from the former Principal. The whole staff felt "in it" together, and they were proud to be "ahead of the curve." According to the former Principal, almost 100% of the staff was 4-Category trained by the end of the study period.

Language Objectives Training. The impetus for a focus on language objectives in all classrooms came both from the district and from the school's



SLOP Lesson Planning: Examples of Language Objectives

On the Wiki site, resources compiled from external sources were placed for teachers to access and use. This one page document, prepared by Professor Elke Schneider, adapted from a SLOP handbook, and shortened here, was included (Schneider, 2007). Adapted from Echvarria, J, Short, D., & Vogt, M. (2008). *Implementing the SLOP Model through effective professional development and coaching*. Columbus, OH: Pearson. (p. 148)

LANGUAGE OBJECTIVES	Examples of appropriate LANGUAGE SUPPORT
LISTENING <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Comprehend text content Comprehend content vocabulary Comprehend idiomatic expressions Comprehend multiple step instructions Use knowledge of base words Express preferences, interests 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explicitly identify strategies to model for ELL students to be successful in listening comprehension Clearly identify what type of practice ELL students might get before being engaged in listening comprehension, use of knowledge base words, etc.
READING <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Describe ... using precise vocabulary Identify the main/the antagonist Orally defend a position Predict Summarize the findings State the author's/your purpose Practice agreeing/disagreeing Compare Give multiple-step instructions Share personal experiences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Preteach vocabulary using content, providing actions, visuals, and graphics Provide 2-3 sentence structures that are used frequently when predicting, defending a position, expression an opinion, comparisons, giving instructions, interrupting politely, summarizing. e.g.: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>The author seems to tell us...</i> <i>Sorry, I disagree. I think... because</i> <i>Overall, the text made... points: first... second... third...</i> Gradually increase the complexity of such language phrase grids after the student demonstrates comfort with the simpler expressions Teach explicitly how to compose a summary (highlighting keywords)
READING <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read letter/text out loud/silently Read abbreviations Participate in choral reading Recognize prefixes, roots, suffixes and their meaning Understand/interpret graphic organizer and other visual cues Rely on personal experience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Avoid read-aloud tasks, replace with choral reading Teach abbreviations explicitly Model how to interpret graphic organizers, let students demonstrate understanding of them by creating their own Cultures differ in how they process information: a circular thinking culture will find it easier to understand circular graphics Teach explicitly how to identify prefixes, roots, and suffixes in words Teach frequent sentence and tense structures for different genre
WRITING <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Share personal experiences Predict Take notes Complete graphic organizer Express preferences, interests Defend a position in writing Paraphrase Summarize State the author's/your purpose Record observations Enter ideas in a journal Create a list of Ask/answer questions Practice agreeing/disagreeing Compare 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduce expectations of complexity of sentence structures, focus on meaning first and then model the use of more complex sentences as ELL CAUSAL STATEMENT: BEGINNER <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>..... because</i> <i>The Consequently,</i> <i>There is a reason for this. The.....</i> <i>Due to.....</i> As a consequence/result of..... <p>CAUSAL STATEMENT: ADVANCED</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explicitly model and practice note-taking with ELL students beginning with a simple, then a more complex process. Explicitly teach/model compare and contrast statements Teach frequent sentence and tense structures for different genre (e.g., math book/tasks, science book chapters)

As a result of both the top-down mandate from the district and the buy-in from the staff, the LAT facilitator conducted professional development for each department team during one common planning time session on incorporating language objectives into each lesson in SY2009. This meeting included differentiating language objectives from content objectives, a brief description of Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SLOP) Model, and examples of content-specific language objectives. SLOP is a widely used resource for the SEI approach to educating ELL students (Echvarria, Vogt, & Short, 2004). There was also a hands-on element of the session. During the meeting, each teacher revised an upcoming lesson plan to include language objectives, while the LAT facilitator provided assistance. A school-wide expectation that all teachers would post learning objectives on their whiteboards was made clear. The Principal and subsequently the Acting Principal provided feedback on whether the teachers' language objectives met expectations during regular observations.

The LAT facilitator has since supported this professional development by posting a Wiki site (website) for staff which includes resources such as sample language objectives, articles about teaching ELL students, and lesson plan examples. As a result of both the district and school mandates to incorporate language objectives and the teacher teams' investment in learning about language objectives, almost all classes had daily language objectives posted on whiteboards, and most teachers explicitly taught the language objectives during the observations. One member of the LT noted that being able to decide how to address the directive from the district through in-house professional development was key to buy-in for the change. Now, staff from each content area supports the ELL students. The content area teachers all focus on language, vocabulary, and speaking" (ELL teacher).

Theme 2: Quality Curriculum and Instruction for ELL Students

The ESL teaching is of high quality, incorporates multiple observable research-based strategies, and is aligned with the regular education ELA curriculum.

Alignment of ESL and ELA Curriculum

The former Principal initiated a curriculum review and renewal that involved the district and the school. The LAT facilitator, in collaboration with another ESL teacher and a staff person from the Office of English Language Learners at Boston Public Schools (BPS) central office started with the BPS ESL curriculum, the state's English Language Proficiency Benchmarks and Outcomes (ELPBO), and the BPS ninth grade ELA curriculum. As a result, according to the ESL teachers, students in the ESL classes at Excel HS were taught to integrate language, content, and higher order thinking skills through reading a variety of texts and writing complex essays, skills that are much more in line with expectations in the ELA curriculum.

In order to prepare students to transition to mainstream classes, and as a result if the curriculum alignment, the ESL 3 students read some of the same texts that the Grade 9 ELA students read, such as Farwell to Manzanar, Animal Farm, and Of Mice and Men. Modifications for ELL students included reading different versions of texts, such as shorter sections or graphic novels, and allowing more time to read one novel. While ESL student read original texts as well, these units provided ESL students with the opportunity to interact with their English proficient peers in meaningful ways focused on academic content.

The ELA and ESL departments worked together to align the curricula so that they feed into each other. There is less differentiation for the students as they move from ESL to ELA. Now, the ESL curriculum uses more literary texts, and has the students do more analysis and essay writing. For example, in ESL 1, they are reading a graphic novel version of Romeo and Juliet – ELL teacher

In ESL 3, the curriculum was clearly aligned to both the ELA standards and the state's English Language Proficiency Benchmarks and Outcomes (ELPBO) for students who are limited English proficient. For example, by the end of ESL 3, students write literary essays that compare and contrast two works of similar themes, essays that include an introduction, thesis statement, appropriate evidence, and a conclusion. The expectations for analysis, evidence, voice, and grammar were the same as those for students in ELA classes (ESL 3 Course Description).

The curriculum alignment between ESL and ELA meant that students were reading the same novels. Therefore, the ESL and ELA teachers were able to collaborate to have the students conduct final projects across classes. For example, in a Lord of the Flies unit, groups of students from ESL and ELA classes created an anti-bullying movie together. The ESL students wrote the script, the ELA students edited and performed the parts, and the ESL students edited the video. The LAT facilitator commented, "They can get to know their peers in the mainstream, because, after me, they'll be in the mainstream with them." Through this type of collaboration, the transition for students from ESL to ELA is smoother because of peer interactions and familiarity with content and skills standards.

The formal curriculum alignment was done between ESL 3 and ninth grade. According to the LAT facilitator, "since all EL students at Excel move from ESL 1 to ESL 3 before being mainstreamed in the tenth, eleventh, or twelfth grade, exposing them to the ninth grade ELA curriculum would guarantee that they shared some academic/literary background with their eventual ELA classmates." In the ESL 1 and ESL 2 curricula, students read some texts from the ELA curriculum, such as Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde and Romeo and Juliet. However, the formal curriculum alignment for those levels has not been done.

ESL Instructional Strategies

The former Principal also had "an unwavering focus on quality instruction" which she implemented through "frequent formal and informal classroom observations" (Rennie Center, 2008). Through our case study data collection, in which 16 classroom observations were conducted in Spring 2011, we noted that instructional strategies for EL students were prominent in most classrooms, including SEI classrooms predominantly for EL students and general education/special education classrooms

with very few EL students.³⁴ While the instructional strategies varied depending on the subject and teacher, researchers observed some consistent practices, particularly among teachers of EL students who had all been at the school during the study years (but not exclusive to these teachers). These practices, which were likely in place during the study period and were observed in SY2011, are described next:

One instructional strategy that facilitates acquisition of English fluency is the intentional construction of opportunities for students to communicate in English through working in pairs and small groups. We observed this practice both in classrooms with all EL students and in non-SEI program classrooms. In an Advanced Placement ELA and composition class, taught by a veteran Excel HS teacher, which included several students who had recently earned a FLEP designation, students worked in consistent teams for a whole term. On the day of the observation, teams were preparing answers to a list of teacher-generated questions about several related texts. It was clear that each student had a role (facilitator, note-taker, reporter), although those roles seemed fluid enough that students could get the assignment done in a short amount of time. There was a culture of listening and patience with EL students in these small groups, since they spoke

more slowly and hesitantly than native English speakers, not necessarily about the content of the work but about expressing themselves. During the whole-class discussion of the team-generated responses, the teacher strategically called on FLEP students to share their thinking. Through this and other observations, it was clear that students at higher MEPA levels and FLEP students, who are in mainstream classes, are taught by teachers skilled at incorporating best practices to support language learning. Multiple teachers of EL students discussed their strategic grouping of students as a way to address the learning needs of students at different English proficiency levels: "I always use heterogeneous grouping and have the students sit in mixed groups" (ELL teacher).

One strategy was discussed by teachers as having been practiced during the study period as well as observed during the site visit in SY2011. All teachers explicitly taught academic vocabulary. EL teachers but also regular education teachers. For example, a science teacher, whose class was more than half EL students and recent FLEP students, suggested that the content that he was teaching is

"almost like learning a new language, with a massive amount of vocabulary. So my classes with [ELL students] are the same" as for native English speakers. He acknowledged that native English speakers might have more familiarity with root words than EL students, demonstrating an awareness of academic language development needs of EL students. Using that awareness, he differentiated on an individual basis for his students. When this teacher heard students speaking Vietnamese in his class, he asked what they were talking about. If there was an explanation needed, he did so in English.

Theme 3: Out-of-School Time Enrichment Opportunities with English Practice

The EL staff nurture partnerships for out-of-school time opportunities and encourage EL students to take advantage of these opportunities, as participate these programs forces students to speak English with native English speakers.

Afterschool Academic Clubs

During her tenure at Excel HS, the former Principal led the creation of seventeen afterschool clubs run by teachers who received a stipend for their work. Many of the EL teachers interviewed remained in the school after the school day ended to run afterschool clubs and classes for EL students. Some of the offerings included a homework club, MCAS preparation classes, and enrichment opportunities such as art, robotics, and debate. One of the EL teachers ran the homework club, in which struggling students received extra help. He said that their problems were mostly about "understanding the context behind a problem, rather than the content." He used the time to help explain the context to students.

The Principal during the study period deliberately focused on MCAS proficiency and started afterschool offerings devoted to MCAS preparation, which continue today. Afterschool MCAS classes were divided into those for English proficient students and students with high MEPA levels and those for EL students at lower MEPA levels, allowing teachers to tailor instruction. They were offered two days a week for 90 minutes each from January to March. About one third of the students who chose to attend these classes were EL students, which is a higher proportion than the overall student population. Some EL students asked permission to attend both MCAS preparation classes. Teachers also offered afterschool credit

recovery programs so students would not have to go to summer school.

Summer Opportunities

Many adults in the building, including the Student Development Counselor, the career specialist from the Private Industry Council (PIC), and the LAT facilitator talked explicitly about the need for EL students to "take advantage of out-of-school time opportunities because they force students to practice speaking English, whereas staying at home and in school does not." The staff talked about the loss of English proficiency during the summer due to EL students spending most of their time with Vietnamese speakers and the lack of exposure to native English speakers (PIC career specialist). The educators have seen the results of their aggressive attempts to immerse students in English speaking environments over the summer:

We generally don't let the kid leave in June without giving us proof of some kind of study. And we've seen them... come back in September, start in one classroom, and realize, "Oh, he really learned a lot of English over the summer." It's common.
—LAT facilitator

Through the PIC career specialist, the school has established partnerships with entities like the Federal Reserve, Bank of America, and Sovereign Bank, as well as local higher education programs such as Emerson Writers' Program, Tufts Medical Center internship program, SummerSearch, and Harvard Refugee Youth Summer Enrichment program. Two popular programs for Excel EL students have been Urban Scholars and Outward Bound at Ulmoss Boston. During the study period, the Student Development Counselor visited ESL classes and convened assemblies in the auditorium to announce these summer opportunities to students, strategically targeting EL students. The PIC career specialist and LAT facilitator followed up with emails to students and family members for whom they had email addresses. The Student Development Counselor also counseled students and supported the application process. In addition, the LAT facilitator emailed students and parents about these opportunities as they arrived. These programs varied in their offerings. Some had an academic component, such as SAT language, and tutoring support, while others focused on the work setting. A couple of programs

also brought in guest speakers and supported students with college essay writing. However, what all of these programs had in common was that they forced students to be with “just English speakers, to learn English better” (LAT facilitator).

Theme 4: School Culture a Safe Learning Haven for ELL Students

The Vietnamese ELL students, most of whom immigrated in their teens, feel comfort in having Vietnamese peers and teachers around them during their transition to this country, who have common experiences and language.

Students Able to Use First Language and Be Understood

Recent graduates of Excel HS described their experience as “late entry” ELL students, meaning they arrived in this country in their early teens. Most of the Vietnamese students at Excel HS are late entry ELL, and therefore they are placed in the Vietnamese SEI program at the school. These students received their elementary education in Vietnam, where alumni reported the math and science that they learned was typically at a higher level than what American students receive. However, they struggled with the culture and language shock, and with learning English rapidly enough to graduate from high school and go to college.

The graduates we interviewed appreciated the Excel HS experience, partly because they were around students who had gone through the same transition. They shared common experiences and language. The structure of the courses was that the early MEPA level students spent most of their school day together, where they could speak Vietnamese together between classes and for clarification in class. In addition, the school has two Vietnamese teachers who not only speak their language but also understand their home cultures.

When I first came here, I was ... so lost. I don't (sic) speak English and everyone keeps staring at me. And I think the program helps by putting us in an environment where we can still speak our own language, but learning (sic) English at the same time, too. So it's probably (making the transition) ... a little smoother.... So I think ... we have the Vietnamese teachers over here and they understand how that feeling was, because they experienced that too. So they understand what we've been through.
—Alumnus

Like the LAT facilitator, the two Vietnamese teachers performed many roles in the school outside of their teaching responsibilities. They translated documents for Vietnamese families, they made calls home when the school needed to communicate with a family member in Vietnamese, and they even planned and facilitated professional development to build teachers' cultural competence in SY2008 (see below). The Vietnamese teachers knew the families well enough that “they know that they have to call [one family] at 10pm on the cell phone, or this one at work at 8am” (LAT facilitator). When Vietnamese students failed the MCAS, these teachers called home to explain the results and tell families about afterschool opportunities for preparation.

High Academic Expectations

Both the school and the families of ELL students have high academic expectations for their ELL students. In alignment with the mission and consistent message from leadership, the former Principal deliberately increased emphasis on providing more opportunities for students to take demanding courses, including Engineering, AP and Honors classes. The goal was always to prepare students for college and career, and to position them to be eligible for scholarships to college.

In Vietnam, teachers have a high social status, higher than the parent. Education is revered, “something to take seriously, not take for granted” (LAT facilitator). Similarly, Vietnamese immigrant parents and family members expected Excel HS teachers to push and motivate students to do well. Therefore, parents reported an adjustment to the lower level and amount of school work that students must complete. Some ELL students come to the United States accustomed to school seven days a week, and 12-13 subjects per year, so when they came here, “the work load is reduced by half” compared to Vietnam (Parent). The parents interviewed said that at first, when their students came to Excel HS, they thought the work was “too easy” and that their children “didn't have to study as hard” as in Vietnam, which made them skeptical of the quality of the education. They said that their children spent more time relaxing on the computer, and out with friends than possible in Vietnam. However, they said that they came to understand the opportunities and rigor of the Excel HS education over time.

One explanatory factor for the high ELL math achievement at Excel HS is that the material in US high school math is redundant to what Vietnamese students learned by the end of middle school in Vietnam. Therefore, as one alumnus explained, “The difficulty level... of what twelfth graders have to study over here is only the same level as a ninth grader in Vietnam.” Without the need to learn more content in science and math, the students had more time and energy to spend on learning English.

Many Vietnamese ELL students absorbed their families' high academic expectations. Teachers and guidance counselors described the ELL students as “hardworking, focused, and disciplined.” They said that the ELL students had great attendance and were “aggressive (in a good way) about moving up in their [ESL] classes” (Student Development Counselor).

Teachers' Appreciation of ELL Students' Background and Experiences

While only two staff members in the school are Vietnamese, the teaching staff at the school displays cultural competence in its respect for Vietnamese culture, students, and families. In addition, according to the former Principal, the majority were immigrants and spoke a language besides English. Teachers showed interest in and awareness of students' culture, particularly their academic experiences. Many of the teachers interviewed described individual interactions with students, where they learned about ELL students' backgrounds, like how much math they had learned before they came to the states, their religions, their families' attitudes toward education, typical Vietnamese parent-child relationships, typical Vietnamese teacher-student relationships, the difference between rural and urban education in Vietnam, and views on the Vietnam War. One ITT teacher said, “The students are wonderful teachers about their culture.” Clearly, teachers demonstrated curiosity and appreciation for their students' experiences and viewpoints. Alumni students talked about how accessible and welcoming teachers were:

Teachers here, especially the ESL teachers, [are] really helpful, and they're willing to stay after school.... If you have any questions, and it's not really about schooling, but if you have a problem at home you can also talk to them. In Vietnam, the relationship between a teacher and a student is really strict.... We really don't communicate at all. But here, they're more like our friends instead of teachers, so it's easier to talk to them if you have any questions.
—Alumnus



**Excerpt from Cultural Competence Workshop:
Student Generated Teaching Tips for ELL Students
(Vaché, 2008)**

What advice do you have for mainstream education teachers who have FLEPs in their classes?

- They should call on them more and check for understanding.
- They may not adapt to the new culture, so take time to explain it to them.
- Offer after school help.
- Encourage them to speak more. Tell them that the more they practice the better their English will be.
- Go easy on the first two semesters in terms of grammar because they are new. This will give them confidence that they can do it.
- Give them extra homework such as vocabulary worksheets.

Teachers understood that family engagement looks different in the Vietnamese culture. While American educators believe that family engagement includes attendance at school events, helping the student with homework, and communicating with teachers, Vietnamese culture and immigrant circumstances here in the US meant that family engagement looked very different. Many students do not necessarily live with their parents, and the adults in their lives typically work several jobs during all hours of the day. Many of these adults have limited English proficiency themselves. Both the LAT facilitator and the Vietnamese teachers knew details about each student, such as which family members spoke English, which used email, and the best times of day to call family members.

Besides knowing students' personal situations and something about the Vietnamese culture, the school also placed value on professional development that helped teachers learn more about the Vietnamese traditions and family expectations and understand the experiences of the Vietnamese students as teen immigrants and language learners. This two-part professional development workshop, which occurred during the study period, included presentations by the Vietnamese teachers themselves and then by the EL teachers, led by the LAT facilitator. The staff experienced being taught in French and Mandarin, to put themselves in the position of hearing a lecture in a foreign language. They also learned about the theory of academic and social language acquisition, understood the school's ESL curriculum, and examined sample student work at different MEPA levels. The cultural competence professional development included student-generated tips for teachers about how to integrate ELL students with native English speakers, how to support ELL students and FEP students in regular classes, common cultural assumptions and issues, and best ELL instructional strategies.



