AISD REACH Program Update, 2010–2011
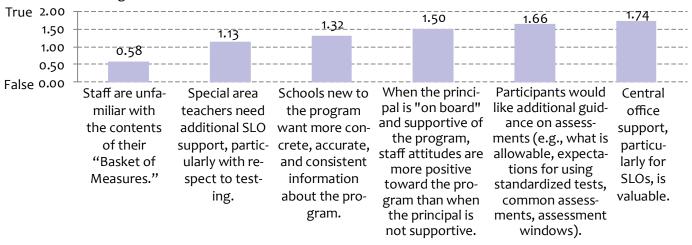
Participant Feedback

Introduction

In Spring 2011, 240 REACH teachers, counselors, librarians, assistant principals, and instructional specialists participated in focus groups to address key program issues including: support from the principal and program staff, Student Learning Objectives (SLOs), Professional Development Units (PDUs), new program elements, and financial compensation. The focus group topics varied slightly based on (a) length of time in the program (e.g., first-year schools compared to fourth-year schools) and (b) program elements offered on each campus (e.g., mentoring). Contents of the focus group discussions were reviewed for common themes, 13 of which were considered consistent across campuses. To establish the relative importance of the 13 identified themes, focus group facilitators rated the extent to which each theme was prevalent on the campuses they visited. The 13 themes were then grouped into two major categories: (a) adequate support for and understanding about REACH, and (b) program elements and their impact (see Figures 1 and 6). In addition, REACH participants were asked to answer questions on the 2010–2011 Employee Coordinated Survey (ECS) that were specific to the REACH program (e.g., attitudes toward REACH, participants' knowledge of program elements, program impact, job satisfaction). The following pages describe participants' feedback about the 13 themes with supplemental information from the ECS when applicable.

Adequate Support for and Understanding about REACH

Figure 1. Average Ratings for Commonly Identified Focus Group Themes Related to Adequate Support for and Understanding About REACH

Source. Focus group theme survey
Note. Focus group ratings ranged from 0 = *false for this campus: no evidence* to 2 = *true for this campus: lots of evidence* with a neutral option of 1 = *some evidence.*

About this report. This is the third in a series of reports evaluating the AISD strategic compensation program, REACH. This report summarizes information gathered from a series of focus groups that were conducted on all 19 REACH pilot schools in Spring 2011. Data gathered from these focus groups will help program staff gauge participants' attitudes toward program elements, understanding about the program, support received from the program, and program impact. When applicable, survey data gathered from the 2010–2011 ECS provide additional support for the focus group themes.
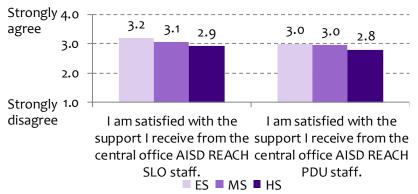
Support from central office staff, campus leaders, and colleagues was critical to REACH participants' understanding about the program and to overall program implementation. Previous analyses (Lamb, Schmitt, & Cornetto, 2010) have documented this relationship, noting that the program is best implemented when: (a) REACH program staff and principals communicate effectively with each other, (b) principals understand the program elements and support their staff, and (c) REACH participants understand the program elements and incorporate SLOs into their daily work. Focus group participants echoed the importance of adequate support for, and understanding about REACH (see Figure 1). Themes within this category are presented below ordered from most prevalent to least prevalent among focus group discussions.

Central office support, particularly for SLOs, was seen as valuable. When asked to describe what the SLO process had been like, and whether sufficient opportunities were available for receiving support, an overwhelming majority of focus group participants said yes. Participants appreciated that, in the words of one focus group participant, program staff "always answered the phone right away...[and] always had a real precise answer to the questions that [participants] asked." These feelings corroborated survey results from the 2011 ECS (Figure 2). Across school levels, survey respondents were satisfied with the support they received from SLO and PDU staff.

> "[The REACH program staff] have been awesome. They have been invaluable and reassuring."

Figure 2. REACH Participants' Satisfaction With Support They Received From SLO and PDU Staff, by Level.

Source. 2010–2011 Employee Coordinated Survey (ECS).
Note. Items ranged from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 4 = *strongly agree*. It is desirable to have a response of at least 3.0.

However, schools that participated in the program for two or more years received less support from central office staff in 2010–2011 than in previous years, and some participants described the effect of this change. Although most participants reported positive relationships with central office staff, staff from several REACH veteran campuses felt that with the expansion of the program, they were "left out in the cold" this year. Staff from veteran campuses would have liked to receive more on-site visits from REACH program staff to help train them about new program elements such as team SLOs and PDUs.

