



Effective English Language Arts Operations and Programming

District Leadership Forum

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1) Executive Overview

Key Observations

Standardize English Language Arts (ELA) curricula to provide a common student experience. Administrators at all profiled districts standardize ELA curricula centrally to ensure that classrooms deliver consistently high-level programming. Districts differ in the ELA program elements that administrators choose to standardize (e.g., texts, units), but administrators generally use state standards to guide curricular design. Administrators at all profiled districts aim to balance standardization with preservation of teacher autonomy so that teachers can adjust their instruction to unique classroom and student needs.

Review district-wide and classroom-specific assessment data regularly to ensure curricular effectiveness. Administrators at District A, District C, District D, and District E measure curricular success through district-wide assessments and classroom-specific measures of individual student progress. Using both sets of assessments allows administrators to both identify district-wide and classroom-specific student needs. Administrators at District A and District D highlight the value of reviewing metrics regularly. Frequent review allows districts to make student-responsive, timely changes to ELA offerings.

Provide personalized support to teachers to improve instruction on both existing and new ELA curricula. Administrators at all profiled districts use structured professional development time to support teachers' ELA instruction, and those at District A, District C, District D, and District E provide further support through specialized coaches. New ELA teachers at all profiled districts receive additional opportunities to jumpstart their instructional skill development by asking questions and forming relationships through summer onboarding, mentorship programs, and cohort-driven professional development sessions. When changing curricular components, administrators at District A host teacher institutes to outline curricular design and provide feedback on teachers' instructional methods.

Use group-based learning environments to enhance student engagement with ELA material. Group environments offer natural ways for students to use language and develop language skills. ELA teachers at District A, District B, and District E use innovative project-based learning methods to expose students to multiple skill development opportunities, many of which require group work and effective collaboration, during a single project. Teachers at District A, District B, and District E integrate these projects into unit plans or use them to replace final exams. While contacts at all profiled districts note that reading and writing instruction drives ELA classroom programming, research indicates that instructors who wish to dedicate more time to explicit vocabulary and grammar instruction should incorporate group work as well.

Personalize instruction to make content more relevant to students and drive student ownership over learning processes. Contacts at District A note that when students feel that instruction meets their individual needs, they engage more with class material. Administrators at District A and District C recently updated classroom texts to ensure that the settings, characters, and themes within them reflect students' diverse backgrounds. These contacts note that when teachers use more diverse texts, they report enhanced student engagement. Technology offers additional ways to personalize ELA instruction by providing students with innovative tools and a greater choice of approaches to accomplish learning goals.

2) ELA Program Operations

Overview

Develop Innovative ELA Programming to Meet Evolving State Standards

In designing English Language Arts (ELA) curricula, administrators at all profiled districts prioritize alignment with evolving state-level standards. In addition, administrators look to provide students with a common student experience that equips each student with the skills needed to both succeed in further ELA education and thrive as informed community members.

Traditionally, teachers retain a great deal of autonomy in their classroom operations. This makes it difficult for district-level leaders to ensure that all classrooms provide students with ELA instruction that meets changing state requirements. Further, new state standards require new skills from students, leaving many teachers with outdated teaching practices that do not directly address standards or no longer relate to students and their experiences. Finally, even once administrators identify these problems and propose solutions, teachers may resist changes to well-known and well-liked methods.

In considering how to navigate these challenges, administrators at all profiled districts aim to provide consistent and universally valuable ELA curricula, support ELA teacher instructional development, and provide students with innovative ways to engage with ELA material.

Standardization and Evaluation

Standardize ELA Program Components to Create a Common Student Experience

Administrators at all profiled districts create a common student experience by standardizing some components of the ELA experience. This standardization ensures that students across grade levels and schools all encounter and can achieve state standards. By creating a common ELA student experience, students can also progress through ELA curricula across grade levels more easily and administrators can compare student outcomes across ELA classrooms more reliably.

However, administrators at all profiled districts look to balance these benefits of standardization with the value of preserving teacher autonomy to design classroom experiences that align with the unique needs of their students. In seeking this balance, administrators at all profiled districts vary in the level of standardization that they incorporate into their ELA programming.

Standardized Curricular Components at Profiled Districts

Standardized Curriculum Component	District A	District B	District C	District D	District E
 Overall Learning Goals	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
 Texts	✓		✓	✓	✓
 Midterms/Finals	✓		✓	✓	✓
 Units	✓			✓	
 Unit Assessments	✓			✓	
 Day-to-Day Instruction				✓	

Administrators at District B elect not to standardize much of the ELA experience across their classrooms. Contacts report that limiting standardization to general learning goals preserves a great deal of teacher autonomy and encourages teachers to take ownership over meeting defined goals.

However, administrators at District C and District E standardize additional curricular components (i.e., some texts and exams) to provide a common background and body of texts for students across classrooms at the same grade level. This allows administrators to integrate common evaluative measures across classrooms.

Administrators at these districts do allow teachers to maintain some freedom through the choice of supplementary texts and instructional methods, including control over mid-unit and end-of-unit assessments. For example, at District C and District E, district leaders expect teachers to teach several specific texts, but teachers personally select additional texts to include in their curricula based on classroom needs and their own preferences.

Administrators at District A and District D designed the most standardized ELA programs, providing teachers with set texts, units, and unit assessments to ensure consistent student experiences in most, if not all, learning activities. At District A, administrators developed common units of study using the Understanding by Design (UbD) framework. Within this framework, teachers work backward from desired outcomes (e.g., achievement of state standards) to design assessments and develop