**Excerpt from Cultural Competence Workshop:
Common Grammar Mistakes (Vaché, 2008)**

For one part of the workshop, teachers focused on learning about language acquisition. Teachers received written examples of common grammar mistakes that Vietnamese students make. They were encouraged to identify these mistakes when students made them. Researchers observed these corrections being made in ESL classes.

GRAMMAR STRUCTURE	Language Transfer Issues for Native Speakers of Vietnamese	Sample Transfer Error
present and past perfect	Avoidance of present perfect where it should be used.	I live here for two years.
irregular past participles	Omission of helping verb be in passive voice.	The food finished.
present continuous	No distinction between count and non-count nouns	I eat cereals for breakfast.
regular nouns: count, non-count and collective	Omission of plural marker -s, a few/few, a little/little, too much	I have a few book.
relative pronouns	No relative pronouns	Look at the backpack is on the floor. = Look at the backpack which is on the floor.
interrogative pronouns: who, what, when, which, how + clauses in object positions	Omission of relative pronouns	My grandfather was a generous man helped everyone.

C Conclusions and Lessons for Other Schools

Case studies have the advantages of providing multiple perspectives on a context or organization, rich description of practice, and information for discussion and learning. The story of Excel HS is unique to Excel HS, not only because it is the only high school in the district with a Vietnamese SEI program, but also because of its history, players, and circumstances. This case study described the following practices that may be “tried on” by other schools through adaptation and refinement to their own contexts.

School leadership had both long-term vision and implementation capacity

The groundwork for the school’s success for ELL students took leadership with a clear mission and vision and the capacity to hire staff who are aligned with the mission and vision. The adult culture in the building is one of teamwork and collaboration. While the LAT facilitator herself exhibited responsibility for all ELL students in the building, she also led the school faculty in learning the practices necessary at the classroom level to ensure ELL success through professional development in category training, language objectives training, and learning about Vietnamese culture and language acquisition. Implications of these findings for school leaders include:

- The patience and planning it takes to build the buy-in for a culture of high academic expectations
- Staffing that can take on the multiple roles that an LAT facilitator plays, especially when she is also a teacher
- Qualified ELL and SEI teachers, not necessarily of the same cultural background as the students
- Commitment to professional development structures and time to build teacher capacity

There was a relentless focus on high-quality instructional practices and support for teachers to use them

The interviews provided a lens into ELL instruction, and the observations confirmed what the teachers said about the thought put into developing curriculum and the consistency of instruction across classrooms. Given the approximate three-year trajectory between their Vietnamese students’ entrance to American schools and mainstream classrooms, the staff paid close attention to a smooth transition by exposing ELL students to native English speakers and regular curriculum throughout their ELL careers. In addition, they used evidence-based classroom strategies such as variety of teaching modes, student groupings across English proficiency levels, materials, and assessments to ensure language acquisition. This school’s consistent implementation of high-quality curriculum and instructional practices for ELL students has implications for other schools:

- The need for ELA standards aligned ELL curriculum and the support and resources for teachers to use it
- The dedicated meeting time during the school day for teacher teams to work collaboratively on instructional improvement

Teachers provided multiple opportunities to acquire English proficiency in reading, writing, speaking, and listening

In addition to teachers, school staff such as the guidance counselor and the career specialist paid close attention to the choices of ELL students in their out-of-school time. The Principal developed an array of opportunities after school that are still running, which provide academic support as well as opportunities to interact with English fluent peers beyond the school day. Teachers also ensure that students avail themselves of summer opportunities, since they are aware of the learning loss that takes place when ELL students stay in their own language isolated communities. Implications of these findings include:

- Resources for teachers to design and conduct afterschool clubs and activities as enrichment for ELL students

- The staff or networking capacity that identifies summer learning opportunities that are of interest to ELL students
- Recruitment strategies to ensure that more ELL and other students pursue out-of-school time learning opportunities

The school staff demonstrated respect for and understanding of ELL students’ culture and language

The school staff, while almost exclusively non-Vietnamese, have prioritized and devoted a great deal of time to professional development that supports ELL learning. In addition, staff have the attitude of respect for and interest in their ELL students’ culture. Not only do they engage students in conversations about their traditions and families’ expectations, they also ask for their advice on how best to teach ELL students.

As an SEI Language Specific school, Excel HS has the advantage of being a haven for Vietnamese newcomers, who can translate for each other and share stories about their transitions. Their similar experiences in the Vietnamese education system include a reverence for teachers and the opportunities that education provides. Given the strong science and math background knowledge that most Vietnamese ELL students come to the US with, their focus in school is on the acquisition of English, which may explain some of their success. However, their rapid acquisition of English and their improved attainment of NCLAS proficiency in ELA suggest that the school has created an excellent educational experience that bears out in the case study. The climate of embracing its newcomer students has implications for other schools:

- SEI Language Specific programs may have an advantage over SEI Multilingual programs because they focus more resources on understanding one culture and language
- An SEI Language Specific program, implemented with quality, allows students and teachers to use L1 strategically without hindering the acquisition of English
- In the case of Excel HS, it appeared that the staff’s welcoming and learning attitude toward the ELL students and their culture and language mitigated the fact that the staff of the school did not reflect the major ELL ethnic group

- Understanding the major language groups and their educational expectations, both from the families and of the schools, is important to tailoring SEI programs to student needs.

- More research should be conducted to understand the experiences of ELL students in an SEI Language Specific program school who are not from the dominant ELL language group.

In summary, this case study of Excel HS illustrates the key elements in one school’s journey of improving the learning of its ELL students. The vision, commitment, and hard work, led by strong leaders who put structures in place that facilitated the improved culture and instruction in the school, resulted in the school being identified as the one of two high schools in Boston showing steady improvement with its ELL students.

²⁹ Other newcomers attend BHS’s Newcomer Academy.

³⁰ The data on teacher qualifications come from the MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/state_report/teacherdata.aspx).

³¹ Further research on the mobility of LEP students is necessary to determine the cause of this unusually high rate and was beyond the scope of this study.

³² The Principal during the study period was promoted in SY2011 to a central office role, and an interim Principal was placed at the school for one year. Since the data were collected for this case study, a new permanent Principal has begun her leadership there. This Principal will preside over a larger high school which combines Excel HS with Monument HS, which shares the building.

³³ An Instructional Leadership Team is a representative body of school staff that meets regularly during the school year to facilitate communication and decision-making school-wide.

³⁴ For an explanation of the timing of the case study (SY2011) compared to the study years (SY2006–SY2009), see the Appendix with Methods.



CHAPTER

VII.

BEST PRACTICES FROM ELL CASE STUDY SCHOOLS IN BOSTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

A Summary of Study

The multiple regression analysis identified two schools that were consistently high performing and two schools that were steadily improving in their ELL LMCAS pass rates for students of intermediate to advanced English proficiency during the study years. The case study schools represented three

of BPS's five major home languages other than English: Spanish, Chinese, and Vietnamese. Three of the four schools represented one program type, SEI Language Specific, while the other one had developed a unique program type adapted from the Two-Way Bilingual program model. All four of the schools enrolled a higher proportion of LEP students than the district average (20%).

Josiah Quiny Elementary School is a K-5 elementary school located in Chinatown, close to the center of Boston. During SY2009, the school served 829 students: 60% were native speakers of Chinese dialects and 46% were students of limited English proficiency (LEP students). In the school as a whole, 64% of students were Asian, 13% were Black, 13% were Latino, and 8% were White. The school is one of two BPS elementary schools with a Chinese-specific SEI program for LEP students. Quiny Elementary is and has been for many years a community school based in the Boston Chinese community. Chinese culture and language are integral to school programs. For example, in the course of study, all students take Mandarin as a specialty class (similar to art and physical education) and throughout the school, Chinese history and culture are visible in the displays of student projects.

Sarah Greenwood K-8 School is a pre-K-8 school located in Dorchester. During SY2009, the school served 390 students: 55% were native speakers of Spanish and 43% were students of limited English proficiency (LEP students). In the school as a whole, 67% of students were Latino, 29% were Black, and 2% each were White or Multiracial. The school is one of three BPS schools categorized by Two-Way Bilingual programs. The Sarah Greenwood occupies a well-maintained brick building dating back to the turn of the twentieth century. The neighborhood where the school is located is largely African-American. Currently, the school has a high concentration of ELL students, who account for 60% of the student body.

David Ellis Elementary School is a K-5 elementary school located in the Roxbury section of Boston. During SY2009, the school served 328 students: 35% were native speakers of Spanish and 40% were students of limited English proficiency (LEP students). In the school as a whole, 55.5% of students were Latino, 40.5% were Black, 2% were White, and 2% were multiracial, Asian, or Native American. The school is one of 34 BPS schools with a Spanish-specific SEI program for LEP students.

Excel High School served 400 students in Grades 9-12 in SY2009. During the study period, it was one of three small high schools housed in the South Boston Educational Complex. The high school has a Vietnamese SEI program that serves 77 students. All ELL students are placed in ESL classes for two to three hours per day, where they are taught by native English speaking, experienced ESL-licensed teachers. One of the ESL teachers is also the school's LAT Facilitator. She provided in-house full staff professional development on cultural competency, 4-category training, and language objectives. The ESL and ELA curriculum have been aligned.

Table 7.1. Summary of Case Study Schools, SY2008

	Grades	Reason for Case Study	ELL Program Type	Major Home Language	% LEP	% Low Income
Josiah Quincy Elementary School	K-5	Consistently High Performing	SEL Language Specific	Chinese dialects	46%	79%
Sarah Greenwood K-8 School	K-8 (K-5 in case study)	Consistently High Performing	Two-Way Bilingual	Spanish	43%	90%
David Ellis Elementary School	K-5	Steadily Improving	SEL Language Specific	Spanish	29%	97%
Excel High School	9-12	Steadily Improving	SEL Language Specific	Vietnamese	23%	70%

We note that the companion study, *Improving Educational Outcomes of English Language Learners in Schools and Programs in Boston*

Public Schools examined the MCAS outcomes by ELL program type across the district and found that the two-Way Bilingual Program schools and Transitional Bilingual Education Program schools had the highest LEP student pass rates. The SEL Language Specific programs did not emerge as having high pass rates in the companion study. However, three out of the four case study schools have language specific programs. There are two explanations for the seemingly inconsistent findings. First, since SEL Language Specific program schools enroll 77% of all LEP students in ELL programs, the strong outcomes of three of these schools would not have been identified using descriptive statistics. Second, the multiple regression analysis in the present study used a more stringent cut than the companion study – MCAS proficiency of MEPA Level 3 and 4 students rather than MCAS pass rates of all LEP students.

In the findings section of this chapter, we review each case study's findings in light of the others to identify key practices which may inform teachers and administrators in other schools. Some of these practices have been found by scholars to be linked to improved student outcomes. Other practices emerged from the case studies that were not identified in the literature-based framework for best ELL practices; they present opportunities for future study.

8 Best ELL Practices from Case Study Schools

In this section, we present a synthesis of our analysis of the four case studies, which is guided by the ELL best practices framework developed from our literature review. However, we prioritize the stories which the schools conveyed over the framework headers. Therefore, because the stories from the schools did not strictly follow the framework focus areas as shown in Appendix 2, the following analysis does not either. The analysis is organized by four categories that move from the guiding vision to structures and process and finally to the classroom, the core of student learning.

1. Mission, Vision, and Leadership
2. School Organization for ELL Teaching and Learning
3. School Culture and Climate
4. Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment

We note that while Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment is no less important than the other categories, the time delay between the data used to identify the schools and the site visits necessitated a more conservative approach to interpretation of our data on classroom practice.

Mission, Vision, and Leadership

The term "vision" refers to a core set of shared beliefs that reflect an individual's or an organization's values about what matters in education. A "mission" is a brief written statement of the school's belief systems that serves as a reminder of the big picture – what matters in the long run. Ideally, from time to time, schools engage in elucidating a shared mission and vision as part of their strategic planning, and in order to keep staff working effectively to attain a set of shared values. As school leaders, principals play a key role in the development and enactment of a school's mission and vision.

School Missions

Data on mission and vision were collected from the schools' SY2006-SY2009 mission statements, from interviews and statements made by the Principals leading the schools during that period, as well as from school staff during the school visits in spring 2011. The four mission statements from the case study schools are as follows:

Josiah Quincy Elementary School: "We seek to provide a challenging academic program that gives all students the means to meet high standards and achieve their best, to foster sound habits of mind and action, and to instill in our students such virtues as integrity, respect and self-discipline."

Sarah Greenwood Elementary School: "To make our school a safe learning environment and to allow our students to grow in directions that will educate and prepare them for life. We seek to produce literate and socially healthy students who are valuable to the community and the world. We view each child as an individual in a holistic manner. Each child can and will learn. As professionals, our mission is to open our hearts and minds, to work together as a cooperative team, and to promote parent and community collaboration."

David A. Ellis Elementary School: "The David A. Ellis community – students, staff, parents, neighborhoods, community organizations, and university and business partners – will provide an effective and enriched education in a safe and supportive environment focused on strong skill development and preparation for productive and responsible membership in society."

Excel High School: "The mission of Excel HS is to

foster academic achievement and creative expressions. Excel HS seeks to cultivate well-rounded students who are prepared for success in college and careers, and to be productive members of a culturally diverse society."

As these mission statements clearly show, all four schools seek to prepare students for life beyond the K-12 experience, with the understanding that academic achievement is an important asset for becoming a productive member of society. Beyond that, all schools recognized that to attain high academic performance, school staff must educate the whole child, and promote social, physical, and creative development. While the four schools were identified based largely on the MCAS performance of their ELL students of intermediate and advanced English proficiency, from these mission statements it is clear that academic achievement means much more than the results from standardized testing.

Principals' Strategic Communication of Vision for ELL Student Success

The four case study school Principals during the study period all communicated their visions not only through the written missions and verbally, but also by modeling behaviors and attitudes that they expected teachers to adopt. By asking probing questions of the staff that encouraged reflection, and by establishing respect for their authority. At two schools, faculty spoke specifically about ways in which their Principals changed teachers' beliefs about ELL students' ability to succeed. At the Sarah Greenwood, the Principal consciously modeled how she wanted teachers to interact with ELL students who were not conforming to their behavior norms by modeling curiosity about what may be causing those behaviors rather than adopting a judgmental attitude. She also facilitated teacher study groups so that the meetings could be a forum for communicating her vision for ELL students. One institutional coach at the Ellis School described the need to build high expectations for ELL students:

The idea that if you don't have the language – or that if you speak a different language – you can't think, was something that we had to challenge very early on.
 –Math coach, Ellis ES

Other than through personal interactions, all four Principals believed that teacher collaboration and expertise was the key to making high academic expectations of ELL students a reality. For example, each school had an Instructional Leadership Team with representation from the ELL teams on them. As a result of their strong visions, not only did the Principals communicate and model their visions, but they also created the space for teachers and other staff in the schools to do so as well. During the interviews, when asked about the possible explanations for their success with ELL education, many teachers in each school used terms such as “speaking with one voice” and “being on the same page” when referring to the attitude and stance of the faculty toward ELL education. Teachers at one school, the Sarah Greenwood, demonstrated their unified vision for ELL and non-ELL students alike by the mantra, “All students are language learners.” The school also reorganized so that there was no distinction between classrooms – all classrooms had equal proportions of ELL students and native English speakers. This stance and organization of classrooms reinforced the notion that therefore, all learners are ELL teachers and must have the strategies in place to teach them effectively. In the other schools, while there were distinct SEI program classrooms, all teachers taught intermediate to advanced English proficient ELL students and therefore considered themselves teachers of ELL students.

The four case study schools exemplified the strong research evidence that when principals communicate a clear vision of high expectations and learning outcomes, ELL achievement improves. The practices most associated with high performing schools included the principal having and communicating a clear vision for ELL education, using state academic standards as a guide, and having high academic expectations (Williams et al., 2007). Confirming the specific findings about vision, the case studies revealed that all four Principals communicated clear visions for ELL education, which included high expectations for meeting measurable academic learning outcomes. Those academic goals were the same for ELL students as for English proficient students and included meeting the state standards for English language proficiency benchmarks and proficiency on the state standardized tests, the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System. In addition, all four Principals distributed responsibility for ELL achievement beyond their ELL staff. The distributed leadership increased the chances that changes in ELL practice would be sustained over time, beyond the tenure of the Principals themselves.

Principals’ Visions Shaped by Shared Experiences as English Language Learners

All four Principals⁷ reported being actively recruited to their respective schools either to turn around a failing school or to improve ELL outcomes. All four shared similar life experiences that shaped their vision for ELL students. All four were experienced bilingual teachers who had worked in Boston during desegregation in the 1970s and reported racist incidents directed at their students, which strengthened their conviction that access to quality education was a civil right of all students, including ELL students. In addition, the Principals all learned English as a second language themselves, and knew from experience that acquiring a strong command of social and academic English required considerable time yet conferred lifelong benefits. This personal knowledge and experience attuned Principals to the needs of teachers of ELL students and to ELL students themselves at their schools and gave them a clear vision for their success. ELL students must attain the same levels of academic achievement as native English speakers. For that to happen, the Principals understood the importance of giving voice and professional development opportunities to their teachers. With this vision, the Principals all developed strategies in their schools which would (1) help ELL teachers to develop effective strategies for language and content instruction, and (2) help ELL students to develop the English proficiency required for them to participate in all of the opportunities their schools offered.

This vision was common to all four schools, but that was not reflected in the literature base on best ELL practices. The recruitment and placement of school leaders with shared life and educational experiences with ELL students was a hallmark of all four case study schools. While the leaders did not necessarily reflect the same culture as the ELL students, they all experienced either immigration or being English learners themselves. This shared experience shaped the Principals’ vision for ELL education to be one of inclusion and high expectations in all four schools.

School Organization for ELL Teaching and Learning

We define school organization for ELL education as the way that students are arranged by grade, classroom, and program as well as the structures that are in place for their ELL programs. It also refers to how the roles and responsibility for ELL education are distributed across the faculty, and what leadership opportunities are available to teachers of ELL students. The case study schools shared common organizational structures across the four case study schools highlight the Principal, the instructional leadership team, and the Language Acquisition Team facilitator (LAT facilitator). These schools also used clear procedures for assessment of English language development levels and placed students with teachers based on their levels of English proficiency.

The Principals Stabilized The Schools, So That Teachers Could Take Instructional Risks And Focus On Continuous Improvement

As discussed previously, the Principals were visionary leaders committed to equity for ELL students. These four Principals shared aspects of how they effectively implemented their visions. They realized that their success rested on the work of the teachers. They first identified students’ as well as teachers’ needs, set expectations, changed attitudes and perceptions of ELL students, built teacher buy-in for improvement of ELL education, and made programmatic and organizational changes for ELL students. For example, the Ellis Principal hired a new ESL teacher who was able to coach other teachers, the Sarah Greenwood Principal changed the school’s language program so that ELL students and native English speakers could be educated together in inclusive classrooms, thereby elevating the role of ELL teachers, and the Excel Principal restructured teacher teams so that ELL teachers were part of content and grade level team meetings. In all four case study schools, the Principals’ strategies involved structural and staffing decisions which helped teachers to continuously monitor ELL student performance and modify their instruction according to the data.

Interviews revealed that all four schools also used the structure of an Instructional Leadership Team (ILT) with ELL staff representation. The ILT in three of these schools functioned as a two-way channel of communication. Teachers shared that information, and directives from the district and Principal were transmitted through the ILT to grade level or content teams of teachers. Teachers communicated thoughts, concerns, suggestions, and decisions through ILT members to the Principal. This structure facilitated the bidirectional spread of information and resources efficiently and gave room for dialogue throughout the school staff.

