



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

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

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY** | November 2011





This document is an Executive Summary of the report ***Learning from Consistently High Performing and Improving Schools for English Language Learners in Boston Public Schools***. The report and its companion report, ***Improving Educational Outcomes of English Language Learners in Schools and Programs in Boston Public School***, are part of a larger project, ***Identifying Success in Schools and Programs for English Language Learners in Boston Public Schools***, commissioned by the Boston Public Schools as part of the process of change set in motion by the intervention of the state and the federal governments on behalf of Boston's English language learners. The project was conducted at the request of the Office for English Language Learners and is a collaboration among this Office, the Center for Collaborative Education in Boston, and the Mauricio Gastón Institute for Latino Community Development and Public Policy at the University of Massachusetts Boston. The full report and companion report may be downloaded at [www.cce.org](http://www.cce.org) and [www.umb.edu/gastoninstitute](http://www.umb.edu/gastoninstitute).

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

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

This report was prepared in fulfillment of the Gastón Institute's contract (30957) with Boston Public Schools. The Center for Collaborative Education and the Gastón Institute gratefully acknowledge the funding support for this project from the following organizations:



Copyright 2011 by the Center for Collaborative Education and the Mauricio Gastón Institute for Latino Community Development and Public Policy. All rights reserved.

Production

Meena Mehta, TwoM's Design | [www.twoms.com](http://www.twoms.com)

Jim O'Brien, Editor

## Acknowledgements

This study has been a collaboration of researchers at the Center for Collaborative Education in Boston and at the Mauricio Gastón Institute for Latino Community Development and Public Policy at the University of Massachusetts Boston, with the staff of the Boston Public Schools. The researchers thank, first of all, our partners at the Boston Public Schools: Carol Johnson, Superintendent; Eileen de los Reyes, Assistant Superintendent and Director of the Office of English Language Learners (OELL); and Kamalkant Chavda, Director of the Office of Research, Assessment & Evaluation. OELL staff members Antonieta Bolomey, Milton Vazquez, Farah Assiraj, and Joseph Dow have generously provided context, coordination, and information. Kamalkant Chavda and Bou Lim provided the student data files that contain the information we drew upon for our multi-year student and school level databases. Assistant Academic Superintendent for High Schools, Ligia Noriega, and Assistant Academic Superintendent for Elementary Schools, Elie Jean-Louis, shared their experiences as administrators in schools with ELL students to inform instrument development.

In Massachusetts one cannot do research on education without taking into account the information and human resources at the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. We would like to thank Bob Lee and Dan Wiener, who helped the team interpret and analyze MEPA data.

We are grateful to the external reviewers of our report: Eleonora Villegas-Reimers, Wheelock College, and Faye Karp and Maria-Idali Torres, Gastón Institute. Leaders from each of our case study schools not only participated in the site visits, but also answered many questions and reviewed drafts of the report: Suzanne Lee and Simon Ho, Quincy School; Isabel Mendez and Amanda Washington, Sarah Greenwood School; Aketa Narang, Marisa Peralta, and Norman Townsend, Ellis School; and Ligia Noriega, Jocelyn Vache, and Mike Smith, Excel High School. Each person contributed valuable perspectives on the findings, analysis, and recommendations presented here.

This project was made possible by a contract from the Boston Public Schools. The Barr Foundation and its staff were instrumental in initiating this project through their suggestions and financial support. We thank them.

Staff at the Center for Collaborative Education, the Gastón Institute, and UMass Boston have supported this study. From CCE, we thank Alethea Pratt and Vivian Unterweger who provided administrative support. Ivelisse Caraballo and Melissa Colon of the Gastón Institute managed the finances of the BPS contracts, assisted by staff of the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs. Sarah Rustan of the Gastón Institute and Jie Chen of UMass Boston supported the database development. We thank them all very much.

Finally, we would like to thank the all of the staff members at the four case study schools, who gave of their time and wisdom to the students during the study period and to us as researchers during our visits, and without whom, we would not have had a study.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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

The Massachusetts context for English language learner (ELL) education has evolved over the last decade, while the population of English language learners in Boston Public Schools (BPS) has increased steadily. During that time, a shift to “English Only” instruction meant that instruction in students’ first language (L1) disappeared virtually overnight in K-12 public schools that were teaching ELL students with bilingual education.

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

Since those sobering findings were released, the Boston Public School district has undergone numerous programmatic and policy changes, including the placement of new leadership, the School Committee convening of a BPS ELL Task Force, a settlement agreement with the U.S. Department of Justice and the U.S. Department of Education with specific remedies spelled out, and the adoption of a new English learner education policy manual.

Against this backdrop, and with the knowledge that many teachers and administrators within the Boston Public Schools were expert practitioners with ELL students and that many BPS ELL graduates succeed academically and professionally, we endeavored to document the practices in successful schools.

This study uses mixed methods to answer the following research questions:

- 1. In which BPS schools were ELL students at intermediate to advanced English proficiency levels (MEPA levels 3 and 4 based on the pre-2009 scale)<sup>1</sup> performing at a consistently high level or showing steady improvement during SY2006-SY2009?**
- 2. What were some of the organizational, cultural, instructional, professional development, and community engagement practices that the school’s staff attributed to their success with ELL students during SY2006-SY2009?**

- 3. Which of the organizational, cultural, instructional, professional development, and community engagement practices identified by school staff were shared among the selected schools?**

## Methods

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

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

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

The four in-depth school case studies and a synthesis of cross-cutting findings are presented as separate chapters in the full report. The purpose of the report is to inform the district and other schools not only about which schools were most successful during the study period, but also to share detailed information that may be disseminated widely so that staff in other schools may consider the lessons and practices for adaptation in their own schools. (See Appendix 1 of the full report for a complete description of the methods and their limitations.)

