Promising Literacy Instruction Practices for Elementary School English Language Learners in Two Districts

MOUNTAIN VIEW ELEMENTARY SCHOOL DISTRICT, EL MONTE, CALIFORNIA
ORANGE COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT, ORLANDO, FLORIDA

NATIONAL READING TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE CENTER
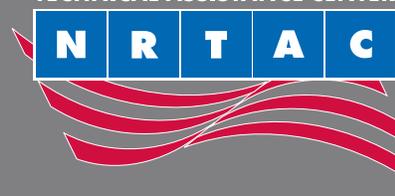
N R T A C

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Contents

This case study presents two successful urban districts, one large district in Florida and one mid-size district in California, engaged in promising practices that have academically benefited K–3 English language learners (ELLs). It focuses on schools in these two districts that have participated in the national Reading First initiative for four or more years. Several sources of data were used in order to offer case narratives on each district and cross-case statements of findings. The primary source of data was focus group sessions conducted by two researchers who collected the information at each district site. Secondary sources of data were meetings with the district coordinators and documents made available to the researchers for review. The final sources were brief school visits during the mornings of the second, third, and fourth days. All of the sources offered the researchers insight into the unique features of the practices supporting ELLs in reading and English language development; the factors that interact between district and school functions on behalf of ELLs; and stakeholders' perceptions of the outcome of the Reading First program's effect on ELLs' success.

> "Case study is the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances."
>
> (Stake, 1995, p. xi)

This section summarizes the background of Reading First and introduces current research on English language development. It is followed by a statement of purpose and research questions, data collection and analysis procedures, and descriptions of the featured districts.

Background

In *The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001*, the Reading First initiative was authorized as a program to improve reading outcomes in the nation's schools through the use of instructional practices and curricula based on scientific reading research for grades K–3. California was approved to participate in the initiative's first year, 2002-03; Florida followed in 2003-04. With considerable Reading First grant funding each year for six years (at least 80 percent to local educational agencies and 20 percent to state agencies), systems were established to provide training, acquire curricular materials, monitor student progress, and meet instructional time requirements in an effort to ensure that all children in America learn to read well by the end of third grade (U.S. Department of Education, 2002).

An overarching objective of this initiative was to assist classroom teachers in screening, identifying, and overcoming barriers to students' ability to read on grade level. One population of students in particular required attention to their unique needs: the growing group of English language learners (ELLs). "In the ten years between 1996 and 2006, the nation's K–12 ELL population rose by over 60 percent while the size of the overall student population remained essentially unchanged" (Batalova, Fix, & Murray, 2006). In recent reports, the achievement of elementary school ELLs has been unremarkable compared to their English-speaking peers. For example, "The results of national testing conducted in 2007 show that only seven percent of fourth grade ELL students scored at or above the proficient level in reading in English compared with 36 percent of English speakers" (NCES, 2007). In

another study, ELLs served by federal programs attended schools in which only 24 percent of students met Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) targets for the Limited English Proficient (LEP) subgroup in 2004-05; the same findings were evident in 2006–07 (LeFloch, Martinez, O'Day, Stecher, & Taylor, 2007).

In general, the scientific research base on ELLs is limited compared to the research base on all students. However, increasing research evidence suggests that some elements of effective reading instruction have demonstrated the importance of explicit instruction when teaching ELLs to read. (Shanahan & Beck, 2006). After a comprehensive search for research literature between 1980 and 2002, the National Literacy Council found 17 experimental studies that identified ways to develop literacy in ELLs (August & Shanahan, 2006). Under NCLB, schools are required to teach ELLs English as a second language and content-related knowledge and skills as defined by the states' English and other academic core content standard. Some critical factors studied by researchers appear to make a significant difference in ELLs' academic performance: "educational history, cultural and social background, length of exposure to the English language, and access to appropriate and effective instruction to support second language development" (Francis, Lesaux, Kieffer, & Rivera, 2006, p.5).

The instructional practices that have been found to accelerate ELLs' reading gains have been well-documented in several findings of the National Literacy Panel (NLP). One key finding, based on five meta-analyses of the 17 experimental studies, is that learning to read in the home language promotes reading achievement in the second language (August et al., 2006). Three of the five meta-analyses focused on elementary-aged students who received reading instruction in Spanish. Another NLP finding, reported in a major teacher journal, confirmed that what we know about good instruction and curriculum in general holds true for ELLs…just like English speakers learning to read in English, ELLs benefit from explicit teaching of the components of literacy, such as phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, comprehension, and writing (Goldenberg, 2008, p.17). Goldenberg also reports that when instructing English learners in English, teachers must modify instruction to take into account students' language limitations.

Goldenberg (p. 22) cites two other important points from NLP concerning the degree of progress ELLs are expected to make and under what instructional conditions:

- Adequate progress in the early stages of learning to read—letter-sound combination, decoding, and word recognition when instruction is clear, focused, and systematic.
- Adequate progress when taught complex vocabulary, syntax, and comprehension when instruction is modified and when oral language is proficient enough to make the content more accessible and comprehensible.

Against this backdrop, we present case studies undertaken in two Reading First districts, in two different geographical areas of the country with high percentages of ELLs and with ELL reading achievement data that documented a level of success.

Purpose

The purpose of the case studies was to explore the practices of two Reading First districts in addressing the learning needs of their ELLs. Specifically, these studies set about to explain or clarify key features of the Reading First program that led to achievement gains for ELLs. The primary data source was the perceptions of the districts' stakeholders: district staff, principals, coaches, teachers, and parents. The four study questions were:

- What are the expectations for English language learners as perceived by the district, schools, parents, and community?
- What are the patterns of instruction for English language learners that differ from the English only students (instructional materials, duration of instruction, grouping, and goals)?

- What role does professional development play in preparing teachers to address the needs of English language learners?
- What are the trends of reading achievement in Reading First selected schools with high percentages of English language learners?

Data collection and analysis

The study proceeded in four stages. The first stage entailed selecting districts and schools based on three criteria: high-density ELL populations, strong implementation of the Reading First program, and relatively high percentage of ELLs meeting "proficiency" on state standards assessments. The second stage required the districts to approve the schedule for focus group sessions and school site visits (see Appendix A). The third stage required the districts to select and assign district stakeholders to five focus groups by function (district leaders, principals, reading coaches, teachers, and parents) based on guidelines for selection (see Appendix B), and to support the focus group sessions (see Appendix C for focus group questions). The final stage required the districts to participate in pre and post briefings. The analyses were then based on information collected from the focus groups, observations from the brief school site visits, and information gathered from debriefings and documents provided by the district.

The case study methodology serves the study's intent to ensure rich and informative answers to each of the investigative questions. The general advantage of the case study approach as a form of qualitative research is to get an "insider's view" of a phenomenon and "give voice" to participants in that phenomenon (Brantlinger, Jimenez, Klinger, Pugach, & Richardson, 2005). As such, the researchers focused on contextual information about ELLs and on the interests of the stakeholders. Unlike quantitative research that uses statistical analysis to answer specific questions, the researchers used probing questions aligned to the study's purpose to explore issues and stakeholder perceptions. With the exception of parents, each focus group answered questions in seven categories of interest: school-level efforts in instructing ELLS; district and school leadership support for instructing ELLs; instructional materials; instructional supports; student achievement; assessment and use of data; and belief and results. The goal of the analyses was to examine information systematically for converging evidence on themes or categories of relevance to practices supporting ELLs' achievements in reading.

Limitations of case study research should be noted. Although a case study can include both quantitative and qualitative data, this study uses quantitative data only for factoring the selection of the Reading First districts and their schools and for reporting achievement data provided through state and district documents. Given that the selections of districts, schools, and focus group participants were not random, generalizations from the study may not reflect other, similar populations. That said, the findings are based on multiple data sources (focus groups, informal interviews with district lead coordinators, district documents, and brief site visits to the selected schools) and a considerable range of perspectives (district leaders, principals, coaches, teachers, and parents) and do converge on factors of practice that appear to have contributed to achievement gains by the districts' ELLs.

Featured districts

To be selected, eligible Reading First districts had to meet three criteria: participation in the Reading First program for four or more years; contain three or more schools identified as effective implementers of the program; and have relatively high percentages of students at proficiency on the state reading standards. One district in California and one in Florida met the eligibility criteria. On full review of school-level data, six schools in Mountain View Elementary School District in El Monte, California, and five in Orange County School District in Orlando, Florida, were chosen to participate in assigned focus groups, with sessions to be held in their local districts.

Background information on the two districts introduces the case narratives that follow in Sections 2 and 3 of this study.

Mountain View Elementary School District. This medium sized, K–8 urban district of approximately 8,600 students in 2007–08, serves the El Monte and South El Monte communities in Los Angeles County. All ten elementary schools were eligible to participate in the Reading First Initiative, of which eight, or 75 percent, entered the program in 2003–04. State documents report the district's student demographics as 99 percent participating in the free or reduced-price lunch program (as the measure of socio-economic disadvantage); 69 percent as English language learners (ELLs); 91 percent as Hispanic or Latino, and 1 percent as White (California Department of Education, 2008). In terms of its schools' achievement scores on the California Standards Test (CST), the California Achievement Test 6 (CAT6), and the Reading First Achievement Index (AI), the district's eight Reading First schools outperformed, on the average, other Reading First districts' schools in Cohort 2 (with five years in the program) as well as those schools considered to be "high implementers" (using the state's Reading First Implementation Index score of greater than 41.1 to define "high"). However, when compared with all non-eligible Reading First schools in the state, the margin of difference remains considerable. A state report and the annual Reading First evaluation report the findings illustrated in Table 1 below to demonstrate the academic performance of Mountain View Reading First schools.

Table 1

Summary of Mountain View Elementary School District's Reading First Schools' Achievement Comparisons with Cohort 2 Districts, High Implementation Schools, and All California Non-Reading First Schools in Year 5 (2007–08)

Percentage of students at or above proficiency on the CST for English/Language arts			
	Comparison Groups		
Mt. View Reading First schools	All cohort 2 Reading First schools	High implementation schools 2 > 41.4	All non-RF schools in state
Grade 2	44	33.9	35.8	51.1
Grade 3	31	22.1	24.3	41.7
Percentage of Students At or Above 50th Percentile on the CAT6 for Reading			
	Comparison Groups		
Mt. View Reading First schools	All cohort 2 Reading First schools	High implementation schools 2 > 41.4	All non-RF schools in state
Grade 3	37	29.6	30.2	45.9

Source: California Department of Education, 2008; and Haager, Heimbichner, Dhar, Moulton, & McMillan, 2008, D-1

Having met all of the case study criteria, this District willingly accepted the invitation to participate in the case study during the week of May 11.