I think we’ve been fairly successful in terms of top-down, bottom-up communication ... from the administration to the ILT to our departments (who meet during common planning time) ... to the classroom. Those policies are communicated clearly, and then any concerns that we have from the teacher and classroom go back to the CPT meetings, ILT, administration ... and school site council. So our policies are established with everyone’s ideas in mind.

—Instructional Leadership Team member, Excel HS

We also found that each case study school had a “go-to” person with lead responsibility for ELL education, namely, the LAT facilitator. The full role of the LAT facilitator is described below.

One common way to tackle change was to start by focusing on one grade level. At the Ellis, the focus was on third grade, at the Quincy it was fourth grade, and at the Sarah Greenwood, first grade. Reform at one grade level created models for other grade level teachers to replicate and a reason to buy into the school’s potential for improvement. For example, after the third grade ELL students at the Ellis showed great improvement in the literacy skills they were focused upon, such as vocabulary, reading comprehension, and writing, the fourth grade teachers who were receiving these students the following year embraced the extra professional development time the inquiry work would take.

All four case study Principals managed the school improvement processes based on their visions, which matches evidence in the research literature (Williams et al., 2007). They also delegated responsibility for ELL education to key staff people, such as their LAT facilitators and ELL teachers, to empower them to implement reform. Thus, the case study findings support the theoretical framework indicators of school organization, that the school has clear procedures for ELL student intake, assessment, and placement, and that the Principal creates the conditions for these procedures to function.

LAT Facilitators Served as Catalysts For Teacher Growth in ELL Best Practices

In our case studies, we found that each study school had an LAT facilitator who was not only a member of the Instructional Leadership Team but also engaged ELL students’ families, organized and led implementation of the school’s ELL program, and shared their knowledge of ELL students with teachers. Simultaneously, the LAT facilitators responded to teachers’ requests for professional development, thereby precipitating improved ELL instruction and highlighting the key role of teachers as the agents of that improvement. The LAT facilitators remained stable during the study period and most were still present at the case study schools, even though the Principals had left. The district describes the current responsibilities of the LAT facilitator position as:

Assists the principals in the implementation of the BPS English Language Education Policy including the identification of LEP students; implementing the ELL services to students, including scheduling in accordance with the Policy; conduct ELL update and ELLP reclassification meetings; organize MEPA assessments; assist teachers in reviewing assessment data, monitor regular education classes with ELL students; participate in the school’s LIT (Office of English Language Learners, 2010)

The LAT facilitators at these schools held a key position as a catalyst and facilitator of ELL student success. Each school chose to fill the role differently. At Quincy Elementary, two SEI teachers filled the LAT facilitator role. At Sarah Greenwood, the director of instruction, an administrator, was the LAT facilitator. At Ellis, an ESL teacher served as a part-time LAT facilitator. At Excel, the LAT facilitator was a stipended ESL teacher with release from one preparatory period. At the three elementary schools, the LAT facilitators all were experienced teachers of ELL students and spoke the predominant native language of the ELL students in their respective schools. The district currently requires that LAT facilitators be experienced ESL or SEI teachers.

In all four schools, we found that the LAT facilitator knew each ELL student’s English language development level, his or her strengths and weaknesses in reading, writing, speaking, and listening, and relevant aspects of the student’s socio-emotional profile and family background. Therefore, the LAT facilitator was able to place students in appropriate classes to take them to the next level of learning. LAT facilitator and teacher knowledge of a student’s functioning in a class factored into a student’s placement as much as ELD level. Thus, a student could have scored Level 4 on the MEPA exam but clearly needed additional support with speaking and listening. The LAT facilitator in the three SEI schools would discuss this information with the classroom teacher to decide whether a student should continue in an SEI classroom setting instead of entering a regular education classroom. At Excel, the students’ English language development levels were known and used to assign them to different levels of ESL (1, 2, or 3) classes, which covered ELA and ESL. Teachers at all of the schools knew about

their ELL students’ life experiences prior to arrival at the school, whether in the U.S. or abroad.

In addition, four of the five LAT facilitators in the case study schools spoke the home language of most ELL students at the school, and of the teachers of ELL students. Being able to communicate with teachers in their home languages helped establish the necessary trust for a productive coaching and collaborative relationship. Sharing a common language with adult family members helped them to come to know about students’ home lives and histories. The communication also built trust between the ELL students’ families and the school staff. At all four schools, LAT facilitators, many teachers of ELL students, and family members shared phone numbers with each other.

Not only were LAT facilitators skilled at working with ELL students’ families, they were also skilled at collaborating with colleagues and Principals. They communicated regularly with their respective Principals for supervision and support. They were also skilled in-house coaches who shared their expertise with teachers to shelter English for content instruction, best ESL practices, cultural competence, formative assessment, curriculum development, and data-based inquiry. For example, teachers at Excel valued the 4-C-Category training they received, which was delivered by the LAT facilitator. On the other hand, LAT facilitators were keenly aware that their role was as catalysts, or agents of change. At the Ellis, for example, the LAT facilitator planned, modeled, observed, and debriefed lessons and units with both SEI and regular education teachers. Ultimately, however, LAT facilitators had a clear sense of the limited role they could play in the absence of teacher dedication to improving ELL education. Finally, the LAT facilitators in the study were all members of their school’s LIT, thereby keeping the interests and needs of ELL students at the forefront of policy and practices discussions.

The School Had Clear Procedures And Guidelines For Identifying ELL Students And Placing Them In Appropriate Programs And Services

The ELL program implemented in the case study schools largely dictated the grouping of ELL students into classrooms as well as the assignment of teachers to those classrooms. The three Language Specific-SEI program schools all grouped their lower MEPA level students together with ESL-licensed teachers, separate from native English speaking students. In the elementary schools, these were self-contained classrooms for all content areas. At the high school, the focus during ESL time was only on English acquisition and English literature. The LAT facilitators in the SEI program schools said that as students progressed to the higher MEPA levels, they were placed in regular education classrooms with teachers who were trained to deliver content by sheltering English. Former Principals and teachers acknowledged that the professional development of teachers to shelter content instruction for ELL students was crucial to their programs. In three of the four case study schools, Principals prioritized 4-C-Category training during the study period. Before the district’s push to have all teachers trained starting in 2010.

A key role of the LAT facilitator was the proper assignment of students to classrooms, in consultation with their teachers. We found that the four schools engaged in the practice of having clear procedures and guidelines for identifying English proficiency levels and the prior school experiences of incoming ELL students. The LAT facilitators took teacher recommendations about placing those who needed special support in programs that met their needs. The common decisions among the four case study schools suggest parameters for student and teacher assignment to classrooms. In these successful and improving schools, students at lower levels of English proficiency were grouped by level and taught by an ESL-licensed teacher, who in the three elementary schools spoke the students’ native language. As students gained English proficiency, they transitioned to regular education classrooms with appropriately trained teachers.

Adults with similar

life trajectories as the students and their families provided role models and supports as students navigated between home and school:

...all the [SEI] teachers in our school do have the background experience of what the child is experiencing now, because we have all grown up that way.

I learned my English this way... My parents didn't speak English at all.... We truly have the experience of what the child is

experiencing now.

—SEI teacher
Quincy School

The research evidence is strong on school organization in terms of how to group students by English proficiency levels; the teacher qualifications necessary for students at each English proficiency level, and the amount of time students should spend on English as a second language (August & Pease-Alvarez, 1996; Gersten et al., 2007). Our case study findings confirm the scholarly evidence that ELL leaders in a school must have training and ongoing support to identify and assess students and to structure classrooms in ways that are most effective for ELL students.

School Culture and Climate

We defined culture as “ways of living, shared behaviors, beliefs, customs, values, and ways of knowing that guide groups of people in their daily life and are transmitted from one generation to the next” (Trumbull & Pacheco, 2005, p.67). School climate on the other hand, is defined as the “mood” or “attitude” of an organization. Climate is malleable over the course of daily events in the organization and/or their members (Gruenert, 2008).

For our examination of school culture, we studied displays of cultural competence throughout the school building. Again, Trumbull and Pacheco define cultural competence as “the ability to recognize differences based on culture, language, race, ethnicity, and other aspects of individual identity and to respond to those differences positively and constructively” (Trumbull & Pacheco, 2005, p. 16). The cultural competence of the staff members, and corresponding cultural relevance of curriculum and instruction in a school, are aspects of both school culture and climate. By being culturally competent, schools reinforce students’ identities and create a sense of academic and physical safety for students and their families. Organizational school culture, which refers to the unwritten rules, expectations, shared beliefs, and practices that a group of people with a common organization develop over time, also shapes the school environment.

In this section, we present findings about cultural competence, school climate, organizational culture, and examine their interaction. While Professional Development and Family and Community Engagement were separate categories in the ELL best practices framework, in our analysis of themes in the case studies, they emerge as components of the overall school culture and climate.

School Cultural Competence

An indicator for the potential presence of cultural competence in the school is the ethnic makeup of school staff. When the school staff mirror the ethnic and linguistic makeup of students, there is a higher likelihood, although not a guarantee, that staff will have shared beliefs, ways of knowing, values, and ways of living as students of the same ethnicity (Tellez & Waxman, 2003).⁸ If not present through an ethnic match, cultural competence can also be developed through skill training and requires a teacher to know about students’ national backgrounds and identities and to be involved with their students’ families. Using this knowledge, teachers are more likely to construct curriculum and instruction that students can engage with and learn from.

Leadership (and sometimes staff) reflected students’ ethnic and linguistic makeup.

As noted, the ethnic and linguistic makeup of teaching staff at Quincy Elementary and Sarah Greenwood, the two consistently high performing schools in this study, were representative of their student bodies. Respectively, each of these schools had high proportions of Asian and Latino teachers. In SY2009, the Quincy school had 41.4% Asian teachers, compared to BPS’s 4.6%, and 64% Asian students compared with BPS’s 8.5%. At the Sarah Greenwood, 45.8% of the staff and 65% of students were Latino. Furthermore, in all three elementary schools, Principals and LAT facilitators were ethnically or at least linguistically matched with their ELL student bodies during the study period. This emerging theme, already noted in the Mission and Vision section, adds a new dimension to ethnic match as a factor in these elementary schools’ success. It suggests a connection between school leaders’ ethnic backgrounds, and linguistic experiences, and an improvement in educational outcomes of ELL students at their schools.

Beyond being ethnically and linguistically matched with the larger EL group at their schools, Principals and LAT facilitators at all four schools were highly qualified for their jobs. They had worked as bilingual teachers at some point in their careers, either in Boston or other urban districts, some had taken additional graduate training relevant to working with their schools’ student populations, and all understood the educational implications of their students’ sociocultural backgrounds. They understood the stress that poverty places on families. They also understood racism and discrimination, as

they reported experiencing these in their personal and professional lives. They believed strongly that children of low-income immigrants such as the ELL students at their schools could succeed, but they also knew that support systems had to be put in place both for ELL students and their teachers.

And for me to be able to go back and forth, and show them how valuable that is...it absolutely helped kids learn, when they see the Principal can speak the language, and it's not so much that they can speak Chinese, but it's the notion that it's okay, that what you bring from home is valuable, it's just that you also need to learn the English language.

—Former Principal, Quincy School

As leaders, these experiences gave them strength to stay the course and to push for changes when faced with resistance and opposition.

There is evidence in the research literature about the value of hiring school staff who reflect the ethnic and linguistic makeup of the school’s English language learners. However, in the type of outcome study selected for our framework, ethnic match in itself was not reported as a strong causal or correlational variable with student outcomes. Rather, ethnic match appears connected to the teacher-student relationship, and a teacher’s ability to incorporate students’ culture into curriculum and instruction. For example, teachers who are bilingual and understand second language learning can help students transition to learning English, empathize with the struggles of second language learning, and design better instruction because of their experience (Tellez & Waxman, 2005). Teachers who are from the same culture as the ELL students in the school are more readily able to develop curriculum that is relevant to those students (Tellez & Waxman, 2005). These teachers can design and choose reading material, activities, and content that connects to students’ lived experiences, making school more meaningful and therefore more engaging to English language learners (August & Shanahan, 2006).

Preparation of the full staff’s cultural competence.

While starting a school with teachers and support staff who reflect the language and culture of the students in the building was one strategy for improving ELL student learning, Principals also led a process of prioritizing the cultural competence of teachers whose cultural backgrounds were different to those of ELL students and other minority students at the school. In this section, we document some examples of practices that were tied to cultural competence at all four schools.

As a community school with strong roots in the Chinatown neighborhood of Boston, the Quincy School is a strong example of cultural competence for ELL students from China and other parts of East Asia. The school has ties to a system of community organizations which also serve Chinatown residents, such as a health center and afterschool programs; will be discussed under the Family and Community section. Some school staff live in the neighborhood and speak the dialects of the ELL students. Shared cultural values between SEI teachers and parents enable teachers to communicate with parents in culturally relevant ways. All Quincy Elementary students study Mandarin at least once a week. Language learning is a priority, and the school makes it clear to parents that students who attend the school are expected to learn another culture through language, while remaining appreciative and respectful of all other cultures.

There are Mandarin classes, which not many schools have, and they celebrate Chinese New Year and culture in this school. The kids have the opportunity to see it and feel it. I think that is most important... We are immigrants and we follow Chinese traditions in daily life and it's good for the kids to learn it in school as well. Parents don't always have the time or knowledge to teach children about Chinese history.

—Parent of Chinese-American student,
Quincy school

The school building itself exudes Chinese culture, from small ornamental plants to lanterns, with a lion head for student performances tucked in a corner of the principal's office. Faculty incorporates Chinese mythical imagery as visual components of new projects. Chinese festivals and cultural celebrations such as Fall Feast and Chinese New Year are celebrated throughout the year. Communication with families is in three or more languages. All SEI teachers have Mandarin and Cantonese language capabilities.

The Sarah Greenwood and the Ells were two schools whose student composition consisted largely of two minority groups: Spanish-speaking ELL students and African American students, respectively. Balancing the needs of these two student groups was not always easy, as both former Principals reported.

We wanted children to be able to talk in whatever language they were comfortable. It was important that everybody felt that they were going to be part of that community too – that everybody could become bilingual in the school. So that's how the Two-Way Bilingual Program started.
– former Principal, Sarah Greenwood

The Sarah Greenwood attained a balance in its ability to validate the identities and home cultures of all its students through the distribution of students for the Two-Way Bilingual program. Perhaps because of this, the Sarah Greenwood presented more as a multicultural school that embraced an ethic of respect for diversity. Specifically, the Two-Way Bilingual program was established to validate Spanish, and to provide a safe climate for ELL students to develop their identities. The emphasis on teaching English and Spanish equally in the early elementary grades created conditions for collaboration and equal exchanges among ELL students and native English speakers, all of whom were in the process of learning a new language. Teachers remembered fondly how students worked together to help their peers learn the language they knew best. At the same time that the Spanish language and culture were validated, so were the identities of African-American students, who constituted almost half of the school population, and whose accomplishments and contributions were highlighted in posters throughout the building as well as in all aspects of curriculum. Staff members with similar cultural

–Teacher,
Sarah Greenwood

roots as their students reported providing ongoing, in-house education on cultural competence to colleagues who did not share the same roots. Both schools had a Principal, an LAT facilitator, and at least a few teachers who spoke fluent Spanish and were skilled at engaging families of ELL students. At Excel HS, where the majority of the school staff and all three ESL teachers were not Vietnamese, cultural competence was a formal professional development topic during the study period. The workshop was delivered to the whole staff by the Vietnamese SEI teachers and by the LAT facilitator. The school culture was one of curiosity about and respect for their ELL students' culture and perspectives, particularly their academic experiences. One IT teacher said, "The students are wonderful teachers about their culture." Teachers' knowledge about their ELL students' experiences translated to the classroom, where they addressed specific grammatical errors common to Vietnamese students, accommodated those students who were hesitant to speak out, and understood that students' prior education levels differed depending on where in Vietnam they came from.

The research literature on cultural competence among school staff, regardless of their ethnicity and language background, provides some evidence that teachers who learn about the students' culture and how to incorporate this knowledge into their curriculum and instruction improve outcomes for their students (August & Pease-Alvarez, 1996; August & Shanahan, 2006; Waxman et al., 2007). However, the evidence does not rise to the level of experimental or quasi-experimental studies, most likely because the attribute of cultural competence lends itself in research to description more readily than to external observation and quantification.

Silence on ELL students who were not from the dominant language group.

In our analysis of success with the dominant ELL group, we also found nuances about the performance of other groups of ELL students present at the school who were not part of the dominant group. For example, in SY2009, 15% of LEP students (14 students) at Excel were not native Vietnamese speakers. While these LEP students were at higher MEPA levels and therefore in regular education classrooms, teachers did not refer to them or their needs when discussing the success of their ELL student population at the school. Similarly, 36% of Quincy Elementary School is not Asian, and 9% of LEP students are not Chinese (34 students). The major focus of hiring and cultural reflection in the events and curriculum was on the Chinese culture and language. Little discussion addressed other ELL students and the services and programs that support them.

This finding suggests to researchers and practitioners that attention to each ELL student means further disaggregation of data and close attention to the experiences of all ELL students, not just those from the dominant ELL groups in each school.

Since the majority of these ELL students are likely in regular education classrooms, the implications of this finding extend to the practices of regular education teachers in schools.

Collaboration as Effective Professional Development for ELL Education

Teachers in the four study schools told a similar story of change, from isolation and distrust to collaboration and collegiality as an aspect of school improvement that supported their success with ELL students in the classroom. Professional development for teachers may occur during the school day or outside of the school day. It may also be facilitated from within the school or outside the school. Professional development opportunities range from one-time workshops to courses to continuous work throughout a school year embedded within regularly scheduled meetings of teachers. In schools that have developed a collaborative culture, professional learning takes place on an ongoing basis. In these case study schools, professional development was not isolated, but rather a part of daily practice during the study period. In the sections below, we discuss both types of professional learning.

Teachers moved from isolation to collaboration.

This change in relationships among adults was an explicit goal at the Sarah Greenwood, where the Principal had a clear vision that collaborative adult relationships would model collaboration among students. Teachers who had been at the school during SY2006-SY2009 had fond memories of Latino ELL students and African-American native English speakers helping each other learn a second language. This kind of collaboration was not just across language differences, but also across racial and cultural differences, and added to a sense of safety at the school. Finally, collaboration led to cohesiveness. We heard at more than one school that teachers "spoke with one voice," which contributed to the school's safe climate.

So if we were all here and the students were here, I might teach a lesson or somebody else might teach a lesson. And then we would debrief and we would talk about the lesson and how it went. We'd have goals ahead of time of what we wanted to look for. So it was basically peer observation and watching. I found it to be very helpful.
–Teacher, Sarah Greenwood

Many authors have studied school collaborative culture and its impact on student achievement (Blank & de las Alas, 2009; Darling-Hammond, 2009; Desimone, Porter, Garet, Yoon, & Birman, 2002; Dufour & Eaker, 1998; Galda & Kollia, 2008; Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001; Little, 2006). However, reviewers have not tied that literature to the literature on ELL education and ELL student outcomes. Our case studies therefore extend the theoretical framework by suggesting that when ELL students are in schools where the adults work collaboratively through structures that enhance professional community, ELL student achievement is high. If collaboration occurs among a racially and ethnically diverse staff that has an understanding of students' lives and cultures, in the study schools, student collaboration also crossed racial and ethnic lines in ways that promoted student learning.

Shared planning time facilitated a focus on instruction and student learning.

In-service professional development was a priority, as evident from the numerous structures in place during the study period to allow different groups of teachers to meet during school hours to discuss teaching and learning. Interviews discussed common meeting times, usually weekly, for various gatherings such as instructional leadership teams, grade level teams, teacher study groups, and/or content teams; these meetings took place during the study period as well as currently. During these meetings, former Principals reported that teachers were encouraged to focus on curriculum, instruction, and assessment. For example, at Quincy Elementary, teachers reported that grade level teams used protocols for looking at and scoring student writing to engage in discussions about how writing prompts elicited quality writing or whether teachers agreed on the student's score on the school-wide writing rubric.