## The Four ELL Case Study Schools

The multiple regression analysis identified two schools that were consistently high performing (Josiah Quincy Elementary School and Sarah Greenwood K-8 School) and two schools that were steadily improving (David Ellis Elementary School and Excel High School) in their ELL MCAS pass rates for students of intermediate to advanced English proficiency during the study years.

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

	ELA			Math		
	Observed Proficiency Rate	Predicted Proficiency Rate	Standardized Residual	Observed Proficiency Rate	Predicted Proficiency Rate	Standardized Residual
<b>Josiah Quincy Elementary School</b>	40.9%	17.6%	<b>1.88</b>	52.3%	24.2%	<b>1.83</b>
<b>Sarah Greenwood K-8 School</b>	41.7%	11.5%	<b>2.43</b>	50.0%	22.4%	<b>1.80</b>
<b>David Ellis Elementary School</b>	37.5%	8.6%	<b>2.33</b>	43.8%	18.0%	<b>1.68</b>
<b>Excel High School</b>	29.0%	17.5%	<b>0.93</b>	92.9%	34.8%	<b>2.46</b>

**Table 1.2. Summary of Case Study Schools, SY2009**

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

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

**Sarah Greenwood K-8 School** is a preK-8 school located in Dorchester. During SY2009, the school served 390 students; 55% were native speakers of Spanish and 43% were students of limited English proficiency (LEP students). In the school as a whole, 67% of students were Latino, 29% were Black, and 2% each were White or Multiracial. The school is one of three BPS schools categorized as implementing a Two-Way Bilingual program.

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

**Excel High School** is one of three small high schools located in the South Boston Educational Complex. In SY2009, the school served 408 students, 26% of whom are native speakers of Vietnamese and 23% of whom were students of limited English proficiency. In the school as a whole, 34.6% of students were Black, 29.2% were Asian, 18.6% were Latino, and 16.7% were White. The school is the only high school with a Vietnamese SEI program.



## Key Findings: Best ELL Practices from Case Study Schools

The stories that staff, families, and community partners from the four schools told represented many overlapping topics and ideas. Using the research base on effective schools and on ELL best practices, we developed a best ELL practices framework to guide the data collection and cross-case analysis. The framework was organized into seven domains of effective school reform: a) mission and vision; b) school organization and decision-making; c) instruction and curriculum; d) assessment; e) culture and climate; f) professional development; and g) community engagement. We expected that some of the practices and strategies identified in the case study schools would mirror those found in the literature to be correlated with attributes of effective schools for ELL students and also with strong ELL outcomes. In addition, we expected that other practices would not be represented in the literature and would provide findings for further investigation. The major findings, however, are organized not under these seven headings but rather to fit the school's stories; we prioritize the stories which the schools conveyed over the framework headers. Therefore, because the stories from the schools did not strictly follow the framework focus areas as shown in Appendix 2, the following analysis does not either. The analysis is organized by four categories that move from the guiding vision to structures and process and finally to the classroom, the core of student learning.

### **Mission, Vision, and Leadership**

- Principals' strategic communication of vision for ELL student success
- Principals' visions shaped by shared experiences as English language learners

### **School Organization for ELL Teaching and Learning**

- The Principals stabilized the schools, so that teachers could take instructional risks and focus on continuous improvement
- LAT facilitators served as catalysts for teacher growth in ELL best practices
- Schools had clear procedures and guidelines for identifying ELL students and placing them in appropriate programs and services

### **School Culture and Climate**

- Cultural competence among staff in school
- Collaboration as effective professional development for ELL education
- Climate of safety and belonging for ELL students and families
- Community and family involvement

### **Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment**

- The primary use of a coherent, standards-based curriculum, sheltered for ELL students
- Explicit teaching of all aspects of English and opportunities to use them
- Teachers' use of ELL students' native language to ensure that students understood tasks, vocabulary, and metacognitive strategies
- Multiple forms of assessment: "We know our students well"

## 1 Mission, Vision, and Leadership

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

### a. Principals’ strategic communication of vision for ELL student success

The four case study school Principals during the study period all communicated their visions not only through the written missions and verbally, but also by modeling behaviors and attitudes that they expected teachers to adopt, by asking probing questions of the staff that encouraged reflection, and by establishing respect for their authority.

All four Principals believed that teacher collaboration and expertise was the key to making high academic expectations of ELL students a reality. For example, each school had an Instructional Leadership Team with representation from the ELL teams on them. During the interviews, when asked about the possible explanations for their success with ELL education, many teachers in each school used terms such as “speaking with one voice,” and “being on the same page” when referring to the attitude and stance of the faculty towards ELL education.