Orange County School District. This very large, K–12 urban district of approximately 175,000 students in 2007–08, serves the greater Orlando area in Central Florida. Of the district's 127 elementary schools, 37 participate in the Reading First initiative, of which 26, or 70 percent, entered the program in 2004–05. The remaining 11 schools began implementation in 2005–06. Elementary level student demographic information for the district indicates that 56 percent of the students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, 30 percent are classified as English language learners (ELLs); 32 percent are White, 32 percent Hispanic, and 28 percent are Black (Florida Department of Education, 2008b).

In terms of its student achievement levels, Orange County Public Schools (OCPS) has enjoyed much success in recent years, as demonstrated by its performance on the state assessment, the *Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test* (FCAT). In 2008, OCPS was graded an "A" district by the Florida Department of Education, one of only three large districts in Florida to receive this honor. English language learners in OCPS outscored the state average on the FCAT in reading in grades three through nine and outscored the state average in writing in grades four, eight, and ten. Additionally, the district has made great progress in narrowing the achievement gap between ELLs and non-ELLs, decreasing it from 35 percentage points in 2002–03 to 16 percentage points in 2007–08. Furthermore, more OCPS ELLs scored at level three (i.e., proficient) and above on the FCAT in reading than did ELLs in neighboring and other large school districts in Florida.

The transformation of classroom instruction to overcome barriers to students' ability to read is the essential objective of Reading First. This case study highlights the impact of Reading First on English language learners. The individual case narratives share certain characteristics, presented below.

Overarching finding

Priority support is given to instruction based on reading research and delivered through a variety of instructional models, with results of increased achievement for English language learners. Decisions are data-driven.

There is a precise intention in both districts to define instruction as more than the act of teaching. Instruction, in accordance with the Reading First precepts, also concerns the interactions among students, teachers, coaches, principals, district staff, and parents. Defined more broadly, the view shared by stakeholders is that "instruction is a stream, not an event, and it flows in and draws on environments—including other teachers and students, school leaders, parents, professionals, local districts, state agencies, and test, and text publishers" (Cohen, Raudenbush, and Ball, 2003). District leaders call for personalizing instructional approaches for English language learners through a variety of instructional models parents may choose for their children; extending instructional time after core instruction for English language development; and supporting site-based decision-making to give teachers time to plan lessons or to rearrange school schedules to improve opportunities for data-driven teaching.

Classroom teachers and coaches use data for many purposes: refining lessons, diagnosing learner weaknesses, sharpening instructional decisions, monitoring student progress, celebrating and staying focused on learning needs, and reporting and sharing findings through grade-level meetings and other professional learning lesson-planning sessions. Both districts use assessment tools tied to their instructional programs to monitor all students' learning. District and school stakeholders have embraced data-driven decision-making, both as recipients of the data reports and as discussants on the reports. They claim that schools' effective data use is key to the success of English language learners.

Four other important findings draw upon the circumstances and environments of these two districts: district leadership and collaboration, professional learning and professional development, focus on the non-negotiable beliefs, and trends in academic achievement.

Finding 1

District leadership and collaborative school cultures help to drive accountability for ensuring that English language learners achieve.

There is evidence of a direct relationship between the districts' clear expectations (in goal statements and in strategic plans) and expectations that ELLs will meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) growth targets—grade-level proficiency—along with all other students. When district leaders partner with schools to support time for collaboration, there is more flexibility at the school level to provide additional time for English language development, more time for teachers to meet on lesson development; and regular collegial exchanges for "homing in on certain areas that kids need extra help," as one teacher put it, for the benefit of both ELLs and other students. The districts are best described as places where top down meets bottom up: "shared leadership and joint responsibility for outcomes are the norm. The whole organization focuses on student performance."

Finding 2

Professional learning and professional development are key to changing classroom practice.

Leaders at both districts are committed to professional learning as both an individual and collective experience by providing and supporting opportunities for district-level professional development sessions (either face-to-face or through online courses), through sessions with external experts, and on-site professional learning with the aid of qualified literacy coaches. Increasingly, these districts appear to be investing in and building on professional learning opportunities in the context of the school and classroom. They are taking to heart the reform literature that calls for supporting the classroom teacher in the school: "Improvement is more a function of learning to do the right things in the setting where you work" (Elmore, 2004). According to stakeholders, both districts encourage teachers, coaches, and the district literacy experts to continue and sustain school-based learning opportunities that focus on improving their practices for teaching English language learners. Through a variety of examples (observing colleagues, holding professional learning community sessions, participating in grade-level meetings, etc.) teachers and coaches perceive they are able to refine their teaching practices in delivering core instruction and English language development instruction with favorable results.

Finding 3

A non-negotiable common mission: All students, especially English language learners, can achieve high standards given sufficient time and support.

When asked about their expectations for the academic success of ELLs, stakeholders in both districts appeared surprised by the question. They expressed a moral commitment to strive for equivalent results for ELLs and their English-speaking peers. Most focus group participants acknowledged proactive leadership at both the district and school levels in seeking ways to sustain connections among the layers of the system (district, school, parents, and community). Their non-negotiable conditions were: collaboration on moral purpose, continued learning about best practices, personalized instruction based on needs of ELLs, and use of data to be precise on delivery of instruction, whatever choice of instructional model. ELLs are expected to succeed and excel in meeting grade-level English reading standards.

The academic achievement of English language learners is improving incrementally to meet the States' Annual Measurable Achievement Objectives (AMAOs) in 2008.

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) is required under Title I of the federal NCLB Act of 2001. Each state, however, can set its own AYP/Annual Measurable Achievement Objective (AMAO) targets from 2002 through to 2014. Each state also has its own reading content standards tests with different benchmarks for proficiency (see descriptions in each case study). Both districts are focused on meeting the AYP/AMAOs for reading and their achievement is encouraging and for some schools, quite remarkable.

Three schools in Mountain View Elementary School District met their AMAOs for reading in 2007 and 2008; the other three are close to meeting the targets. The district's average percentage of proficiency (≥ level 4) for 2008, the year in English-Language Arts, for grades 2 and 3 was 44 percent and 31 percent respectively. For the six selected schools, the range at proficiency (≥ level 4) in English-Language Arts for grade 2 was 44 percent to 63 percent; and for grade 3 was 29 percent to 41 percent. All schools made the AMAO target (≥ 35.2 percent) for English Language Arts for second grade; and three schools made the targets in third grade. While the percentages are not yet at the level the district's stakeholders are ready to accept, they are improving and they feel they know where to tighten their precision in using promising practices.

The five selected elementary schools in Orange County School District exceeded the State's AMAO reading target for their total population in both 2007 and 2008. The State's reading AMAO benchmark was set at 51 percent in 2007 and increased to 58 percent in 2008. The district's average percentage for 2008 was 66 percent in reading and 84 percent in writing. For 2007, these numbers were 64 percent for reading and 85 percent for writing. All five schools selected for the study met the AMAO requirements in both reading and writing in 2007. In 2008, three of the five schools met AMAO requirements in both reading and writing.

In addition to the FCAT, Florida uses the Comprehensive English Language Learning Assessment (CELLA) to measure the growth of ELLs in the English language skills that they need to succeed in school. The percentage of OCPS ELLs making gains in all three domains of the CELLA exceeded state benchmarks in both 2006–07 and 2007–08.

Based on the 2008 achievement of the selected schools, three of the five schools are exceeding academic expectations in reading and writing, while two schools are making strides in meeting the Florida criteria for AYP.

Mountain View Elementary School District, El Monte, California

The Mountain View School District (MVSD) is located in the heart of San Gabriel Valley in Los Angeles County, California. A K–8 school district, it comprises ten elementary schools, one intermediate school, one middle school, an alternative education program for students in grades 5 through 8, and a Children's' Center/Head Start Pre-school Program. This mid-size urban district, with an enrollment of 8,600 students, serves the communities of El Monte and South El Monte, California. The student population is close to 91 percent Hispanic and 69 percent English Language Learners (ELLs).

Note: Many districts in California use the designation *English learners (ELs)*. For the sake of consistency, students will be referred to as *English language learners (ELLs)* throughout this document.

The district entered Reading First in California's second cohort (2003–04) and has participated in the grant for five years.

District and school selection

Six of the district's eight Reading First schools are included in this study. Figures on enrollment, disadvantaged status, and percentage of ELLs are detailed below in Table 2.

Table 2

Selected District Reading First Schools' Demographic Information, 200 –08

School	Student Enrollment	% Free/Reduced Lunch	% ELLs
1	594	100	58
2	808	100	44
3	602	100	52
4	674	100	43
5	966	100	50
6	608	98	38

Source: California Department of Education, 2008

Like all California Reading First LEAs, the Mountain View district has committed to a set of agreements (assurances) regarding program selection, implementation, assessment, collaboration, and coaching. The district adopted one of two comprehensive reading/language arts programs on California's approved list; committed to full implementation; required a monitoring system of program-related assessments, administered frequently; initiated a process for teacher collaboration; and hired qualified, full-time coaches to support its K–3 teachers. Efforts are ongoing to meet and strengthen the assurances to effect continuous improvement in student achievement and to extend the Reading First model throughout the district.

Student achievement in California schools is measured in a number of ways. The California Standards Test (CST), administered to all students in grades two through eleven each spring, measures student progress toward meeting the state standards benchmarks. It consists of criterion-referenced tests in mathematics, English-language arts, science, and writing, which measure student progress toward meeting the *California State Standards* benchmarks. Five achievement levels range from *far below basic* to *advanced*, with the second highest ranking of *proficient* being the desired target and an indication of grade-level performance for all students (see Table 3).

Another state test, the California English Language Development Test (CELDT) is administered annually to gauge English language learners' progress through five levels of English acquisition ranging from beginning Level 1 to *advanced* Level 5. Levels 4 and 5 on the CELDT, along with district-chosen additional measures, are used to reclassify English language learners as fully English proficient (see Table 4). There was a 30 percent increase from 2003 to 2008 in the number of ELLs in the elementary schools who were classified at the proficiency categories of level 3 and above. Another measure of the academic success of English language learners is the percentage of students who are reclassified as fully English. From 2003 to 2007, on the average, ten percent of students were reclassified each year.

Students in Reading First schools are also monitored on regularly administered program-related assessments that align with the units or themes of the core curriculum used in the district. The end-of year results on fluency and CST are reported centrally and form the basis for a Reading First Achievement Index (RFAI; see Table 5). In addition, a required survey of stakeholders (teachers, coaches, and principals) in Reading First schools is used to develop a Reading First Implementation Index (RFII). Results indicate that all schools achieved the State's Cohort 2 average performance on the RFAI and two schools performed higher on the average RFII survey. Four schools in Cohort 2 were statistically determined as "high implementer" schools.