I knew that unless teachers are confident, and feel safe to examine and question, kids are not going to [either]...so I really wanted there to be a child focus, a professional learning community, and shifting that culture is the most important piece. Without having that, you cannot have people learn.

—former Principal, Quincy School

At Sarah Greenwood, teachers talked about teacher study groups which met regularly during the study period to review data about student performance and develop classroom action steps to address areas of challenge, such as students' ability to use inference in their writing. At Excel HS, the common planning time was created by the former Principal for use in instructional improvement. For example, teachers participated in professional development on including language objectives in daily lessons. Because the schools had expertise to improve staff capacity in ELL education during the study period, including the LAT facilitators, the common planning time could be facilitated internally by those familiar with the context of the teachers and the students and could tailor discussions and resources to their particular needs.

The effective schools' research literature is strong on the development of professional learning communities as a means to student achievement (Saunders et al., 2009; Waxman et al., 2007). Teachers in effective schools who work together with a sharp focus on student learning have better student outcomes (Waxman et al., 2007). More specifically, when the meeting time is focused on how to change instruction for a particular learning challenge rather than on more general instructional issues, ELL student learning is enhanced (Saunders et al., 2009). While the focus of the research was not to document professional learning communities, the case study schools provided examples of how teachers used meeting time to enhance student achievement through changed practice.

Teachers invited experts to enhance their professional training and collaboration.

Although each school was unique in the structures and process created to facilitate professional learning, at these four schools all Principals strategically developed a culture of adult collaboration and created professional learning communities, albeit over time. When Principals first began to create opportunities for collaboration, well before the study period, they purposefully used common planning time for professional development, during which teachers exchanged ideas and practices with their colleagues. Collaboration developed through many pathways. At first, the Principals had to break down barriers and push teachers to move beyond the boundaries of their classrooms to work together. One form of professional development that was repeatedly mentioned as contributing to collegiality was the use of Collaborative Coaching and Learning (CCL) cycles, which were part of district-wide reform efforts in the early years of the study period (Neulield & Roper, 2002). All elementary school teachers spoke about the impact that CCL cycles had on their curriculum and instruction for ELL students as well as their trust in their colleagues.

Common planning time and teacher study groups also supported a culture of collaboration. Teachers reported that, as trust and buy-in built in these schools, the adult learning extended beyond the meetings and into the classrooms and even beyond the school day. For example, during the study period, the LT at Quincy Elementary conducted learning walks through classrooms to identify and share best practices school-wide. At the Ellis during the study period, the LAT facilitator described conducting peer reviews of lessons, as well as co-constructing and modeling curriculum units and lessons with teachers to provide them with the tools and resources to reach their ELL students.

I would credit [the LAT facilitator] as the one who taught me what to do.... So every day during my ESL time, my kids and I worked with her, and she would model lessons, and then we would break the kids up. So I would be learning from her, and then we would divide the children to differentiate the instruction. We would plan together, and over time, I would do more of the instruction, but we would still meet to plan. And I guess after a couple of months, I was more on my own with the kids and she was doing other things, but we would still meet to plan.

—SE teacher, Ellis ES

This opening of classrooms to other professionals was evidence of a culture of adult learning, a hallmark of professional collaboration.

In addition to professional development conducted by adult experts within the building, one school's success with ELL students was attributed to an externally facilitated team through a grant during the study period. At the Ellis School, this grant-funded facilitator led data-based inquiry focused on ELL student achievement at one grade level at a time.

What patterns do you see?...What's the small thing that's very high leverage that we can focus on, and that would really give us the biggest bang for our buck? It made us think in a different way, and look at patterns within the data, and focus in on a group of kids. That was different.

—SAM team member, Ellis ES

The goal of this team's work was not only to use data to identify ELL student needs and address them, but also to build the capacity of the school's staff to systematize and institutionalize the practice for future years.

These findings support the review of research conducted by the National Literacy Panel on Language-Minority Children and Youth that, in addition to common planning time and traditional "workshop" professional development that teachers participate in, the most effective professional development includes practice of instructional changes with a coach or mentor supporting the teacher (August & Shanahan, 2006). They also found that outside collaborators, such as those found at the Ellis, also helped teachers improve classroom practice (August & Shanahan, 2006).

Teachers were qualified to shelter English for content instruction (A-Category training), teach ESL, or clarify for students in L1, and were assigned appropriately.

Teachers of ELL students in the case study schools were highly qualified to teach them. Not only did most of the ELL teaching staff in the case study schools speak the home languages of the students, they were also ESL-licensed. Thus, for self-contained classrooms of ELL students, virtually all of the teachers in the case study schools were fully equipped to address student needs, both in learning English and in learning content. Because of the qualifications of teachers when they were hired, as well as the professional development they participated in during the study period, teachers learned aspects of ELL instruction that supported student learning, such as using the SLOP (Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol) approach and incorporating language objectives into each lesson.

A primary approach to preparing teachers to teach English language learners in Boston Public Schools since SY2009 has been training for teachers to shelter English for content instruction, known as 4-Category training. This training supports both SEI classroom teachers and regular education teachers. The district has offered this training in multiple opportunities so that all teachers, including regular education teachers, who have LEP students in their classrooms, even at the advanced English proficiency levels, are prepared. The four categories are:

- Category 1: Second language learning and teaching
- Category 2: Sheltering content instruction
- Category 3: Assessing speaking and listening
- Category 4: Reading and writing in the sheltered content classroom

However, in three of the case study schools, interviewees mentioned that 4-Category training was a priority before SY2009 and was provided to teachers as in-service professional development.

At Quincy Elementary, three of the four categories were offered to the whole staff during the study period through the BPS Office of English Language Learners, and 80% of teachers participated. At Excel HS, parts of the 4-Category training were provided by the LAT facilitator for the full staff, also during the study period, so that when students moved to regular education classrooms, their teachers were aware of strategies for scaffolding the academic English.³⁷

The research base for teacher's knowledge of how to modify instruction for ELL students is low and mostly consists of descriptive studies of techniques that may apply to all students who need more support (Goldenberg, 2008). However, when teachers have opportunities to attain specialized knowledge of language learning, modify instruction to include opportunities for instructional conversation, adjust instruction according to students' oral English proficiency, and use content and language objectives in every class, there is evidence that learning improves (August & Pease-Alvarez, 1996; Goldenberg, 2008; Waxman et al., 2007).

Climate of Safety and Belonging for ELL Students and Families

One connection we saw at the case study schools was between cultural competence and the creation of a safe climate where all students and families could experience a sense of belonging. Cultural competence, linguistic affinity, and adults who collaborated on students' behalf (described below) were important elements in the safe climate that permeated these case study schools. The predominance of students belonging to one language group at each school also contributed to a sense of home-school continuity and familiarity for ELL students, at least for those who spoke the predominant ELL language. Furthermore, adults with similar life trajectories as the students and their families provided role models and supports as students navigated between home and school. Even at Excel HS, where ethnic match was less prominent than at the two high performing elementary schools, students appreciated having adults in the building who had undergone similar transitions to education and life in the U.S.

When I first came here, I was ... so lost. I don't (s/c) speak English and everyone keeps staring at me. And I think the program helps by [putting] us in an environment where we can still speak our own language, but learning (s/c) English at the same time, too. So it's probably [making the transition] ... a little smoother.... So I think ... we have the Vietnamese teachers over here and they understand how that feeling was, because they experienced that too. So they understand what we've been through.
—Alumnus, Excel HS

Parents also felt safe trusting their children to schools which reflected their own cultural traditions and belief systems. At the Sarah Greenwood, knowing that mothers were likely to dismiss their children's doodling as not "real" writing, the Principal explained to them the need for positive reinforcement that would build their child's confidence and interest in writing. The former Principal emphasized importance of interacting with mothers in particular.

At Quincy Elementary, Chinese teachers understood Chinese parents' cultural background, in which standardized test performance in their home country affects students' life opportunities. They tried to educate them about other educational outcomes that may be more representative of their children's progress, such as level of effort, classroom assessments modified for student English proficiency levels, and portfolios. These forms of assessment alleviated parents' anxiety that their children are not working hard enough.

Other formal structures were in place to ensure that the schools promoted a climate of safety for all students, including ELL students. The Sarah Greenwood instituted home visits during the study period, because students' families and living conditions were seen as important factors in student success. Sometimes, teachers identified needs which they could remedy, for example through providing a mattress, transportation home after school, or referrals to community services. This sense of non-judgmental collaboration between school and home developed mutual trust and partnership on behalf of students.

School safety is a key attribute of effective schools, and ELL scholars affirm the importance of this attribute in effective schools for language learners. The case study schools all created safe and orderly climates for their ELL students, not only through the previous two practices of hiring staff who reflect the students and ensuring their cultural competence, but also by instituting formal structures. Waxman et al (Waxman et al., 2007) note that in such schools students have better self-confidence and self-esteem and lower anxiety and alienation when they feel safe. A by-product of the affirmation and valuing of students' language and culture is that discrimination and oppression based on race or language are not only not tolerated, but also explicitly addressed (August & Pease-Alvarez, 1996).

Community and Family Involvement

Schools with culturally diverse student bodies have greater complexity in how they engage families. Effective schools partner with community organizations to make available more resources to their students. In order to meet the needs of ELL students, those partnerships must be strategic and robust.

The schools actively engaged community partners as resources for ELL students. All of the case study schools were providing support for ELL students during out-of-school time during SY2006-SY2009. All schools provided afterschool and summer learning opportunities. Some of the opportunities were focused on preparing students for MCAS and for the SAT. Some of the support was provided by school staff. At all four schools, teachers remained in the building after hours to reinforce ELL student learning of specific classroom materials, with corresponding parental trust. At the same time, community partnerships were also an important source of academic enrichment outside school hours.

As a community school, the Quincy School was a model of a school with deep roots in its immediate Chinatown community and ramifications throughout the city of Boston. Community partners not only provided health services, after-hours academic support and enrichment, but also teachers. In its partnership with Northeastern University, the Quincy School developed an urban teacher training program that used the Quincy as its laboratory.

Teachers' beliefs that they could elicit ELL students' strengths and potential were essential in building teacher commitment and dedication: The idea that if you don't have language—or rather that you have a different language that your teacher cannot understand—you can't think, was something that we had to challenge very early on...

—*Math coach, Ellis ES*

At Excel HS, a part-time staff person, shared with another high school in the building, was in charge of coordinating, recruiting community-based organizations, advertising the opportunities to ELL students, and encouraging them to participate during the study period. The Sarah Greenwood used afterschool instruction as a “safety net” for students who were at risk of falling behind in their learning. The use of afterschool time in such a manner required curriculum and instructional practices that were consistent with the school's school hours. To ensure such continuity, afterschool time was supervised by a member of the I/T. Students were moved in and out of after-school tutoring as needed. At the time of the study, at least three out-of-school time programs were serving all students at the school. At the Ellis School, the partnership with the Boston Plan for Excellence around data-driven instruction was essential to school improvement efforts.

This finding, that the case study schools engaged community partners as instructional resources, has some basis in the research literature (August & Pease-Alvarez, 1996). While the research on the effect of community partnerships on ELL student achievement does not rise to the level of strong evidence, schools that partner with culturally competent community-based organizations and link ELL students with their services, whether they are about counseling, college guidance, or academics, are better able to meet the needs of ELL students (Warman et al., 2007). Our findings suggest that community partnerships designed to prolong the school day and expose students to instruction and curriculum that is continuous with their day-time learning can improve achievement. In the presence of limited resources, giving priority for their use to students at risk appears to be helpful for the school's overall performance.

The schools used a variety of communication and outreach modalities.

In addition to employing bilingual staff, the school leaders understood the need to provide multiple opportunities for family engagement with schools. In the section on culture and climate, we reviewed school practices leading to the establishment of a safe and welcoming climate for students and families. We have also noted each school's efforts to ensure that communication with parents occurred regularly about student academic progress, using the mode most effective with the families. Furthermore, since large proportions of the staff at the consistently high performing schools could speak the ELL students' native languages, communication with students and their families was possible in their primary language. At the same time, schools understood that not all families could be involved in the same ways. A newer teacher at the Sarah Greenwood labeled the need to “differentiate” interactions with families, just as he differentiated instruction with students. This term serves to describe practices at the schools during SY2006-SY2009. During the study period, all schools engaged in “differentiating” parent involvement opportunities to engage parents in ways that were comfortable to them as exemplified in the following practices.

The most striking finding was the practice, shared across all four schools by many teachers and LAT facilitators, of giving their cell phone numbers to parents in case of a problem, or to make themselves easily accessible when they were keeping their children after school for additional practice, or even so students could call them in the evenings with homework questions.

At all schools, teachers during the study period had either personal knowledge or training about their students' countries of origin and the circumstances upon arrival in the U.S. In addition, teachers demonstrated awareness of families' perspectives and practices vis-à-vis their ELL students' education. Excel HS teachers commented that Vietnamese parents typically trusted the school with their children's education but that at the same time had high standards of achievement. The need for a rigorous education was a recurring theme among teachers and was also highlighted by parents and school alumni:

At the Ellis, the LAT facilitator and teachers reported tension with parents around the timing for mainstreaming ELL students. Parents had a tendency to want their children re-designated as English proficient or advanced in MEPA levels earlier than teachers. The LAT facilitator attributed this parental rush to mainstream children to a common misperception that students learned more in regular education than in SEI classrooms. The LAT facilitator reported explaining to parents during the study period that SEI classrooms were especially designed to address the language learning needs of ELL students while covering the same content as regular education classrooms. Furthermore, ELL students benefited from SEI classrooms that were usually smaller than their regular education counterparts.

Other forms of differentiating parent involvement included showing awareness of parental working hours and scheduling meetings at convenient times for parents. The two consistently high performing schools reported interactions with parents before the beginning of the school year that included teacher calls to ask the parents about their child's school experience the previous year (Quincy), and home visits before the start of the school year (Sarah Greenwood). In addition, the high performing schools reported offering a variety of social events to attract parents. The Quincy reported good results with social events featuring music and dancing as universally appreciated opportunities for involvement. Schools reported communicating events to parents in their native languages.

Family involvement is positively correlated with student achievement; however, because family involvement has multiple dimensions, schools must attend to a myriad of factors in engaging families (Lee & Bowen, 2006). Schools with culturally diverse student bodies have greater complexity in how they engage families.

Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment

Quality curriculum and instruction were at the heart of each case study school's ELL programs. All four case study schools focused on developing curriculum and instruction that strengthened students' English literacy. Despite the fact that one school used a Two-Way Bilingual program model and the other schools used an SEI Language Specific model, many curriculum and instruction practices cut across all four schools. These common practices are described in more detail.

The Primary Use of a Coherent, Standards-Based Curriculum, Sheltered for ELL Students

All four case study schools demonstrated this effective practice identified in the literature; they all used district curricula in ELA and math. However, they spent time and effort to adapt curricula for the needs of ELL students. At the high school, where ELL students were grouped into ESL classes which covered the ELA curriculum as well as ESL, the school's ELA teachers, ESL teachers, and a district ELL staff person worked together to align the curricula so that they fed into each other. This alignment created a smoother transition for students as they moved from ESL classes to regular ELA classes for English proficient students. The texts for ESL and ELA now overlap so that ELL students read some of the same literary texts as English proficient students. At Quincy Elementary, an SEI teacher noted that the driver for what they taught was the district curriculum and the state standards. However, this teacher acknowledged that all curricula need to be modified for ELL students. “Whatever curriculum we get, it doesn't matter, as long as we can adapt and scaffold, we'll teach the standards in the frameworks. Our end goal is clear.”

Research evidence for the use of the district curriculum is strong. Studies and reviews of studies have found that English language learners should have access to the same core curriculum that all students receive, aligned with district and state standards and frameworks (August & Pease-Alvarez, 1996; Goldenberg, 2008; Williams et al., 2007). Effective schools for ELL students not only provide equal access to the curriculum, resources, and programming, but the curriculum also accommodates ELL students' range of knowledge, skills, and needs (August & Pease-Alvarez, 1996; Williams et al., 2007). The fact that the case studies confirmed research evidence in the use of the same standards for ELL students as for non-ELL students strengthens the theoretical framework.

Explicit Teaching of All Aspects of English and Opportunities to Use Them

Interviews with teachers of ELL students revealed that the instructional practice of grouping students, both by English proficiency level and across English proficiency levels, was common during the study period. For example, at Quincy Elementary and Sarah Greenwood, teachers discussed the consistent use of Readers' and Writers' Workshop model of literacy development across grades, which gave students practice in all modes of English, not only with the teacher but with their peers. This model provided multiple opportunities for small groups of students to work together, while the teacher moved among groups to provide additional support. Questioning techniques, pair sharing, and peer editing were common practices in the three elementary schools; they provided students with frequent opportunities to develop their English proficiency. When properly implemented, this approach incorporates extensive peer learning opportunities, as students work in small groups to reinforce mini-lessons collaboratively. Classroom observations in SY2011, two years after the study period ended, reinforced that the practices were sustained. Teachers ensured that students practiced listening, speaking, reading, and writing in each class period.

At the high school we studied, teachers of ELL students and regular education teachers crafted their lessons to provide students with opportunities to practice all aspects of English language development as well. Teachers described grouping students heterogeneously to complete classwork.

Similar to the practice of using small groups to differentiate instruction, noted above, case study schools acknowledged the need for ELL students to practice their English in settings where their peers did not speak their native language. This need was especially true in the three case study schools which have Language Specific SEI programs. By definition, schools with Language Specific ELL programs have large proportions of students who speak the same native language and therefore could speak the language they are most comfortable in throughout the school day, thereby missing opportunities to practice speaking and listening to English. In regular education classrooms with ELL students at higher English proficiency levels, these heterogeneous groupings were created intentionally by teachers. At the high school, the former principal and ELL staff described taking heterogeneous grouping a step further during the study period, beyond the classroom, by developing and encouraging ELL students to join afterschool clubs and participate in summer programs that were not necessarily designed for ELL students during the study period. By participating in Upward Bound or the debate club, for example, ELL students were forced to speak English with native English speakers because there were few to no Vietnamese students in their groups. Teachers noted that while many ELL students plateau or decline in their English language development over summers, the students who participated in these types of summer programs typically returned to Excel having improved their English proficiency. Adult alumni of Excel who enrolled in these programs during the study period described being out of their comfort zones at first but appreciating what they learned.

These effective instructional approaches have been supported by multiple studies, which suggest that such cooperative techniques facilitate learning because they enhance self-confidence, promote communication skills, and provide more rich language experiences than whole-group instruction (August & Shanahan, 2006; Gersten et al., 2007; Waxman et al., 2007). Goldenberg notes that these practices hold true for non-ELL students as well (Goldenberg, 2008). In the studies reviewed in Gersten et al. (2007), ELL students regularly (daily) practiced reading out loud and responding to questions both orally and in writing. Teachers applied small-group interventions to students at the same English proficiency levels who were struggling with reading (Gersten et al., 2007). Thus, while the research base for the teaching of all aspects of English through multiple grouping techniques was already strong, the case study schools strengthened this part of the theoretical framework focused on interactive learning.

Several experimental and quasi-experimental studies show that having ELL students work with more fluent peers results in improved learning outcomes (Gersten et al., 2007). When ELL students pair with English proficient students, there is time for practicing decoding, comprehension, and spelling (Gersten et al., 2007). August and Pease-Alvarez (August & Pease-Alvarez, 1996) highlight a science program in which ELL students worked with native English speakers to discuss the scientific concepts of plant growth, while caring for and observing plants during the unit. Studies reviewed in August and Pease-Alvarez (August & Pease-Alvarez, 1996) include some showing that schools with more instructional conversations and more actively-based, collaborative learning give students more opportunity to learn English. Clearly, the case study schools also strengthened this indicator from the theoretical framework by adding examples of ways to increase interactions between LEP students and English proficient students.