The four case study schools exemplified the strong research evidence that when principals communicate a clear vision of high expectations and learning outcomes, ELL achievement improves. The practices most associated with high performing schools included the principal having and communicating a clear vision for ELL education, using state academic standards as a guide, and having high academic expectations (Williams, Hakuta, & Haertel, 2007). Confirming scholars’ specific findings about vision, the case studies revealed that all four Principals communicated clear visions for ELL education, which included high expectations for meeting measurable academic learning outcomes. Those academic goals were the same for ELL students as for English proficient students and

included meeting the state standards for English language proficiency benchmarks and proficiency on the state standardized tests, the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System. In addition, all four Principals distributed responsibility for ELL achievement beyond their ELL staff because they believed that distributed leadership would increase the chances that changes in ELL practice would be sustained over time, beyond the tenure of the Principals themselves.<sup>2</sup>

### b. Principals’<sup>3</sup> visions shaped by shared experiences as English language learners

All three elementary school Principals reported being actively recruited to their respective schools either to turn around a failing school or to improve ELL outcomes. All four Principals shared similar life experiences that shaped their vision for ELL students. All four were experienced bilingual teachers who had worked in Boston. In addition, the Principals all learned English as a second language themselves, and knew from experience that acquiring a strong command of social and academic English required considerable time, but conferred an advantage in the long run. This personal knowledge and experience attuned Principals to the needs of teachers of ELL students and to ELL students at their schools and gave them a clear vision for their success: ELL students must attain the same levels of academic achievement as native English speakers. With this vision, the Principals all developed strategies in their schools which would support 1) ELL teachers to develop effective strategies for language and content instruction, and 2) ELL students to develop the English proficiency required to participate in all of the opportunities their schools offered.

LAT facilitators precipitated improved ELL instruction by providing customized professional development to staff: The Category training was key for dealing with ELL students. The best training was with [the LAT facilitator], because she knows us and she knows the school. This school was ahead of the curve [relative to other BPS schools] because the old Principal pushed training the whole school. They all felt in it together.

– ELL teacher, Excel HS

## 2 School Organization for ELL Teaching and Learning

We define school organization for ELL education as the way that students are arranged by grade, classroom, and program as well as the structures that are in place for their ELL programs. It also refers to how the roles and responsibility for ELL education are distributed across the faculty, and what leadership opportunities are available to teachers of ELL students. The organizational structures across the four case study schools highlight the Principal, the Instructional Leadership Team (ILT), and the Language Acquisition Team facilitator (LAT facilitator).

### a. The Principals stabilized the schools, so that teachers could take instructional risks and focus on continuous improvement

As discussed previously, the Principals were visionary leaders committed to equity for ELL students. They realized that their success rested on the work of the teachers. They first identified students' as well as teachers' needs, set expectations, changed attitudes and perceptions of ELL students, built teacher buy-in for improvement of ELL education, and made programmatic and organizational changes for ELL students. In all four case study schools, the Principals' strategies involved structural and staffing decisions which supported teachers to continuously monitor ELL student performance and modify their instruction according to the data.

*Staff members acknowledged the critical role of the Principal in creating a foundation for ELL improvement:*

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

– Ellis School, SAM team member

Interviews revealed that all four schools also used the structure of an Instructional Leadership Team (ILT) with ELL staff representation. The ILTs in three of these schools functioned as two-way channels of communication. This structure facilitated the bidirectional spread of information and resources efficiently and gave room for dialogue throughout the school staff.

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

– Excel HS Instructional Leadership Team member

The fact that all four case study Principals managed the school improvement processes based on their visions had evidence in the research literature (Williams et al., 2007). They also delegated responsibility for ELL education to key staff people, such as their LAT facilitators and ELL teachers, to empower them to implement reform.

### b. LAT facilitators served as catalysts for teacher growth in ELL best practices

In our case studies, we found that the study schools had an LAT facilitator who was not only a member of the Instructional Leadership Team but also engaged ELL students' families, organized and led implementation of the school's ELL program, and shared his/her knowledge of ELL students with teachers. Simultaneously, the LAT facilitators' responded to teachers' requests for professional development. In so doing, they precipitated improved ELL instruction and highlighted the key role of teachers as the agents of that improvement.

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

– SEI teacher, Ellis ES

The LAT facilitators remained stable during the study period and most were all still present at the case study schools, even though the Principals had left. The LAT facilitator held a key position as a catalyst and facilitator of ELL student success. At the three elementary schools, the LAT facilitators all were experienced teachers of ELL students and spoke the predominant native language of the ELL students in their respective schools.

In all four schools, we found that the LAT facilitator knew each ELL student's English language development level, his or her strengths and weaknesses in reading, writing, speaking, and listening, and relevant aspects of his/her socio-emotional profile and family background. Therefore, the LAT facilitator was able to place students in appropriate classes to take them to the next level of learning English as well as content. Teachers at all of the schools knew about their ELL students' life experiences prior to arrival at the school, whether in the U.S. or abroad.

In addition, four of the five LAT facilitators in the case study schools spoke the home language of most ELL students at the school, and of the teachers of ELL students. Sharing a common language with adult family members helped them to come to know about students' home lives and histories. The communication also built trust between the ELL students' families and the school staff. At all four schools, LAT facilitators, many teachers of ELL students, and family members shared phone numbers with each other.

Not only were LAT facilitators skilled at working with ELL students' families, they were also skilled at collaborating with colleagues and Principals. They communicated regularly with their respective Principals for supervision and support. They were also skilled in-house coaches who shared their expertise with teachers to shelter English for content instruction, best ESL practices, cultural competence, formative assessment, curriculum development, and data based inquiry. On the other hand, LAT facilitators were keenly aware that their role was as catalysts, or agents of change.