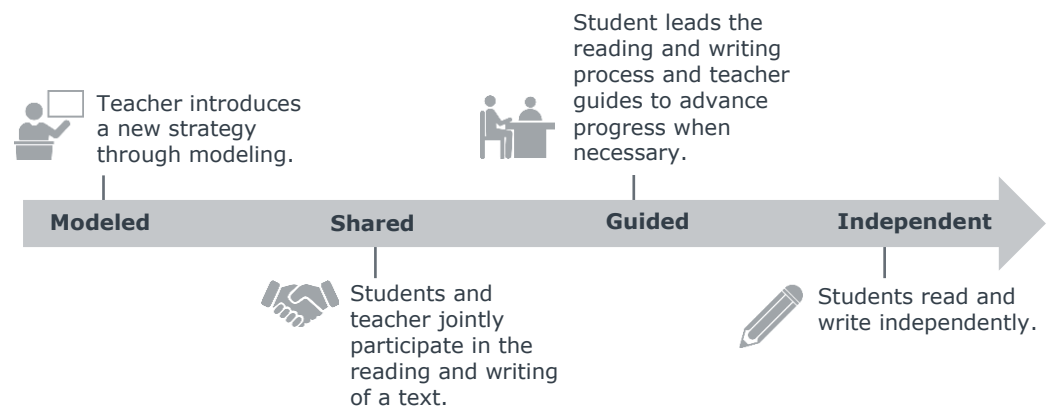
See [here](#) for additional information on the UbD framework and refer to **page 25** of the Appendix for a UbD-based unit of study outline from District A.

activities that help students achieve said outcomes. Use of the UbD framework does not fully standardize the ELA experience, but it does provide a common process through which teachers develop their own daily programming.

Refer to the Appendix (pages 26-31) for a calendared curriculum map toolkit.

To further standardize the ELA experience, administrators at District D provide common calendared curriculum maps that detail daily learning targets, common assessments, consistent resources, and common learning experiences. The district pairs their calendared curriculum maps with a balanced literacy framework for ELA programming. Within this framework, teachers first model a new skill or strategy and later ask students to complete independent work to further develop those skills.

Phases of the Balanced Literacy Framework Used at *District D*



New State-Level Standards Require Only Small Curricular Changes

While administrators at District A, District C, and District D note that their districts underwent many changes after implementing the Common Core Standards in the 2011-2012 academic year,¹ they feel less concerned about changes needed to fulfill more recent state-level standards.

Administrators at District A and District C expect to make only small modifications to current practices to meet new standards, and contacts at District D will focus primarily on meeting the standards' emphasis on building lifelong readers and writers.

Administrators at District A, District C, District D, and District E also cite district-wide programs, aimed at special student populations, as an essential component to ensuring consistent ELA success for all students. These standardized programs ensure that all students, not just those who already succeed in general ELA classrooms, receive a sufficient level of ELA support.

¹ "Common Core Implementation Timeline." EngageNY. Accessed December 16, 2019. <https://www.engageny.org/resource/common-core-implementation-timeline>.

Personalized Support for Special Student Populations



Support for Struggling Students

Administrators implement AIS to increase achievement for students who struggle to meet state standards for any reason.² District A, District D, and District E use the model to provide more individualized support to students.

- The exact reading assessment used to determine AIS need varies by district (e.g., District D uses the Scholastic 180 reading inventory, District E uses i-Ready scores).
- Students receive supplemental AIS support through regular, scheduled meetings with a reading interventionist. At these meetings, students work to develop weak ELA skills.
- Administrators at District E cluster AIS students into three groups. The most at-risk group receives targeted AIS instruction every day, while the other two receive support every other day.



Support for Special Education and English as a Second Language (ESL) Students

Administrators at District A, District C, District D, and District E use co-teaching classrooms to provide effective instruction to specific student populations. In these classrooms, an ELA instructor and an expert in working with the specific student population in need of additional support collaborate to provide instruction.

- District A, District C, and District D use co-taught classrooms for special education programs.
- District E uses co-teaching classrooms for ESL students.

Review a Wide Array of Student Data Regularly to Gauge ELA Program Success

Administrators at District A, District C, District D, and District E use a diverse combination of student assessment data (from both district-specific and state-wide assessments) to measure the effectiveness of ELA programming in depth. Administrators also use student data to diagnose ELA program areas in need of improvement. Across all assessment methods, administrators emphasize the need to track data regularly to ensure that they can implement necessary shifts as they arise.

At District A, administrators use three routine checkpoints during the year to review data and consider programmatic changes. At District D, school principals attend periodic data review sessions with the assistant superintendent to document growth and set action plans. Both systems allow administrators to adjust ELA programming throughout the school year, as opposed to only between school years.

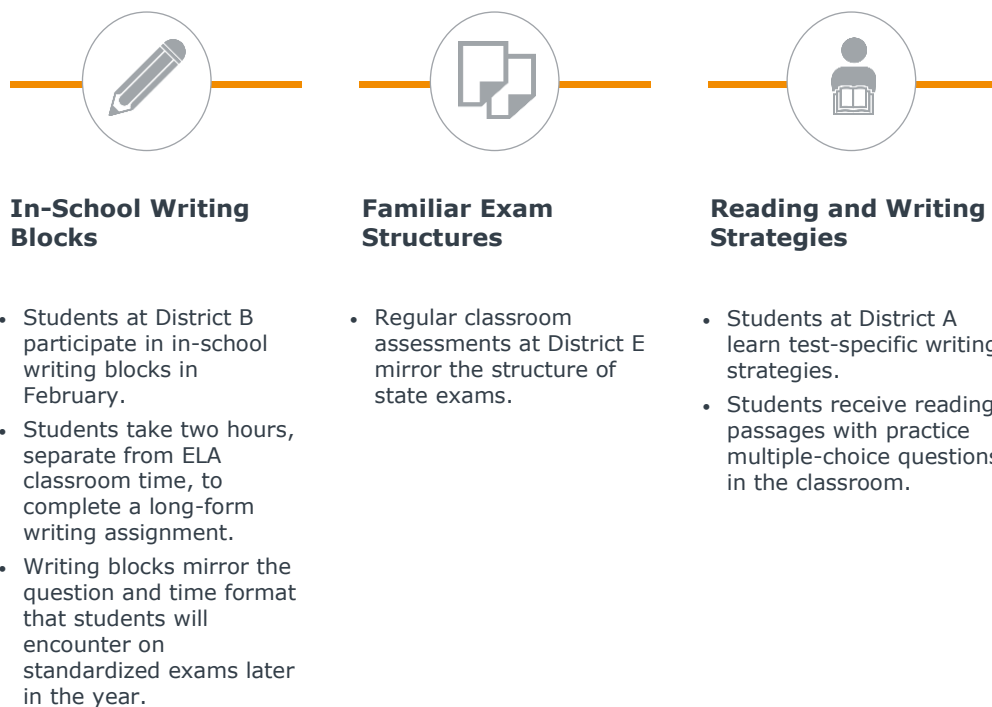
Contacts at four profiled districts describe supplementing state testing data with a variety of district-specific measures to obtain a more nuanced picture of student learning. Administrators at District A, District C, District D, and District E capture student data several times throughout the year. Students at District A and District D participate in online benchmarking assessments twice each year. The frequency of these assessments allows administrators to track individual student progress and compare progress between different cohorts of students. Administrators at District D also use the [NWEA MAP](#) assessment in the fall, winter, and spring as an additional metric by which to evaluate student progress across the year. District leaders at

² "Academic Intervention Services." New York State Education Department. Accessed January 3, 2020. <http://www.nysed.gov/budget-coordination/academic-intervention-services>.

