



# Supporting English Language Learners in Low- Incidence Districts

# District Leadership Forum

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# 1) Executive Overview

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## Key Observations

In this report, **low-incidence district** refers to a district with an ELL population of 5.0 percent or less of the total student body.

**Administrators at most profiled low-incidence districts provide English language (EL) services at all school sites.** For example, administrators at **District I**, where English language learners (ELLs) make up four percent of the total student population, offer EL services at all sixteen elementary, middle, and high school sites. Contacts cite an inclusive culture of community-based schools as the rationale behind providing EL services at all schools. In contrast, administrators at two profiled districts, **District B** and **District E** provide EL services at select school sites, to consolidate resources. If administrators aim to expand EL services at the district, they should leverage existing learning facilities, such as shared classrooms and the school library.

**All profiled districts provide pull-out services, push-in services, or a combination of both to serve ELLs.** Administrators at some districts primarily reserve pull-out services (i.e., ELLs leave the general education classroom to work with the EL teacher in a small group setting) for ELLs with the lowest English level proficiency. For example, at **District A**, EL teachers reserve pull-out services for students who identify as entering or emerging English speakers, based on the [World-class Instructional Design Association \(WIDA\) Consortium's](#) classification. In contrast, EL teachers at **District C** and **District H** primarily use the push-in model (i.e., EL teacher supports ELLs in the general education classroom). Contacts report that the push-in model fosters inclusive classrooms by allowing ELLs to participate in the general education classroom.

**Administrators at District I implement academic support and enrichment programming for ELLs to build a supportive school culture.** Administrators at **District I** establish after-school programming specifically for ELLs, such as a homework club, study skills workshop, or state assessment preparation. During the summer, administrators also offer ELLs a four-week-long, half-day enrichment program focused on building vocabulary, background knowledge, and overall language acquisition—ultimately preparing ELLs for the upcoming school year. For high school ELLs, summer programming emphasizes postsecondary education awareness and readiness through activities such as college visits and workshops on the college application process.

**Provide EL professional development to general education teachers to ensure that all teachers learn strong instructional practices for ELLs.** By doing so, administrators ensure that general education teachers, even if they do not have the English as a Second Language certification, understand how to support ELLs in the classroom. For example, at **District B**, the EL coordinator offers a one-day summer workshop for all teachers. In the workshop, the EL coordinator shares district demographic data to demonstrate the diversity in cultural backgrounds and English language levels represented by the ELLs, reviews research-based strategies for teaching ELLs, and facilitates practice of strategies. At **District A**, EL teachers offer a weekly 90-minute class on ELL best practices to all teachers in the district and follow up with implementation support in the classroom.

## 2) EL Programming

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### Overview

### Low-Incidence Districts Face Unique Challenges When Serving ELLs

English language learners (ELLs) represent the fastest growing segment of students in U.S. public schools. For example, the ELL population in states with the highest growth rates between 1993 and 2004 (i.e., Indiana, South Carolina, North Carolina, Tennessee, Georgia) increased by at least 400 percent.<sup>1</sup> Contacts at several profiled districts note increasing numbers of ELLs in recent years. For example, contacts at **District B** report a 20 percent increase in ELL enrollment every year in the last four years.

In addition, ELLs represent a highly heterogeneous group of students who have diverse language backgrounds, English language levels, socioeconomic backgrounds, content knowledge, and educational needs.<sup>2</sup> Even at most profiled, low-incidence districts, there is no dominant native language spoken by ELLs. At **District I**, ELLs together speak at least 40 different languages. At **District H**, ELLs together speak 80 languages.








Contacts at multiple profiled districts note the challenge of serving ELLs in low-incidence districts, where ELLs make up a small percentage (i.e., less than five percent) of the total school population. Administrators at low-incidence districts typically possess a limited budget for EL programming. For example, administrators may not have the funds to hire a district-level English language (EL) director. Research highlights the unique challenges faced by low-incidence districts<sup>3</sup>, which inform the practices that profiled low-incidence districts employ when serving ELLs.

1) Goldenberg, Claude. "Improving Achievement for English Learners: Conclusions from 2 Research Reviews." Colorín Colorado. Accessed August 8, 2019. <http://www.colorincolorado.org/article/improving-achievement-english-learners-conclusions-2-research-reviews>.

2) "English Language Learners." National Council of Teachers of English, 2008. <http://www.ncte.org/library/NCTEFiles/Resources/PolicyResearch/ELLResearchBrief.pdf>

3) De Cohen, Clemencia Consentino, Nicole Deterding, Beatriz Chu Clewell. "Who's Left Behind? Immigrant Children in High and Low LEP Schools." The Urban Institute, 2005. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED490928.pdf>.