### **c. Schools had clear procedures and guidelines for identifying ELL students and placing them in appropriate programs and services**

The ELL program implemented in the case study schools largely dictated the grouping of ELL students into classrooms as well as the assignment of teachers to those classrooms. The three Language Specific SEI program schools all grouped their lower MEPA level students together with ESL licensed teachers, separate from English proficient students. In the elementary schools, these were self-contained classrooms for all content areas. At the high school, the focus during ESL time was only on English acquisition and English literature.

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

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

Adults with similar life trajectories as the students and their families provided role models and supports as students navigated between home and school: ...all the [SEI] teachers in our school do have the background experience of what the child is experiencing now, because we have all grown up that way. I learned my English this way. ...My parents didn't speak English at all.... We truly have the experience of what the child is experiencing now.

– SEI teacher,  
Quincy School

### 3 School Culture and Climate

We defined culture as “ways of living, shared behaviors, beliefs, customs, values, and ways of knowing that guide groups of people in their daily life and are transmitted from one generation to the next” (Trumbull & Pacheco, 2005, p.67). School climate, on the other hand, is defined as the “mood” or “attitude” of an organization. Climate is malleable over the course of daily events in the organizations and/or their members (Gruenert, 2008). Trumbull and Pacheco define cultural competence as “the ability to recognize differences based on culture, language, race, ethnicity, and other aspects of individual identity and to respond to those differences positively and constructively” (Trumbull & Pacheco, 2005, p. 16). The cultural competence of individuals as well as of the staff as a whole and the cultural relevance of curriculum and instruction are aspects of school culture and climate. By being culturally competent, schools reinforce students’ identities and create a sense of academic and physical safety for students and their families. Organizational school culture refers to the unwritten rules, expectations, shared beliefs, and practices that a group of people with a common organization develop over time.

#### a. School cultural competence

An indicator for the potential presence of cultural competence in the school is the ethnic makeup of school staff. When the school staff mirror the ethnic and linguistic makeup of students, there is a higher likelihood, although not a guarantee, that staff will have shared beliefs, ways of knowing, values, and ways of living as students of the same ethnicity (Tellez, & Waxman, 2003).<sup>4</sup> If not present through an ethnic match, cultural competence can also be developed through skill training and requires a teacher to know about students’ national backgrounds and identities and to be involved with their students’ families. Using this knowledge, teachers are more likely to construct curriculum and instruction that students can engage with and learn from.

The ethnic and linguistic makeup of teaching staff at Quincy School and Sarah Greenwood, the two consistently high-performing schools in this study, were representative of their student bodies. The staff of Ellis ES and Excel HS were less representative of the ELL student population and managed the development of cultural competence differently.

Respectively, Quincy School and Sarah Greenwood had high proportions of Asian and Latino teachers. Furthermore, at all three elementary schools, Principals, and LAT facilitators were ethnically and/or at least linguistically matched with their ELL student bodies during the study period.

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

– former Principal, Quincy School

This finding suggests a connection between school leaders’ ethnic backgrounds, and linguistic experiences, and an improvement in educational outcomes of ELL students at their schools.

While staffing a school with teachers and support staff who reflect the language and culture of the students in the building was one strategy for improving ELL student learning, at Excel HS, where there were fewer staff members who shared the ELL students’ language and culture, the Principal led a process of prioritizing the cultural competence of teachers whose cultural backgrounds were different from those of ELL students and other minority students at the school.

As a community school with strong roots in the Chinatown neighborhood of Boston, the Quincy School is a strong example of cultural competence for ELL students from East Asia. Some school staff live in the neighborhood and speak the dialects of the ELL students. Shared cultural values between SEI teachers and parents enable teachers to communicate with parents in culturally-relevant ways. All Quincy School students study Mandarin at least once a week.

*There are Mandarin classes, which not many schools have, and they celebrate Chinese New Year and culture in this school. The kids have the opportunity to see it and feel it. I think that is most important....We are immigrants and we follow Chinese traditions in daily life and it's good for the kids to*



*learn it in school as well. Parents don't always have the time or knowledge to teach children about Chinese history.*  
– Parent of Chinese-American Student, Quincy School

All written communications with families are printed and distributed in at least three languages: English, Mandarin, and Spanish. All SEI teachers have Mandarin and Cantonese language capabilities.

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

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

The Sarah Greenwood attained a balance in its ability to validate the identities and home cultures of all its students through the distribution of students in its Two-Way Bilingual program – ELL students and English proficient students were placed in equal proportions in classrooms. Perhaps because of this, the Sarah Greenwood presented more as a multicultural school that embraced an ethic of respect for diversity. Specifically, the Two-Way Bilingual program was established to validate Spanish, and to provide a safe climate for ELL students to develop their identities. The emphasis on teaching English and Spanish equally in the early elementary grades created conditions for collaboration and equal exchanges among ELL students and native English speakers, all of whom were in the process of learning a new language.

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

At the same time that the Spanish language and culture were validated, so were the identities of

African-American students, who constituted almost half of the school population, and whose accomplishments and contributions were highlighted in posters throughout the building as well as in all aspects of curriculum.

At Excel HS, where the majority of the school staff and all three ESL teachers were not Vietnamese, cultural competence was a formal professional development topic during the study period. The school culture was one of curiosity about and respect for their ELL students' culture and perspectives, particularly their academic experiences. One ILT teacher said, "the students are wonderful teachers about their culture."