Teachers' Use of ELL Students' Native Language to Ensure that Students Understood Tasks, Vocabulary, and Metacognitive Strategies

Initially, the language restrictive policy newly implemented in SY2004 was interpreted to prohibit the use of native language in the classroom. However, Boston Public Schools was the first district to implement a policy on the use of native language which provided principles and guidance to school staff on when L1 could be used in the classroom, with families, and throughout the school grounds (De Los Reyes, 2003). As SEI Language Specific schools, the case study schools still had the staff and the expertise to use L1 to support learning of L2. While the case study schools were not teaching students in their native languages in order to maintain or learn L1, they were using L1 for the purposes of explanation and clarification. In the case of the Sarah Greenwood, in order to be in compliance with the law, while continuing Spanish instruction in the early grades, the school changed its designation to Two-Way Bilingual program.

At the Sarah Greenwood, Quincy Elementary, and the Ellys, the native language of the predominant group of ELL students (Spanish and Cantonese) was used by teachers and administrators for both academic and social purposes. At the Sarah Greenwood, classroom learning in Spanish was a formal part of the Two-Way Bilingual program through the early grades. At Quincy Elementary, early grade teachers used Cantonese to tell stories, which helped students with low English proficiency to express their understanding and ideas. With knowledge of the Chinese language and culture, the SEI teachers could understand student thinking, speaking, and writing in English. Because of the ability of teachers to use L1, they could build on students' L1 proficiency in teaching English literacy. For example, when English vocabulary words had similar cognates in Spanish, teachers at Sarah Greenwood and Ellys used students' knowledge of Spanish to expand their comprehension and word usage in English.

The research literature is clear that bilingualism is positively correlated with academic achievement (Lundholm-Leary & Borstato, 2006). It is also clear on the finding that students who received instruction in L1 for longer achieved at higher levels than those who received instruction for a short term (Lundholm-Leary & Borstato, 2006). However, the amount of L1, the length of time to use L1, and the ways in which to use L1 need further study (August et al., 2010). In the case study schools, L1 was not the primary language of instruction and so our findings do not completely align with the ELL practices framework. Rather, our findings suggest that teachers who speak L1 can help students learn vocabulary, literacy, comprehension, and transfer of skills in L1 (August et al., 2010).

Assessment: “We Know Our Students Well!”

Assessments are tools that teachers use to measure students’ progress, skills, and content knowledge. Broadly speaking, there are two types: formative and summative. The terms “formative” and “summative” are used in reference to the different purposes of assessments. Formative assessment is used to evaluate classroom learning, and to provide students with immediate feedback for improvement. Summative assessment, on the other hand, is used for reporting and accountability purposes, as required by No Child Left Behind and statewide regulations. One characteristic of summative assessment is that the results are not known until months later, and therefore cannot be used to support learning of the specific student who took the test. However, many schools use summative assessments like the MCAS for formative purposes. Itemized analyses of the test can yield valuable information of patterns of errors and/or non-responses that point to a school’s own curricular and instructional practices. The schools featured in these case studies all used the MCAS for formative purposes, in addition to many formative academic assessments.

Furthermore, teachers at the schools featured in this report claimed to know their students in ways that went beyond their academic performance. A focus on the whole child was reflected in the schools’ missions, which highlighted other developmental outcomes beyond academics. Thus, in addition to remembering each student’s MEPA levels, MCAS scores, and academic strengths and weaknesses, teachers and the LAT facilitator also knew their students’ emotional, physical, health needs, and potentially distracting family events. The elementary schools especially knew about children’s home languages and cultures, and incorporated them into curriculum design and staffing decisions. Services were available not only for students, but, depending on funding availability, for parents, who were referred to health clinics or mental health services as needed. Community partnerships and family engagement (discussed later) were key mechanisms for providing these supports, which served to develop parental trust for teachers, the LAT facilitator, and the principal. Suffice to say here that, at the

two consistently high performing schools, Student Support Teams (SSTs) were mentioned as the main “safety net” for supporting the whole child. SSTs could include, depending on each individual student’s needs, academic members, including teachers of ELL students, counselors, special needs, psychiatric, assessment specialists, and occupational therapists. They met regularly to look at student-by-student progress. Below, we highlight the types of assessments highlighted at each school.

Teachers used formative assessments for ELL students to identify and monitor those who required additional instructional support. At all four case study schools, student assessment results were used both to identify ELL students who needed additional support and to identify content and skills that required instructional changes. Not only did the schools use the MCAS and MEPA results, but also school-created, more frequent formative and summative assessment data. Examples of standardized tests used to identify students in need of support or skills that were uniformly weak included the Stanford Reading Inventory (SRI) and Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA). Teachers at Sarah Greenwood also used Fountas and Pinnell running records of students’ reading to identify and monitor students with reading difficulties.

The Ellis was the school that had accomplished the most systematic use of assessment to drive instruction by working with external facilitators on the Scaffolded Apprenticeship Model (SAM). One remarkable finding at the Ellis was the identification and use of the PASTK (Formative Assessments of Student Thinking in Reading) as an assessment that was 80% predictive of student performance on the MCAS.

All schools developed their own local assessments of sub skills, or skills within a larger skill such as reading comprehension, throughout the year, based on what they saw in their item analysis of MCAS outcomes. At Ellis, when teachers found that the standardized assessments they were using were not predictive of MCAS performance, or were not informative about what their students knew or could do, they developed their own assessments to measure those skills. Assessment was used in meaningful ways to guide teacher practice, rather than simply for compliance sake. When assessment

data showed that students were struggling in a particular skill or sub-skill, teachers at the case study schools had clear formal and informal mechanisms and resources to address those weaknesses. At Sarah Greenwood, students received academic support during short stretches of the school day, such as at lunch, or they were referred to student support teams that used the assessment findings to match students to appropriate resources. At the Ellis, the SAM team facilitated the identification of intermediate assessments that measured intermediate steps toward the mastering of a larger skill.

There is strong evidence in the research literature that the use of multiple formative and summative assessments to drive instruction is linked to student achievement. Assessments of content and English proficiency are both necessary for effective ELL education (August & Pease-Alvarez, 1996). In particular, many studies support the notion that frequent, regular assessment of reading in particular is associated with early identification of ELL students who need reading interventions (Geisen et al., 2007). Higher performing schools reported frequent use of multiple types of assessments, from state to district to commercial to local assessments, to support and monitor individual students and to examine school-wide instructional issues (Williams et al., 2007). Clearly, an inquiry-minded approach both to supporting struggling students and to identifying school-wide or classroom instructional changes not only has strong evidence in the research base, but also was associated with all of the case study schools. Our findings from the case study schools, that non-standardized assessments are frequently created and used by teachers for their inquiry, increase the robustness of this research evidence.

¹⁵ In this paper, we use the term “Principal” to refer to the Principals during the study period, SY2006–SY2009. We note that at none of the four case study schools is the Principal during the study period currently the Principal of the same school. All four case study schools experienced one, if not two, leadership transitions from SY2009 to SY2011.

¹⁶ The higher likelihood of cultural competence associated with ethnic match is important to note, in order to qualify assumptions that ethnic match guarantees a cultural match. We do not assume cultural homogeneity among people of the same ethnicity, or ethnic homogeneity among people who share cultural beliefs and practices.

¹⁷ Data on the percentages of teachers who were 4-Caregory trained in each of the study years was not available to the research team. More recent data would not account for staff turnover in these schools.



CHAPTER

VIII.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- We dove by reviewing a few key conclusions that emerged from the four case studies and the preceding synthesis. The first four conclusions align to the four categories in Chapter VII. The last two conclusions relate to connections between this study and the overall project. Within each concluding section, we provide related recommendations.
- 1) **Mission, Vision, and Leadership:** The Principal laid the groundwork for teachers to lead reform of ELL education
 - 2) **School Organization** for ELL Teaching and Learning: The LAT facilitators were catalysts for the improvement of ELL education
 - 3) **School Culture and Climate:** Cultural competence crossed all aspects of school reform
 - 4) **Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment:** Teachers differentiated instruction for the specific needs of ELL students
 - 5) **The findings of this study shed light on the findings in *Improving Educational Outcomes of English Language Learners in Schools and Programs in Boston Public Schools***
 - 6) **Reflections on the research methods and recommendations for future research**

A The Principals laid the groundwork for teachers to lead reform of ELL education

- A consistent theme across the case study schools was that the Principals responsible for the promising results that led to their identification for this study had in common key attributes:
- Life experience as ELL students
 - Professional experience as ELL teachers
 - Strong vision for school organization, instruction, culture, and high expectations, including that equity is not equality and that ELL students should be integrated into the whole school
 - Recruitment of highly qualified teacher leaders and teachers for ELL students in whom to build capacity
 - Creation of structures that allow for professional learning, collaboration, and opening of classrooms for improving ELL instruction

- Small changes as a systematic and sustainable way to transform a school culture to one that embraces ELL education

These strong leaders had long tenures in the schools before the study period and had strategically organized the roll out of their schools' reform in every aspect of the framework for ELL best practices. Rather than start with whole facilities, three of the schools started with one grade level team and built the buy-in of teachers at that grade level before adding other grade level teams to take on new work. Except for the Ellis, the other schools had undergone at least ten years of the process of change under one leader prior to being identified for this study for their outcomes in SY2006-SY2009. Unfortunately, after the study period, all four principals left their schools for retirement or promotion. In three of the four schools, there were multiple unanticipated leadership transitions between SY2009 and SY2011. It is unclear whether the strong outcomes that led to the identification of the case study schools was sustained beyond the study period. However, leadership instability is one reason that capacity for reform should also lie within a school staff.

Recommendations

- A. In recruiting and placing principals, the district should consider candidates whose professional and life experiences prepare them to serve student populations targeted for improvement
- B. School principals should not only recruit highly qualified teacher leaders and teachers, they should also build their capacity to take on administrative roles and earn principal credentials. Retiring principals should develop and document preferred succession plans for their schools.
- C. The district should use data on student outcomes by subgroup to determine when Principals are moved from school to school. If a school is showing strong performance or improvement, the district should ensure that a change in leadership does not result in the loss of the programs or structures which led to those results.

B The LAT facilitators were catalysts for the improvement of ELL education

The LAT facilitator(s) in each case study school played a key role in the implementation of the program and services to ELL students. These staff members oversaw the identification, placement, services, scheduling, assessment, and reclassification of all ELL students in the school. These responsibilities involved multiple meetings with teachers and families and documentation review and creation. In addition, the LAT facilitators acted as teacher leaders, providing support to classroom teachers in information about language acquisition, interpretation of assessment data, delivery of professional development workshops, mentoring and coaching teachers on instructional improvements, and facilitation of team meetings. Finally, the LAT facilitators also acted as liaisons to BPS OELL, ensuring that schools were compliant with the regulations from the OELL and the state.

In the case study schools, all of the LAT facilitators were bilingual, ESL-licensed, and four category trained. All but one spoke the major native language in the school. All but one was a classroom teacher. In interviews, most indicated that they spent many hours beyond the school day completing their LAT facilitator responsibilities in addition to their teaching responsibilities. However, they did so out of strong commitment to their ELL students.

Recommendations

- A. The district minimal qualifications for LAT facilitators should go beyond the current requirements that they have experience as ESL or SEI teachers, have completed C categories 1, 2, and 4, and are qualified MELAO administrators. The minimal qualifications should extend to require that LAT facilitators have experience with assessment data analysis, experience providing professional development, and experience facilitating adults.
- B. The district should have provisions for compensating LAT facilitators that take into account the size of the ELL population in a school. For example, in schools with large ELL populations, LAT facilitators should not have teaching responsibilities since their work as assessors, schedulers, professional developers, parent liaisons, and district liaisons constitute more than 1FTE.

- C. School principals should appoint LAT facilitators who either speak the major native language of the ELL students in the school or are motivated and positive about becoming culturally and linguistically competent.

D. The district should publish its own guidelines for school organization for each type of ELL program, including information about teacher qualifications, student groupings by MEPA level into classrooms, the amount of time students at each MEPA level should receive ESL instruction.

C Cultural competence crossed all aspects of school reform

In all four schools, we found different degrees of cultural competence among staff. Clearly, the predominant group of ELL students at each school shaped teaching practices by their mere presence, and provided a sense of continuity for ELL students between home and school. We found that hiring staff that speaks the language of ELL students, and can communicate fluently with their families appears to increase cultural competence, especially in the presence of school leaders who can reconcile different perspectives within members of the same linguistic and ethnic group into a cohesive vision for ELL students. However, in one of the schools, where most of the ELL teachers did not share the ELL students' language and culture, teachers learned both formally and informally about the backgrounds of their ELL students and families, and in so doing created a more culturally relevant school. As this report shows, in culturally competent schools, culture permeated every aspect of the elementary schools, from mission and vision, to organization, to curriculum and instruction, to professional development, to family and community relationships.

The research literature on cultural competence among school staff—regardless of their ethnicity and language background, provides some evidence that teachers who learn about the students' culture and how to incorporate this knowledge into their curriculum and instruction improve outcomes for their students (August & Pease-Alvarez, 1996; August & Shanahan, 2006; Waxman et al., 2007). However, the evidence does not rise to the level of experimental or quasi-experimental studies, most likely because the attribute of cultural competence

leads itself to descriptive research more readily than to external observation and quantification. Our findings point to a strong alignment between the lives and professional experiences of school leaders and LAT facilitators and the lives of EL students and their teachers.

Recommendations

- A. Hire staff who are highly qualified to teach EL students and speak their language. Just hiring staff that speak the language of EL students is not sufficient. Rather, when teachers of the same linguistic background as the majority EL group are not available, staff should be recruited with in-depth knowledge of second language acquisition.
- B. Hire staff who, in addition to the language capabilities described above, have a similar cultural or immigrant experience.
- C. For staff who do not reflect the linguistic and cultural backgrounds of the EL students, develop professional learning communities and professional development experiences which educate them about their students' lived experiences.
- D. Given the silence in the case study data collection around the non-dominant EL language groups, ensure that teachers of EL students from those groups are represented in the LT, LAT, teaching staff, and have a strong voice at the school.

D Teachers differentiated instruction for the specific needs of EL students

The literature review identified many indicators of curriculum and instruction for EL education. The curriculum in each school was standards-based, and EL students were taught to the same standards as English proficient students with adapted and modified curricula. Teachers during the study period considered all students language learners and reported differentiating instruction to acknowledge that each person's path to the standard might be unique in the turns or directions or numbers of steps. Because teachers acknowledged the differences in language abilities, content knowledge, learning styles, and self-esteem, they used different groupings of students throughout a class period.

different materials and aides such as technology and interactive approaches, and many opportunities to practice English, including with non-EL students. These instructional practices were aligned with the district model of Readers' and Writers' Workshop, which was used in the elementary schools during the study period.

Because of the staffing practices in the case study schools, most EL teachers could speak the native language of the EL students, allowing the use of L1 in supporting student understanding of assignments, vocabulary development, and metacognitive strategies. While teachers in these SEL language specific schools did not use L1 to teach, they were able to use L1 to also communicate with families and to engage in non-academic conversations with students when not in class.

Finally, the in-service professional development practices in the four schools during the study period included data-based inquiry, teacher study groups, and grade level common planning time meetings to look at student work. In interviews, teachers described having clear agendas, goals, and outcomes monitoring for their meetings. Due to the collaborative cultures built in these schools during the study period, teachers felt accountable to each other to implement new strategies and report back to each other on how they went.

Recommendations

- A. High expectations mean that schools should teach EL students to the same standards as they teach English proficient students, while acknowledging that good instruction supports EL students to reach those standards.
- B. The district and principals should augment the 4-category training with support for teachers to apply the practices, strategies, and ideas in the training. For example, the Principal or LAT facilitator could observe the teacher providing a differentiated lesson to EL students at different English proficiency levels or to a regular education class with LEP students in it and provide feedback on the teacher's instructional moves.
- C. The district and state should heed the strong research evidence that students who learn L1 and L2 simultaneously have stronger outcomes and develop more Transitional Bilingual Education and Two-Way Bilingual programs for the district.

D. Principals should ensure that structures are in place for faculty to develop professional collaborative cultures through regularly scheduled meetings within and across grades to focus on continuous improvement of instruction. They should also ensure that those meetings include only academic agenda items.

E The findings of this study shed light on the findings in *Improving Educational Outcomes of English Language Learners in Schools and Programs in Boston Public Schools*

Both studies in this project, this one and the companion paper to this one, *Improving Educational Outcomes of English Language Learners in Schools and Programs in Boston Public Schools*, used a comprehensive student-level database to describe and analyze EL student enrollment and outcomes in BPS during SY2006-SY2009.

A sobering finding of *Improving Educational Outcomes of English Language Learners in Schools and Programs in Boston Public Schools*, the companion report, was that in SY2006, 2536 LEP students were transferred to out of EL programs into general education or special education programs before they were deemed English proficient. In the case study schools, the only LEP students who were enrolled in general education classes were at the highest MEPA levels. The LAT facilitators and EL staff followed set protocols involving the review of multiple sources of data, including grades and teacher recommendations, to move their LEP students into general education classrooms. In addition, these schools ensured that teachers in those classrooms were aware of the English proficiency levels of their EL students and knowledgeable about how to shelter instruction. The companion report uses compelling data analysis combining MEPA and MCAS outcomes to show not only that students take more than three years to attain academic English proficiency, but also that until they reach MEPA Level 4, they have very little hope of passing the MCAS. Using this and previously published information (English Language Learners Sub-Committee of the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education's Committee on the Proficiency Gap, 2009), the case study schools were identified based on the MCAS

ELA and Math proficiency of MEPA Level 3 and 4 students only.³⁸ In these schools, we found that students at the lower MEPA levels were closely monitored and frequently assessed for their progress in attaining English. In addition, teachers were skilled at sheltering English for content instruction, differentiating instruction for students at different English proficiency levels, creating multiple entry points in to the curriculum for EL students, and grouping students strategically for practice in all modalities. In addition, many teachers and staff members in all four schools could use the students' native language to ensure understanding, develop vocabulary, and use metacognitive strategies. LEP students at higher MEPA levels perform as well or better than their English proficient counterparts in their schools. However, it takes time to reach those higher MEPA levels. During that time, staff must realize that MCAS is not an appropriate measure of learning. Thus, even though the two studies differ in the ways MCAS was used, they come to the same conclusions – MCAS performance is dependent on English proficiency.

Both the study from April 2009 by the same authors (Tung et al., 2009) and the companion report found that many LEP students were placed in special education programs that were not designed for EL students nor staffed with qualified EL teachers. These transfers meant that these students were likely not receiving optimal services for their special needs nor for their English learning needs. Among the case study schools, the situation of students who were designated LEP and with disabilities did not arise as a point of discussion during the site visits. The proportion of LEP-SWD students in each of the case study schools was lower than the district average. As the companion report indicates, assessment, identification, and placement guidelines and procedures from the district did not exist during the study period. Our study did not reveal whether the low proportions of LEP-SWD students in the case study schools were due to the schools following their own guidelines and procedures or to some other reason.

F Reflections on the Research Method

In its analysis of outcomes by ELL program type, the companion report demonstrated that students in Transitional Bilingual Education and Two-Way Bilingual programs had the highest MCAS pass rates of all ELL program types. The Sarah Greenwood was one of the schools included in the TWB analysis.