> **A district leader comments on district growth**
>
> "Five years ago, 60 percent of our middle school students were classified as English learners. We are now at 35 percent by middle school, much due to reclassification based on improved English/Language Arts skills."

The district's Reading First schools were chosen for this study because of the high number of English language learners, the efforts made to meet their needs, and the successes achieved in increasing the numbers of ELLs in meeting proficiency in reading and language development and mathematics. For the past two years, at least three of the selected schools have met the targets for Annual Measurable Achievement Objectives (AMAOs) and all have met the annual growth targets for Academic Performance Index (API), both of which are California's key measures of progress (see Table 6).

Table 3

Percentage of Selected Reading First Schools' Grades 2–3 Students Scoring at Level 4 or Above on CST English-Language Arts and Mathematics in 2007 and 2008

Year	Grade	% Students Scoring > 4 (Proficient)	
		English-Language Arts	**Math**
School 1			
2007	2	54	75
2007	3	29	56
2008	2	44	64
2008	3	39	73
School 2			
2007	2	56	57
2007	3	18	43
2008	2	57	63
2008	3	27	59
School 3			
2007	2	44	57
2007	3	16	44
2008	2	28	49
2008	3	24	43
School 4			
2007	2	63	78
2007	3	30	64
2008	2	63	68
2008	3	41	70
School 5			
2007	2	46	65
2007	3	23	58
2008	2	49	61
2008	3	29	64
School 6			
2007	2	55	60
2007	3	21	48
2008	2	50	61
2008	3	33	54

Source: California Department of Education. (2008). The state does not disaggregate results for English learners, only for English Fluent Learners (those who are reclassified as Fluent English Proficient).

Table 4

California English Language Development Test (CELDT): District's Grade 3, Students at Proficiency Levels for 2002–2003 and 2007–2008 for Mountain View Schools

2002–2003					
Performance Levels	**Number Tested**	**Students at Proficiency Level**		**Students at Proficiency Level (Intermediate or Above)**	
		Number	**%**	**Number**	**%**
Advanced	847	23	3	371	44
Early Advanced		94	11		
Intermediate		254	30		
Early Intermediate and Beginning		476	56		
2002–2003					
Performance Levels	**Number Tested**	**Students at Proficiency Level**		**Students at Proficiency Level (Intermediate or Above)**	
		Number	**%**	**Number**	**%**
Advanced	626	39	6	466	74
Early Advanced		156	25		
Intermediate		271	43		
Early Intermediate and Beginning		160	26		

Table 5

California Reading First Achievement Index (RFAI) and Reading First Implementation Index (RFII) for Year 5 (Cohort 2) for Mountain View Reading First Schools

ELEMENTARY	2006 YEAR 3		2007 YEAR 4		2008 YEAR 5	
	RFAI	**RFII**	**RFAI**	**RFII**	**RFAI**	**RFII**
School 1	49	55	57	47	59	39
School 2	53	53	54	48	58	42
School 3	50	57	47	53	48	55
School 4	54	49	62	43	69	38
School 5	50	66	54	58	55	47
School 6	55	47	54	44	57	42
(State Average for Year 5 Districts)					(44.9)	(46.9)

RFAI: Reading First Achievement Index, a composite of K–3 achievement metrics that ranges from 0 to 100, and has risen an average of 3.1 points per year. For grades 2 and 3, the CST is a significant component of the RFAI.

RFII: Reading First Implementation Index, a composite score of K–3 teachers, coaches, and principals based on an annual survey that ranges from 0 to 100, and categorizes schools as high implementers from 41.5 and above or as low implementers from 35.9 and below.

(Source: Haager, et al., 2008, pp. 30, F-30 and F-31)

Table 6

2007 & 2008 Annual Measurable Achievement Objectives (AMAOs) and CA API Based on California Standards Test Scores on English-Language Arts and Mathematics for Selected Schools

	Met 2007 (24.4%) and Met 2008 (35.2%) for Proficiency on CST-English-Language Arts Met 2007 (26.5%) and Met 2008 (37.0%) for Proficiency on CST-Mathematics		
	English-Language Arts	Mathematics	CA API
School 1	NO	YES	YES
School 2	YES	YES	YES
School 3	NO	YES	YES
School 4	YES	YES	YES
School 5	NO	YES	YES
School 6	YES	YES	YES

Source: California Department of Education, 2008

Data collection

Researchers visited the district for four days from May 12–5, 2009. Five focus groups, arranged by the district, were convened to meet with the researchers to gather perceptions about the success of Reading First for the English language learners in their schools. To ensure consistency, similar questions were posed to each group. The daily schedule for the focus groups and school visits is found in Appendix A; Appendix C contains the focus group questions.

In addition to gathering information through focus groups, visits were made to selected schools to become more familiar with classroom climates and practices.

Selection and description of focus groups

- The district-level staff focus group contained five staff representatives of district administration including the directors of curriculum and instruction, English learner and parent programs, assessment and evaluation, student support services, and the district literacy content expert.
- The principal focus group contained six principals and one dean of instruction. All were from the schools selected to represent Mountain View School District in the study.
- The teacher focus group consisted of sixteen teachers who taught kindergarten through grade 3 and represented all Reading First schools in the district.
- The reading coach focus group consisted of six reading coaches and the district content literacy expert and represented the schools selected to participate in the study. The district content literacy expert supports the coaches in all of the district's schools.
- The parent focus groups consisted of fourteen parents of students at Reading First elementary schools. A translator accommodated parents as needed.

Findings

Information gathered through the focus group discussions suggest a number of findings that may account for the district's success with ELLs.

High expectations are matched with enabling actions.

Each stakeholder group was asked its expectations of academic success for ELLs. There was almost a sense of surprise that the question was posed, and to a person, stakeholders responded that expectations for ELLs were identical to those for English-speaking students. A principal commented: "The district's expectation for the success of English learners is communicated more strongly than ever before, and the supports are also more evident than ever."

Another principal noted that an additional $5000 was committed to each school to enhance materials for English Language Development, focused on oral language development. One coach expressed the district's shift in expectations for ELLs: "We've moved from a philosophy that said we should make the kids feel good to accepting the responsibility to push for success."

Another teacher echoed this idea when she said: "It's not okay to teach ELLs to draw. Reading First has changed our mentality; all students can learn at very high levels when we provide the instruction they need."

Stakeholders expressed recognition of the challenges involved in meeting the goal of reading and language proficiency for English learners—and the conviction that expectations could be met.

The parent focus group had the most to add in this area. In general, parents were very satisfied with the educational experiences and opportunities offered to their children. Most felt that the school system valued their children and that teachers and principals communicated openly and often with them. They valued the transparency and availability of data and cited visual displays of fluency progress as welcome information about their student's progress. One parent noted that she had at first been concerned about the public displays of children's fluency progress, and that her concern was alleviated through open communication with the teacher so that she understood the value of fluency and could work with the teacher to help her child make progress. Another parent welcomed the value placed on teaching academic English: "Spanglish is just not enough for my child to succeed in the world."

Parents felt very much included in the workings of the school and cited many opportunities to participate in meetings, parent nights, book fairs, family reading nights, and other literacy events. Community liaisons and translators added greatly to the events' accessibility for parents.

Asked to identify some enabling actions contributing to making high expectations a reality, stakeholders agreed on the following:

- District-wide scheduling of English Language Development time
- Monitoring student progress
- Emphasizing the oral and academic language needs of students
- Encouraging consistent routines in program and across grade levels
- Providing explicit instruction in standards-aligned materials with high levels of modeling the learning expectations for students
- Increasing grade-level planning and working toward Professional Learning Communities
- Owning the responsibility that all students needed to make grade-level benchmarks
- Monitoring and collaborating among district leaders, principals, coaches, and teachers in order to respond appropriately to student needs
- Keeping the explicit needs of English language learners front and center at the district and school levels

> **A comment on success with ELLs**
>
> "We don't think so much about what we do for English learners. We accept the challenge of meeting the needs of all our kids. English learners are our kids."

While no stakeholders expressed total satisfaction with the current achievement of English language learners, they agreed generally that steady progress is being made and is largely attributable to expectations and actions at both the school and district levels.

Finding 2

Reading First instructional design serves all students, especially English language learners.

California is a K–8 instructional materials adoption state. This means that curricular programs must align with state standards and meet state criteria to be eligible for purchase with state textbook funds; reading/language arts materials were most recently adopted in 2008. Most districts, including Mountain View, are using materials adopted in 2002. In the 2002 adoption cycle, the first in California to be measured against state standards, only two programs were approved. Mountain View, as such, is implementing one of the approved comprehensive reading programs.

> **A coach comments on the core program**
>
> "Seven years ago we were all doing our own thing. We now willingly teach a common core and have common material to plan lessons together."

The *Reading/Language Arts Framework for California Public Schools* suggests a minimum of a 1-hour block for Kindergarten and a two-and-a-half-hour block for grades 1 through 3. The state's Reading First Assurances require these minimums and further identify intervention as a 30 to 45-minute additional block of time for struggling students.

Focus group participants in all roles affirmed adherence to the required time allocations and confirmed the district's position on protecting instructional time from interruptions. The time blocks included whole-group instruction and small-group, differentiated instruction. Students were generally grouped homogeneously for whole-group instruction and heterogeneously for targeted instruction during small-group sessions.

District leaders expressed commitment to supplying schools with a full complement of instructional materials and teachers; coaches concurred that they were supplied with the basic and ancillary materials in the core program.

There was also consistency in what was said about the approach and materials used for English language development. Various programs had been used in the past with limited success, but the current approach, in which teachers collegially develop lessons based on structured criteria, seems to be an enthusiastically welcomed approach to language development instruction. Highly structured lessons were observed in classrooms. Language modeling for beginners was apparent, with increased reading and writing for students who had moved up through higher levels of English proficiency. Explicit attention to oral language and language patterning, at all levels of proficiency, surfaced when viewing various grade level classrooms.

English language learners in all reported and observed settings received core instruction in English. Whole-group instruction included both English-speaking students and ELLs. In many situations, the teacher, instructing in English, was able to provide simultaneous primary language support as needed. The fact that the primary language of the vast majority of ELLs is Spanish and many teachers, coaches, and principals were bilingual themselves, made this support widely available to students. In addition to the one hour in kindergarten and the two-and-a-half-hour-block of core reading/language arts instruction, ELLs received 30 to 40 minutes daily of English Language Development (ELD) tailored to their levels of language proficiency. Though this is a common practice in California schools, the difference in Mountain View was in the emphasis and energy devoted to structured language development. In most situations, the ELD period was the first lesson in the day and considered as protected as the core reading/language arts block. Teachers and coaches also reported using a good portion of weekly collegial time in planning for ELD instruction and formulating lessons that focused on oral and written language development.