There is evidence in the research literature about the value of hiring school staff that reflects the ethnic and linguistic makeup of the school's English language learners. For example, teachers who are bilingual and understand second language learning can help students transition to learning English, empathize with the struggles of second language learning, and design better instruction because of their experience (Tellez & Waxman, 2005). Teachers who are from the same culture of the ELL students in the school are more readily able to develop curriculum that is relevant to those students (Tellez & Waxman, 2005). These teachers can design and choose reading material, activities, and content that connects to students' lived experiences, making school more meaningful and therefore more engaging to English language learners (August & Shanahan, 2006).

The research literature on cultural competence among school staff, regardless of their ethnicity and language background, provides some evidence that teachers who learn about the students' culture and how to incorporate this knowledge into their curriculum and instruction are then able to improve outcomes for their students (August & Pease-Alvarez, 1996; August & Shanahan, 2006; Waxman, Padron, & Garcia, 2007).

## **b. Collaboration as effective professional development for ELL education**

Teachers in the four study schools told a similar story of change, from isolation and distrust to collaboration and collegiality as an aspect of school improvement that supported their success with ELL students in the classroom. In these case study schools, professional development was not isolated, but rather a part of daily practice during the study

The Sarah Greenwood staff built a sense of trust and camaraderie that changed the school culture for ELL students: I think that sense of community that we have in here, it really helps. I think the students notice that, they can recognize that. If we didn't have that comfort between each other, I don't think it would have gone over to the students in the way that I teach.

— Teacher,  
Sarah Greenwood

period. This change in relationships among adults was an explicit goal at the Sarah Greenwood, where the Principal had a clear vision that collaborative adult relationships would model collaboration among students. Collaboration led to cohesiveness. We heard at more than one school that teachers “spoke with one voice,” which contributed to the school’s safe climate.

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

— Teacher, Sarah Greenwood

*Now, staff from each content area supports the ELL students. The content area teachers all focus on language, vocabulary, and speaking*

— ELL teacher, Excel HS

In-service professional development was a priority, as evident from the numerous structures in place during the study period to allow different groups of teachers to meet and discuss teaching and learning during school hours. Interviewees discussed common meeting times, usually weekly, for various gatherings such as instructional leadership teams, grade level teams, teacher study groups, and/or content teams during the study period as well as currently. During these meetings, Principals reported that teachers were encouraged to focus on curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

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

— former Principal, Quincy School

Because the schools had expertise to improve staff capacity in ELL education during the study period, including the LAT facilitators, the common planning time could be facilitated internally by those familiar with the context of the teachers and the students and could tailor discussions and resources to their particular needs.

Collaboration developed through many pathways. At first, the Principals had to break down barriers and push teachers to move beyond the boundaries of their classrooms to work together. One form of professional development that was repeatedly mentioned as contributing to collegiality were Collaborative Coaching and Learning (CCL) cycles that were part of district-wide reform efforts in the early years of the study period (Neufeld & Roper, 2002). All elementary school teachers spoke about the impact that CCL cycles had on their curriculum and instruction for ELL students as well as their trust in their colleagues.

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

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

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

— SAM team member, Ellis ES



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

A primary approach to preparing teachers to teach English language learners in Boston Public Schools since SY2009 has been training for teachers to shelter English for content instruction, known as 4- category training. This training supports both SEI classroom teachers and regular education teachers. In three of the case study schools, interviewees discussed that 4-category training was a priority before SY2009 and was provided to teachers as in-service professional development.

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

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

### c. Climate of safety and belonging for ELL students and families

One connection we saw at the case study schools was between cultural competence and the creation of a safe climate where all students could experience a sense of belonging. Cultural competence, linguistic affinity, and adults who collaborated on students' behalf were important elements in the safe climate that pervaded these case study schools. The predominance of students belonging to one language group at each school also contributed to a sense of home-school continuity and familiarity for ELL students, at least those who spoke the predominant ELL language. Furthermore, adults with similar life trajectories as the students and their families provided role models and supports as students navigated between home and school. This match was particularly relevant to high school students who left Vietnam as teenagers and needed to adjust to education and life in the U.S.

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

– Alumnus of Excel HS

Not only did the language specific nature of the formal ELL programs contribute to school climates of safety, the strength-based model in which students' home languages and traditions were an asset and a resource for learning English helped students develop positive identities connected to their families and cultures.

School safety is a key attribute of effective schools, and ELL scholars affirm the importance of this attribute in effective schools for language learners. The case study schools all created safe and orderly climates for their ELL students, not only through the previous two practices of hiring staff who reflect the students and ensuring their cultural competence, but also by instituting formal structures. Waxman

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

— Math coach, Ellis ES

et al note that in such schools students have better self-confidence and self-esteem and lower anxiety and alienation when they feel safe (Waxman et al., 2007). A by-product of the affirmation and valuing of students' language and culture is that discrimination and oppression based on race or language are not only not tolerated, but also explicitly addressed (August & Pease-Alvarez, 1996).

#### d. Community and family involvement

Schools with culturally diverse student bodies have greater complexity in how they engage families. Effective schools partner with community organizations to make available more resources to their students. In order to meet the needs of ELL students, those partnerships must be strategic and robust. In addition to employing bilingual staff, the school leaders in the case study schools understood the need to provide multiple opportunities for family engagement with schools. Since large proportions of the staff at the consistently high performing schools could speak the ELL students' native languages, communication with students and their families was possible in their primary language.