District E similarly collect student progress scores throughout the year with the [i-Ready](#) program.

Administrators at District A, District B, and District E highlight that standardized test success requires students to possess specific skills, so ELA teachers at these districts provide explicit standardized test preparation to students.

Test-Taking Skill Preparation Provided at Profiled Districts



Stakeholder Support

Provide Current Teachers with ELA-Specific Professional Development Sessions to Encourage Better ELA Instruction

To support ELA teachers' skill-building, administrators at all profiled districts provide current ELA teachers with multiple ELA-specific professional development sessions. These professional development opportunities range from sessions in which teachers participate in curriculum design processes to trainings in which teachers learn effective instructional strategies. These professional development strategies foster teacher support for ELA programs by increasing teachers' comfort with curricula and inspiring teacher ownership over effective instruction.

At District A, District D, and District E, professional development opportunities incorporate collaboration between teachers and administrators. Administrators and teachers meet to design curricular frameworks, identify learning targets, and determine best practices for ELA instruction. These opportunities allow teachers to delve into ELA curricula with district leaders in charge of curricula development so that teachers feel prepared for classroom teaching.

Alternatively, at District B and District C, administrators conduct professional development sessions that focus more on ELA information-sharing than on collaborative planning. Teachers attend sessions on topics such as using new texts to teach writing skills, incorporating technology into the ELA classroom, and encouraging

Administrators at District B further increase staff buy-in by bringing in other staff members, rather than just administrators, to provide professional development instruction. Contacts report that teachers often find sessions led by more immediate peers more digestible and less evaluative than sessions led by higher-level administrators.

independent reading and writing skill development. These sessions communicate valuable information while maintaining teacher autonomy to choose exactly how to implement effective practices in their own classrooms.

Contacts at District B also use modeling or mock classroom demonstrations to further demonstrate the feasibility and value of new strategies. Administrators and teachers leading these sessions may model how to guide reading instruction, host check-ins and research conferences, or mentor independent reading.

Lastly, administrators at District A and District D encourage instructor participation in externally-provided professional development through [Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling \(LETRS\)](#) training. Administrators at District D explained that all reading interventionists attend this training to learn to better distinguish between student challenges (e.g., fluency breakdown versus letter-sound breakdown) so that they can provide appropriate support to students. Alternatively, contacts at District A select staff to participate in LETRS facilitator training.³ This training certifies teachers to conduct standard LETRS training at their home district in the future, increasing accessibility for other district teachers.

Supplement Professional Development Sessions with Customized Coaching Support for Teachers

District leaders at District A, District C, District D, and District E also use coaching specialists to provide additional customized support to their ELA teachers. Coaches provide tailored support to help teachers solve problems specific to their classrooms and thus increase teacher confidence.

At District A and District D, literacy coaches provide ELA-specific support to teachers. At District D, the middle and high schools share one literacy coach, while administrators at District A employ multiple literacy coaches as well as an assessment coach that acts as an UbD expert. The assessment coach specifically helps teachers incorporate the UbD curricular framework into their planning process.

Contacts at District D, District C, and District E provide technology coaches to help teachers bolster their technology use within ELA classrooms. Uniquely, the internal instructional technologist at District C offers technology-specific professional development in person and online, easing teacher access to this support. Alternatively, District E uses external coaching specialists through [Model Schools](#)—a program through which administrators can book technology trainers to spend a day within a specific school. Teachers at the school then sign up alone or in groups to receive customized support. This partnership with Model Schools allows administrators to provide teachers with personalized support without employing full-time coaches on campus.

Embed Professional Development Resources into the Standard School Day to Minimize Teachers' Time out of the Classroom

Administrators at District D believe that students suffer when their teachers must leave the classroom for entire days at a time to receive professional development support. In response, the district created an embedded coaching model for all internal teacher professional development. Instead of leaving the classroom for entire days at a time, teachers receive professional development support during free blocks of time within their standard day.

³ "Flexible In-Person and Online Training and Support Options." LETRS Training & Support. Voyager Sopris Learning. Accessed December 30, 2019. <https://www.voyagersopris.com/professional-development/leters/training-support>.

Give New ELA Teachers Opportunities to Ask Questions and Form Relationships to Increase Comfort with ELA Programming

At all profiled districts, new ELA teachers receive additional support mechanisms to effectively begin their career at a new district. New teachers participate in summer onboarding, ongoing professional development sessions throughout the year, and mentorship programs. These opportunities allow new teachers to form relationships with other teachers, and to ask questions that will make them more confident when teaching in the classroom. Contacts at District C note that for new teachers unfamiliar with the district's ELA practices, these opportunities are a way to understand district expectations and culture.

New teachers at District C and District E participate in a formalized summer onboarding process through which they complete general professional development training before teaching at their new district. Through these general trainings, teachers learn about district expectations and receive training on inclusivity and technology use. Contacts at District C emphasize that new teachers react positively when administrators bring in senior teachers to conduct panels or join group discussions during these types of professional development sessions. Summer programming sets the stage for new teachers to understand the curricula and its rationale, encouraging teacher buy-in for ELA frameworks during un-interrupted development time.

Administrators at District A, District B, District C, and District E also conduct new-teacher professional development with each cohort of new teachers as a full group. This cohort meets separately throughout the school year for general professional development sessions led by district-level administrators. New teacher cohorts at District B and District E meet monthly, and those at District A meet quarterly. These meetings provide a concrete platform for new teachers to continue asking questions that will enhance their instruction. By answering new teacher questions regularly, district leaders can mitigate the chances that typical challenges faced by new teachers evolve into more persistent deficits.