We note that the case study findings clarify the ELL program implementation that was in place during the study years. While Grades K-2 conformed to the definition of Two-Way Bilingual program, Grades 3-5 did not. The school deliberately modified its Two-Way Bilingual program to meet the needs of its students, while ELL students and native English speakers continued to share classrooms, the instructional model being implemented was more similar to a SEI Language Specific program than to Two-Way Bilingual program. This finding reinforces a recommendation from the companion report to develop consistent definitions of each program type, their similarities and differences in instruction and the use of L1. Only with definitions and measures of fidelity of implementation in each school is it possible to explain outcomes by program type in a comprehensive way.

Finally, the companion report finds that of all grade levels, middle school ELL students were particularly vulnerable to low academic performance and school engagement. Confirming these findings, multiple regression analysis identified only three schools serving middle grades. However, two of these schools experienced inconsistent patterns of achievement and one's SEI Language Specific program had been replaced by SEI Multilingual program and could not be studied. Clearly, improving middle school ELL program options and services should be a priority.

Collaboration

This study and its companion study were produced in collaboration with the Office of English Language Learners at BPS. During the course of the research, regularly scheduled meetings and electronic communication allowed researchers and district staff to pose questions, examine emerging issues, refine methods, and discuss implications in an ongoing, and collaborative way. Through these interactions, trusting relationships were formed among district staff and research team members that ensured the relevance of the findings for the district. The collaboration succeeded in reflecting on and affirming the OELL's policy and programmatic decisions and directing the OELL in next steps.

Theoretical Framework and Case Study Synthesis

The multiple methods used in this study involved analysis of both quantitative data to identify the schools and qualitative data to create portraits of these schools. The qualitative data analyses for the individual case studies were conducted inductively. Interviews were coded openly, allowing the stories of success in each school to emerge from the data. The analysis of themes across the four case studies was deductive, guided by the ELL best practices framework, which was based on empirical evidence of what works for ELL school success. Using the framework, we identified the practices and strategies across schools that were found by other researchers as correlated with attributes of effective schools for ELL students. We also identified case study findings that did not appear on the framework but did across the case study schools. Thus, we both confirmed aspects of the theoretical framework as well as identified new areas for inquiry. The process of analyzing the case studies brought up the question of what "evidence-based practice" means. Because the literature base for the ELL practice framework was stringently formed based upon correlative and causative research, the practices identified were largely ones that resulted in increased test scores. However, large swaths of scholarly research on teaching and learning for ELL students are ignored by these stringent criteria. We must recognize the limitations of the framework

and remain open to new best practices emerging from schools themselves. Reflecting upon this report's findings and in light of the companion report's findings, several research questions emerged for further study.

Recommendations for Further Research and Evaluation

- A. The model of collaborative research between researchers and district offices should inform other program areas within the district.
- B. Qualitative research should accompany reports of outcomes as often as possible, as descriptions of practice allow the audience to understand how they are implemented in schools.
- C. The district should define what each ELL program type entails, how program types differ, and clear criteria to monitor fidelity of implementation across the district of each program type.
- D. Researchers should study the experience of ELL students in SEI Language Specific schools who speak other languages than the dominant ELL language. What were their educational experiences? How did they perform?
- E. The ELL practice framework guided data analysis and strengthened the research base for some of the practices within it. In addition, the study identified common practices for further study as they relate to ELL student outcomes (role of LAT facilitator, focus on the whole child, collaborative culture). Future research questions should focus on the common practices identified in this study.
- F. The case study schools represented three of the five top non-English language groups in BPS. Thick descriptions of SEI Language Specific schools serving Haitian Creole and Cape-Verdean Creole native speakers will be needed.
- G. Given the finding in the companion report of large proportions of students who are both LEP and SWD, more information is needed about the identification, assessment, program placement, teachers, and services to these students. Are they in the least restrictive environments for their language and disability needs?

- H. More research on the optimal qualifications for teachers of ELL students is needed to determine which ones result in improved instruction. ESL licensure, 4-category training, bilingualism.
- I. A follow-up study should include more recent data and comparison schools of average or low ELL student outcomes, to verify or refine the current study's findings of cross-cutting ELL best practices.

¹⁸ MEPP scores from SY2006-SY2008 were reported as a performance level on a scale of 1 to 4. In 2009 performance levels were changed to a 1 to 5 scale. Using the MA DISE chart provided in the Guide to Understanding the 2009 Annual Measurable Achievement Objectives (AMAO) Reports (December 2009), we converted April 2009 results back to a 1 to 4 scale to use for the creation of the dependent variables used in the multiple regressions for MCAS proficiency rates.

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APPENDIX 1: Detailed Methods

Overview

This report responds to a request from the Boston Public Schools Office of English Language Learners to undertake a qualitative examination of the practices at four BPS schools which were performing at a consistently high level or showing steady improvement in educating ELL students. The report sought to answer the following research questions:

- In which BPS schools were ELL students at intermediate to advanced English proficiency levels performing at a consistently high level or showing steady improvement during SY2006-SY2009?
- What were some of the organizational, cultural, instructional, professional development, and community engagement practices that the school staff attributed to their success with ELL students during SY2006-SY2009?
- Which of the organizational, cultural, instructional, professional development, and community engagement practices identified by school staff were shared among the selected schools?

Our approach to answering the research questions involved multiple methods. Multiple regression was used to identify schools having success with English language learners (ELL students) while controlling for the characteristics of the schools' student populations. A qualitative case study approach was used to allow for discovery and unanticipated findings while gathering multiple perspectives on each school's ELL education approach and implementation. To guide the case study protocol development, data collection, and analysis, the researchers conducted a literature review in order to understand the theoretical and empirical basis of some of the practices that might be found in the schools. From this literature review, the researchers developed an empirically based framework for best ELL practices. This ELL practices framework grounded our inquiry and guided the development of research instruments used when conducting our case studies. A multiple case study design was used (Yin, 2009). Each of four case studies involved two-day school visits which included pre- and post-interviews with school leaders, classroom observations, and interviews with additional teachers and administrators. Finally, we analyzed the data from the individual case studies in order to tell the story of ELL success in each school. The data were analyzed in relation to the ELL practices framework, while allowing for

new insights and practices not found in the framework to emerge. We also analyzed the data across the four case studies, again in relation to the ELL practices framework, to strengthen or expand upon the research of others. When replication occurred among two or more case studies, they strengthened or modified the existing framework. For example, many ELL practices in the evidence-based framework were found in multiple case studies, strengthening the support for those practices. In addition, some ELL practices were found in multiple case studies which were not identified in the literature review that added emerging themes to the analysis and will inform future research.

This study, *Learning from Consistently High Performing and Improving Schools for English Language Learners in Boston Public Schools*, and its companion study, *Improving Educational Outcomes of English Language Learners in Schools and Programs in Boston Public Schools*, have been a collaborative project among Boston Public Schools Office of English Language Learners (OELL), the Center for Collaborative Education, and the Mauricio Gaston Institute for Latino Community Development and Public Policy at the University of Massachusetts, Boston. During each phase of the research, regularly scheduled meetings were held among the three research partners.

During these meetings, staff members from each partner discussed emerging findings and potential explanations for them. The OELL staff provided the reactions, feedback, and context that allowed the researchers to move forward with each step. This collaborative relationship enhanced the analysis and use of the research findings. The aim of this collaboration has been to produce a report that can blend different research methods to produce an in-depth study of how and why ELL students in the selected schools attained the high performance or steady improvement, while at the same time providing a description of the practices and strategies identified.

Multiple Regression Methods for Identification of Case Study Schools

Background to Multiple Regression

The objective of this phase of the study was to identify schools in which ELL students were performing at rates above what would be predicted, knowing only the demographic characteristics of the school. Other researchers have used several methods to identify schools that are performing substantially better than schools with comparable demographics: two standard methods are: (1) cluster analysis and (2) multiple regression (Buttram, 2007; McREL, 2005). While both methods address the school selection process differently, they produce comparable results. To provide equitable comparisons of student performance among schools, we used multiple regression to identify groups of schools similar in demographic characteristics but distinct in performance. By using these analyses, a school with a large proportion of students receiving free or reduced price school lunch would not be compared to a school with a small proportion of students receiving free or reduced price school lunch (Buttram, 2008). These analyses allow us to compute the effects of ELL programs on student performance above and beyond the effects of the student population.

We chose to replicate the method used in the study "High Needs Schools – What Does It Take to Beat the Odds?" (McREL, 2005). In the McREL study, multiple regression was used to examine performance while controlling for differences in student populations across schools.³⁸ A key implication of the findings in the McREL study was that low-performing, high-needs schools did not need to reorganize, but rather that the priority for improving student achievement should be on creating better school-wide policies and practices, especially through the role of leaders. Thus, the McREL study supported using case studies to illustrate the policies and practices of high performing high-needs schools. Using multiple regression, we set out to identify schools that were performing substantially above the level that would be predicted by their demographic characteristics alone in which to conduct case studies. When only two schools emerged after discussion of the multiple regression results, we identified a second type of school in which to conduct case studies: those that were showing steady improvement in outcomes, controlling for any

changes in student demographics. These analyses were conducted separately for elementary (K-5) and secondary (6-12) grades.

Boston Public Schools Sample

The unit of analysis for this portion of the study was the school. During the study period (SY2006-SY2009), there were 140 total schools in Boston Public Schools. Nine Boston public schools that serve specific populations were excluded from the participant set: six Early Learning Centers do not have students in Grade 3 or above and do not have standardized performance data; and three special schools, as they would not address the goal of providing transferable examples of ELL best practice due to the unique populations they serve and the unique strategies in these schools, which would not be appropriate for the majority of ELL students.³⁹ For the remaining 131 schools in the sample, we separated the data file into elementary schools (n=80) and secondary schools (n=68) to deal with outliers in the regression analyses.⁴⁰ Seventeen K-8 schools that include both elementary and secondary grades were included in both the elementary file (K-5 and K-8 schools) and the secondary file (K-8, MS, HS, middle-high schools). A separate middle school sample was not possible due to the small number of schools when dividing the schools into three groups (elementary, middle, and high) rather than two (elementary and secondary). However, schools at all three levels were identified as the high performing type and the steadily improving type. Approximately 30 schools enrolled fewer than 15 students of limited English proficiency (LEP) during at least one of the study years. Though these schools were included in the initial sample of 131 schools, because the focus of this study was on the performance of LEP students, a threshold of fifteen was selected as the minimum number of LEP student cases needed to generate each of the outcome variables related to performance (one promotion variable and three MCAS variables). This threshold was selected in an attempt to balance the desire to include as many schools as possible in these analyses with the need to generate relatively stable parameter estimates.⁴¹ Different schools met the threshold for different outcome variables in different years. Thus, we began with all 131 schools for each outcome variable, with some schools being eliminated by the threshold each time.

School Level Database Creation

The database for the multiple regression analysis used to identify case study schools differs from the database for the descriptive analysis in the companion report for the project, *Improving Educational Outcomes of English Language Learners in Schools and Programs in Boston Public Schools*, since the unit of analysis is the school rather than the student. Student-level data from the database created for the companion report was used to create a school-level database for multiple regression.⁴³

School Demographic Control Variables

We used two student-level SIMS data elements⁴⁴ and a variable for Limited English Proficiency created from BPS data for each year of the study to create school-level control variables:

- Low Income (DOE019)
- Limited English Proficient (BPS data)
- LEP Students in their First Year in U.S. Schools (DOE021)

For Low Income, the percentage of students receiving free or reduced priced lunch was computed for each school. For Limited English Proficient, the percentage of students who were not capable of performing ordinary class work in English was computed. For LEP Students in their First Year in U.S. Schools, the percentage of students who meet this definition was computed. This variable was available for the first time in the October 2007 SIMS, and thus was not included in the first study year's data set. Data from these three variables represent a description of the school. For example, one school might be 75% low income, 15% LEP students, and have no LEP students in their first year in U.S. schools.

These three variables were selected because they describe school-wide demographic characteristics of the school that are related to ELL and/or high-need populations. The variables also meet the necessary conditions to ensure that the results we obtained were valid. First, the three variables are not correlated compared to standard regression practice

(Variable correlation < 0.80). Next, our target number of variables was calculated by the fact that we needed 10 to 20 times the number of schools in the database as the number of variables we used to cluster the schools. Therefore, three variables were selected and not more.

ELL Outcome Variables

Promotion Rate Variable. The SIMS Grade Level variable (DOE016) was used to compute the percentage of students promoted at the end of the school year by school. By comparing the grade level in June of one year with the grade level in October of the following year, school promotion rates were calculated. For students who changed schools from one school year to the next, the promotion rate was attributed to the school the student was in during the spring of the first year. Because the focus of this study was on the performance of LEP students, this variable was computed for LEP students only (using the threshold of a minimum of 15 LEP student cases), rather than for the entire population of the school. The total number of schools for which the "promotion rate" variable was computed is shown in Table 9.1.

MCAS Proficiency Rate Variables. The Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) is the state accountability test with results available in three content areas: (1) English Language Arts (ELA), (2) Mathematics, and (3) Science. Assessments are administered annually in ELA and Mathematics for students in Grades 3-8 and Grade 10. For Science, assessments are administered in Grades 5 and 8 and in high school grades as end-of-course science and technology tests (i.e., biology, chemistry, introductory physics, and technology/engineering). Individual student performance levels for the MCAS assessments were collected and from them, school-level variables were created for each school. For each of the content areas, the percentage of students earning one of the two highest performance levels (proficient or advanced) was computed. Proficiency rates were chosen over pass rates because of the purpose of this portion of the

Table 9.2. Total Number of Schools for Analysis – MCAS Performance

Year	Elementary (n=80)	Secondary (n=88)
SY2006	25	27
SY2007	29	29 ^a
SY2008	31	34 ^b
SY2009	33	35

^a In mathematics, one of these schools did not meet the threshold of 15 cases.

^b In mathematics, two of these schools did not meet the threshold of 15 cases.

study – to identify schools whose ELL students were performing or improving at high levels. While pass rates were the accepted threshold for high school accountability during the study period, the purpose of this study, the identification of high performing schools, required a higher bar. Since the focus of

this study was the performance of ELL students, these MCAS proficiency rates were computed for LEP students rather than the entire population of the school. Furthermore, because the MCAS

is administered only in English, we limited the computation of these variables to LEP students for whom English proficiency had reached intermediate to advanced English language development levels (e.g., performance level of 3 or 4, using the pre-2009 scale, on the Massachusetts English Proficiency Assessment [MEPA] test⁴⁵). Previous studies

have shown that the LEP students at MEPA Levels 1 and 2 do not achieve proficiency in MCAS, and that only LEP students who have attained the higher levels of English proficiency reach the proficient category on MCAS (English Language Learners Subcommittee of the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education's Committee on the Proficiency Gap, 2009; Tung et al., 2009).

Given the limited number of grades in which the Science test is administered, very few schools met the threshold of fifteen cases. Therefore, MCAS Science proficiency rates were dropped as a dependent variable for this study. The total number of schools for which the remaining two MCAS variables were computed is shown in Table 9.2.

In comparing the numbers of schools used for each dependent variable in the regression analysis, fewer schools were used for MCAS proficiency rates than for promotion rates. The reasons for the difference include (1) the use of all LEP students in promotion rates versus LEP students at MEPA Levels 3 and 4 for MCAS proficiency rate and (2) the fact that not all grade levels take MCAS. The combination of these

factors meant that fewer schools met the threshold of 15 students for the MCAS variables than for the promotion variable.

Method for Multiple Regression

The first standard multiple regression analysis was performed between the dependent variable (promotion rate) and the independent variables (percentage low-income, percentage LEP, and percentage LEP in first year in the U.S.). Analysis was performed separately for elementary schools and secondary schools using SPSS Regression. Assumptions were tested by examining scatterplots of residuals versus predicted residuals. Pearson product-moment bivariate correlations were computed. All correlations were below 0.67, indicating low to moderate multi-collinearity. No violations of normality, linearity, or homoscedasticity of residuals were detected. In addition, case-wise diagnostics revealed no evidence of outliers.

The regression formula predicted promotion rates based on the percentage of low-income students, percentage of Limited English Proficient students, and the percentage of LEP student in their first year in U.S. schools (for SY2008 and SY2009, when this variable was introduced by the state). The regression equation allowed us to create groups of schools similar in demographic characteristics, but distinct in performance by using the standardized residuals, which compare the observed performance of the school (e.g., the actual percentage of students promoted to the next grade) to the predicted performance based on the characteristics of the student population. In other words, standardized residuals are the differences between the actual and the predicted values of the outcome variable based on the model we have specified, measured in standard deviation units. Following Cronk and Teddlie, a cut point of 0.75 standard deviations above the predicted score for each school was used to identify

schools whose promotion rates were distinctly higher than those of schools with similar demographics (Cone & Teddlie, 1995). This process was conducted for each of the three years of data for which promotion rate data were available.⁶⁶

This process was repeated to generate regression formulas to predict MCAS proficiency rates for LEP MEPA Level 3 and 4 students for each of the four years of ELA data and Mathematics data.

Multiple Regression Analysis Interpretation

The next step was to determine whether or not the three independent variables alone could explain the dependent variables of promotion and MCAS ELA and Mathematics performance. Because our hypothesis was that school-based practices make a difference in ELA performance, we needed to confirm that the three independent variables explained only a small proportion of the variance, if any.

Elementary Grades

Regression analyses revealed that the model did not significantly ($p > .05$) predict promotion rates in two out of the three years. However, in SY2008, the three independent variables explain a small portion of the variance: $F(3,58) = 3.205$, $p < .05$, R^2 for the model was .142 and adjusted R^2 was .098, indicating that nearly 10% of the variance in that year can be explained by percentage of low-income students, percentage of LEP students, and percentage of LEP students in their first year in the U.S. Table 9.3 displays the unstandardized regression coefficients (B) and standardized regression coefficients (β) for each variable.

Regression analyses revealed that the model did not significantly ($p > .05$) predict MCAS proficiency rates for English Language Arts or Mathematics in any of the four years.

Table 9.3. Regression Coefficients for Elementary Promotion, SY2008

Predictor	B	β
Intercept	79.92	
Percent Low Income	.200	.257
Percent LEP	-.004	-.008
Percent LEP in first year in U.S.	-.275	-.309

Table 9.4. Regression Coefficients for Secondary Promotion

Predictor	SY2007		SY2008	
	B	β	B	β
Intercept	53.62		74.05	
Percent Low Income	.520	.515	.278	.108
Percent LEP	-.307	-.367	-.128	-.081
Percent LEP in first year in U.S.	NA	NA	-.138	-.178

Secondary Grades

Regression analyses revealed that the model did not significantly ($p > .05$) predict promotion rates in one out of the three years. However, in SY2007 and SY2008, the three independent variables explain a small portion of the variance.

- In SY2007, the R^2 for the model was .386 and the adjusted R^2 was .352, indicating that 35% of the variance can be explained by percentage of low-income students and the percentage of LEP students. ($F(3,36) = 11.337$, $p < .01$)
- In SY2008, the R^2 for the model was .239 and the adjusted R^2 was .179, indicating that nearly 18% of the variance can be explained by percentage of low-income students, percentage of LEP students, and percentage of LEP students in their first year in the U.S. ($F(3,38) = 3.982$, $p < .05$)

Table 9.4 displays the unstandardized regression coefficients (B) and standardized regression coefficients (β) for each variable for these two years.

Regression analyses revealed that the model did not significantly ($p > .05$) predict MCAS proficiency rates for English Language Arts or Mathematics in any of the four years.

Though in several instances, the independent variables significantly predicted the outcome variables, in the cases when they did, those variables explained only a small proportion of the variance (10%, 35%, and 18%). The proportions were acceptable for our purpose, allowing us to proceed with case study school selection.