## Limitations in EL Services at Low-Incidence Schools, Compared to High-Incidence Schools<sup>4</sup>

Limitation	Implication for ELLs
 <p>Less likely to offer Title I services</p>	<p>Administrators receive less funding for schoolwide EL services.</p>
 <p>Less likely to have standardized procedures for identifying ELLs</p>	<p>Administrators are more likely to use teacher observations or referrals to identify students as ELLs, rather than external assessments and home language surveys, which may lead to misidentifying ELLs.</p>
 <p>Less likely to offer bilingual education, native language instruction, and structured immersion programs</p>	<p>Teachers are less likely to adapt instruction to ELLs' diverse needs.</p>
 <p>General education teachers are less likely to have the English as a Second Language certification.</p>	
 <p>Less likely to provide in-service training on EL strategies for general education teachers</p>	
 <p>Less likely to provide special programs</p>	<p>ELLs are less likely to receive additional support through programs such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• On-site, pre-K program</li> <li>• Before- or after-school enrichment</li> <li>• Summer remedial or enrichment</li> <li>• Foreign language immersion</li> </ul>
 <p>Less likely to be involved in parent outreach</p>	<p>Families of ELLs are less likely to receive the following support:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parent liaison</li> <li>• Parent drop-in center</li> <li>• Free childcare and transportation to boost parent attendance at school events</li> </ul>

Administrators at profiled districts have identified many effective strategies to mitigate the above barriers, summarized in this report.

## Models

### Most Profiled Districts Provide EL Services at All School Sites to Cultivate an Inclusive Culture

Administrators at **District A, District C, District D, District F, District G, District H, and District I** provide EL services at all school sites, while **District B** and **District E** provide EL services at select school sites. For example, administrators at District I offer EL services at all sixteen elementary, middle, and high school sites. Contacts at profiled districts that offer EL services at all school sites (versus clustering ELLs at

4) De Cohen, Clemencia Consentino, Nicole Deterding, Beatriz Chu Clewell. "Who's Left Behind? Immigrant Children in High and Low LEP Schools." The Urban Institute, 2005. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED490928.pdf>.

specific sites) highlight an integrated, inclusive culture of community-based schools as the motivation behind the decision. In addition, contacts at District C note that the district's schools are spread out, so providing ELLs with bus transportation to select sites would be complicated and expensive.

In contrast, administrators at District B provide EL services at two out of ten elementary school sites and at all middle and high school sites. By concentrating EL services at two elementary sites, administrators consolidate resources and limited staffing. Administrators selected the two specific elementary school sites because they belong to two different feeder systems. Thus, ELLs can stay in the same feeder system throughout elementary, middle, and high school at District B, which helps them build a consistent community.

### Overview of EL Services at Profiled Districts

District	Percent ELLs	Number of School Sites*	Program Model	EL Services Provided at All School Sites?
District A	3.1%	7	Pull-out, push-in, and dual language immersion program	Yes
District B	2.0%	16	Primarily pull-out	No. EL services provided at two out of 10 elementary schools and at all middle and high schools.
District C	1.7%	5	Primarily push-in	Yes
District D	1.8%	14	Primarily pull-out	Yes
District E	3.5%	9	Pull-out and push-in	No. EL services provided at one out of two middle schools, and at all elementary and high schools.
District F	1.1%	5	Pull-out and push-in (especially for students in kindergarten to third grade)	Yes
District G	1.8%	5	Primarily pull-out	Yes
District H	2.8%	29	Primarily push-in	Yes
District I	4.0%	16	Primarily pull-out	Yes

\*Does not include alternative high schools.

### Profiled Districts Vary in Their Approach to Pull-out and Push-in Services for ELLs

Profiled districts provide pull-out services (i.e., ELLs leave the general education classroom to work with the EL teacher in a small group setting), push-in services (i.e., EL teacher supports ELLs in the general education classroom), or a combination of both for ELLs. Some districts primarily use pull-out services for ELLs who have the lowest level of English proficiency.

The six levels of English proficiency (i.e., entering, emerging, developing, expanding, bridging, reaching) are classified by the [WIDA Consortium](#).

For example, at **District A**, EL teachers reserve pull-out services for students who identify as entering or emerging English speakers. Similarly, teachers at **District I** use the World-class Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA) Consortium's Accessing Comprehension and Communication in English State-to-State ([ACCESS](#)) exam scores to determine for how much time an ELL receives pull-out services. Contacts at **District E** note that sometimes general education teachers are unsure of how to maximize the role of the EL teacher or paraprofessional in a push-in context. In these cases, EL teachers could maximize content instruction for ELLs in a pull-out setting.

In contrast, EL teachers at **District C** and **District H** primarily use the push-in model for ELLs. Contacts share that by allowing ELLs to participate in the general education classroom helps to foster an inclusive classroom and school culture.

## Explore Co-Teaching Models to Increase ELL Academic Achievement

Contacts at **District A**, **District B**, **District F**, and **District H** highlight the value of the co-teaching model for ELLs. For example, at District A, one EL teacher recently transitioned to teaching general education classes. This former EL teacher and the current EL teacher adopted a co-teaching framework and subsequently saw significant growth in ELLs' language proficiency across the year.

Research confirms that a co-teaching model incorporates inclusive practices to support ELLs, to facilitate creative collaborations between EL and general education teachers, and to help all students achieve regional and local academic standards.<sup>5</sup>

5) Honigsfeld, Andrea, Maria Dove. "Co-Teaching in the ESL Classroom." The Delta Kappa Gamma Bulletin, NYU, 2008.  
[https://steinhardt.nyu.edu/scmsAdmin/media/users/xr1/CoTeaching/Articles\\_and\\_PPTs/2008\\_dkg\\_article\\_co-teaching\\_copy.pdf](https://steinhardt.nyu.edu/scmsAdmin/media/users/xr1/CoTeaching/Articles_and_PPTs/2008_dkg_article_co-teaching_copy.pdf).