At the same time, schools understood that not all families could be involved in the same ways. Other forms of differentiating parent involvement included showing awareness of parental working hours and scheduling meetings at convenient times for parents. The two consistently high performing schools reported interactions with parents before the beginning of the school year that included teacher calls to ask the parents about their child's school experience the previous year (Quincy School), and home visits before the start of the school year (Sarah Greenwood). In addition, the high performing schools reported offering a variety of social events to attract parents. The two steadily improving schools focused their family engagement on phone calls with families in their native languages, reporting on students' academic progress.

Family involvement is positively correlated with student achievement; however, because family involvement has multiple dimensions, schools must attend to a myriad of factors in engaging families (Lee & Bowen, 2006).

## 4 Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment

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

### a. The primary use of a coherent, standards-based curriculum, sheltered for ELL students

All four case study schools used district curricula in ELA and math. However, they spent time and effort to adapt curricula for the needs of ELL students. At the high school, the school's ELA teachers, ESL teachers, and a district ELL staff person worked together to align the curricula so that they feed into each other. At Quincy School, an SEI teacher noted that the driver for what they taught was the district curriculum and the state standards. However, this teacher acknowledged that all curricula need to be modified for ELL students: "whatever curriculum we get, it doesn't matter, as long as we can adapt and scaffold, we'll teach the standards in the frameworks. Our end goal is clear." One strategy that the case study schools turned to for delivering curriculum was the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) approach:

*I realized that we had a lot of English language learners in the regular ed classrooms, which made all classrooms English learning classrooms.... And so, we did a significant part of our 18 hours [of professional development] just understanding SIOP. The teachers started to realize that they had a responsibility for those students, and as we learned that, we realized that it was not good instruction for English language learners, it was good instruction for everybody.*

— former Principal, Ellis ES

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

### **b. Explicit teaching of all aspects of English and opportunities to use them**

Interviews with teachers of ELL students revealed that the instructional practice of grouping students, at times by English proficiency level and at times across English proficiency levels, was a common practice during the study period. For example, at Quincy School and Sarah Greenwood, teachers discussed the consistent use of Readers' and Writers' Workshop model of literacy development across grades, which gave students practice in all modes of English, not only with the teacher but with their peers. This model provided multiple opportunities for small groups of students to work together, while the teacher moved among groups to provide additional support.

The Readers' and Writers' Workshop model and the SIOP were complementary approaches to teaching both literacy and content. The research-based SIOP approach was used in all four case study schools, with the acknowledgement that the instructional strategies promoted by SIOP were good for all students, not just ELL students. Questioning techniques, pair sharing, and peer editing were common practices throughout the three elementary schools, providing students with frequent opportunities to develop their English proficiency.

Similar to the practice of using small groups to differentiate instruction, teachers in case study schools acknowledged the need for ELL students to practice their English in settings where their peers did not speak their native language. In regular education classrooms with ELL students at higher English pro-

ficiency levels, these heterogeneous groupings were created intentionally by teachers.

These effective instructional approaches have been supported by multiple studies, which suggest that such cooperative techniques facilitate learning because they enhance self-confidence, promote communication skills, and provide more rich language experiences than whole group instruction (August & Shanahan, 2006; Gersten et al., 2007; Waxman et al., 2007). Goldenberg notes that these practices hold true for English proficient students as well (Goldenberg, 2008). In the studies reviewed in Gersten et al, ELL students regularly (daily) practiced reading out loud and responding to questions both orally and in writing (Gersten et al., 2007). Teachers applied small group interventions to students at the same English proficiency levels who were struggling with reading (Gersten et al., 2007).

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

### **c. Assessment: "We know our students well"**

Assessments are tools that teachers use to measure students' progress, skills, and content knowledge. Analysis of assessment data informed discussions of ELL student learning at all four case study schools and included teacher developed assessments as well as standardized test results. The schools featured in this report claimed to know their students in ways that went beyond their academic performance. A focus on the whole child was reflected

in the schools' missions, which highlighted other developmental outcomes beyond academics. Thus, in addition to remembering each student's MEPA levels, MCAS scores, academic strengths and weaknesses, teachers and the LAT facilitator also knew their students' emotional, physical, health needs, as well as major family events. At the two consistently high performing schools, Student Support Teams (SSTs) were mentioned as the main "safety net" for supporting the whole child.

At all four case study schools, student assessment results were used both to identify ELL students who needed additional support as well as to identify content and skills that required instructional changes. Examples of standardized tests that were used to identify students in need of support or skills that were uniformly weak included the Stanford Reading Inventory (SRI) and Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA). Teachers at Sarah Greenwood also used Fountas and Pinnell running records of students' reading to identify and monitor students with reading difficulties. The Ellis ES was the school that had accomplished the most systematic use of assessment to drive instruction by working with external facilitators on the Scaffolded Apprenticeship Model (SAM).

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

At Ellis ES, when teachers found that the standardized assessments they were using were not predictive of MCAS performance or were not informative about what their students knew or could do, they developed their own assessments to measure those skills. Assessment was used in meaningful ways to guide teacher practice, rather than simply for compliance sake. At Sarah Greenwood, students received academic support during short periods of the school day, such as at lunch, or they were referred to student support teams who used the assessment findings to match students to appropriate resources.