One teacher said, "Our work is too important to be hit and miss. We have a schoolwide imperative to teach English."

Finding 3

Special attention is paid to the language needs of English language learners.

Ample research on beginning reading now supports the assertion that all learners, including ELLs, need to acquire facility with the sounds and symbols of their language to learn to read (Goldenberg, 2008, pp.17, 22). They need to become automatic enough with word recognition to build speed and accuracy in decoding and to build an increasingly mature vocabulary to comprehend complex text. This is true for English speakers as well as for ELLs. It is also true that ELLs have the added challenge of learning to read in a language they are in the process of acquiring.

In the Mountain View School District, English Language Development consists of well-orchestrated lessons that focus on oral language production. The lessons, as described by teachers and coaches and observed in classrooms, focus on the sounds and syntax of English and vocabulary development. At lower levels of student proficiency, teachers describe using plenty of visual support, language patterning, choral response, and guided opportunities for students to produce language as well as structured written exercises such as sentence frames to write in English. As children moved through stages of English proficiency, teachers reported adding more rigorous reading and writing tasks to their repertoire. The documented levels of English proficiency from *beginning* through *advanced* were known by teachers and used to tailor language instruction to student needs.

Simultaneously, as stated earlier, ELLs receive instruction in the district core reading program with additional supports. One teacher stated that her school convened sessions three days a week before school to pre-teach the week's lessons for ELLs. Many teachers identified components of the core program such as sound spelling cards and ELL handbooks that help them support their students' literacy and language development.

In the Mountain View School District, English acquisition is not expected to happen automatically as a result of the time students spent in school. Conscious and careful attention is paid to students' language needs in both the core reading/language arts and ELD programs.

Asked to identify key factors in ELLs' success, district leaders offered:

- Explicit and direct instruction
  - Lessons include modeling, graduated levels of practice, and application.
- Strategies to scaffold new learning and language
  - Pre-teaching, choral response, use of visuals, and language patterning help to make the curriculum accessible.
- Response to data—instructional changes supported by evidence
  - Both large-scale and classroom data are used to adjust instruction.
- Appropriate groupings for language instruction
  - Students receive English Language Development instruction in groups determined by language proficiency.
- Implementation of Response to Intervention (RtI)
  - Students receive layers of instruction based on their learning needs (i.e., all students receive core instruction and intervention over and above the core tailored to the intensity of instruction each student needs).

- District professional development based on trends in the data
  - Student achievement determines the content of ongoing professional development.
- Walk-through observations involving all levels of school personnel
  - District office leadership and principals regularly conduct observations at school sites to keep abreast of what is actually happening in the schools.

Most stakeholders expressed confidence in the above instructional approaches and the adopted curricular programs. Implementation was considered to be faithful and well-supported through collegial interactions. District office leaders agreed that they were becoming more collaborative every year in supporting school-level ELL practices. Principals articulated their knowledge of the instructional program well. Coaches felt that they played an important resource role and were not used as quasi-administrators, but rather as supporters for teachers. Teachers verified the importance of coaching. One teacher emphasized this, saying, "Coaches are non-threatening, trusted partners—valuable resources for us."

Issues did surface around the need for coaching support for intermediate grade teachers (grades 4 through 6). This was described as further confirmation of the value of the Reading First coaching model.

Finding 4

Common professional development provides coherence and support for district efforts to improve instruction.

Professional development in reading/language arts was substantial and closely related to the adopted core program. Virtually all of the teachers and coaches had met the requirement of the California Reading First Assurances by attending a 40-hour summer institute on the core program each year of the grant, offered through the California Reading Implementation Center (RIC—Los Angeles). Teachers reported that many of their colleagues had completed the 80 hours of follow-up professional learning requirement annually. This follow-up professional learning consisted of additional workshop sessions provided by the district or school coach on the important topics of phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension; grade-level meeting time for planning and analysis of the results on the curriculum-embedded assessments given six times a year; and other special events on reading instruction. Recently, most teachers attended a summer institute on the needs of ELLs.

Principals and other district leaders also attended summer institutes on leadership issues related to implementing the core program. Modules developed by the Reading First California Technical Assistance Center were delivered at the district level to refine and expand principal knowledge and practice.

Coaches affirmed that their district content literacy experts provided much support and regular professional development to support coaches' work. Professional development offerings were frequently described as high-quality, relevant to coaches' needs, and considered an important factor in unifying the district behind common knowledge and actions. This common understanding undergirded the emerging Professional Learning Communities at all district schools.

In sum, stakeholders stressed the importance of the district's role in providing opportunities to build a common knowledge base. One teacher said: "There's so much to know to teach here. It helps that we have so much in common and can learn from each other."

A coach added, "Our professional development is so much more effective when we learn side-by-side with principals and teachers."

Finding 5

Data are used for real and constructive instructional purposes.

State-level summative assessment results (CST and CELDT) drive policy decisions and are examined to measure growth toward district goals and to compare the district with others in the state. The CELDT data also determine the language proficiency levels of ELLs and are part of the criteria for language proficiency groupings for English Language Development instruction. Curriculum-embedded data are derived from six- to eight-week skills assessments (progress monitoring) aligned to the core program. These tests measure the effectiveness of the teaching and the progress made by students and include subtests in fluency, comprehension, vocabulary, skill development (usage and mechanics), spelling, and writing. They are administered and scored by teachers and reported to the school principal and district through an electronic data system (Online Assessment and Reporting System, OARS). Reports are then returned to the school and the information is disaggregated in a number of ways; data reports are discussed at grade-level meetings and inform instructional decisions.

Many participants cited data as a key feature in the success of ELLs. District leaders, principals, coaches, and teachers all play a role in collecting, analyzing, and—most importantly—using data. Principals and district staff closely monitor data use. One district administrator identified a major improvement in this area, explaining, "We now collect less data, but do something with it." The something refers to the collegial analysis of assessment information and the decisions made to improve the achievement of students. Data are described as the catalysts for instructional change—elements the district could not do without.

Finding 6

Collaboration among all stakeholders is crucial to meet district and school academic goals.

It is all too common to find relationships between district administration and school staff that could be described as "us and them" relationships. This is not the case in the Mountain View School District. District leaders credit each other with increasing success and acknowledge their work removing "silos" and improving collaboration. District office leaders are well known at the school sites. School walk-throughs with district administrators and principals were cited as ways of "keeping in touch" with classroom-level efforts. The district content literacy expert is referred to as the bridge between district office and coaches and between coaches and teachers. Teachers noted that they have been given the opportunity to go to different schools to observe and learn from fellow teachers. Various school-level documents reflect the reality of the collaboration.

> Leadership requires participation of more than just administration … leadership teams and committees are formed to make major decisions and consist of the principal, assistant principals, teachers, community members, and parents.

The Reading First assurances also require the district to "organize and support regular, collaborative grade-level teacher meetings to discuss the use of the instructional program and student results on the selected assessments, and to develop action plans for student interventions and/or additional teaching" (*Assurances for the Sake of Our Children*, p. 30). This agreement is well operationalized in the district and has been of great value in improving instruction. Grade-level collaboration is, in fact, at a level of refinement as schools work to develop professional learning communities. Teachers were very positive about this requirement of collegial work, describing it more as a benefit than a mandate.

It was clear that ELLs benefit from the collaborative efforts of district office, schools, and teachers. District office leaders shared information about schools to allow for collaboration. Principals affirmed their commitment to ELLs in actions that ranged from scheduling ELD through making time for teachers to meet to develop supportive lessons for ELLs based on data and to discuss movement in flexible student groupings to address reading and language needs. One principal hired a part-time teacher to release teachers for collegial work during the school day; others principals indicated their use of early release days for teacher and coach collaboration. Still another described allocating time for organized peer observations in teachers' classrooms. All of these collegial interactions focused on improving instruction for all students, and expressly for English Language Learners.

> **Teachers comment on collegiality**
>
> "My life was made easier. I was not alone trying to figure out how to solve problems."
>
> "We all have different strengths. Each of us is better when we have the chance to learn from each other."

In summary, Mountain View's success is, at least in part, due to "top-down meeting bottom-up." Shared leadership and joint responsibility for outcomes is the norm. The whole organization a collaborative system that focuses on student performance, values efforts at all levels, and aims its efforts toward a common outcome—the success of its students.

Concluding statements

Staff members at all levels expressed a belief that all students can learn. This shift, prompted by Reading First and its iterative refinement processes, demonstrates how action must follow belief if change is to occur. The belief that ELLs can achieve at the same level as their English-speaking peers has changed the way the district does business. English language learners are a top priority and their success depends on the actions of the people who serve them. Administrators, coaches, and teachers have accepted this charge. Incremental growth in ELL achievement is reason to believe that the district is on the right track. It has not reached the finish line, but much can be learned from its efforts in place. As one coach put it: "The more we know, the more we need to raise the bar." There seems to be a high level of correlation between what the literature indicates about educating ELLs and the actions of the Mountain View School District,

> **A teacher comments**
>
> "I see myself in these children—our work is a labor of love."

including the recognition that there is no magic bullet for success. There is clearly an understanding that explicit, systematic instruction that benefits English-speaking students also benefits ELLs, and a recognition that ELLs need not only a strong core program but also accommodation for their language needs. There is a reliance on "hard-copy" assessment for instructional decision-making and the less tangible, but very real value placed on ELLs.

This district has accepted a challenge and is on its way to realizing its goals.

Orange County Public Schools, Orlando, Florida

The Orange County Florida public school system, located in central Florida, is the eleventh largest in the nation and fourth largest in Florida. During 2008–09, Orange County Public Schools (OCPS) had a student enrollment of nearly 175,000 students, 47 percent of whom were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, and 23 percent classified as English language learners.[1]

One hundred twenty-two elementary, 33 middle, and 18 high schools serve students from 179 countries, speaking 132 different languages and dialects. The top four languages are Spanish (75 percent), Haitian Creole (12 percent), Vietnamese (3 percent), and Portuguese (2 percent). In 2008, OCPS was graded as an "A" district by the Florida Department of Education, one of only three large districts in Florida to receive this honor.

The district began implementing its Reading First grant in the 2004–05 school year. The first of two cohorts of Reading First schools began in 2004–05 and consists of 26 schools. The second cohort began in 2005–06, and consists of 11 schools. In January 2009, the Florida Department of Education recognized OCPS as being in the top 25 percent of all Reading First districts in the state. The Reading First grant is firmly embedded into the district's organization for literacy instruction, with Reading First staff members housed in the district's curriculum services department and integrated as members of the district's literacy team.