## Five Models of Grouping Students and Co-Teaching<sup>6</sup>

### One Group

- **Model 1:** Two teachers work collaboratively to teach the same lesson at the same time to the whole class.
- **Model 2:** One teacher leads content instruction, while the other reinforces concepts by delivering mini lessons to individual ELLs, pairs, or a small group. For example, the latter teacher could pre-teach vocabulary, review assignment expectations, or re-teach a concept. Teachers switch roles regularly.

### Two Groups

- **Model 3:** Two teachers divide students into two heterogeneous groups within one classroom. Each teacher leads one group (i.e., parallel teaching). In smaller group environments, ELLs have more opportunities to interact with their peers, share ideas, and receive feedback.
- **Model 4:** Two teachers divide students into two groups based on language proficiency, skills, or content knowledge. Each teacher instructs one group. Teachers rearrange groups as topics and skills change.

### Multiple Groups

- **Model 5:** Two teachers teach and monitor multiple groups (e.g., learning stations groups, reading groups) within one classroom. ELLs can receive differentiated instruction based on their unique learning needs.

Co-teaching does not mean that one teacher plans and executes all instruction and the other only provides general classroom assistance, nor does it mean that an EL teacher works only with ELLs while a general education teacher instructs the rest of the class. Instead, teachers collaborate to create differentiated instruction to students' levels of language proficiency and cultural backgrounds and share delivery of instruction.<sup>7</sup>

## Elements of a Successful Co-Teaching Model for ELLs<sup>8,9,10</sup>

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Garner administrative buy-in and support at district and school level.                           | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Ensure that the EL and general education teacher share delivery of instruction in the classroom.                                     |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Provide professional development to general education and EL teachers as well as administrators. | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Establish regular collaborative teacher preparation time to plan curriculum and develop appropriate supports and scaffolds for ELLs. |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Establish a set of common expectations and goals.  | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Ensure that the EL and general education teacher share accountability for student outcomes.  |

6) Honigsfeld, Andrea, Maria Dove. "Co-Teaching in the ESL Classroom." The Delta Kappa Gamma Bulletin, NYU, 2008.

7) "Co-Teaching and Collaboration for Teachers of ELLs: The Role of Administrators." Eastern Suffolk BOCES. Accessed August 8, 2019. [http://www.nysed.gov/common/nysed/files/programs/bilingual-ed/co-teaching\\_for\\_administrators\\_web\\_version.pdf](http://www.nysed.gov/common/nysed/files/programs/bilingual-ed/co-teaching_for_administrators_web_version.pdf).

8) Robertson, Kristina. "Essential Actions: 15 Research-Based Practices to Increase ELL Student Achievement." Colorín Colorado. Accessed August 8, 2019. <http://www.colorincolorado.org/article/essential-actions-15-research-based-practices-increase-ell-student-achievement>.

9) Honigsfeld, Andrea, Maria Dove. "Co-Teaching in the ESL Classroom." The Delta Kappa Gamma Bulletin, NYU, 2008. [https://steinhardt.nyu.edu/scmsAdmin/media/users/xr1/CoTeaching/Articles\\_and\\_PPTs/2008\\_dkg\\_article\\_co-teaching\\_copy.pdf](https://steinhardt.nyu.edu/scmsAdmin/media/users/xr1/CoTeaching/Articles_and_PPTs/2008_dkg_article_co-teaching_copy.pdf).

10) "Co-Teaching and Collaboration for Teachers of ELLs: The Role of Administrators." Eastern Suffolk BOCES. Accessed August 8, 2019. [http://www.nysed.gov/common/nysed/files/programs/bilingual-ed/co-teaching\\_for\\_administrators\\_web\\_version.pdf](http://www.nysed.gov/common/nysed/files/programs/bilingual-ed/co-teaching_for_administrators_web_version.pdf).

### **EL Teachers at *District E* Now Report to District Leader to Increase Program Cohesiveness**

Administrators at **District E** changed the reporting structure of EL teachers, so that they currently report to an assistant superintendent (instead of the school principal). By managing all EL teachers at the district, the assistant superintendent can gather district-level data, monitor and set a cohesive tone of the district's EL program, and streamline coaching to EL teachers. In addition, by using this reporting structure, administrators help elevate the role of EL teachers.

## Program Evaluation

### **Most Profiled Districts Use the ACCESS Assessment to Measure Effectiveness of EL Programs**

Most profiled districts use ELLs' performance on the ACCESS assessment as the primary measure of effectiveness of EL programs. At **District A**, administrators conduct the initial ACCESS assessment in the fall and re-test ELLs in February, to measure student progress and growth. Administrators gauge ELL progress by analyzing ACCESS scores over multiple years. In addition, administrators at profiled districts compare performance of ELLs and of their non-ELL peers on local assessments and state exams.



Contacts at District A also note informal, consistent monitoring of ELLs by EL teachers and general education teachers to ensure language proficiency progress. At **District C**, administrators use progress towards goals in Individual Learning Plans (ILPs) and feedback from teachers and students to gauge the impact of the EL program on ELL outcomes. At **District H**, administrators anecdotally use EL program exiting rates to evaluate program success. Specifically, contacts highlight the success of their push-in program centered on co-teaching.