Administrators at District A, District C and District E also employ formalized mentorship programs for new teachers to provide teachers with a clear network of support. At these districts, administrators pair teachers in the same department for mentorship opportunities. These mentorship programs provide new teachers with ongoing assistance from someone working within a similar role. Programs may include opportunities for the new teacher to shadow the senior teacher, or the chance for senior teachers to observe new teachers' classrooms. Often, pairs meet for the first time during summer orientation for new teachers.

Involve Teachers in Decision-Making to Drive Successful ELA Program Changes

While professional development opportunities allow teachers to onboard, learn, and align themselves with existing programs, contacts at District A, District B, and District C also note the importance of allowing teachers to contribute to changes to existing ELA curricula.

Contacts describe that teachers often feel strongly about teaching methods they have used in the past and hesitate if asked to change well-liked methods. When making changes to ELA programs, contacts at District A, District B, and District C highlight

the importance of communicating with teachers and providing opportunities for them to work through new curricular components and to provide feedback. Specifically, contacts at District B describe that teachers involved in the decision-making process may feel more empowered to enact changes since they played a role in shaping those changes.

The same contacts emphasize the power of demonstrating new instructional techniques, noting that teachers respond favorably when administrators prove that teachers can realistically accomplish new tasks within a class period. To demonstrate new curricula and instructional tasks, administrators at District A bring teachers in for three-day institutes that outline the administrators' curriculum design process and provide opportunities for teachers to give feedback on new practices and instructional techniques. These institutes help to ensure that teachers feel comfortable with new aspects of ELA programming prior to full implementation.

At District C, administrators also provide opportunities for teachers to gain familiarity with new instructional materials. Teachers participate in book clubs designed to gain support for bringing diverse books into the classroom. Proactive teacher exposure to new ELA program components provides administrators with opportunities to address teacher misunderstandings or resistance prior to the implementation of new program components.

3) In-Classroom ELA Programming

Overview

Pair Group-Based ELA Teaching Methods with Independent Work to Provide Students with Both Organic Language Experiences and Personal Content Relevance

Both group-based teaching practices and independent work drive effective ELA instruction at profiled districts. Administrators at all profiled districts incorporate both group-based instructional strategies and independent student work to maximize student learning in the ELA classroom.

Group-based learning provides opportunities for students to use and hear language in organic ways through natural group dynamics. Group work also gives students a chance to talk about class material with teachers and peers, encouraging their participation and active engagement with ELA course content.

Independent work helps students develop a sense of personal relevance for ELA content, fostering students' sense of ownership over their learning. Innovative teachers can incorporate technological tools into this independent work to diversify the avenues through which students can engage with ELA course content.

Group-Based Learning

EAB's report **Project-Based Learning** provides three different models to deliver PBL to students.

Use Innovative Project-Based Learning Tasks to Develop Many ELA-Related Skills Efficiently

In the Project-Based Learning (PBL) instructional approach, teachers ask students to answer a complex question or solve a real-world problem through a long-term project. Teachers at District A, District B, and District E use PBL methods during ELA instruction, as contacts report that these projects align with standards, capture student interest, and provide unique learning experiences.

PBL differs from other teaching methods by encouraging students to use and develop multiple skills through a single project, including skills related to problem-solving, critical thinking, collaboration, and various forms of communication.⁴ Students must often learn to work as a team, use effective communication strategies to expand their understanding of the assigned project, and ultimately present their finished product to their teacher and peers.⁵ All of these skills help prepare students to effectively use and understand language in a variety of forms.

Projects may last as little as one week or up to an entire semester, and often replace final exams.⁶ Using PBL tasks for ELA assignments encourages students to drive their own learning by prompting self-identified questions and by offering students diverse methods to search for answers.⁷ Differentiated instruction methods in PBL hold student attention, increasing student engagement with ELA material.

⁴ "Strategy Guide: Using the Jigsaw Cooperative Learning Technique." Readwritethink.org. readwritethink. Accessed December 10, 2019. <http://www.readwritethink.org/professional-development/strategy-guides/using-jigsaw-cooperative-learning-30599.html>.

⁵ What is Project Based Learning?" PBLWorks. Accessed November 25, 2019. <https://www.pblworks.org/what-is-pbl>.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Cardenas, Amanda. "Project-Based Learning in the Secondary ELA Classroom." Mud and Ink Teaching, July 31, 2017. <https://www.mudandinkteaching.org/news/2017/7/31/project-based-learning-in-the-secondary-ela-classroom>.

High Quality Project Based Learning's Six Standards for Effective PBL Projects⁸



Intellectual Challenge and Accomplishment

Projects challenge students to think critically and produce high-quality work.



Authenticity

Projects illustrate relevance to students' everyday lives outside of school and give students ownership over their work.



Public Product

Projects receive a public display and feedback from peers and teachers.



Collaboration

Students discuss their work with peers and/or mentors in person or online.



Project Management

Students use an organized process that allows them to complete the project successfully.



Reflection

Students reinforce learning by reflecting on their work.

Administrators at District A, District B, and District E describe various ways that teachers implement PBL tasks into their ELA classrooms. PBL tasks may support unit learning or replace final exams through cumulative portfolios.

Examples of PBL Use at Profiled Districts



Students at District B complete a book review podcast project. Eighth grade students record a book review, stylistically modeling the "This American Life" podcast series. Students read the book, write down their thoughts and analysis, and communicate ideas verbally. Teachers compile and share finished podcasts with students, parents, and the public via the district's website.



At District E, students create a writing portfolio at the end of the year that brings together student writing from across the academic year. The portfolio's composition varies by grade level (e.g., sixth graders write different types of articles found in a newspaper, eighth graders write longer essays to prepare them for high school ELA classes). Students manage portfolio content, reflect on their year's work, and share the portfolio with their teacher and peers.



At District B, students create a digital portfolio that incorporates a wide range of student work and highlights student interests. About 80 percent of district teachers use the optional portfolio structure due to high student engagement. Older students share portfolios with their class and often partake in an event that invites families to view student portfolios at the school.