The district's ELL population has outscored the state average on the state assessment known as the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT), administered to students in grades three through eleven each spring. The FCAT consists of criterion-referenced tests in mathematics, reading, science, and writing, which measure student progress toward meeting the Sunshine State Standards benchmarks. Achievement levels range from one (lowest) to five (highest) and represent the level of success a student has achieved in these subject areas. Students scoring at or above achievement level three are considered to be performing at or above grade level.

English Language Learners in OCPS outscored the state average on the FCAT in reading in grades three through nine and outscored the state average in writing in grades four, eight, and ten (the grades at which the assessment is administered). Additionally, the district has made great progress in narrowing the achievement gap between ELLs and non-ELLs, decreasing the gap from 35 percentage points in 2002–2003 to 16 percentage points in 2000–2008. Furthermore, more OCPS ELLs scored at level three and above on the FCAT reading than did ELLs in neighboring and other large school districts.

District and school selection

Orange County Public Schools was selected as the Reading First district for participation in this case study due to its high proportions of ELLs and their high achievement levels in grades three and four. Detailed FCAT results for grades three and four ELLs for the district and the state are presented in Table 7. As reported there, the percentages of OCPS ELLs scoring at or above the proficient level on the FCAT ranged from ten to twelve percentage points higher than the state percentages for grades three and four.

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[1] In addition to the core reading program, ELLs are all enrolled in English for Speakers of Other Languages, ESOL programs.

Table 7

Percentage of Grades 3 –4 ELLs Scoring at Level 3 or Higher on FCAT Reading in 2007 and 2008

Year	Grade	OCPS % ELLs Scoring > 3	Statewide % ELLs Scoring > 3
2007	3	51	41
2007	4	44	34
2008	3	54	44
2008	4	48	36

Source: Florida Department of Education, 2008a

In addition to the FCAT, Florida uses the Comprehensive English Language Assessment (CELLA) to measure the growth of ELLs in the English language skills they need for academic success. All Florida students classified as ELLs take the CELLA annually each spring until they are reclassified as English proficient. The CELLA is designed to provide evidence of program accountability, data for charting student progress, information about the language proficiency levels of individual students, and information about students' strengths and weaknesses in English. The CELLA tests students in listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

The percentage of ELLs making progress toward English language acquisition as measured by the CELLA is reported in Table 8. In order for a district to meet Annual Measurable Achievement Objective (AMAO) 1, the district must demonstrate that a certain percentage of its English Language Learners are making gains in each domain. For 2006–07 and 2007–08, the state objective was to have at least 70 percent of students making gains in listening/speaking; 54 percent of students making gains in writing; and 56 percent of students making gains in reading. As presented in the table, OCPS ELLs' gains in all three domains exceeded state benchmarks in both 2006–07 and 2007–08.

Table 8

Percentage of OCPS ELLs Meeting Benchmarks on CELLA Subtests 2007 and 2008

Year	Listening/Speaking			Writing			Reading		
	N Tested	% Making Gains	Benchmark Met?	N Tested	% Making Gains	Benchmark Met?	N Tested	% Making Gains	Benchmark Met?
2006–07	16014	82	Yes	16081	66	Yes	16011	69	Yes
2007–08	17673	80	Yes	17654	66	Yes	17604	69	Yes

Source: Florida Department of Education, 2007 and 2008d

The Reading First schools chosen to represent OCPS in this study have particularly high proportions of their ELLs scoring at the proficient level on the FCAT.

Tables 9 and 10 show demographic and FCAT information for the five selected schools. As seen in Table 9, the size of the schools varies; socio-economically disadvantaged percentages, represented by the percentage of students eligible for free or reduced price lunch, are within a tight range of 74 percent–82 percent; percentages of ELLs range between 44 percent and 64 percent.

Table 9

Selected Reading First Schools' Demographic Information, 2007-08

School	Student Enrollment	% Free/Reduced Lunch	% ELLs
1	783	79	51
2	1028	74	55
3	604	82	64
4	706	78	62
5	627	77	44

Source: Florida Department of Education, 2008a

Table 10 presents the percentage of grades three and four ELLs who scored at or above Level 3 on the FCAT at each school. In 2007, the percentage of grade three students scoring at or above Level 3 ranged from 41 to 60 percent; in grade 4 the percentages ranged from 30 to 61 percent. In 2008, the percentage of grade three students scoring at or above Level 3 ranged from 39 to 59 percent; in grade 4 the percentage ranged from 38 to 67 percent. In all but two cases, these percentages met or exceeded state average percentages.

Table 10

Percentage of Selected Reading First Schools' Grades—ELLs Scoring at Level 3 or Higher on FCAT Reading in 2007 and 2008

Year	Grade	% ELLs Scoring > 3
School 1		
2007	3	60
2007	4	53
2008	3	59
2008	4	47
School 2		
2007	3	48
2007	4	35
2008	3	48
2008	4	40
School 3		
2007	3	50
2007	4	30
2008	3	39
2008	4	38
School 4		
2007	3	59
2007	4	61
2008	3	47
2008	4	67
School 5		
2007	3	41
2007	4	41
2008	3	45
2008	4	47

Source: Florida Department of Education, 2008a

Table 11 presents the percentages of the total student population meeting AYP benchmarks in reading and writing for 2007 and 2008 for each of the selected schools. The 2007 state benchmark for reading was 51 percent and increased to 58 percent in 2008. All of the selected schools exceeded this benchmark for their total population, with percentages ranging from 61 percent to 77 percent in 2007 and 63 percent to 76 percent in 2008. Writing benchmarks vary by school and are based on a minimum of one percent increase in students scoring at or above the proficient level. All of the selected schools exceeded this benchmark for the total population in both 2007 and 2008, with percentages ranging from 61 percent to 90 percent in 2007 and 65 percent to 85 percent in 2008. While the schools met all 39 criteria for meeting AYP in most cases, schools two and three were among the 76 percent of the schools in the state that did not meet the requirements in 2008, due to the performance of one or more subgroups of students (Florida Department of Education, 2008c).

Table 11

2007 and 2008 Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) Percentages Based on Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) for Selected Schools

	2007[a]				2008[b]			
	Reading		Writing[c]		Reading		Writing	
	Total Population AYP Met?	% Total Population Meeting High Standards	Total Population AYP Met?	% Total Population Meeting High Standards	Total Population AYP Met?	% Total Population Meeting High Standards	Total Population AYP Met?	% Total Population Meeting High Standards
School								
1	YES	77	YES	86	YES	76	YES	72
2	YES	61	YES	88	NO	71	NO	86
3	YES	66	YES	77	NO	63	NO	69
4	YES	75	YES	90	YES	72	YES	86
5	YES	72	YES	61	YES	68	YES	65

[a] In 2007, the AYP benchmark reading target was 51%.

[b] In 2008, the AYP benchmark reading target was 58%.

[c] The benchmark for writing is to improve the percentage of students scoring at or above Level 3 by one percentage point, or to have a performance rate of at least 90% scoring at or above Level 3.

(Source: Florida Department of Education, 2008b)

Selection and description of focus groups

In selecting participants for the focus groups, the research team asked the district's senior administrator for elementary reading to select participants as representatives of Reading First schools. Five focus groups were formed by role functions. To accommodate proximity to their residences, parents were grouped in three separate focus groups. Technically, seven focus groups were convened. The representation in each focus group by role is described below.

The district-level staff focus group consisted of nine district-level staff members who represented the district literacy team, the Reading First program, Reading First professional development, curriculum services, the English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) program, Title I, and special education.

The principal focus group consisted of the five principals of the schools selected for the study. All were experienced with the Reading First program, and all had participated in extensive professional learning experiences in literacy and English language acquisition.

The teacher focus group consisted of five teachers from the schools in the study and included two first-, two second-, and one third-grade teacher. All possessed specialized training in literacy and ESOL instruction and represented the three ESOL models in the district.

The reading coach focus group consisted of five reading coaches from the schools in the study. All were experienced Reading First coaches with advanced training in literacy. Four of the five were employed as full-time coaches; one served as an addition to the school's full-time coach by dividing her time equally between coaching and compliance oversight assignments.

Three parent focus groups were held at three school sites. The four parents who participated in the first focus group had students enrolled in pre-K and grades one, two, three, and five, all of whom were enrolled in the bilingual ESOL model, with the exception of two children who were in the mainstream classroom. A bilingual

paraprofessional provided translation services for the research team; this was only necessary for the first parent focus group. The second focus group consisted of three parents who had students enrolled in grades one, three, and five, all of whom were enrolled in mainstream classrooms and all were proficient in English. The third focus group comprised three parents who had students enrolled in pre-K, K, and grades two, three, and four, all of whom were enrolled in the bilingual ESOL model, with the exception of the sole fourth grader, who is no longer an ESOL student.

Data collection

A four-day site visit to the district was conducted on May 4–7, 2009. All staff focus groups occurred at the district office, while the parent focus groups occurred at three different school sites. The daily schedule is presented in Appendix A.

Finding 1

The district focuses on and supports the individual needs of its Reading First ELLs.

Throughout the focus group sessions, it was apparent that success was viewed as being able to deliver different models of ELL instruction to meet the needs of individual students. As described by the district Reading First coordinator, classroom instructional models for ELLs included Sheltered English Classroom Model, General Education Model, and the Bilingual Classroom Model (consisting of either the One-Way Developmental Bilingual Program or the Two-Way Developmental Bilingual Program). See Appendix E for a description of these models.

By offering a variety of instructional models and ensuring fidelity to the chosen model, the district is able to tailor instruction based on the needs of individual students and their families at each school. Parents are able to choose from the range of instructional models at the time of student enrollment. The comments on this page illustrate parents' enthusiasm for being offered a choice of instructional model for their children. It is particularly noteworthy that while all of the programs were received favorably, the Bilingual Program seems to have particularly strong parent support. Parents view bilingualism as a long-term benefit to their children.

Parents of ELLs who are not in the bilingual program are also pleased with their chosen instructional model for their children, as evidenced by this remark from a group of parents whose children are served in the general education model: "Our children read well in English. For our kids, we teach Spanish reading at home after they have mastered English."

Representative teachers, coaches, and principals also expressed enthusiasm for being able to offer a variety of instructional models, and for parents the option to choose the model most appropriate for their children.

Throughout all of the focus groups, it was apparent that there is a common mission throughout the district to build on the strengths of individual students. A district-level staff member illustrates this point: "We know and believe every single child can learn and we provide support to ensure that it will occur."