## Inclusive School Environment

### **Create EL-Specific Programming to Build a Supportive Environment for ELLs**

To foster an inclusive school environment for ELLs, administrators at **District I** implement ELL-specific programming focused on academic support and enrichment. Administrators cover the expenses of ELL programming through Title III funds.

## ELL-Specific Programming at *District I*

Program	Features
 <p>After-school program</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teachers submit proposals for after-school programming at the beginning of the school year. School administrators select which programs to implement.</li> <li>Administrators provide bus transportation home for participating students.</li> <li>Example programming focuses on homework club, study skills, vocabulary development, and state assessment preparation.</li> </ul>
 <p>Summer program</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Four-week-long, half-day enrichment program.</li> <li>Focused on building vocabulary, background knowledge, and overall language acquisition—ultimately preparing ELLs for the upcoming school year.</li> <li>Administrators provide bus transportation for participating students.</li> </ul> <p><i>Elementary:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Example activities include hosting a traveling zoo, visiting a local museum, and engaging in STEAM/STEM projects.</li> </ul> <p><i>Secondary:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Example activities include visiting colleges, learning about the college application process and funding, and exploring different jobs in the community.</li> </ul>

At **District A**, administrators organize a World Language Day for all elementary school students through the local university. Students create art pieces, poetry, skits, and speaking activities, drawing from different languages and cultures, and present their projects to a panel of judges (i.e., university faculty). Judges give feedback to each group of students and award prizes. By encouraging all students to participate in World Language Day, administrators and teachers at the district encourage all students to celebrate the diversity of cultures and languages at school.

As a global inclusive model for all students (e.g., ELLs, students with special needs, students with trauma), administrators at **District G** implemented the social and emotional learning (SEL) program [Responsive Classroom](#).

## Build Relationships with and Regularly Engage Parents to Create a Welcoming School Culture

Several profiled districts emphasize building positive relationships with parents to create an inclusive school environment for ELLs and their families and to increase ELL outcomes.

## Resources Provided to Parents of ELLs at Profiled Districts

For more information on cultivating meaningful parent engagement using a culturally-responsive framework, review EAB's brief [Strategies to Engage Parents and Guardians at School Districts](#).



Translate district- and school-based documents, policies, and communications (e.g., monthly newsletters, progress reports) into accessible languages.



Ensure that an EL teacher or translator attends all parent trainings (e.g., college workshops on the application process and student loans), parent-teacher conferences, and events (e.g., open house, course selection).



Guide parents on how to access grades and information online.



Establish a parent committee to gather input on how to make the school environment more inclusive and improve the home-school partnership.



Maintain open lines of communications (e.g., phone, email, text, home visits, school conferences) between EL teachers and parents on ELL learning outcomes and progress, questions and concerns, and resources. Use apps such as [Remind](#) or Google Translate to translate communications.

## Initiatives to Create an Inclusive School Culture for Parents of ELLs at *District A*



### Language Classes

- Held every Thursday evening at the district's Professional Development Center.
- English-language classes for Spanish-speaking parents of ELLs.
- Spanish-language classes for English-speaking parents of students in the dual language immersion program.



### Parent Night

- Held three times per year.
- EL teachers teach parents activities to help boost their child's English language proficiency at home and explain expectations for common school assignments.
- Administrators serve dinner to parents and provide free childcare.

Offering foreign language classes for English-speaking parents helps build cross-cultural understanding and engagement at the school.

### 3) Professional Development

#### EL Teachers

#### Establish Consistent Collaboration Time for EL Teachers to Strengthen Instructional Practices

Administrators at **District A** and **District H** establish regular meetings for EL teachers to discuss classroom practices and receive professional development. During these meetings, teachers typically discuss individual student concerns, brainstorm solutions to challenges with push-in or pull-out services, analyze ELL data, and discuss appropriate placements for the following year.

Contacts at District H emphasize the importance of dedicating professional learning time for EL teachers in addition to schoolwide professional development days. During schoolwide professional development, teachers work with their colleagues by department. However, because most school sites at District H only have one EL teacher, the EL teacher is unable to collaborate with other EL teachers. In response, administrators at the district bring EL teachers together for specific professional development time.

#### Professional Development Time Designated for EL Teachers at Profiled Districts



**District A**

##### Logistics

###### Participants

- EL director
- EL teachers
- Paraprofessionals
- Assistant Superintendent

###### Meeting Structure

- Monthly meetings
- Facilitated by EL director

##### Professional Development Topics

- Discuss improving school culture, leveraging ELLs' strengths, teaching academic language, scaffolding complex texts, connecting language and content



**District H**

###### Participants

- EL director
- EL teachers
- District content area specialists

###### Meeting Structure

- Monthly Professional Learning Community (PLC) meetings

- Discuss topics such as latest trends and research in EL strategies, assessments
- Invite district content area specialists (i.e., former teachers who now coach teachers in math, reading and writing, science) to facilitate sessions on content-specific instructional practices. For example, a science specialist might work with EL teachers on strategies to help students access scientific text
- Review the effectiveness of the EL program

## Explore External Resources to Provide Professional Learning Opportunities for EL Teachers

Several profiled districts draw support for EL programming from regional associations, ranging from statewide resources to county-specific intermediate units. By encouraging EL teachers to obtain ongoing professional development, administrators ensure continued success of the EL program.