⁸ "A Framework for High Quality Project Based Learning." High Quality Project Based Learning. Accessed November 25, 2019. <https://hqpl.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/FrameworkforHQPBL.pdf>.

Provide Natural Language Experiences when Explicitly Teaching Grammar and Vocabulary

Administrators at all profiled districts note that ELA instruction most overtly focuses on reading and writing, with vocabulary and grammar learning often embedded in the development of broader reading and writing skills.

When instructors wish to focus on grammar and vocabulary instruction more explicitly, research suggests that students should partake in group work that provides natural language experiences. In other words, group settings, whether working with peers or instructors, give students the opportunity to hear and use various vocabulary and grammatical structures.

Verbal communication between students provides an opportunity to use language skills organically, avoiding instructional methods that fragment language or present artificial language experiences (e.g., teaching grammar rules without the opportunity to use rules in context).⁹ With group interaction, students can hear academic language aloud and have the opportunity to practice using academic words in real conversations.¹⁰ Studies also suggest that group activities boost student engagement with their classmates and with curricular material by encouraging active participation with ELA material.¹¹ Some effective group-based vocabulary and grammar-focused activities include partner discussions before answering text questions, mock interviews between students using target words, class-creation of target word definitions, and pair-shares. In pair shares, students first think individually about a topic and then discuss their thoughts with a partner. This opportunity to collaborate maximizes student participation and engages students in further comprehension.¹²

Experts also highlight the value of scaffolding as an especially effective form of interpersonally-based ELA instruction, which could be used for vocabulary or grammar instruction. In this structure, the scaffolder (i.e., a teacher or peer trained in scaffolding instruction) uses leading or probing questions to build upon foundational knowledge that a learner already possesses.¹³ In general, effective scaffolding prioritizes contingency, transfer of responsibility, and fading.

Effective Scaffolding Components¹⁴



Contingency

Scaffolders account for individual learners' needs when choosing how to best provide support.



Transfer of Responsibility

The learner takes ownership of the learning event.



Fading

The scaffolder fades out support as the learner moves closer to successful understanding of the material.

⁹ Abune, Addisu Alehegn. "Effects of Peer Scaffolding on Students' Grammar Proficiency Development." *Journal of English Literature and Culture* 7, no. 5 (August 2019). <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED599080.pdf>.

¹⁰ Kelley, Joan G., Nonie K. Lesaux, Michael J. Kieffer, and S. Elisabeth Fallor. "Effective Academic Vocabulary Instruction in the Urban Middle School." *The Reading Teacher* 64, no. 1 (2010): 5-14. <https://doi.org/10.1598/rt.64.1.1>.

¹¹ Jurhill, D. A. "Propelling Students Into Active Grammar Participation." May 2011. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED521059.pdf>.

¹² Williams, Kimberly, and Maha Alsha'ar. "Think-Pair-Share: Classroom Strategy." Reading Rockets. Accessed January 7, 2020. <https://www.readingrockets.org/strategies/think-pair-share>.

¹³ Abune, Addisu Alehegn. "Effects of Peer Scaffolding on Students' Grammar Proficiency Development." *Journal of English Literature and Culture* 7, no. 5 (August 2019). <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED599080.pdf>.

¹⁴ Reynolds, Dan, and Amanda Goodwin. "Supporting Students Reading Complex Texts: Evidence for Motivational Scaffolding." *AERA Open* 2, no. 4 (2016): 1-16. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/2332858416680353>.

Individually-Responsive Learning Strategies

Promote Technology as a Classroom Tool that Furthers Student Learning

As technology becomes increasingly present in students' daily lives, contacts at all profiled districts note the importance of encouraging productive technology use in the classroom. In the context of ELA classrooms specifically, technology gives students access to reading materials at any time and place, and provides software that supports better writing (e.g., spelling and grammar checks). Students can also leverage these technologies to meet unique individual needs.

To promote student achievement, contacts at District C highlight that technology should introduce new instructional opportunities, instead of simply replacing existing classroom tools (e.g., whiteboards, notebooks). This way, technology adds value to the student experience by diversifying opportunities for students to engage with ELA course content. Further, technology can adapt to specific student needs, giving students the power to drive their own learning process (e.g., using writing software to focus on independent vocabulary development or grammar consistency).

Student Technology Distribution at Profiled Districts

District	Technology Program Description
District A	Sixth and seventh grade students can access iPads and laptops, but administrators do not distribute these devices to individual students. Students in grades 8 through 11 each receive their own tablet.
District B	Students have access to shared Chromebooks and computer labs, but administrators do not distribute these devices to individual students.
District C	Each student receives a Chromebook that they can bring home and use over the summer.
District D	Each student receives a Chromebook that they can bring home as needed.
District E	Sixth grade students receive iPads that they can bring home. Next year, administrators plan to provide iPads to both sixth and seventh grade students.

Additionally, administrators at District C, District D, and District E leverage external digital tools to maximize the impact of classroom technologies. Contacts at both District C and District D note that Google Suite tools help classrooms operate more effectively and efficiently. Teachers can gain more in-class time for ELA instruction because they can easily communicate logistical information to students outside of in-class time. Alternatively, teachers at District E emphasize the value of i-Ready in providing differentiated ELA instruction to students. Specifically, this tool designs individualized learning pathways for students and allows teachers to digitally assign work to students.

To inform the incorporation of technology into the classroom, administrators at District D refer to both state standards related to technological literacy and the International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) standards for integrating technology into the classroom.

ISTE Standards for Students¹⁵

 Empowered Learner	Students leverage technology to reach their learning goals.
 Digital Citizen	Students acknowledge the complexities of an interconnected digital world and act safely, legally, and ethically.
 Knowledge Constructor	Students use digital tools to construct knowledge, produce creative work, and create meaningful learning experiences.
 Innovative Designer	Students use many technologies to identify problems and develop new or creative solutions.
 Computational Thinker	Students solve problems by leveraging the power of technological methods.
 Creative Communicator	Students use the tools, platforms, and media appropriate to their goals to communicate clearly and creatively.
 Global Collaborator	Students use digital tools to broaden their perspectives and further their learning by collaborating with others.

Consider Personal Relevance for Students when Selecting Course Texts

A list of texts used by profiled districts can be found in the Appendix (page 32).