Selection of Case Study Schools Based on the Results of Multiple Linear Regression

Consistently High Performing Schools

The regression equation for promotion and MCAS proficiency rates resulted in a number of schools that were considered to be performing better than predicted in terms of promotion and high MCAS proficiency rates, with a standardized residual of 0.75 or higher. For elementary grades (K-5), each year there were 10-14 schools identified for promotion and 4-8 schools identified for MCAS proficiency in ELA and Mathematics. For the secondary grades (6-12), each year there were 6-7 schools identified for promotion and 3-6 schools identified for MCAS proficiency in ELA and Mathematics. As shown in Table 5, for promotion, most of the schools earned the distinction for promotion one year while some earned it for all three years. Likewise, for MCAS proficiency, some of the schools earned this distinction for one year, while very few earned it for three years or more. It is also evident from Table 5 that many more schools emerged for the promotion variable than did for the MCAS variables.

Because of the close collaboration with staff from the BPS Office of English Language Learners, the results in Table 9.5 were brought to a regularly scheduled project meeting, where each of the schools with high standardized residuals was discussed, using the contextual knowledge that the district personnel possessed. For example, one goal of identification of case study schools was representation across language groups, EL program types, school size, and other salient characteristics. In addition, OELL staff were knowledgeable about recent leadership or programmatic changes, and this information was brought into the final selection of case study schools. Though promotion rate was included as a dependent variable, the schools with multiple years of high promotion rates did not overlap with those with multiple years of high MCAS proficiency rates. In addition, consistent standards

Table 9.5. Number of Schools with Standardized Residuals Greater than 0.75 across Years

Number of Years	Elementary Grades			Secondary Grades		
	Promotion	ELA	Math	Promotion	ELA	Math
One Year	21	10	7	9	3	4
Two Years	5	0	2	3	1	2
Three or Four Years	2	2	2	2	3	2
TOTAL	28	12	11	14	7	8

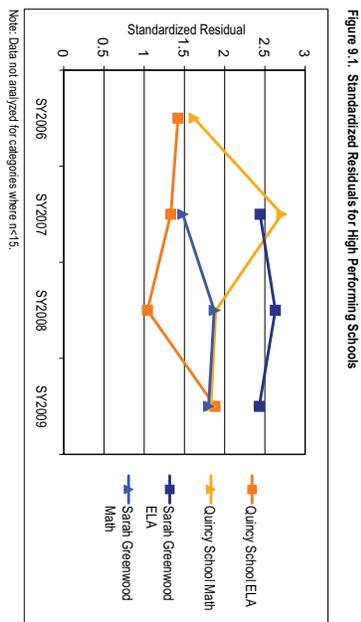


Figure 9.1. Standardized Residuals for High Performing Schools

for promotion do not exist across schools, whereas they do for MCAS proficiency.

Of the two elementary cases in Table 9.5, the schools identified as having high performance for multiple years in both ELA and Mathematics were Josiah Quincy Elementary School and Sarah Greenwood K-3 School. These two schools represented two different language groups, Chinese and Spanish, respectively. They also represented two different ELL program types, SEI Language Specific and Two-Way Bilingual.

For the secondary grades, three schools were identified for multiple years in both ELA and Mathematics, though ultimately we chose not to study any of these schools for their secondary grades. One of the secondary schools had an SEI Chinese program. Since there are only four BPS schools with SEI Chinese programs, we did not want to choose two of them as case study schools. Since the Quincy Elementary School serves a larger number of LEP students than the secondary school, the Quincy School was chosen. Another secondary school's SEI Language Specific program had been converted to an SEI Multilingual program in SY2010. Therefore, this middle school's program with the strong results was no longer present to be studied. Finally, the third secondary school was Sarah Greenwood K-8 School. While emerging from the multiple regression analysis of the secondary school database with high standardized residuals, the school had too few cases for two of the four years and declining middle school proficiency rates during the remaining two

years. Therefore, we chose not to study the secondary grades at the Sarah Greenwood K-8 School.

Thus, we finalized the selection of two high performing case study schools to two elementary schools, the Quincy School and Sarah Greenwood (Grades K-5 only). Their standardized residuals during the study years are shown in Figure 9.1. Both schools' standardized residuals for ELA and Math MCAS proficiency exceed 1.0 for all years, meaning that their LEP students at MEPA Levels 3 and 4 performed consistently higher than predicted. As noted, a standardized residual of 0.75 is interpreted as MCAS proficiency distinctly higher than schools with similar demographics (Cronk & Tiedtle, 1995).

Steadily Improving Schools

Our analysis revealed only two elementary schools performing at high levels in multiple areas (i.e., promotion, ELA, Mathematics) for at least three years. In order to identify schools that were making substantial gains in outcomes over the four-year study period, additional analyses were conducted. Using the standardized residuals from the results of the regression analyses explained above, we examined the trajectories of each school for SY2006-SY2009 to identify schools whose standardized residuals showed meaningful improvements in MCAS proficiency rates of LEP WPA Level 3 and 4 students for ELA and Mathematics, ending the study period with a standardized residual of greater than 0.75. Two secondary schools and two elementary schools met this definition.

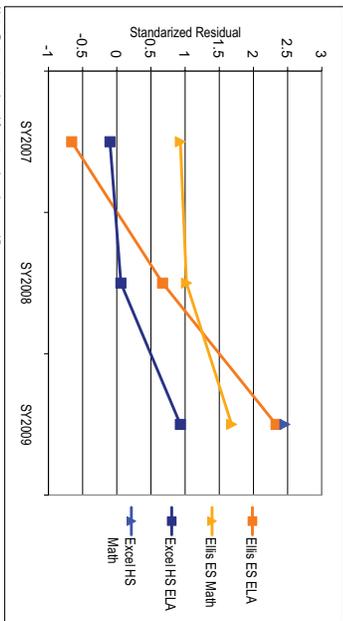


Figure 9.2. Standardized Residuals for Improving Schools

Note: Data not analyzed for categories where n<15.

Table 9.6. Case Study Schools

Case Study School	Grades Studied	Predominant Native Language	ELL Program Type
Quincy School	K-5	Chinese dialects	SEI - Chinese
Sarah Greenwood	K-5	Spanish	Two-Way Bilingual (Spanish)
Elis ES	K-5	Spanish	SEI - Spanish
Excel HS	9-12	Vietnamese	SEI - Vietnamese

To identify two of these schools for further study, a variety of factors were considered, including the contextual knowledge of the Office of English Language Learners. The goal was to maximize information that could be shared across the district. We again took into account the predominant native language of the ELL students in the school. One of the secondary schools was a middle school with a Chinese SEI program, and since Chinese was already represented in one of the high performing schools, this secondary school was eliminated. The school also experienced a dip in MCAS Mathematics in SY2009. The other secondary school, Excel High School with a Vietnamese SEI program, was identified as the third case study school. Of the two elementary schools with steady improvement, Elis Elementary, which has an SEI Spanish program, was selected because it had a stronger upward trajectory and higher standardized residuals than the other elementary school.

Thus, we finalized the selection of two steadily improving case study schools to Excel High School and Elis Elementary School. Their standardized residuals during the study years are shown in Figure 9.2.

In summary, four BPS schools were identified for further study using qualitative methods, which are shown in Table 9.6.

This selection of schools does not include middle schools, serving Grades 6-8. Although two middle schools were identified in the regression analyses, they were not chosen for case studies because of contextual reasons, as described previously.⁴² While this selection of schools represents three of the five major languages spoken by BPS students, it does not represent Haitian Creole or Cape Verdean Creole. Finally, three of the ELL programs are SEI Language Specific programs. None of the schools identified in the multiple regression analyses were SEI Multilingual program schools.

All of the selected schools were invited to formally participate in the case study portion of this study. They were notified of their selection by the director of the Office of English Language Learners in person and in writing. All four Principals agreed to the study and cooperated with the site visit data collection and follow-up, including review of drafts of the case studies. All participation in interviews and observations was voluntary and signatures of informed consent were collected.

Limitations of Method for Site Selection

- One limitation to the methods for this study was the restriction to LEP students with MEPA Levels 3 and 4 in the multiple regression with MCAS proficiency as the outcome. This choice was necessary given the MCAS outcomes measure used: students at the lower MEPA levels by definition are not English proficient, and are very unlikely to be proficient on an MCAS exam. Promotion rate for all LEP students at a school was included as a dependent variable; however, the schools identified for high promotion rates did not overlap with those identified for their high or improving MCAS proficiency rates. Therefore, the findings do not refer to all LEP students. Despite this limitation in case study selection, data collection was conducted for the whole school, including the practices and strategies used with LEP students at beginning and early intermediate English proficiency levels (MEPA Levels 1 and 2).
- A separate middle school sample was not possible due to the small number of schools when dividing the schools into three groups (elementary, middle, and high) rather than two (elementary and secondary). In addition, the two middle schools that were identified through regression analysis were not chosen for case study due to contextual reasons. The findings in *Improving Educational Outcomes of English Language Learners in Schools and Programs in Boston Public Schools*, that BPS middle school LEP students post weak MCAS outcomes, indicate that future research should investigate successful middle schools and their strategies.
- The method used for site selection does not reflect the fact that many schools are performing as expected based on their student populations. The purpose of the study was to identify strong performers or steadily improving schools, so the standardized residual of greater than 0.75 was used. All schools within -0.75 to 0.75 standardized residual were performing within the expected range given their student populations.
- Some BPS schools were not included in the method for site selection because they served special populations, early childhood grades when there are few consistent performance measures to use as dependent variables, or very few students of limited English proficiency. However, their LEP students may have been performing well.
- We did not identify or select any comparison schools to study (i.e., schools that were low-performing or performing as expected), because of the sensitive nature of being identified as a low performing school. Therefore we do not know if any of the practices identified in the case studies are also present in low performing/average schools.
- We were limited by the availability of student-level variables to create school-level variables. Student and family-level variables, which have been shown to make a difference include various demographic and socioeconomic circumstances (Jensen, 2001). Student-level variables include generation number, age at immigration, and amount of schooling in home country. Family-level variables include family educational level, labor force status of parents, residential concentration of students' home, home ownership of family, and health insurance coverage of family.

Case Studies

Development of a Theoretical Framework

A theoretical framework for the study was informed by a review of the literature on effective schools and EL best practices. Just as the literature on school reform is vast, so is the literature on English language learner education. In order to bring the two strands of literature together into one theoretical framework, we searched for studies about the practices and conditions necessary for quality ELL education at the school level. While there is extensive literature on effective whole-school reform, there are fewer studies that focus on effective schools for ELL students, and even fewer that show a correlation or causative link between specific practices and ELL student outcomes.

However, others have attempted to identify attributes of schools that are effective for ELL students. Two major reviews of the research on best practices for ELL students guided our framework development. One, by the National Literacy Panel (NLP), found fewer than 300 reports that were empirical and that focused on ELL students in K-12 schools (August & Shanahan, 2006). The other, published by the Center for Research on Education, Diversity, and Excellence (CREDE), reviewed 200 reports that were correlational or experimental in approach (Geneese, Lindholm-Letty, Saunders, & Christian, 2005). We were also guided by other reviewers who describe primary and secondary research that established ELL practices in light of student outcomes (August & Pease-Alvarez, 1996; Gersten et al., 2007; Goldenberg, 2008; Norris & Ortega, 2010; Tellez & Waxman, 2005; Waxman, Pardon, & Garcia, 2007).

The best ELL practices identified in the meta-analyses populated the theoretical framework for this study. The framework was organized into seven domains of effective school reform: (1) mission and vision, (2) school organization and decision-making, (3) instruction and curriculum, (4) assessment, (5) culture and climate, (6) professional development, and (7) community engagement. These seven domains are widely accepted and have been used by many researchers and practitioners at different administrative levels (local, district, state, federal) to both design and evaluate school quality and results, including School Quality Reviews for Boston pilot schools, MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education Walkthrough protocols, and

the Department of Justice collection of evidence (Buttram, 2007; Office of Educational Quality and Accountability and University of Massachusetts Donahue Institute, 2007; Office of English Language Learners, 2010; Rennie Center, 2008; Shields & Miles, 2008; Tieddle & Reynolds, 2008; The Education Trust, 2005).

One limitation of using stringent criteria (such as studies that show correlation or causation with student outcomes) to review the literature or to identify studies for the ELL practices framework is that it favors school practices that lend themselves to quasi-experimental or large randomized studies. These studies focus on easily quantifiable, standardized outcomes such as test scores. Another potential limitation of using an evidence-based framework is to end up with a purely confirmatory study – practices intended to raise test scores will result in high test scores. To avoid this pitfall, we kept protocols semi-structured to check for framework indicators in operation in the schools, allowing for other topics to emerge. We also triangulated data collection in an effort to hear different perspectives on the same questions.

Case Study Methods

A case study design was selected to capture the uniqueness of each school in a rich, in-depth portrait. Case studies seemed better suited for this task than other forms of qualitative inquiry because we wanted to conduct within-case analyses to identify and report themes and practices emerging within each specific school context first. As a second step, we conducted a cross-case analysis to identify shared practices at the schools during the study period, SY2006-SY2009. The case study method, however, presented some hurdles: data collection was conducted in the Spring of 2011, after the end of the study period (SY2006-SY2009), and the boundaries of the unit of analysis – the school – were not always clear. In the section below we discuss what we did to surmount these hurdles.

Timing of the Case Study Data Collection

The study period, SY2006-SY2009, was one of intense change in Boston Public Schools. The district's response to the passage of Chapter 386 of the Massachusetts Laws of 2002, which replaced Transitional Bilingual Education with Sheltered English Immersion programs as the preferred modality for the education of ELL students, was only two years old. At an administrative level, a new Superintendent was recruited in 2007 and a new Assistant Superintendent for English Language Learners was hired in 2009. Following the study period, in 2009, changes initiated by the administration were capped by a civil rights investigation by the U.S. Department of Justice, which was settled in 2010, when the district agreed to redress violations of ELL students' civil rights. Simultaneously, there were also district changes in curriculum and professional development programs. For example, the district purchased Reading Street, a set of leveled reading materials with embedded activities, for literacy instruction. At the time, many schools were implementing Readers' and Writers' Workshop, an approach to literacy instruction. Thus, in the Spring of 2011, the district-wide climate for the education of ELL students was different from the one encountered by the schools in SY2006-SY2009. For example, there was an increased awareness of the rights of ELL students and their families to language learner services. The legal mandate requiring that ELL students be taught by teachers who were trained to shelter English instruction meant that many BPS teachers were participating in the 4-Category Training. Other compliance issues, including those regarding assessment and services, were also being followed closely by the Department of Justice.

Yin (Yin, 2009) has argued that, because case studies rely largely on interviews and observations, they should only be used to investigate contemporary phenomena. When the phenomenon under study is in the past, the method can become unreliable. To mitigate the effects of this limitation, one of the research team's first tasks was to recruit the former principals to participate in the study. In addition, during site visits, we reminded study participants to focus on effective practices with ELL students during the period between SY2006 and SY2009. Specific strategies to ensure that the portraits were accurate depictions of the schools during the study period included the following:

- During interviews, researchers noted which school staff had been in the school during the study years. Additional interviews were conducted with key school staff in one school who had been in the school during the study years and had left. They were contacted by the key school ELL leaders and asked to be interviewed.
- Interviewers included regular guiding comments and questions such as "We are trying to document what was going on in SY2006-SY2009, so please tell us about that time period." "Was this practice or PD or framework happening in the study years?" and "Were there major changes in this practice since SY2009?" These prompts ensured that researchers were capturing what occurred during the study years and eliminated from the study information about what occurred after the study years.
- Hallway and classroom observation data were used to corroborate rather than identify best ELL practices. We interpreted classroom and other school observations conservatively. If the data from observations aligned with the interviews and documentation, we assumed that the work from the study period had carried over to the present day. If interviews and documentation focused on a particular practice from SY2006-SY2009 that was seen in multiple observations, we concluded that it was an institutionalized practice from that time period rather than something that was introduced more recently. No observation data were included in the case studies unless they were triangulated by interviews and/or documentation.
- We requested documentation from the study period, rather than from the data collection period. The availability of this documentation was

uneven. As with the interviews, if documentation from after the study period was submitted, we asked whether or not the documentation reflected what was going on during the study period. The documentation that appears in the case studies was all from the study period.

- Key school ELL leaders during the study period reviewed the portraits for accuracy, with the directive to check for reflecting SY2006-SY2009 activities and practices (LAI facilitators and former Principals).

For an example of how researchers dealt with the data collection timing issue, in one school, interviews revealed professional development on language objectives during the study period. Artifacts from the study period revealed that teachers did receive resources on developing language objectives for their lessons. In the observations of 2011, we found that in most classes, teachers had posted language objectives on their daily agenda boards. With this level of triangulation, despite not having observations from the study period, we could be confident that the schools' investment during the study period was implemented and sustained.

Despite these efforts, we still had to deal with recall bias and uneven availability of archival materials across schools. For example, the improving schools had much more detailed archival data of practices during the study years than the consistently high performing schools. We speculated this could be due to the fact that the improving schools were in the midst of school reform during the study period, while the consistently improving schools had stabilized after intense reforms in years prior to SY2006-SY2009. On the other hand, the Principals of the consistently high performing schools had the benefit of time to work out a vision of which school improvement efforts could be attributed to ELL success during those years.

A second challenge the study confronted was that, although the school was the unit of analysis, the boundaries of this study were ELL students. In the schools that had SEI programs, the separation of ELL students from native English speakers made it easier to differentiate what worked for ELL students, especially those at lower MEFLA levels. However, in the Two-Way Bilingual program school, ELL students were taught in integrated classrooms with native English speakers and special needs students from the outset. Thus, it was harder to distinguish practices for ELL students from practices for all students.

Data Collection

Preparatory Interviews. Schools were advised of their selection for the current study by the Office of English Language Learners in Boston Public Schools. The Assistant Superintendent for English Language Learners wrote a congratulatory letter – sent by email as well as regular mail – introducing the study and the research team that would be responsible for data collection and analysis. The research team included representatives of the two collaborating research institutions, the Center for Collaborative Education and the Mauricio Gaston Institute. One explicit request of the OELL was that researchers be paired for site visits rather than conducting them alone. Thus, the two-day site visits to each school were conducted by pairs of researchers.

Prior to entering each school, a preliminary phone call and/or meeting was held with each school Principal and relevant staff to familiarize them with the background to their school's identification, to discuss the selection of interviewees, and to share scheduling and logistical needs for the site visits. Researchers also used this initial meeting to clarify that the period under study was SY2006-SY2009 and the need to interview individuals who could speak about changes that took place at the school leading to success in those years. The following list of site visit activities was shared with the Principals of case study schools. A key task during the preliminary meeting was a discussion of the interviewees and the scheduling of interviews, including class coverage during interviews, so as to maximize the research team's time on site and to reduce disruption to classes. There was some variation in the site visit schedules at each school. Site visits typically included:

- Interview and debrief with Principal
- Interview with other administrators
- Interview with Instructional Leadership Team
- Interview with SEVELL staff members
- Interview with regular education teachers who have ELL students in their classrooms
- Interviews with other staff
- Focus group with family members of ELL students
- Classroom visits to ELL classrooms and at least some regular education classrooms

We wanted to ensure that each case study included the experiences and perceptions of multiple stakeholders, including families, administrators, and staff who had been at the school during SY2006-SY2009. The interim Principals⁴⁸ who headed the four schools at data collection time had different levels of knowledge about their schools' histories. Thus, one of our first steps was to interview teachers who had been at the school during SY2006-SY2009. We discovered that all four of the schools had strong LAT facilitators for at least part of the study period, three of whom were still there. These LAT facilitators all provided a historical overview of the school's efforts to improve and sustain ELL learning during the study period. All except one former Principal conceded interviews to discuss progress in their previous schools.

Site visits. The Principals or their designees developed a two-day site visit schedule based on these guidelines and the background meeting. They also notified their respective staffs about the site visits and the block of time during which they would be interviewed and observed.