### Sample Regional Resources to Support EL Programming



Kansas

#### Regional Organization

[Educational Services and Staff Development Association of Central Kansas \(ESSDACK\)](#) is a collaborative of schools by region. ESSDACK offers resources to address specific challenges in EL programming, such as providing automated audio translators and guidance on working with families who speak little to no English. ESSDACK also discusses current statewide regulations, helps districts analyze test scores and review areas of program success, and provides EL training to teachers and paraprofessionals.



Massachusetts

[The Education Cooperative \(TEC\)](#) provides professional learning opportunities to Massachusetts districts. TEC offers online courses that English as a Second Language-certified teachers can take to earn professional development credits needed to renew their certification every five years. Example course topics include cultural proficiency, modifications to assignments, and differentiation strategies.



Missouri

[Migrant English Language Learners \(MELL\)](#) program is offered by the Missouri Regional Professional Development Center (RPDC). MELL organizes local, free-of-charge professional development. For example, the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) presents on assessments, and education experts Andrea Honigsfeld and Maria Dove discuss co-teaching. A regional MELL specialist comes to the district to facilitate professional development, conduct classroom observations, and give program feedback, at no charge.

Administrators at **District I** send EL teachers to national conferences hosted by organizations such as the Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) International Association and WIDA Consortium. Administrators cover these expenses through Title III funds.

## General Education Teachers

### Incentivize General Education Teachers to Earn the English as a Second Language Certification

General education teachers who have the English as a Second Language certification are more prepared to deliver effective instruction to ELLs. Administrators at districts with expanding ELL populations that wish to explore different EL models can leverage current general education teachers to deliver EL services by facilitating certification. Some profiled districts, such as **District E**, offer incentives for general education teachers to complete their certification.

## Incentives Provided to General Education Teachers at *District E*



### Study Resources

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Administrators provide a free-of-charge English as a Second Language certification exam preparation workshop, a few weeks prior to the exam date. Teachers review exam expectations, study content, and complete practice tests. An EL teacher in the district facilitates the workshop.



### Financial Incentive

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Administrators reimburse teachers for the cost of the English as a Second Language certification, if they pass the exam.

## Offer Professional Development Opportunities to General Education Teachers on Supporting ELLs

Administrators at several profiled districts provide opportunities for general education teachers to learn about EL strategies. By doing so, administrators help general education teachers, even if they do not have the English as a Second Language certification, understand how to support ELLs in the classroom. For example, by pairing EL and general education teachers together to navigate professional development opportunities, administrators at **District H** facilitate strong professional relationships between EL and general education teachers.

## EL Professional Development Opportunities for General Education Teachers at Profiled Districts

### Best Practice Workshops



- At **District A**, EL teachers offer a weekly 90-minute class on EL best practices to all teachers in the district. EL teachers send out in advance the topic or strategy for the week. In follow-up to the class, EL teachers offer to help general education teachers implement the strategy in their classroom.
- At **District E**, EL teachers and general education teachers with the English as a Second Language certification offer workshops and trainings on EL practices, open to all teachers. Example topics include anchor charts, language development, and writing.

### Pairing General Education and EL Teachers



- Administrators at **District H** recently implemented the [Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling \(LETRS\)](#) professional development course. The course is aimed at general education teachers who teach introductory reading and EL teachers for essential components of literacy instruction. Administrators ask EL teachers to pick a K-2 general education teacher partner (with whom they frequently work together) to complete the training, which also involves together tracking the literacy progress of three ELLs throughout the school year.
- Outside of the LETRS program, contacts recently organized a workshop on middle school math strategies for ELLs. Administrators invited a district math specialist to meet with a general education math teacher representative from each grade and an EL teacher from every middle school.

### Professional Learning Communities



For more information on PLCs, review EAB's brief [Professional Learning Communities](#).

At **District B**, the EL coordinator attends PLC meetings with secondary general education and EL teachers to facilitate discussions on ELLs.