Contacts at all profiled districts described the importance of incorporating texts that correspond with individual students' unique needs—either in terms of text content or level. Contacts at District A and District C describe that if students work with texts that do not feel relevant to their lives, they will not feel as engaged with their learning. Thus, it is important to select texts that students find personally relevant.

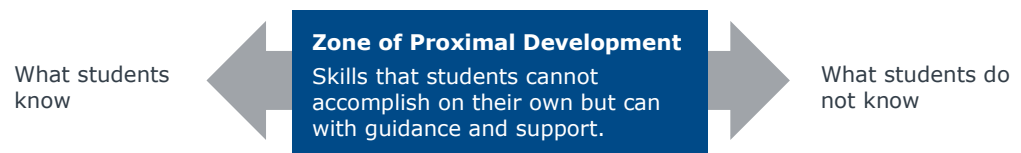
When selecting new texts for ELA classes, administrators at District C prioritize the diversity of voices highlighted in chosen pieces to reflect the perspectives of the

¹⁵ "ISTE Standards for Students." ISTE. Accessed December 14, 2019. <https://www.iste.org/standards-for-students>.

entire student population. Contacts report that students—especially students from traditionally underrepresented groups—appreciate the range of voices and identities present in newer course texts. In this way, diversifying course texts can ensure that students better connect with text content and feel more engaged with ELA course material.

Alternatively, contacts at District A focus on alignment with reading levels when choosing new texts. Administrators explain that texts should put students within their zone of proximal development (ZPD) to encourage an engaging degree of difficulty for each student. Within this structure, students read texts that are challenging enough to be interesting, but not so challenging that students give up on the learning process.

The Zone of Proximal Development¹⁶



Researchers describe ZPD as what a learner can accomplish, but only with external support. Thus, texts chosen within a student's ZPD engage the student because students are challenged but can succeed. Contacts at District A highlight one tool, Newsela, as a way to efficiently incorporate texts that meet individual reading levels. The application takes a single article and provides versions at multiple reading levels.

Inspire Ownership Over ELA Learning by Providing Opportunities for Students and Teachers to Choose Their Own Texts

Administrators at District B, District D, and District E note that giving both students and teachers the chance to choose some of their own texts fosters feelings of ownership over ELA learning. For students, a stronger sense of ownership over their learning process can increase their engagement with ELA learning experiences as a whole. Also, when teachers make their own text selections, they may more fully connect to the material, enhancing engagement with overall instruction.

Independent choice reading allows students to read a book of their choice for a set period of classroom time. Contacts at District B and District D highlight that when students drive their own reading choices, they can feel more engaged with their reading and ELA learning process overall. In addition, dedicating classroom time for reading guarantees that students actually read their selected books, safeguarding against the reality that students often will not read on their own at home.

While administrators at District B and District D describe the challenge of finding time for independent reading in the classroom, teachers have seen increases in reading proficiency, as well as higher student engagement, when allotting just 10 to 12 minutes of class time for independent reading.¹⁷

¹⁶ "Zone of Proximal Development." Innovative Learning. Accessed December 19, 2019. http://www.innovativelearning.com/educational_psychology/development/zone-of-proximal-development.html.

¹⁷ Dickerson, Katie. "Reimagining Reading: Creating a Classroom Culture That Embraces Independent Choice Reading." *PennGSE Perspectives on Urban Education* 12, no. 1 (2015). <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1056721.pdf>.

To boost student engagement with independent reading activities, teachers can also set concrete guidelines for these activities. For example, some teachers instruct students to track reading progress or write regular journal reflections on their reading.¹⁸

Five Rules to Guide Independent Reading Time¹⁹

				
A Book is a Book	I (The Teacher) Read Too	We Talk About Our Books	We Write About Our Books	We Are Free to Ditch Our Books
Students can choose any book that interests them.	The teacher reads a book while the students read.	After reading, the teacher and students can share about their books.	Students use reading notebooks to reflect on their reading.	If students no longer enjoy a book, they can abandon it.

Contacts at District B suggest that independent student reading may have additional positive effects on test preparedness. Specifically, at the high school level, students who participated in independent choice reading during class performed better on standardized exams. Administrators believe that independent reading improved students' overall reading skills, increasing their performance on reading-related aspects of exams.

Book Clubs Engage Students Outside of the Classroom

Some students at District E and District C choose to participate in book clubs outside of traditional ELA class time, providing a way for students to engage with their reading in a more conversational setting, compared to in-classroom independent reading time. During book club meetings, students draw personal connections to the text, which can promote sustained investment in and engagement with the material.

Administrators at District E also provide opportunities for teachers to select their own class texts. Administrators stock a book room and tag novels by grade level. This room allows teachers to explore an array of texts and make text choices in-person. Contacts at District E highlight that when teachers have some choice in text, their sense of ownership over their instruction increases. Ultimately, this benefits students by providing them with highly engaged teachers.

Encourage Student Agency Through Writing Workshops

Teachers at District A, District B, and District E lead writing workshops to guide writing instruction. The model's mode of differentiated instruction attends to students'

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

individual needs.²⁰ It also amplifies students' own voices through opportunities to share work with their peers.²¹

Components of a Writing Workshop Session²²

 Mini-Lesson	The teacher begins the class session with a five- to ten-minute lesson to the entire class that explicitly teaches a reading or writing strategy.²³
 Independent Work	For most of the class session, students engage in independent reading and writing. Students focus on developing the skills taught during the mini-lesson and working toward personal reading and writing goals.
 Conferring and Small Groups	The teacher confers with individual students on individual challenges while students work independently. If multiple students have a similar problem, the teacher may conduct a small group lesson.
 Mid-Workshop Teaching Point	Partway through independent work time, the teacher extends the initial mini-lesson or reminds students of previously taught habits for three to five minutes.²⁴
 Share	During the last few minutes of class, students share and celebrate their work with a single peer or with the entire class.