Parents also support this contention, as evidenced by this comment: "Teachers and principals are attentive to the students and their individual needs." There is a well-articulated belief throughout the district that all students can be successful. As a Reading First coach said: "All students can learn. They need to be given a variety of opportunities so that they can learn."

> ### Parents comment on bilingual education
>
> "At this school, the teachers and principal are attentive to the students. Bilingual education is super because of how it will help the kids in the future."
>
> "The bilingual program gives kids more opportunity when they grow up, and my child is making good progress in it."
>
> "My daughter came from another school where she cried a lot. Now, she is having much better success because of the Bilingual program."
>
> "In first grade, my son was able to read in Spanish. I am happy with where he is; he's aware; he's learning about the culture; and he's able to read in Spanish."

Finding 2

There is an intense focus on data.

The implementation of Reading First in the district brought with it a keen focus on data collection and interpretation, including the regular review and discussion of student reading assessment data at the school level. The district's strategic plan, featuring its Intense Focus on Student Achievement: Eleven Essential Outcomes (see Appendix F), emphasizes high achievement for all students. Everyone in the district understands these outcomes and the strategic plan permeates professional practice.

Throughout all of the focus groups, participants credited Reading First with playing a key and valuable role in the increased emphasis on data. One teacher described the importance of data: "Data are very important because regular assessments allow us to see which instructional areas are in need of additional attention. The data help us to choose the skill lessons, and are also used for grouping the students."

The view that data are valued and important was corroborated by the district-level staff focus group, one of whom characterized data in this way: "Data tell us if we're doing our job. We are continually focusing on what the numbers tell us."

Students are also aware of the importance of data, and often participate in charting their own growth. Informal visits to school sites further supported the notion that data are openly discussed, well understood, and used frequently and thoughtfully. Data walls were frequently spotted both in classrooms and in common areas such as administrative offices and lunchrooms.

> **Reading coaches reflect on Reading First's focus on student achievement**
>
> "Reading First has contributed to an emphasis on consistent, steady growth of students, rather than on absolute level of achievement."
>
> "We've learned strategies and tools and we understand data and how all children can learn. People really embrace the data."
>
> "We look at the data and celebrate successes, while keeping in mind we have a way to go."

The core program includes assessments that monitor student progress regularly. These assessments are closely aligned to the instructional program and lessons. Participants in the focus groups described these assessment data as "extremely important" for the role they play in informing instruction, including how students are grouped and skills lessons are chosen. Regular, frequent (often weekly) data meetings occur at each school site and serve as a time for the leadership team (coach, the curriculum resource teacher, principal, intervention teachers, and others) to review data with teachers, discuss strategies, and formulate next steps. Participants perceive these meetings as very effective. One reading coach said of data meetings: "As a result of Reading First, teachers are now looking at assessment data more frequently and coming to data meetings with questions. The group will then discuss potential solutions."

Focus group participants also said the departments of instructional technology and assessment and evaluation were very supportive of teachers and coaches, providing data disaggregated by classrooms in reports for schools. The district has an easy-to-use system for collecting, reporting, and using data. Progress monitoring data are collected using hand-held electronic devices and transmitted electronically to the state's database, Progress Monitoring and Reporting Network (PMRN). The PMRN is a web-based data management system hosted by the Florida Center for Reading Research in support of the Reading First initiative.

Throughout the focus groups and the visits to the study schools, it was evident that the frequent review of student data enabled schools' stakeholders to offer more precision in meeting the goals and expectations of reading on or above grade level for each ELL. One principal concluded, "With data and [an attitude of] whatever it takes, we can ensure all children are learning and achieving."

Finding 3

Staff members receive the necessary professional learning and support to be confident and competent in literacy instruction.

OCPS staff members at all levels are highly qualified to do their respective jobs, and each is seen as contributing to the instructional team. Teachers, coaches, and instructional leaders receive extensive training in literacy and English language learning and partake in a variety of professional learning experiences. Many paraprofessionals who work

with students hold Bachelor's degrees and/or teaching certification from other countries and they, too, receive formal, ongoing training in literacy instruction. One district-level staff member summed up the district's emphasis on training and support for teachers: "The core [reading program] is only as good as the teachers teaching it."

Professional learning opportunities abound in the district, and are delivered in a variety of modes throughout the year. In recent years, the district has shifted toward engagement in Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) and book studies. Discussion is underway to increase the emphasis on professional learning at the school site. Wednesday afternoons are set aside for teachers to work in PLCs and to take part in other professional learning experiences. *What Great Teachers Do Differently* and *Catch Up Growth* were two book titles mentioned by principals as contributing to their schools through PLC discussions.

In addition to PLCs and formal professional learning opportunities, a full-time Reading First coach provides job-embedded, ongoing support at each of the district's Reading First schools. District staff members noted that the coaches are highly trained, effective, and warmly welcomed in classrooms. The critical areas for their work are instructional pacing and lesson modeling.

Coaches also participate in their own professional learning. The district supports its more than 160 coaches by dividing them into cadres, each led by one of the district's literacy team members, who communicates regularly with the cadre, meets monthly with the cadre, visits schools on a regularly basis, and facilitates professional learning by the cadre. During school visits, literacy team members often model effective coaching behaviors and classroom walk-throughs. They also work with coaches to review and analyze test data, and often conduct training for school staff members. During monthly cadre meetings, the focus is on professional learning; meetings may include keynote speakers and breakout sessions featuring consultants, professional learning communities sessions, book studies, and meetings with curriculum experts, including the district's multilingual services' staff members.

The district literacy team (including Reading First staff members) works closely with staff members from the multilingual services department and is widely credited with providing the guidance and support school administration and staff need to provide the most effective research-based instruction.

Attention to ELLs' instructional needs is evident in the district's ESOL for Administrators course, an intensive, week-long course intended to increase knowledge and awareness of effective ESOL strategies. According to several comments from focus group sessions, most teachers in the district have completed the ESOL certification course, which consists of 300 hours of professional learning.

The district's website gives both teachers and administrators access to best practices presentations which include many offerings that address ELLs (e.g., Reading Essentials: Research Practices that Work for LEPs, Implementing a Research-Based Sheltered Instruction Program, and What Works for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students).

> **A teacher comments on how the coach works with teachers**
>
> "What has been most helpful for me is participating in a lesson study. We will observe other teachers or the coach modeling a lesson, and then we will discuss how it went. It's really helpful to get together with colleagues after the lesson and share ideas. The coach at my school does a great job of facilitating our discussions."

> **A reading coach comments on working with the district literacy coordinator**
>
> "She helps me to improve my coaching. She models classroom walkthroughs and helps me to analyze test data. She also conducts trainings for teachers based on what is needed."

Finding 4

Purposefully chosen instructional materials and resources are provided.

Throughout the focus groups, and further evidenced by informal classroom visits, a common theme emerged: high-quality instruction must be supported not only through ongoing, high-quality professional learning experiences, but by access to high-quality instructional materials that are backed by scientifically based reading research (SBRR) as well.

The district chose two programs from a state-approved pool of programs, and individual schools chose one of the two. The school-level choice was most often made with input from the staff, and teachers often traveled to other districts to observe the program being used in classrooms. Teachers cited several strengths of the core reading program, including that it:

- is comprehensive;
- is available in English and Spanish versions;
- has an ELL support guide which offers additional support and practice for ELLs;
- has publisher consultants who are available for support;
- offers guided reading support;
- offers structure and routine; and
- has high-quality ancillary materials, such as picture cards for spelling and center kits.

> **A reading coach comments on Reading First**
>
> "Reading First has given us great access to the latest research and materials to affect teacher and student learning. A key component of Reading First is providing whatever resources teachers need, and in terms of classroom libraries and literacy activities, every teacher needs something different for their classroom."

Finding 5

Staff members work collaboratively.

There is evidence that collegial and collaborative relationships are keys to effective ELL instruction, and in turn, increased achievement by ELLs. Teachers trust each other enough to allow other educators into their classrooms regularly. One principal described the openness to collegial feedback in this way: "Teachers trust enough to allow others into their classrooms and they not only accept feedback, they really want feedback on their teaching."

One principal's strategy for staff collaboration was also echoed by others: "I look within my own faculty for knowledge and expertise in certain areas. Teachers model instruction for each other all the time. This builds morale and serves as a means of validating the staff."

Coaches are particularly able to foster collegial relationships among teachers by facilitating teacher learning in a variety of ways. In addition to in-class coaching, coaches often facilitate book and lesson study groups, PLCs, and use the district's intranet website to share information such as model lessons on particular strategies and presentations on topics important to teachers such as developing a classroom library. This collegial relationship is a result of the district-wide support for collegial exchange at all levels.

The importance of time for teachers to meet collegially to plan, provide peer coaching, and to discuss data is understood. Teachers work together most Wednesday afternoons during PLC time, and perceive this time spent planning together and sharing ideas to be "very well spent and valuable." In addition to collegial exchange, teachers described how they often team together with other teachers to provide targeted instruction: "A group of us will work together and split up our kids based on particular skill areas in which they need help. Even with cuts in the number of staff, this way of approaching instruction allows us to still really hone in on certain areas that kids need extra help with."

Finding 6

Instructional time is respected and protected.

Orange County has a district-wide protected 90-minute reading block. All are keenly aware that this time is of utmost importance, and must not be interrupted. Parents especially value and appreciate this. As a parent said, "I especially like that the school is so protective of instructional time, especially the morning reading time."

In addition to the 90-minute reading block, there is a 30-minute intervention time, as well as ESOL time in some cases. The combination of instructional time spent in the reading block, along with the intervention time and after-school help is widely viewed as having the greatest impact on student achievement.

One factor that seems to enhance the effectiveness of the intervention time is the district's "all-hands-on-deck approach" to this instructional time. It often occurs that all staff members (including office staff) are in classrooms during this time, helping teachers deliver thoughtfully planned intervention instruction. During informal class visits, it was apparent that teachers use a variety of strategies to check student understanding, including calling on non-volunteers and asking students to check in with their partners.

Extended help is available to students who need it. Through programs such as *Supplemental Educational Services* and *Catholic Charities*, students are able to stay after school for help. In addition, the district offers a summer reading camp for third-grade students who scored at Level 1 on the FCAT. Students attend 20 half-days of intensive literacy instruction, with transportation provided. These opportunities for extended learning time are valued.

Finding 7

There is true involvement of parents and the community.

Another factor participants cited as having contributed to the district's success with all students, including ELLs, was greater community and family involvement, with frequent celebrations of student accomplishments. There are myriad ways that parents and the greater community are involved in the schools. In focus group discussions, parents described school events that they have attended, including Family Literacy Night, Mother's Day Brunch, and Science Night. All of the parents in the three parent focus groups said that they feel very welcomed in their children's schools, and enjoy being actively involved.