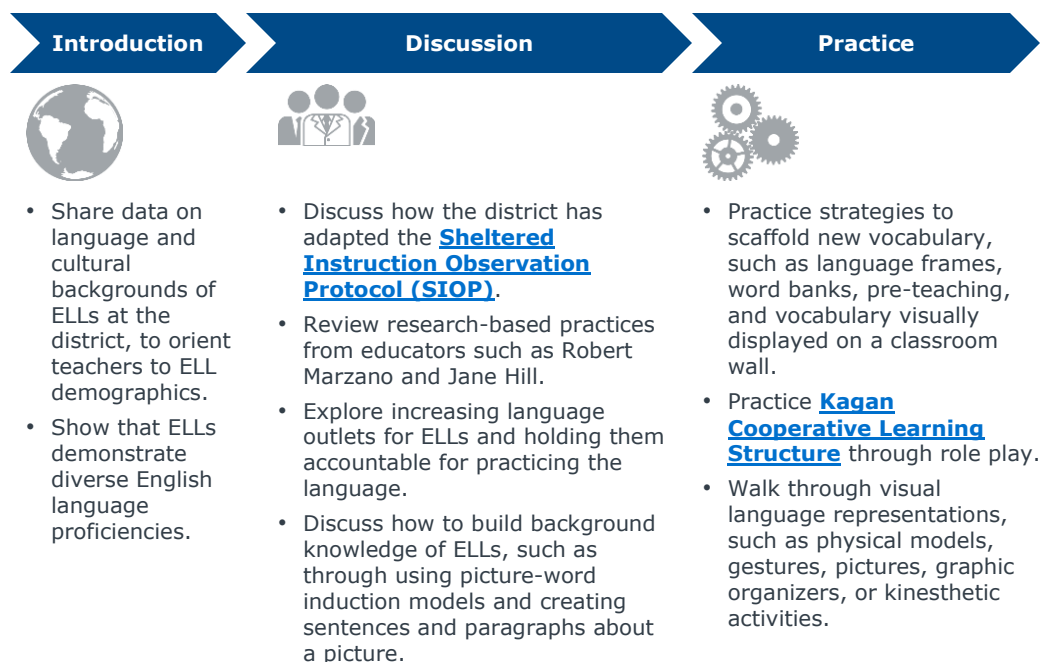
### Other Training



- At **District B**, the EL coordinator presents an overview of ELLs at the preschool level to preschool teachers.
- Administrators at **District I** plan to implement professional development for general education teachers on accommodations for ELLs, especially the differences in accommodation between ELLs and students receiving special education services.



## Example Activities During Daylong Summer EL Workshop at *District B*



### All Teachers

### Integrate EL Strategies into All-Faculty Professional Development Sessions

At profiled low-incidence districts where ELLs make up a small proportion of the general education classroom, administrators struggle to persuade general education teachers to voluntarily participate in ELL-specific training. In response, some profiled districts embed EL strategies into mandatory all-faculty professional development, faculty-wide meetings, and new teacher trainings. By doing so, administrators ensure that all teachers learn about effective ELL strategies and understand that supporting ELLs is a school- and district-wide expectation. Contacts at **District H** note that this strategy helps administrators reinforce the belief that the EL teacher is a peer teacher, instead of simply a resource teacher.

## Strategies to Embed EL Practices into All-Faculty Professional Development and Meetings at Profiled Districts

### Audience

#### All Teachers



### Strategy

- At **District D**, EL teachers explain instructional practices during faculty meetings and during all-faculty professional development days. EL teachers provide department-specific support on implementing specific strategies.
- At **District I**, EL teachers share inclusive practices during all-faculty meetings.
- Administrators at **District I** provide all general education teachers with a list of accommodations for ELLs, such as test read aloud, extended time, differentiated instruction, and visual prompts.
- Administrators at **District B** are planning to integrate content on ELLs into every professional development opportunity offered to general education teachers. For example, all teachers recently studied the Lucy Calkins framework for teaching reading and writing.<sup>11</sup> One recommended activity is role play to persuade someone of a perspective. Both general education and EL teachers discussed language scaffolds that an ELL might need, if paired with a native-English speaking student.

#### Grade-Specific Teams



- At **District D**, EL teachers facilitate discussions with grade-level teams so that everyone can learn more about individual ELLs, what to expect from these students, and how best to support them in the classroom.

#### New Teachers



- Every new teacher at **District H** must attend a professional development workshop on differentiated instruction that includes EL strategies and relevant research on ELLs.

## Follow Up on Professional Development to Ensure Teacher Accountability to Practices

Contacts at **District H** recommend that principals attend professional development sessions, so they understand the practices to look for when conducting classroom observations.

Following professional development, administrators and instructional coaches should conduct classroom observations to provide feedback and targeted coaching. By doing so, administrators hold general education teachers accountable for employing these practices. At **District I**, the director of student services conducts classroom observations at least twice a year. The director notifies the general education teacher in advance of the observation and emphasizes that the purpose of the observation is not to evaluate the teacher but to see how ELLs are performing and offer constructive feedback. This strategy alleviates teacher apprehension and mitigates assumptions of classroom observations as a punitive action.

Contacts at **District H** emphasize the importance of following up with summer professional development during the year (e.g., through classroom observations), to ensure accountability to implementing specific instructional strategies.

<sup>11</sup>"Units, Tools, and Methods for Teaching Reading and Writing: A Workshop Curriculum – Grades K-8." Lucy Calkins and the Teachers College Reading and Writing project (TCRWP). Accessed August 8, 2019. <http://www.unitsofstudy.com/>.

## Emphasize That Instructional Practices for ELLs Can Benefit All Students

Contacts at all profiled districts agree that ELL-specific strategies, such as scaffolding new vocabulary and leveraging visual and kinesthetic learning to reinforce concepts, are valuable for all students. Research confirms that ELLs and their English-speaking peers benefit from effective instructional practices in similar ways.<sup>12</sup> For example, ELLs, just like their peers, benefit from clear learning objectives, active participation, regular review and assessments, and consistent feedback on their work.

For more information on literacy development, review EAB's brief [Narrowing the Third-Grade Reading Gap](#).

More specifically, research demonstrates that ELLs and non-ELLs make progress in literacy development in similar ways, especially in the early stages of learning to read. To become strong readers, both ELLs and non-ELLs need rigorous instruction in phonemic awareness and phonics, with a focus on building reading fluency and comprehension and boosting vocabulary.<sup>13</sup> When general education teachers understand that EL strategies are overall effective instructional practices for all students, they are more likely to be receptive to EL training.

12) Goldenberg, Claude. "Improving Achievement for English Learners: Conclusions from 2 Research Reviews." Colorín Colorado. Accessed August 8, 2019. <http://www.colorincolorado.org/article/improving-achievement-english-learners-conclusions-2-research-reviews>.