Administrators at District A again note that time constraints may make implementation of this teaching method difficult, as a traditional workshop framework requires an entire class period. Therefore, administrators can abbreviate the full model to fit available class time and teacher preferences. For example, teachers may instead choose to extend a single workshop process across a week or an entire unit, instead of completing it within a single class period.²⁵

Although most leaders at all profiled districts tend not to differentiate instruction between writing styles, contacts note using the workshop model most often for creative writing. While test writing's rigidity lends itself best to explicit test-

²⁰ EAB. "Reading and Writing Workshops at Secondary Schools," 2019. <https://eab.com/research/district-leadership/resource/reading-and-writing-workshops-at-secondary-schools/>

²¹ "Overview – What Is the Classroom Workshop Model." Lucy Calkins and Colleagues Units of Study. Accessed December 10, 2019. <http://www.unitsofstudy.com/introduction>.

²² "The Reading and Writing Workshop Framework and Environment." Lucy Calkins and Colleagues Units of Study. Accessed November 21, 2019. <http://www.unitsofstudy.com/framework>.

²³ "Overview of a Day's Reading or Writing Workshop." Lucy Calkins and Colleagues Units of Study. Accessed November 21, 2019. <http://www.unitsofstudy.com/shared/resources/Overview%20of%20A%20Day's%20Reading%20or%20Writing%20Workshop.pdf>.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ "Why I Fell in Love with Workshop Teaching...and How You Can Too!" *We Are Teachers* (blog), July 31, 2015. <https://www.wearateachers.com/why-i-fell-in-love-with-workshop-teaching-and-how-you-can-too/>.

preparation lessons, creative writing's flexibility lends itself well to the fluid writing workshop structure.

4) Research Methodology

Project Challenge

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

- How do districts effectively teach grammar at the secondary level?
- How do districts effectively teach vocabulary at the secondary level?
- How do districts effectively teach writing at the secondary level?
- How do districts effectively teach reading at the secondary level?
- What practices do contact districts employ for ELA instruction?
- For writing instruction, how do contact districts differentiate instruction for different writing styles?
- How do teachers at contact districts maximize student engagement with ELA instruction?
- What types of resources and professional development do contact districts offer to new ELA teachers?
- What types of ongoing professional development do contact districts provide to ELA teachers?
- How do contact districts ensure standardization of instruction across classrooms and schools?
- What metrics do contact districts use to evaluate ELA program success?

Project Sources

The Forum consulted the following sources for this report:

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- National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (<http://nces.ed.gov/>)
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Research Parameters

The Forum interviewed ELA-focused administrators at suburban school districts in the Northeast regarding their ELA operations and programming.

A Guide to Schools Profiled in this Brief

District	Location	Approximate Enrollment
District A	Northeast	3,500
District B	Northeast	3,000
District C	Northeast	6,000
District D	Northeast	5,500
District E	Northeast	7,000

5) Appendix

Unit of Study Outline

Abbreviated Unit of Study Outline²⁶

Utilize this outline when considering how to develop units of study, or when reflecting on important considerations that teachers should make for their instruction.

Unit Plan

Stage 1: Long-Term Goals of Discipline

What are the long-term goals for your discipline that will guide the creation of your assessments? (K-12 departments have these defined; please check with a department leader)

Stage 1: Understandings/Big Ideas

What are the conceptual understandings students will develop? (Students will understand that...)

Stage 1: Essential/Compelling Questions

What higher order, often open-ended and debatable questions will guide student learning?

Stage 1: Content

What topics will be used to develop the understandings identified? This should be a prioritized list of topics that are taught and assessed.

Stage 1: Skills

What skills will be used to develop/assess the understandings identified? This should be a prioritized list of taught and assessed skills which are aligned to the disciplinary practices.

Stage 2: Evaluation Criteria/Criteria for Success

Regardless of the assessment, what criteria are you using to evaluate student learning? (accuracy, use of evidence, analysis, organization, etc.)

Stage 2: Assessments

Performance Assessment: How will the students demonstrate their understanding through a meaning making or transfer task?

Other: what other evidence will you collect to determine whether Stage 1 goals are achieved?

Stage 3: Learning Plan

What is the sequence of learning experiences students will engage in to exhibit understanding(s) for the unit?

Vocabulary

Resources

Reflection

What worked? What needs to be refined? Place dated notes with ideas for revision in the space below so teachers can reference them when updating curriculum units.

²⁶ District A, "Abbreviated Unit of Study Outline," Provided November 11, 2019.

Example Performance Based Assessment (Part 1)²⁷

Teachers use a two-part performance-based assessment when evaluating students. Provide students with an explanation for assessment and means of success.

Writing to Sources: Nonfiction Narrative

In this unit, you read about a variety of characters who influenced one another across generations. Often, the insight went both ways, as older people learned from younger people, just as children learned from adults.

Assignment

Write a nonfiction narrative in which you use dialogue, description, and precise words to develop and convey experiences and events. Your narrative should respond to the following prompt:

In what situations can one generation learn from another?

Your narrative might be about an experience that you had with an older relative or another person from a different generation. As an alternative, you could write about an experience one of your friends or family members had with someone from a different generation. Conclude your narrative by reflecting on the ways in which the selections in this unit and the process of writing this narrative have deepened your understanding of the relationships between people of different generations.

Reread the Assignment: Review the assignment to be sure you fully understand it. The assignment may reference some of the academic words presented at the beginning of the unit. Be sure you understand each of the words here in order to complete the assignment correctly.

Review the Elements of a Nonfiction Narrative: Before you begin writing, read the Nonfiction Narrative Rubric. Once you have completed your first draft, check it against the rubric. If one or more of the elements is missing or not as strong as it could be, revise your narrative to add or strengthen that component.

Connect to the Selections: In your narrative, make connections to the selections in this unit by including details and examples that clarify the ideas in your narrative. Review the literary techniques, such as description and dialogue, that the authors use in the selections to engage readers. You may use the authors' examples as a model to develop the use of literary techniques in your own narrative.

²⁷ District D, "Example Performance Based Assessment (Part 1)," Provided November 22, 2019.

Part 1 Rubric²⁸

Teachers use this rubric to evaluate student success on their Part 1 performance assessment. Provide students with the rubric before writing to ensure that they have clear guidelines to achieve success.