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

## Conclusions and Recommendations

We close by focusing on a few key conclusions that emerged from the four case studies and the preceding synthesis. The first four conclusions align to the four categories presented in Key Findings. The last two conclusions relate to connections between this study and the overall project, which is comprised of this report and its companion report, ***Improving Educational Outcomes of English Language Learners in Schools and Programs in Boston Public Schools***. Within each concluding section, we provide related recommendations. These conclusions include:

- 1) Mission, Vision, and Leadership: The Principal laid the groundwork for teachers to lead reform of ELL education
- 2) School Organization for ELL Teaching and Learning: The LAT facilitator served as catalysts for improving ELL education
- 3) School Culture and Climate: Cultural competence crossed all aspects of school reform
- 4) Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment: Teachers differentiated instruction for the specific needs of ELL students
- 5) Reflections on the research methods and recommendations for future research

### The Principal laid the groundwork for teachers to lead reform of ELL education

The Principals responsible for the promising results that led to their school's identification for this study had in common key attributes:

- Life experience as ELL students
- Professional experience as ELL teachers
- Strong vision for school organization, instruction, culture, and high expectations, including that equity is not equality and that ELL students should be integrated into the whole school
- Recruitment of highly qualified teacher leaders and teachers for ELL students in whom to build capacity
- Creation of structures that allow for professional learning, collaboration, and opening of classrooms for improving ELL instruction
- Small changes as a systematic and sustainable way to transform a school culture to one that embraces ELL education

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

### Recommendations

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

## **LAT facilitators served as catalysts for the improvement of ELL education**

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

In the case study schools, all of the LAT facilitators were bilingual, ESL licensed, and 4-category trained. All but one spoke the major native language in the school. All but one was a classroom teacher. In interviews, most indicated that they spent many hours beyond the school day completing their LAT facilitator responsibilities in addition to their teaching responsibilities. However, they did so out of strong commitment to their ELL students.

### **Recommendations**

- A. The district should have provisions for compensating LAT facilitators that take into account the size of the ELL population in a school.
- B. School principals should appoint LAT facilitators who either speak the major native language of the ELL students in the school or are motivated and positive about becoming culturally and linguistically competent.
- C. The district should publish its own guidelines for school organization for each type of ELL program, including information about teacher qualifications, student groupings by MEPA level into classrooms, and the amount of time students at each MEPA level should receive ESL instruction.

## **Cultural competence crossed all aspects of school reform**

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

The research literature on cultural competence among school staff – regardless of their ethnicity and language background, provides some evidence that teachers who learn about the students' culture and how to incorporate this knowledge into their curriculum and instruction improve outcomes for their students (August & Pease-Alvarez, 1996; August & Shanahan, 2006; Waxman et al., 2007). Our findings point to a strong alignment between the lives and professional experiences of school leaders and LAT facilitators and the lives of ELL students and their teachers.

### **Recommendations**

- A. Hire staff who are highly qualified to teach ELL students and speaks their language.
- B. Hire staff who, in addition to the language capabilities described above, have a similar cultural or immigrant experience.



- C. For staff who do not reflect the linguistic and cultural backgrounds of the ELL students, provide professional development experiences, including professional learning communities, which educate them about their ELL students' lived experiences.

### Teachers differentiated instruction for the specific needs of ELL students

The literature review completed for this study identified many indicators of curriculum and instruction for ELL education. The curriculum in each of the case study schools was standards based, and ELL students were taught to the same standards as English proficient students, with adapted and modified curricula. Teachers during the study period considered all students language learners and reported differentiating instruction to acknowledge that each person's path to the standard might be unique in the turns or directions or numbers of steps. Because teachers acknowledged the differences in language abilities, content knowledge, learning styles, and self-esteem, they used different groupings of students throughout a class period, different materials and aids such as technology and interactive approaches, and many opportunities to practice English, including with English proficient students. These instructional practices were aligned with the district model of Readers' and Writers' Workshop, which was used in the elementary schools during the study period.

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

Finally, the in-service professional development practices in the four schools during the study period included data-based inquiry, teacher study groups, and grade level common planning time meetings to look at student work. In interviews, teachers described having clear agendas, goals, and outcomes monitoring for their meetings. Due to the

collaborative cultures built in these schools during the study period, teachers felt accountable to each other to implement new strategies and report back to each other on how they went.

### Recommendations

- A. The district and principals should augment the 4-category training with support for teachers to apply the practices, strategies, and ideas in the training. For example, the Principal or LAT facilitator could observe the teacher providing a differentiated lesson to ELL students at different English proficiency levels or to a regular education class with LEP students in it and provide feedback on the teacher's instructional moves.
- B. The district and state should heed the strong research evidence that students who learn L1 and the target language (English) simultaneously have stronger outcomes and develop more TBE and Two-Way Bilingual programs for the district.
- C. Principals should ensure that structures are in place for faculty to develop professional collaborative cultures through regularly scheduled meetings within and across grades to focus on continuous improvement of instruction.

### Reflections on Research Method

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

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

Reflecting upon this report’s findings and in light of the companion report’s findings, several research questions emerged for further study.

### **Recommendations for further research and evaluation**

- A. The model of collaborative research between researchers and district offices should inform other program areas within the district.
- B. The district should define what each ELL program type entails, how program types differ, and clear criteria to monitor fidelity of implementation across the district of each program type.

C. The ELL practice framework guided data analysis and strengthened the research base for some of the practices within it. In addition, the study identified common practices for further study as they relate to ELL student outcomes (role of LAT facilitator, focus on the whole child, collaborative culture). Future research questions should focus on the common practices identified in this study.

D. The case study schools represented three of the five top non-English language groups in BPS. Thick descriptions of SEI language specific schools serving Haitian Creole and Cape-Verdean Creole native speakers well are needed.

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

<sup>2</sup> This study did not focus on documenting sustainability, although site visits included some data collection about current practices.