13) Ibid.

## 4) Expanding EL Services

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### Staffing

#### Most Profiled Districts Assign EL Teachers to Multiple School Sites

To provide EL services at all school sites, administrators often assign EL teachers to multiple sites. For example, at **District A**, three EL teachers, assisted by two paraprofessionals, work with ELLs across five elementary school sites. In addition, one EL teacher divides their time between the middle school and high school. Contacts at the district note that because the same EL teacher works with ELLs in the district's middle and high school, the EL teacher helps middle school ELLs transition into high school.

Similarly, at **District H**, some EL teachers divide their time among multiple schools. For example, one EL teacher works at three elementary schools with lower ELL enrollment. On the other hand, four EL teachers work full-time at one elementary school, in which ELLs make up 25 percent of the student population. By assigning EL teachers to multiple sites, instead of pulling ELLs from their neighborhood school and community to attend another school, administrators prioritize creating an inclusive school environment for ELLs. Providing bus transportation for ELLs to attend a school outside of their neighborhood may diminish sense of belonging and community.

#### Leverage Paraprofessionals to Supplement Services Provided by EL Teachers

At many profiled districts, paraprofessionals support EL teachers in delivering push-in or pull-out services. Paraprofessionals do not need to be certified teachers and typically receive less compensation than EL teachers. Thus, if expanding EL services to other school sites, administrators should leverage paraprofessionals for additional support. Administrators at **District D** and **District H** compensate paraprofessionals through Title III funds.

By employing paraprofessionals, administrators ensure that there is always an EL provider available in the building. At most profiled districts that use paraprofessionals, EL teachers still maintain full responsibility for serving and checking in with all ELLs.

## The Role of Paraprofessionals at Profiled Districts



### Pull-out Services

At **District A** and **District B**, paraprofessionals help conduct pull-out sessions. At District B, paraprofessionals either work in the same room or same vicinity as the EL teacher with their own group of ELLs. Contacts note that this strategy allows EL teachers to provide support to the paraprofessional when needed.



### Push-in Services

Administrators at **District H** place paraprofessionals at school sites with the highest numbers of ELLs. At one middle school site with relatively high numbers of ELLs, paraprofessionals help the one full-time EL teacher with push-in services. For example, the EL teacher supports ELLs in English language arts (ELA), while paraprofessionals support ELLs in science, social studies, and math classes.

At **District E**, paraprofessionals primarily provide push-in support, such as re-teaching concepts to a small group of students. EL teachers primarily provide pull-out services.

## Programming



### Provide Consistent Support and Professional Development for Paraprofessionals

Contacts at several profiled districts recommend providing training to paraprofessionals on EL best practices. For example, at **District E**, EL teachers meet with paraprofessionals one-on-one every week to discuss ELLs' ILPs and workshop challenges. Paraprofessionals at **District D** and District E attend monthly professional development meetings on topics such as literacy strategies, cultural competence trainings, and trauma-informed care. Through robust paraprofessional training, administrators ensure that paraprofessionals consistently deliver effective instruction to ELLs.

## When Expanding EL Services, Consider Exploring a More Tailored EL Program for Specific ELL Groups

In addition to providing pull-out services for ELLs, administrators at **District I** recently implemented a [Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education \(SLIFE\)](#) program at one high school site. Research shows that more than 20 percent of high school ELLs and 12 percent of middle school ELLs have missed at least two years of consistent schooling.<sup>14</sup> These students demonstrate the highest risk for academic failure and drop-out.<sup>15</sup> The SLIFE program allows ELLs to leverage learning in both their native language and English in a highly rigorous environment, which also helps build a supportive school culture for these students.

14) Ruiz-de-Velasco, Jorge, Michael Fix. "Overlooked and Underserved: Immigrant Students in U.S. Secondary Schools." The Urban Institute, 2000. <https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/62316/310022-Overlooked-and-Underserved-Immigrant-Students-in-U-S-Secondary-Schools.PDF>.

15) "SLIFE: Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education." WIDA, 2015. <https://wida.wisc.edu/sites/default/files/resource/FocusOn-SLIFE.pdf>.

## SLIFE Program at *District I*

### District Motivations

- Administrators established the program in response to an increase in the number of ELLs who fit the SLIFE criteria (e.g., students coming from refugee camps with lack of consistent schooling).
- The numbers of high school ELLs who qualify for the SLIFE program were not high enough to support SLIFE programs at all three high schools in the district. Thus, administrators implemented the program at one school site.

### Criteria for Eligibility<sup>16</sup>

- Usually unfamiliar with the U.S. school system.
- Limited reading and writing skills in their native language(s).
- Below grade level in most academic areas.
- Could be a refugee, migrant student, or any student with a lack of consistent schooling opportunities due to reasons such as poverty, isolated geographic locations, societal expectations for attending school, and conflict.

### Program Features at the District

- A general education teacher, who has received additional training to teach ELLs (from the district's EL teachers), co-teaches one period a day with an EL teacher who is bilingual in Spanish. Most SLIFE students at the district speak Spanish as their first language.
- The general education teacher and EL teacher use the SIOP model to guide instruction.
- Teachers incorporate opportunities for students to practice life skills, such as using public transportation, visiting a restaurant, and navigating a grocery store, to ensure that students practice vocabulary in settings outside of the classroom.
- Teachers evaluate students' language proficiency at the end of the year to gauge eligibility to exit the program.
- Administrators provide bus transportation to ELLs who opt into the program.