One important and unique way in which parents of ELLs are involved in their children's schools is through the school's Parent Leadership Council. Several parents mentioned these councils, explaining that they encourage parental involvement and community engagement by ELLs and their families, with a major emphasis on student achievement. Council meetings are held throughout the year.

Schools also involve ELLs' families by inviting parents to participate in English language classes. These efforts to involve parents in the school have paid off. One teacher expressed it this way: "In recent years, most of my ESOL students come to me reading above grade level. I attribute this to the level of involvement of the parents and their support, as well as all of the opportunities the school offers for adult English language classes."

Several other programs were mentioned as district-supported programs that involved the greater community in education. One example was the participation of several schools in the *Toyota Family Literacy Program* which emphasizes parents' literacy skills. Parents are in the classroom during reading time, alongside their children, creating an impact that has been described as *monumental*. Other

> **Message on the school's marquee**
>
> Don't forget to read!

grant-based programs, such as *Partners in Print* and *Families Building Better Readers*, involve families in the literacy process.

Concluding statements

The success of Orange County Public Schools' Reading First program for ELLs is rooted in several factors. First, the district focuses and supports the individual needs of its ELLs. This is done through a variety of means, but the district's ability to offer different instructional models is widely credited in its success. Second, the focus on student data is intense and permeates all levels of instruction. Staff are comfortable with collecting, analyzing, and discussing data and regularly use assessment results to inform instruction. Third, staff members receive the ongoing professional learning they need to be confident and competent in delivering effective literacy instruction. Myriad opportunities exist for professional learning, and staff members take frequent advantage of them. Fourth, teachers have access to the instructional materials they need. In addition to the "comprehensive" core reading program, Reading First has provided teachers with the additional high-quality SBRR materials they need to provide the most effective instruction for their students.

> **In the words of one principal**
>
> "In this district, students and their families are celebrated, respected, and appreciated. This is a real motivator for students to do well."

Another factor contributing to the district's success is the collaborative and collegial relationships of the staff members throughout the district. It was obvious to the research team that trusting relationships have formed throughout the district to produce a cohesive effort to improve student achievement. Next, instructional time is protected and respected. This was evident at all levels, with parents demonstrating a keen awareness of this fact. Finally, the district not only encourages, but seeks out relationships with parents, families, and the community at-large. Many family involvement activities occur at school sites, focused not only on student literacy, but family literacy as well.

Appendix A

Daily Schedule for Focus Groups and School Visits

Day	Time	Event
Day 1	8:30 am–10:00 am	Orientation Meeting with Reading First Coordinator
	10:00 am–11:30 am	Conduct Focus Group of District-Level Team
	11:45 am–1:00 pm	Lunch
	1:00 pm–3:00 pm	Debriefing
	3:00 pm–4:30 pm	Conduct Focus Group of Reading First Principals
Day 2	9:00 am–10:45 am	Visit School 1
	10:45 am–12:00 pm	Lunch and travel to School 2
	12:00 pm–1:45 pm	Visit School 2
	1:45 pm–3:00 pm	Conduct Reading First Parent Focus Group 1
	3:00 pm–4:00 pm	Site Visitors Debrief and Travel to District Office
	4:00 pm–5:30 pm	Conduct Reading First Teacher Focus Group
Day 3	9:00 am–10:45 am	Visit School 3
	10:45 am–11:45 am	Lunch and travel to School 4
	12:00 pm–1:45 pm	Visit School 4
	1:45pm–3:00pm	Conduct Reading First Parent Focus Group 2
	3:00 pm–4:00 pm	Site Visitors Debrief and Travel to District Office
	4:00 pm–5:30 pm	Conduct Reading First Reading Coach Focus Group
Day 4	8:30 am–9:00 am	Conduct Reading First Parent Focus Group 3
	9:00 am–10:45 am	Visit School 5
	11:00 am–1:00 pm	Travel to District Office and Debrief

Follow-up discussions and clarifying questions were conducted with the district's Reading First Coordinator subsequent to the site visits.

Guidelines for Selection of Focus Group Members

Teachers
Five teachers selected by the district from the five highest achieving and successfully implementing Reading First schools
Preference should be given to five teachers who are articulate and are recognized by the district as highly qualified teachers of English Learners, and provide representation of one or more of the selection criteria below:

(1) a teacher of one of the grade levels, K–3
(2) a teacher who provides English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) or English Language Development (ELD) instruction within his/her classroom
(3) a teacher who provides pull-out English Language Development instruction
(4) a teacher who is qualified to teach in a primary language other than English

Principals
Five principals selected by the district from the five highest achieving and successfully implementing Reading First schools
Preference should be given to five principals or assistant principals who are articulate and are recognized by the district as strong instructional leaders in the selected schools

Coaches
Five coaches selected by the district from the five highest achieving and successfully implementing Reading First schools
Preference should be given to five coaches who are articulate and well-trained as coaches, and provide representation of one of more of the selection criteria below:

(1) a full-time Reading First coach from the selected schools
(2) a coach with specific training in teaching EL students
(3) a coach with three or more years experience in a Reading First school

District Leadership Team
Superintendent-selected district staff team, knowledgeable about the Reading First program and schools
Preference should be given to those district leaders who represent one or more of the district programs:

(1) Superintendent or Designee
(2) Reading First Director/Coordinator
(3) Associate/Assistant Superintendent for Instruction
(4) Supervisor of Principals
(5) ESOL or Language Acquisition Director/Coordinator
(6) Title I Director/Coordinator [and Migrant Education Coordinator]
(7) Professional Development Coordinator

Appendix B (continued)

Parents of English Learners in Grades K–3

Five parents of English Learners selected by the District from the five highest achieving and successfully implementing Reading First schools

District will make the selection of five parents that are available to meet for 45 minutes to one hour at the beginning of the school day (preferably at the site of one of the five selected schools).

Appendix C

District Focus Group Questions

1. **School-Level Efforts for Instructing ELLs**

   a. What are some of your success stories about your students' progress in English Language Development?

   b. What are some success stories about their progress in reading?

   c. How does your district support schools in organizing instruction for reading? For English Language Development?

   d. What is required to support English Learners at both the school and the classroom levels?

   - Grouping
   - Time
   - Materials
   - Other
   - How are district mandates monitored?

2. **District and School Leadership Support for Instructing ELLs**

   a. How does the district support principals and teachers in refining practice for instructing ELLs?

   b. Please describe the content and frequency of professional learning opportunities in this area.

   - Professional learning sessions
   - Coaching support
   - Other professional learning opportunities

   c. What district policies have an impact on instruction of ELLs?

   - Grouping
   - Identification of students
   - Classification of language proficiency levels
   - Parent rights
   - Other

3. **Instructional Materials**

   a. How was your district's comprehensive reading program chosen?

   b. What are the strengths of your reading program?

   c. How effective is the comprehensive reading program for your ELL students?

   d. Do you use a supplementary program for English Language development? If so, how was it chosen?

   e. How do you measure the success of ELLs?

4. **Instructional Supports**

   a. Does the district require collegial interaction such as grade-level meetings, professional learning communities, study groups, or others? How does the district support schools in creating a context and making time for these collegial interactions

   b. Are any collegial opportunities offered to teachers outside of the contract day?

   c. If so, are there any incentives for teachers to participate?

5. Student Achievement

    a. What are your expectations for academic success for your English learners?

    b. Have your expectations changed over the last several years? If so, in what ways have they changed?

    c. If you could identify some factors to explain the success of your ELLs, what might they be?

6. Assessment and Use of Data

    a. How do you monitor the success of your ELLs in reading? In ELD?

    b. How are data collected, organized, and made accessible to central office leadership?

    c. What are district office structures for examining and responding to student data?

    d. How do you rate data use as a factor in the success of your ELLs?

7. Belief and Results Statements

If you were to make a general statement about how the needs of English learners are valued and addressed in your district, what might it be?

8. Concluding Statements

(One last chance to add something not specifically addressed in the other questions.)

Principal Focus Group Questions

1. School-Level Efforts for Instructing ELLs

    a. What are some of your success stories about your school's efforts to support ELLs?

    b. What are some success stories about their progress in reading?

    c. How do you organize your school for instruction for reading? For English Language Development?

    d. What support systems do you have in place specifically designed to support English Learners at both the school and the classroom levels?

- Grouping
- Time
- Materials
- Other

2. District and School Leadership Support for Instructing ELLs

    a. How is your instructional leadership, especially in meeting the needs of ELLs, supported by your district?

    b. What opportunities have you had to build your own knowledge base about best practices in instructing ELLs?

    c. What district policies have had an impact on instructional practices for ELLs in your school? Consider grouping, identification of students, classification of language proficiency levels, parent rights, etc.

- Grouping
- Identification of students
- Classification of language proficiency levels
- Parent rights
- Other

    d. How are district policies communicated to you? To parents?

3. **Instructional Materials**

    a. How was your comprehensive reading program chosen?

    b. What are the strengths of your reading program?

    c. How do you ensure that the comprehensive reading program is fully implemented?

    d. Do you use a supplementary program for English Language development? If so, how was it chosen?

    e. How well do you think the ELD program supports continuous development of English for your students?

    f. How do you ensure that teachers have adequate instructional materials for both reading and ELD?

4. **Instructional Supports**

    a. How do you provide teachers with opportunities for collegial interaction?

    *   Grade-level meetings
    *   Professional learning
    *   Study groups
    *   Other

    b. What is your perception of the impact collegial interaction has had on the success of ELLs in your school?

5. **Student Achievement**

    a. What are your expectations for academic success for your English Learners?

    b. Have your expectations changed over the last several years? If so, in what ways have they changed?

    c. If you could identify some factors to explain the success of your ELLs, what might they be?

6. **Assessment and Use of Data**

    a. How do you monitor the success of your ELLs in reading? In ELD?

    b. How are data collected, organized, and made accessible to you?

    c. How do you rate data use as a factor in the success of your ELLs?

7. **Belief and Results Statements**

    If you were to make a general statement about how the needs of English learners are valued and addressed in your school or district, what might it be?

8. **Concluding Statements**

    (One last chance to add something not specifically addressed in the other questions.)

Coach Focus Group Questions

1. **School-Level Efforts for Instructing ELLs**

    a. What are some of your success stories about your role as a coach supporting ELLs?

    b. Do you support teachers in ELD as well as in reading? If so, how do you differentiate support?

    2. **District and School Leadership Support for Instructing ELLs**

    a. How is your instructional leadership, especially in meeting the needs of ELLs, supported by your district?

    b. What opportunities have you had to build your own knowledge base about best practices in instructing ELLs? Has your own professional learning kept pace with the growing knowledge level of your teachers?

    c. How are district policies communicated to you? To parents?