<sup>3</sup> In this paper, we use the term “Principal” to refer to the Principals during the study period, SY2006-SY2009. We note that at none of the four case study schools is the Principal during the study period currently the Principal of the same school. All four case study schools experienced one, if not two, leadership transitions from SY2009 to SY2011.

<sup>4</sup> The higher likelihood of cultural competence associated with ethnic match is important to note, in order to qualify assumptions that ethnic match guarantees a cultural match. We do not assume cultural homogeneity among people of the same ethnicity, or ethnic homogeneity among people who share cultural beliefs and practices.



# References

- August, D., & Pease-Alvarez, L. (1996). *Attributes of Effective Programs and Classrooms Serving English Language Learners*. Washington, DC: National Center for Research on Cultural Diversity and Second Language Learning.
- August, D., & Shanahan, T. (2006). Executive Summary. In D. August & T. Shanahan (Eds.), *Developing Literacy in Second-Language Learners: A Report of the National Literacy Panel on Language Minority Children and Youth*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.
- Blank, R. K., & de las Alas, N. (2009). *Effects of Teacher Professional Development on Gains in Student Achievement: How Meta Analysis Provides Scientific Evidence Useful to Education Leaders*. Washington, DC: Council of Chief State School Officers.
- Darling-Hammond, L., and Nikole Richardson. (2009). Research Review / Teacher Learning: What Matters? *Educational Leadership*, 66(5), 46-53.
- Desimone, L. M., Porter, A. C., Garet, M. S., Yoon, K. S., & Birman, B. F. (2002). Effects of Professional Development on Teachers' Instruction: Results from a Three-year Longitudinal Study. *Educational Evaluation And Policy Analysis*, 24(2), 81-112.
- DuFour, R., & Eaker, R. (1998). *Professional Learning Communities at Work: Best Practices for Enhancing Student Achievement*. Bloomington, IN and Alexandria, VA: National Educational Service and Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Gajda, R., & Koliba, C. J. (2008). Evaluating and Improving the Quality of Teacher Collaboration: A Field-Tested Framework for Secondary School Leaders. *NASSP Bulletin*, 92(2), 133-153.
- Garet, M., Porter, A., Desimone, L., Birman, B., & Yoon, K. S. (2001). What makes professional development effective? Analysis of a national sample of teachers. *American Educational Research Journal*, 38(4), 915-945.
- Gersten, R., Baker, S. K., Shanahan, T., Linan-Thompson, S., Collins, P., & Scarcella, R. (2007). *Effective Literacy and English Language Instruction for English Learners in the Elementary Grades*. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Institute for Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education.
- Goldenberg, C. N. (2008). Teaching English Language Learners: What the Research Does – and Does Not – Say. *America Educator*, 8-44.
- Gruenert, S. (2008). School culture, school climate: They are not the same thing. *Principal*, March/April.
- Lee, J. S., & Bowen, N. K. (2006). Parent Involvement, Cultural Capital, and the Achievement Gap Among Elementary School Children. *American Educational Research Journal*, 43(2), 193-218.
- Little, J. W. (2006). *Professional Community and Professional Development in the Learning-Centered School*. NEA Research Best Practices Working Papers. Washington, DC: National Education Association.
- MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. (2009). *Guide to Understanding the 2009 Annual Measurable Achievement Objectives (AMAOs) Reports*. Malden, MA: MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education Retrieved from [www.doe.mass.edu/ell/amao/2009/guide.pdf](http://www.doe.mass.edu/ell/amao/2009/guide.pdf).
- Neufeld, B., & Roper, D. (2002). *Off to a Good Start: Year 1 of Collaborative Coaching and Learning in the Effective Practice Schools*. Cambridge, MA: Education Matters, Inc.
- Saunders, W. M., Goldenberg, C. N., & Gallimore, R. (2009). Increasing Achievement by Focusing Grade-Level Teams on Improving Classroom Learning: A Prospective, Quasi-Experimental Study of Title I Schools. *American Educational Research Journal*, 46(4), 1006-1033.
- Tellez, K., & Waxman, H. C. (2005). *Quality Teachers for English Language Learners*. Philadelphia: Laboratory for Student Success at Temple University Center for Research in Human Development and Education.

Trumbull, E., & Pacheco, M. (2005). *Leading with Diversity: Cultural Competencies for Teacher Preparation and Professional Development*. Providence, RI and Honolulu, HI: The Ed Alliance at Brown University and Pacific Resources for Education and Learning.

Tung, R., Uriarte, M., Diez, V., Lavan, N., Agusti, N., Karp, F., & Meschede, T. (2009). *English Learners in Boston Public Schools: Enrollment, Engagement and Academic Outcomes, AY2003-AY2006 Final Report*. Boston: Mauricio Gaston Institute for Latino Community Development and Public Policy.

Waxman, H. C., Padron, Y. N., & Garcia, A. (2007). Educational Issues and Effective Practices for Hispanic Students. In S. J. Paik & H. J. Walberg (Eds.), *Narrowing the Achievement Gap: Strategies for Educating Latino, Black, and Asian Students* (pp. 131-151). New York: Springer Science + Business Media.

Williams, T., Hakuta, K., & Haertel, E. (2007). *Similar English Learner Students, Different Results: Why Do Some Schools Do Better? A Follow-Up Analysis, Based on a Large-Scale Survey of California Elementary Schools Serving Low-Income and EL Students*. Mountain View, CA: EdSource.