Administrators selected one general education teacher per core content area (i.e., math, English, science, history) to participate in the SLIFE program.

Administrators spent a year planning for the SLIFE program before implementation, which included:

- Garnering stakeholder buy-in
- Visiting other districts with similar programs
- Consulting with the county intermediate unit
- Discussing assessments
- Selecting teachers
- Providing professional development to SLIFE teachers

Contacts note that ELLs who participated in the SLIFE program demonstrated progress on the ACCESS assessment scores and showed higher confidence with speaking English. After the first year of the program, several students were ready to enter a general education class with less support from the EL teacher.

<sup>16</sup>"SLIFE: Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education." WIDA, 2015. <https://wida.wisc.edu/sites/default/files/resource/FocusOn-SLIFE.pdf>.

Profiled Districts Leverage Various Learning Spaces to Provide Pull-out Services

Contacts at most profiled districts did not report specifically planning designated learning facilities in advance to accommodate EL services. Instead, administrators at profiled districts leverage a variety of existing classrooms and building spaces for pull-out services. When implementing pull-out services at additional school sites in the district, administrators can often use existing learning facilities to accommodate the EL teacher and ELLs.

Learning Spaces Used for Pull-out Services by EL Teachers at Profiled Districts

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Full-sized classrooms. Sometimes shared with the paraprofessional (e.g., divided by shelves and half-walls) | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Full-sized classrooms shared (i.e., used at different times) with other staff (e.g., speech language therapist, instructional coach) and classes (e.g., band) |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Smaller classrooms that can accommodate 10-15 students  | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Full-sized classrooms shared with general education teacher (i.e., EL teacher works with ELLs in one section of the room)                                     |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> School library  | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Offices   |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Open corridors in hallway   |   |

When designing new facilities, administrators should proactively consider additional learning spaces for all accommodations. For example, when recently planning for new building construction, administrators at **District D** considered current and anticipated needs of different types of spaces (e.g., for reading and math intervention, EL services, special education support services). Because EL teachers at District D typically work with fewer than 20 ELLs at one time for pull-out services, administrators acknowledge that small group instruction spaces (versus full-sized classrooms) are sufficient.

Consider Building a Culturally Responsive Library Collection for ELLs

Consider establishing a culturally responsive library collection to recognize ELLs’ diverse backgrounds, boost their self-esteem and adjustment, and ultimately create a more inclusive school environment. For example, at **District H**, librarians, ELA teachers, and EL teachers collaborate to select books for ELA courses. Contacts note that administrators often add books to the library at the recommendation of EL teachers or ELLs. In addition, beginning this fall, all students will receive a public library card.

## Strategies to Support ELLs in the School Library Collection<sup>17</sup>



### Place bilingual or foreign language books in easy-access displays

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- Designate these sections with bilingual signs (e.g., Spanish/English, Chinese/English).
- Provide translated books that align with the curriculum (e.g., translated *Magic School Bus* books to supplement ELLs' understanding of a science concept).

### Offer books on ELLs' countries of origin

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- With limited library budgets, school administrators might not be able to afford books in every language spoken by ELLs. However, administrators can select books in English about the respective countries.
- Select books with colorful photos and illustrations (e.g., important symbols such as the flag).



### Provide online access to reading materials in different languages

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- Explore audio books to help boost ELLs' English listening skills.
- Demonstrate how to use online English translation dictionaries that provide audio pronunciation guides.
- Administrators at **District F** and **District G** use the online reading platform [Lexia](#).



### Promote sharing of culturally meaningful stories

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- Explore stories that showcase holidays and traditions from around the world, such as Ramadan, Diwali, and Chinese New Year.
- Use visuals (e.g., props, puppets) to add meaning to culturally responsive stories.

<sup>17</sup>Jules, Jacqueline. "10 Ways to Support ELLs in the School Library." Colorín Colorado. Accessed August 8, 2019. <https://www.colorincolorado.org/article/10-ways-support-ells-school-library>.



## 4) Research Methodology

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### Project Challenges

Leadership at a member district approached the Forum with the following questions:

- What EL program and instructional models do contact districts employ?
- How do instructional strategies for ELLs benefit students in other subgroups?
- How do contact districts measure the effectiveness of the EL program on ELL outcomes?
- What learning facilities do contact districts provide ELLs?
- How did contact districts develop a library collection to support ELLs?
- How do contact districts engage parents of ELLs to make them feel supported by the school?
- How do contact districts gather buy-in from school administrators and teachers to ensure that ELLs feel supported in the school community?
- What professional development do contact districts provide general education teachers to teach ELLs?
- What certification programs do contact districts use to train general education teachers to teach ELLs?

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## Research Parameters

The Forum interviewed school and district-level EL administrators.

### A Guide to Districts Profiled in this Brief

District	Location	Approximate Enrollment
District A	Mountain West	4,000
District B	Midwest	11,600
District C	Midwest	2,400
District D	Mid-Atlantic	11,000
District E	Midwest	5,600
District F	Northeast	2,500
District G	Northeast	3,000
District H	Midwest	19,700
District I	Mid-Atlantic	11,600