3. **Instructional Materials**

   a. What are the strengths of your reading program?

   b. How do you support full implementation of the reading program?

   c. Does your school use a supplementary program for English Language development? If so, how was it chosen?

   d. How well do you think the ELD program supports continuous development of English for your students?

   e. How well equipped do you feel in supporting both the reading and the ELD programs?

4. **Instructional Supports**

   a. How do you interact with teachers in collegial groups specific to the instruction of English language learners?

   - Grade-level meetings
   - Professional learning
   - Study groups
   - Other

   b. What is your perception of the impact collegial interaction has had on the success of ELLs in your school?

   c. How do you feel about your role as a leader and/or member of these groups?

5. **Student Achievement**

   a. What are your expectations for academic success for English Learners in your school?

   b. Have your expectations changed over the last several years? If so, in what ways have they changed?

   c. Is there a structure in place for you to collaborate with the principal specifically around issues of student achievement? If there is, how well is it working?

   d. If you could identify some factors to explain the success of your ELLs, what might they be?

6. **Assessment and Use of Data**

   a. How does your school monitor the success of your ELLs in reading? In ELD?

   b. What is your role in data collection and use?

   c. How do you rate data use as a factor in the success of your ELLs?

7. **Belief and Results Statements**

   If you were to make a general statement about how the needs of English learners are valued and addressed in your school or district, what might it be?

8. **Concluding Statements**

   (One last chance to add something not specifically addressed in the other questions.)

Teacher Focus Group Questions

1. **School-Level Efforts for Instructing ELLs**

   a. What are some of your success stories about your students' progress in English language learning?

   b. What are some success stories about their progress in reading?

   c. How does your school organize for instruction for reading? For English Language Learning?

   d. What support systems are specifically designed to support English Learners at both the school and the classroom levels?

- Grouping
- Time
- Materials
- Other

2. District and School Leadership Support for Instructing ELLs

   a. How have you been supported by your district and/or school leadership in refining your instruction of ELLs?

   b. Please describe the impact of your professional learning in this area. Comment on formal professional learning sessions, coaching support, and any other professional learning opportunities you have had.

   c. What district policies have had an impact on your instruction of ELLs?

- Grouping
- Identification of students
- Classification of language proficiency levels
- Parent rights
- Other

   d. How are district policies communicated to you? To parents?

3. Instructional Materials

   a. How was your comprehensive reading program chosen?

   b. What are the strengths of your reading program?

   c. How effective is the comprehensive reading program for your ELL students?

   d. Do you use a supplementary program for English Language Development? If so, how was it chosen?

   e. How well do you think the ELD program supports continuous learning of English for your students?

4. Instructional Supports

   a. What impact have the following types of collegial interaction had on your success in instructing English learners?

- Grade-level meetings
- Professional learning
- Study groups
- Other

   a. What support has been most helpful to you?

5. Student Achievement

   a. What are your expectations for academic success for your English Learners?

   b. Have your expectations changed over the last several years? If so, in what ways have they changed?

   c. If you could identify some factors that contribute to the success of your ELLs, what might they be?

6. Assessment and Use of Data

   a. How do you monitor the success of your ELLs in reading? In ELD?

   b. How are data collected, organized, and made accessible to you?

   c. How do you rate data use as a factor in the success of your ELLs?

7. **Belief and Results Statements**

   If you were to make a general statement about how the needs of English learners are valued and addressed in your school or district, what might it be?

8. **Concluding Statements**

   (One last chance to add something not specifically addressed in the other questions.)

Parent Focus Group Questions

1. **At which grade levels do you currently have children attending elementary school in Orange County?**

2. **Please describe the language and/or reading program in which your child is enrolled.**
   - Sheltered English (a classroom with all ELL students who are taught in English)
   - Regular Education (a classroom with a handful of ELL students taught by a teacher with ESOL certification or endorsement)
   - Bilingual Classrooms (a classroom with both ELL and non-ELL students taught in both English and Spanish)

3. **How does your child feel about going to school? What type of progress is your child making in:**
   - Speaking English?
   - Reading in English (or Spanish if taught in Spanish)?

4. **How well do you feel your child comes home able to read to you in English?**

5. **How well does your child's teacher keep you informed about his/her progress? Probes:**
   - How often does the school communicate with you?
   - What is the main (or primary) way in which you communicate (in writing, by talking, face-to-face (directly to your child or through another person), email, other)?
   - How pleased are you with the communication?

6. **When you receive report cards and the state's reading test results, how well are you able to understand the report and know about your child's strengths and weaknesses in skill areas? How helpful is this information to you?**

7. **Describe some of the events that you attend at school. For example:**
   - Back to School Night
   - Open House
   - What other events do you attend at school?
   - What events do you attend that are for families?

8. **What do you view are the positive things about your child's schooling?**

9. **As parents of children who are English learners, are you finding that each year your child is improving his or her skills in speaking English and reading in English? How do you feel your child is advancing his or her skills in both use of the English language and in reading?**

10. **Would you like to add anything else about your child's schooling?**

    We thank you for coming today.

Appendix D

Mountain View School District, 2008-2009 Goals
[Excerpts Keyed to ELLs]

1. Student Academic Achievement

During the 2008–2009 academic year, our primary objectives will be to increase student achievement from preschool to grade eight through the ongoing implementation of current standards-based instructional materials that emphasize rigorous high expectations for each and every student. This will be accomplished through the mastery of State content standards in all subject areas, especially English language development. Teachers will use standards-based curricular materials with the integration of technology; implement research-based instructional strategies (e.g., Systematic ELD), focused interventions and enrichment opportunities to meet the needs of all students. Examination of data through collaboration and professional learning opportunities will be used to monitor achievement and guide the teaching and learning process.

2. Recruitment, Staff Development & Professional Growth

During the 2008–2009 school year, highly qualified personnel will be recruited, employed and provided professional growth opportunities. This will be accomplished by leading and supporting the long-term staff development of all personnel consistent with the continuing effort to improve employee performance and academic achievement of each student. Research-based staff development, career ladders, mentoring and support for new and veteran employees, plus summer academies, will be offered to deepen employees' knowledge and skills.

3. Educational Leadership Development

During the 2008–2009 school year, purposeful development of educational leadership capacity will result in a shared vision of a district/school high achieving culture supportive of student learning. This will be accomplished by strategically using data to implement District initiatives. Effective school systems and processes such as professional learning communities and regular classroom observations with constructive feedback will develop accountability and ensure school-wide implementation. Leadership capacity will also be nurtured through short and long-term planning, effective management of the school/department operations, development of personnel and efficient use and management of educational, fiscal, and human resources driven by the cycle of continuous improvement.

4. Parent Education, Training and Involvement

During the 2008–2009 school year, a strong parent/school partnership will be emphasized and support our efforts to accelerate student academic achievement. This will be accomplished by providing parents the opportunity to deepen their skills and knowledge by attending school and District trainings and workshops, higher educational opportunities, volunteer programs and parent advisory committees. In addition, parents will be supported to take an active role in their child's education both at home and at schools.

Orange County Public Schools ESOL Instructional Models[2]

During the 2008–09 school year, the ELL service delivery models offered by the district varied by school, and included the following three models:

1. In the *Sheltered English Classroom* model, a class of all ELLs is taught in English by a teacher who does not speak the language(s) of the students and is highly trained (e.g., possesses either ESOL certification or ESOL endorsement) in implementing this model to ensure student success. This instructional model has ESOL as a main component.

2. In the *General Education* model, ELLs are taught in a class of ELLs and non-ELLs in English by a teacher who does not speak the language(s) of the English-learning students and is highly trained in ESOL concepts.

3. In the *Bilingual Classroom* model, students receive Language Arts instruction in their native language while ESOL time allows for instruction in the second language. As students progress through the grade levels, a greater percentage of instruction in the subject areas occurs in the second language. The transfer of skills to the second language is strongly emphasized. Within this model, there is the *one-way developmental bilingual program* and the *two-way developmental bilingual program*.

   The *One-Way Developmental Bilingual Program* includes students who are acquiring English as their second language. This instructional model has ESOL as a main component

   The *Two-Way Developmental Bilingual Program* includes students who are native speakers of English and students who speak another language, for example English and Spanish or English and Chinese. This instructional model has ESOL as a component for students who are not proficient in English. Additionally, Spanish as a Second Language (SSL) is offered for the native speakers of English.

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[2] Source: *Team Work Leads to Success, PLC Institute Presentation,* Orange County Public Schools. Retrieved July 8, 2009 from https://www.ocps.net/cs/multilingual/parents/Pages/PLCInstitute.aspx

Intense Focus on Student Achievement: Eleven Essential Outcomes
Orange County Public Schools Strategic Plan

The district now has a strategic plan adopted by the school board that sets the direction and vision for the school district. The vision of the district is:

To be the top producer of successful students in the nation

The strategic plan also has a mission that replaces the mission used previously:

To lead our students to success with the support and involvement
of families and the community

Schools also develop a vision statement in their plans. The vision in the school improvement plan should be reviewed to ensure it is in alignment with the district's vision.

• Next, the district strategic plan lists five goals for the district. They are:

• Intense Focus on Student Achievement

• High-Performing and Dedicated Team

• Safe Learning and Working Environment

• Efficient Operations

• Sustained Community Engagement

The intense focus on academic achievement has always been the primary focus of the school improvement plan and it is also now the first goal in the district strategic plan. In the division of Instruction and Curriculum Services, the first goal has been further developed through the League of Educational Excellence to include 11 Essential Outcomes. These outcomes are in alignment with the Charter School District Contract, the League of Excellence, and the district's Integrated Business Plans. All district plans and initiatives should now be in alignment with the district strategic plan including the school improvement plans.

(Selected outcomes pertaining to all elementary students and all schools are provided below.)

OUTCOME 1: All elementary students will read independently on grade level by age nine.

OUTCOME 2: All elementary students will become fluent in all four basic mathematical operations (whole numbers) by grade four; adding and subtracting fractions and decimals by the end of fifth grade.

OUTCOME 4: All students will be proficient in FCAT mathematics, reading, science, and writing and all students will demonstrate learning gains in reading and math.

OUTCOME 8: All elementary schools will adopt and implement the "Destination College" program and all middle and high schools will implement the AVID program/philosophy with fidelity to support academic rigor and promote college readiness.

OUTCOME 10: All schools will eliminate the disproportionate classification and placement of minority students in special education.

OUTCOME 11: All schools will decrease drop-out rates and increase graduation rate for all students.

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