	Focus and Organization	Evidence and Elaboration	Language Conventions
4	- The introduction is engaging and introduces the characters and situation in a way that appeals to readers. - Events in the narrative progress in logical order and are linked by clear transitions. - The conclusion follows the events in the narrative and provides insightful reflection on the related experiences in the narrative.	- Narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, and description, are used to add interest to the narrative and to develop the characters and events. - Precise, vivid words and sensory language are frequently used to convey the experiences in the narrative and to help the reader imagine the characters and scenes.	The narrative intentionally uses standard English conventions of usage and mechanics.
3	- The introduction is engaging and clearly introduces the characters and situation. - Events in the narrative progress logically, and transition words are used frequently. - The conclusion follows the rest of the narrative and provides some reflection on the experiences related in the narrative.	- Narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, and description, are often used to add interest to the narrative and to develop experiences and events. - Precise, vivid words and sensory language are usually used to convey the experiences in the narrative and to describe the characters and events.	The narrative demonstrates accuracy in standard English conventions of usage and mechanics.
2	- The introduction introduces the characters. - Events in the narrative progress somewhat logically, and some transition words are used. - The conclusion adds little to the narrative and does not provide reflection on the experiences in the narrative.	- Narrative techniques, such as dialogue and description, are sometimes used in the narrative. - Precise, vivid words and sensory language are sometimes used to convey experiences.	The narrative demonstrates some accuracy in standard English conventions of usage and mechanics.
1	- The introduction does not introduce the characters and situation, or there is no introduction. - Events in the narrative do not progress logically. The ideas seem disconnected and are not linked by transitional words and phrases. - The conclusion does not connect to the narrative, or there is no conclusion.	- Few, if any, narrative techniques are used in the narrative. - The narrative fails to incorporate sensory language and precise words to convey experiences and to develop characters.	The narrative contains mistakes in standard English conventions of usage and mechanics.

²⁸District D, "Part 1 Rubric," Provided November 22, 2019.

Example Performance Based Assessment (Part 2)²⁹

Teachers instruct students to create a multimedia presentation as Part 2 of their performance-based assessment.

Speaking and Listening: Multimedia Presentation

Assignment

After completing the final draft of your nonfiction narrative, use it as the foundation for a **multimedia presentation**.

Do not simply read your narrative aloud. Take the following steps to make your multimedia presentation lively and engaging.

- Review your narrative, and concentrate your presentation on the parts of your narrative that provide reflection on the events and experiences presented.
- Include different types of media that will help emphasize the main points of your presentation.
- Use appropriate eye contact, adequate volume, and clear pronunciation.

Review the Rubric: Before your deliver your presentation, check your plans against this rubric. If one or more of the elements is missing or not as strong as it could be, revise your presentation.

²⁹District D, "Example Performance Based Assessment (Part 2)," Provided November 22, 2019.

Part 2 Rubric³⁰

Teachers use this rubric to evaluate student success on their Part 2 performance assessment. Provide students with the rubric before presenting to ensure that they have clear guidelines to achieve success.

	Content	Use of Media	Presentation Technique
3	- The narrative effectively establishes a point of view and follows a logical sequence. - The speaker effectively uses narrative techniques and a variety of transitions for cohesion and clarity. - The speaker includes relevant descriptive details.	- The media connect to all parts of the narrative. - The media enhance and add interest to the narrative. - The timing of the media matches the timing of the narrative.	- The speaker makes eye contact and speaks clearly. - The speaker adjusts volume and pacing effectively.
2	- The narrative establishes a point of view and generally follows a logical sequence. - The speaker uses some narrative techniques and some transitions. - The speaker includes some descriptive details.	- The media connect to some parts of the narrative. - The media add interest to the narrative. - The timing of the media sometimes matches the timing of the narrative.	- The speaker sometimes makes eye contact and speaks clearly. - The speaker sometimes adjusts volume and pacing.
1	- The narrative does not establish a point of view and does not follow a logical sequence. - The speaker does not use narrative techniques and transitions. - The speaker does not include descriptive details.	- The media do not connect to the narrative. - The media do not add interest to the narrative. - The timing of the media does not match the timing of the narrative.	- The speaker does not make eye contact and does not speak clearly. - The speaker does not adjust volume and pacing.

³⁰District D, "Part 2 Rubric." Provided November 22, 2019.

Evidence Log Template³¹

Students write about texts at different times throughout the curriculum. Distribute evidence log templates to inspire thoughtful reading of texts paired with writing prompts. Teachers can adapt the template to fit any text that students will write about.

Title of Text: _____		Date: _____
Connection to Prompt	Text Evidence/Details (with page #)	Additional Notes/Ideas
How does this text change or add anything to my thinking?		

³¹District D, "Evidence Log Template," Provided November 22, 2019.

First Read Guide³²

Students receive unfamiliar texts at different times throughout the curriculum. Give students the following guidelines for close reading texts assigned during classroom instruction. Recording ideas while reading and physically marking the text can help students highlight the most important information and identify areas where they need help.

Record Your Ideas:

NOTICE

New information or ideas you learned about the topic as you first read this text.

ANNOTATE

By marking vocabulary and key passages you want to revisit.

CONNECT

Ideas within the selection to other knowledge and the selections you have read.

RESPOND

By writing a brief summary of the selection.

Mark the Text:

* **Key Idea**

! **I love it!**

? **I have questions**

○ **Unfamiliar or important word**

- - - **Context Clues**

³²District D, "First Read Guide," Provided November 22, 2019.

Text Examples

Examples of Texts Used at Profiled Districts

Profiled districts use the following texts in their current ELA curricula. Contacts explained that students find these modern texts especially engaging and relevant to their own lives.

Title	Author	Text Type
<i>Bud, Not Buddy</i>	Christopher Paul Curtis	Book
<i>Freak the Mighty</i>	Rodman Philbrick	Book
<i>Hanging Fire</i>	Audre Lorde	Poem
<i>Hush</i>	Jacqueline Woodson	Book
<i>National Geographic Articles</i>	National Geographic	Magazine
<i>Return to Sender</i>	Julia Alvarez	Book
<i>Sixth Grade Can Really Kill You</i>	Barthe DeClements	Book
<i>The Arrival</i>	Shaun Tan	Book
<i>The Giver</i>	Lois Lowry	Book
<i>The House on Mango Street</i>	Sandra Cisneros	Book
<i>The Medicine Bag</i>	Virginia Driving Hawk Sneve	Short Story
<i>Translating Grandfather's House</i>	E.J. Vega	Poem