Each interview began with a brief description of the study and the reasons why the school was selected. After that, interviewees were encouraged to tell their story of success or improvement in educating ELL students. Rather than structured protocols, interviews were semi-structured, guiding participants in addressing each domain of the framework for ELL education, if relevant. However, interview questions did not probe for specific practices that populated the framework; rather, they asked the interviewees to describe any practices related to each domain (i.e., mission and vision, assessment). For the case study schools that had predominantly native Spanish speakers (Ellis and Sarah Greenwood),

one member of the pair of researchers was herself a native Spanish speaker. For the Chinese and Vietnamese SEI program schools (Quincy School and Excel HS), neither member of the research pair reflected the language of the SEI program. When needed, translators identified by the schools were used to communicate with families of ELL students for internal validity and triangulation purposes; one researcher attended all four site visits.

Interviews had either a one-on-one or a focus group format that lasted 45-60 minutes. Principals were interviewed independently. Teachers were mostly interviewed in groups at times that called for the least disruption in their teaching schedules, such as during common planning time or lunch. The LT was interviewed in a focus group. All interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed.

Because all four Principals who had led the schools before and during SY2006-SY2009 had left their positions at the schools,⁴⁹ one of the first steps in data collection was to identify, contact, and interview these former school leaders. We also determined that interviewing teachers who had been in each school before and during the study period was important.

During classroom observations, the researchers attended the classes alone and took notes. The researchers filled out the observation protocols after each observation, rather than during it, so as not to distract the teachers and students. The researchers entered the rooms quietly and sat behind or to the side of the students in order to be as unobtrusive as possible.

After the first site visit, the research team met to discuss the process, and they determined that the protocols were operating as designed and intended

Table 9.7. Site Visit Data Collection

	# of Class Observations	# of Staff Interviewed (Individual & Group)	# of Parents and Alumni Interviewed (Groups)	# of Community Partners Interviewed or Observed (Individual)
Quincy School	15	31	5	4
Sarah Greenwood	16	28	5	7
Ellis ES	9	13	1	0
Excel HS	16	17	6*	1
TOTAL	56	89	13	12

* Alumni were adult graduates of the school who attended the school during the study period. Alumni were interviewed only at Excel HS.

One modification was to cast a more narrow net by focusing only on teachers and staff who had been at the school during the study period. The remaining site visits were then conducted.

The table summarizes the data collected at each site. The Ells posted the lowest numbers of interviews and observations because four of the SEI teachers who had been at the school during SY2006-SY2009 were either on leave or had left the school by the time of data collection. The guidelines, interview, and observation protocols are available upon request.

While retrospective case studies are challenging, in the interviews we asked specifically about events and activities during the study period. We interpreted classroom and other school observations conservatively. If instructional strategies were consistently observed in multiple classrooms, we concluded that they had reached a level of sustainability over time. If the data from observations aligned with the interviews and documentation, we assumed that the work from the study period had carried over to the present day.

Case study analysis. The purpose of analysis was to describe practices found at each school. Yin recommends treating each case study as a separate "experiment" leading to its own findings (Yin, 2009). We compared practices found in each school to the ELL practices framework to check for replication, which strengthened the framework. The same logic involved documenting practices that emerged across schools and were not in the framework for the purposes of expanding the ELL best practices framework using future research. Thus, we used the literature base to analyze our findings, but we also allowed findings to inform potential modifications of the evidence base. In this way, we recognized the important contribution that experienced practitioners, in this case the staff from the case study schools, made to our understanding of best ELL practices.

Analysis began with a full day meeting once the site visits were completed, for the researchers to discuss findings and identify patterns and differences across the sites. One of the two researchers who conducted each site visit took primary responsibility for the analysis of the site visit data and writing of the case study. A primarily inductive approach was taken to analyzing the data collected in each school. Analysis began with the research team sharing observations from each school about practices and stances.

Discussions involved the sharing of emerging categories, patterns, and themes from interviews and observations in each school. Researchers used software for qualitative analysis to code interview transcripts. Codes documented the teachers' and administrators' beliefs and practices during the study period. We used open coding to extract key "themes" from the data, especially themes that explained the "how" and "why" of a school's success. We also used the theoretical framework to code individual school practices that were shared during interviews. In other words, when data reflected practices in the framework, supported by the literature, they were coded accordingly. This analysis approach did not exclude the coding of practices that emerged which were not reflected in the framework. Rather, they expanded the research team's findings about ELL practices present in and across case study schools. Triangulation involved hearing from multiple stakeholders about the same topics. In addition, because site visits involved pairs of researchers, including one researcher who participated in all four pairs, triangulation occurred by comparing findings between the two researchers. To a lesser extent, the use of documentation from the study period and observations from site visits further confirmed our findings.

The codes and themes in the reports were shared and revised multiple times to monitor a level of consistency in "gran size" across the four case studies. Draft case studies were shared with each Principal, former Principal, and primary case study contact for feedback and factual corrections before finalizing. When the emerging findings suggested that some individuals in each school played key roles in the success of the school's ELL program, researchers returned to these people to inform them of the unanticipated finding and ask them to consent to participation in the study without a guarantee of full confidentiality, since there was only one person in that role at the school. They all subsequently signed the same consent form as the Principals, to whom we also could not guarantee full confidentiality.

Synthesis Report

Once we coded each case study inductively, we proceeded to conduct comparisons across cases using two strategies. First, we analyzed findings deductively to compare them to the ELL practices framework developed in the beginning of the study. The codes and findings from each case study were reviewed using the expectation that some or all of the ELL best practices in the framework would have been found in the case study schools, since these were high performing or steadily improving schools for ELL students. Data from each school were mapped onto the ELL practices framework to identify which of the four schools exhibited each indicator, and to what extent. We created charts of shared practices among the schools, using the framework to identify practices for which there is strong empirical support in the literature, while allowing space for emerging practices that were not in the framework. Second, we also identified practices and strategies that were not found in the research-based framework, and reported them as emerging themes. This inductive strategy allowed us to showcase practices recurrent across schools during the study period that may have accounted for the school's success as well.

Limitations of the Case Study Approach

As mentioned previously, the fact that the data used to identify the case study schools were from SY2006 to SY2009, while data collected from the schools for the case studies were gathered in SY2011 limited the conclusions that could be drawn. However, we specifically focused on the events and activities during the study period during interviews and in document collection. We interpreted classroom and other school observations conservatively. If instructional strategies were consistently observed in multiple classrooms, we concluded that they had reached a level of sustainability over time. If the data from observations aligned with the interviews and documentation, we assumed that the work from the study period had carried over to the present day. With this level of triangulation, despite not having observations from the study period, we deduced that the school's investment during the study period was implemented and sustained.

Other limitations to the case study methods included:

- The researchers did not always reflect the language and culture of the predominant ELL group.
- Classroom observations were 15-30 minutes each, which is not enough time to capture all of the activities and expertise that a teacher employs. Given their brief nature and the timing of the data collection relative to the study period (discussed previously), observations were used as secondary data to corroborate interview findings.
- Due to resource constraints, schools were only visited for two days; thus, they are a snapshot of a particular point in time, rather than across time. Additional data collection time for each school extended beyond the two site-visit days, through email, phone calls, and in-person interviews with key individuals.
- In all of the case study schools, there had been one or more changes in leadership between the study period (SY2006-SY2009) and the data collection period (SY2011). Thus, some of the practices that were implemented during the study period had not been sustained and could not be observed during data collection.

- Given the difference between the study period for which these schools were identified as consistently high performing or steadily improving and the data collection period, even staff who were present in the school during the duration may have memories that are not entirely accurate, or perceptions of their own practices that are different from reality due to the context of the school and the district. This sort of recall bias could lead a study participant to report ELL practices in hindsight which might have been less developed or implemented than they report. Our efforts to take into account the possibility of recall bias include making sure more than one person told us the same information in separate interviews, phone calls, or emails.

- Comparison schools, such as those that were performing as predicted or lower than predicted, were not studied. Thus, some of the practices that emerged in the case study schools could also be found in those schools.
- Four case studies are a limited sample of schools. The study of more high performing, steadily improving schools, or of schools with similar demographic profiles with predicted or lower than predicted outcomes based on their demographic profiles, would strengthen this study.
- The ELL practices framework was developed using stringent criteria for inclusion. Therefore, many expert recommendations from researchers, practitioners, and policy-makers were not included unless they were confirmed by empirical evidence. The criteria eliminated a vast descriptive literature on what is known about ELL culture, language, assimilation, and learning when the studies were not focused on student outcomes.

⁴⁹ MEREL's High-Performing, High-Needs (HPPHN) study compared two groups of demographically similar, high-needs elementary schools in 10 states. The study identified four key components of school success: Leadership, Professional Community, School Environment, and Instruction.

⁴⁸ The Horace Mann School for the Deaf serves deaf students and uses American Sign Language; in SY2009 there were 17 ELL students. The Carter Development Center serves students with severe/profound disabilities; in SY2009 there were 9 ELL students. The Community Academy is an alternative high school which did not serve any ELL students during SY2009.

⁴⁷ When we ran initial regressions on the entire sample of 131, we obtained three or four outliers. After removing the outliers from the analyses and re-running, we obtained three or four new outliers. This pattern could continue until we had very few schools left in the analyses. When we divided the sample into elementary and secondary samples, outliers disappeared in nearly all analyses. Because individual cases that are substantially different from the bulk of the cases can distort the regression equation that is created, careful attention to outliers is critical. In regression, it is common practice to remove outliers from the analysis and re-compute the regression equation to ensure that it accurately represents the data.

⁴⁶ Because results based on small numbers of students can fluctuate widely from year to year due to random fluctuations in the characteristics of the children participating in a particular year as opposed to programmatic features present in the school, it is unwise to make policies or institute practices based on results from these schools. The central limit theorem and the law of large numbers indicate that once the number of students in the sample reaches at least 30, these natural fluctuations diminish rapidly. However, if we are able to accept some natural fluctuations, results based on less than 30 may be acceptable. We consulted with two regressions experts at the University of Massachusetts-Boston, who reviewed output files and deemed dropping the threshold to 15 acceptable in this case, because we used the regression results from multiple years, and outliers were not an issue.

⁴⁵ See the Methods Appendix for the companion report, *Improving Educational Outcomes of English Language Learners in Schools and Programs in Boston Public Schools*, for a detailed description of how the student-level database was created.

⁴⁴ The Massachusetts Student Information Management System (SIMS) is a student-level data collection system that includes common data elements for each school and district across the state at three time points during each school year – October, March, and June. For this study we had October and June SIMS data, which we used to define a single variable for a school year in order to include all students, though within a school year, most students were present in both October and June. In general, data from June was used to override any discrepancies with October data.

⁴³ MEPA scores from SY2006-SY2008 were reported as a performance level on a scale of 1 to 4. In 2009 performance levels were changed to a 1 to 5 scale. Using the MA DESI chart provided in the Guide to Understanding the 2009 Annual Measurable Achievement Objectives (AMAOs) Reports (MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2009), we converted April 2009 results back to a 1 to 4 scale to use for the creation of the dependent variables used in the multiple regressions for MCAS proficiency rates. This conversion allowed MEPA results to be comparable over time.

⁴² Promotion data were not available for SY2009, as the computation would require grade level data from October 2009 (beyond the scope of the data available for this study).

⁴¹ Given the findings in the companion report concerning the poor LEP student achievement at the middle grades, future research should focus on middle schools that are successful with ELL students.

⁴⁰ Only the Interim Principal, at the Sarah Greenwood School, was a school veteran who had been appointed Acting Principal at the time of the study.

³⁹ Three retired and one was promoted to Central Office.

³⁸ Alumni were adult graduates of the school who attended the school during the study period. Alumni were interviewed only at Exact HS.

APPENDIX 2: ELL Practices Framework Based on Literature Review

Mission and Vision	References
Principal communicates a clear vision for the school that focuses on high expectations and student learning outcomes (using measurable and monitored objectives, with explicit attention to subgroups).	Williams et al., 2007; Saunders et al., 2009; August & Pease-Avarez, 1996
Responsibility for ELL achievement is distributed school-wide, not just among ELL teachers.	Williams et al., 2007
School Organization & Decision-Making School has clear procedures and guidelines for identifying ELL students, designation of ELL English proficiency level, and assigning students to classrooms and programs that rely on multiple sources of data including information from ELL student's family; assessment results in reading, writing, speaking, and listening in both L1 and L2; and past school records. The principal guides school reform, stabilizes the school so that teachers can take instructional risks, and focuses on continuous improvement.	Gersten et al., 2007; August & Pease-Avarez, 1996
Culture and Climate School's faculty ethnic, cultural, and/or linguistic makeup resembles the student body's ethnic, cultural, and/or linguistic makeup. Students' cultures and life experiences are valued, and students are encouraged to develop ethnic identity. The school provides a safe and orderly environment, including for ELL students. Caring adult-student relationships are a pervasive part of the school culture. The school has a culture of high expectations for ELL students as well as all students.	Tellez & Waxman, 2006; August & Pease-Avarez, 1996 Waxman et al., 2007; August & Pease-Avarez, 1996; August & Shanahan, 2006 Waxman et al., 2007; August & Pease-Avarez, 1996 Waxman et al., 2007
Curriculum and Instruction The curriculum and instruction program is coherent and standards-based. Teachers create small groups of students at different English proficiency levels to work together on academic tasks in a structured fashion. Activities serve to practice and extend material already taught. English language development instruction includes all domains of academic English (syntax, grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, conventions) and daily, meaningful opportunities to use them. Teachers use strategies such as modeling, visual aids, realia, gesture, and interaction around text to ensure that students can successfully engage in literacy activities. Students participate in carefully designed opportunities to interact with more fluent peers in reading and language arts. English language development instruction uses mainstream English, with L1 used strategically to learn L2. Children learn to read in L1 and L2 simultaneously; oral proficiency and literacy in L1 helps students to learn L2.	Williams et al., 2007; August & Pease-Avarez, 1996; Goldenberg, 2008 Gersten et al., 2007; Genesee, 2006; Goldenberg, 2008 August et al., 2010; Gersten et al., 2007; Waxman et al., 2007 August et al., 2010; Goldenberg, 2008 Gersten et al., 2007; August & Shanahan, 2006 August et al., 2010 Goldenberg, 2008; August & Shanahan, 2006; Genesee et al., 2006

English language development instruction continues at least until early advanced (MEPA Level 4) or advanced (MEPA Level 5) before redesignation.	August et al., 2010
English language development instruction is delivered by a specialist in a pull-out program.	Williams, 2007
Teachers use small groups of students at the same language proficiency level during classroom instructional time to differentiate instruction, to promote communication skills, and to build self-confidence.	August et al., 2010; Waxman et al., 2007
Adequate instructional resources are available in the form of classroom materials and supports for struggling ELL students.	Williams et al., 2007
Literacy programs built on those for monolingual English students (e.g. Success for All, Reading Mastery, Read Naturally, Jolly Phonics, FastForWord, etc.).	August et al., 2010
English language development instruction has focused language-learning objectives.	August et al., 2010; Morris & Ortega, 2000
English language development instruction emphasizes oral communication – speaking and listening – and opportunities for extended dialogue.	August et al., 2010; August & Shanahan, 2006; Waxman et al., 2007
Intensive, daily small-group interventions are provided to English learners at risk for reading problems.	Gersten et al., 2007
Interventions focus on the five core reading elements (phonological awareness, phonics, reading fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension).	Gersten et al., 2007; August & Shanahan, 2006
Explicit, extensive, varied vocabulary instruction includes word meaning and word-learning strategies, particularly of common words, as well as of content words in depth.	Goldenberg, 2008
ELL students receive quality content instruction in addition to English Language Arts and ESL instruction is culturally responsive and tied to ELL students' families and communities.	Waxman et al., 2007; August & Pease-Avarez, 1996; Au & Jordan, 1981
Assessment Teachers are trained to use frequent formative assessments of all kinds for ELL students to identify and monitor those who require additional instructional support, particularly in reading. School uses state, district, and local assessment data on English proficiency as well as content knowledge to improve student achievement and instruction. Schools use the same standards and performance benchmarks in reading for ELL students as for native English speakers.	Gersten et al., 2007; Saunders et al., 2009; Goldenberg, 2008 Williams, Hakuta & Haertel, 2007; Saunders et al., 2009; August & Pease-Avarez, 1996 August & Pease-Avarez, 1996
Professional Development Regular education and ELL teachers have weekly, shared planning time to focus on academics and instructional improvement, when they look at student work, share practice, identify student needs, design curriculum and instruction, and review student progress. Professional development in teaching ELL students is hands-on, including demonstration lessons, mentoring, and coaching.	Saunders et al., 2009; Waxman et al., 2007 August & Shanahan, 2006

APPENDIX 3: List of Acronyms

Teachers receive professional development from outside change agents, such as university professors and consultants	August & Shanahan, 2006
Teachers are trained to teach academic English starting in early elementary grades	Genesen et al., 2007
Teachers are qualified to shelter English for content instruction (4-Category training), teach ESL, or clarify for students in LI and are assigned appropriately.	Waxman et al., 2007; August & Pease-Avarez, 1996; Goldenberg, 2008
Teachers and specialists are trained to effectively deliver small-group instruction for ELL students who fall behind	August et al., 2010; Saunter, Goldenberg, & Gallimore, 2009
School staff receive professional development to become familiar with the school's ELL community, recognize cultural differences and how they play out, communicate with families, and deliver instruction in culturally competent ways	Williams et al., 2007; August & Pease-Avarez, 1996
Teachers receive professional development in small-group reading interventions, including the use of intervention materials	Genesen et al., 2007
Family and Community Involvement	
School offers a variety of ways for families become involved with the school, since a family's culture may influence comfort with school involvement	Lee & Bowen, 2006
The school actively engages community partners and the school staff as resources for ELL students; to provide a variety of out-of-school time programs for different linguistic groups, for ELL students and English proficient students to attend together, for ELL students to reinforce academics.	August & Pease-Avarez, 1996; Waxman et al., 2007
School has bilingual, bicultural personnel who are non-judgmental, available to speak to parents when they come to school, and learn about the families' experience	August & Pease-Avarez, 1996; Waxman et al., 2007
School uses a variety of strategies (phone calls, notes, chats a classroom door, home visits, informal focus groups) to communicate with parents regularly	August & Pease-Avarez, 1996
Information about program choices and outcomes is made available to parents in linguistically accessible form	August & Pease-Avarez, 1996
English language development instruction includes all elements of academic English (syntax, grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, conventions) and daily, meaningful opportunities to use them.	August et al., 2010; Genesen et al., 2007; Waxman et al., 2007
Teachers use strategies such as modeling, visual aids, realia, gesture, and intonation around text to ensure that students can successfully engage in literacy activities.	August et al., 2010; Goldenberg, 2008
Students participate in carefully designed opportunities to interact with more fluent peers in reading and language arts.	Genesen et al., 2007; August & Shanahan, 2006

AWC	Advanced Work Class
BPS	Boston Public Schools
CCL	Collaborative Coaching and Learning
DRA	Developmental Reading Assessment
ELL	English language learner
EP	English Proficient
ESL	English as a Second Language
FTE	Full-Time Equivalent
GLM	Grade Level Meeting
ILT	Instructional Leadership Team
L1	First, or native, language
L2	Target or second language (English in this study)
LAT	Language Acquisition Team
LEP	Limited English Proficient
LEP-SWD	Limited English Proficient Students With Disabilities
MCAS	Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System
MELA-O	Massachusetts English Language Assessment-Oral
MEPA	Massachusetts English Proficiency Assessment
OELL	Office of English Language Learners
SAMI	Scaffolded Apprenticeship Model
SEI	Structured English Immersion
SLOP	Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol
SPED	Special Education
SRI	Scholastic Reading Inventory
SST	Student Support Team
SY	School Year
TSG	Teacher Study Group
TBE	Transitional Bilingual Education
TWB	Two-Way Bilingual