In an effort to address this issue, REACH program staff had trained campus-based SLO facilitators to provide veteran campuses with additional SLO support. However, some focus group participants felt their SLO facilitators were not trained well, could not answer their questions, were unavailable, and provided conflicting and/or inaccurate information about the program. Despite these concerns, most participants were comfortable with the idea of having campus-based staff available to help support them with SLOs, but wanted SLO facilitators and REACH program staff to work together to provide them with clear communication and adequate support.

> When the program is adding a new element, veteran campuses "need somebody to come in and show us [what to do] and tell us [the] expectations [that you have for the new program element]."

Reach participants wanted to receive additional guidance about assessments (e.g., what is allowable, expectations for using standardized tests, common assessments, assessment windows). When discussing SLOs, participants at nearly every campus desired additional support

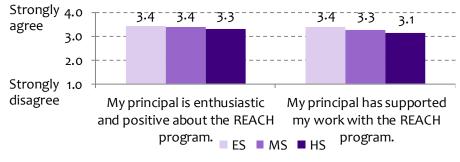> "It would be nice if there were maybe a bank of tests or maybe some default tests [for us to use]."

and better understanding about the SLO assessment process. Although helpful information about SLOs can be found on the REACH website, some participants were unaware this information existed, while other participants thought this information should be updated (e.g., update the SLO calendar, add examples of exemplary SLOs and assessments for all subject areas, and update the FAQs). Secondary special area teachers (e.g., elective teachers) wanted to see more examples of SLOs and assessments in their specific content area, and secondary teachers in general felt the post-test window should be extended because of the additional testing required of secondary students (e.g., advanced placement tests). Although principals and REACH staff currently evaluate SLO assessments to ensure equity in rigor of SLOs, some participants wanted more involvement from content specialists in assessment review.

> "[For the program to work], the principal has got to be on board."

When the principal was on board and supportive of the program, staff attitudes were more positive toward the program than when the principal was not supportive. Previous results (Lamb, Schmitt, & Cornetto, 2010) suggested that the principal's support for and understanding about the program is critical to effective program implementation. Similarly, Goldhaber, DeArmond and DeBurgomaster (2011) argued that strategic compensation programs are more effective when participants report a high degree of trust in their principal than when they do not. When asked to describe their principal's support for REACH, most survey respondents believed their principal supported their work with REACH and were positive about the program (Figure 3). However, focus group participants' responses differed across campuses with respect to their principals' level of engagement with the program.

Figure 3. REACH Participants' Responses to Principal Support Survey Items, by Campus Level.

> "[REACH program staff] would look over my [SLOs] and I would submit it for my principal [to review], [but then] my principal would kick it back without really giving me any kind of details of why. I felt like I had to explain myself over and over again.…It was just a…mess."

Source. 2010–2011 Employee Coordinated Survey (ECS).
Note. Items ranged from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 4 = *strongly agree*. It is desirable to have a response of at least 3.0.

Some were frustrated when their principal contradicted program staff. One participant stated: "[We received] very different information from what the principal [said] and what the REACH people said." This often led to confusion regarding rigor of SLO targets, assessments, and SLO deadlines. Some teachers were discouraged when their principal pushed for absolute attainment on SLOs (i.e., all students must make a 70% on their SLO), rather than rewarding student growth (i.e., tiered SLOs). Given that REACH is designed to promote and reward student growth, as one participants stated, "the SLO committee [should make] the guidelines" on SLOs, not principals.

Schools new to the program wanted more concrete, accurate, and consistent information about the program. Adequate support for, and understanding about REACH is critical at campuses new to the program. Focus group participants from new REACH campuses were frustrated with inconsistent, inaccurate, and unclear information they received during their first year in the program. One teacher said, "[I was] confused by this whole SLO process. The SLO has made me feel totally unsuccessful—I have never felt so unsuccessful or had such low self-esteem towards teaching until REACH and SLOs." Participants from veteran campuses recalled similar feelings during their first year and one participant demanded that "the expectations [for participants in the program] need to be made really clear...from the very get-go." Similarly, teachers new to veteran REACH campuses wanted to receive clear and consistent information about the program. For example, a novice teacher at a veteran REACH campus stated, "As a first year teacher...I did not understand what the REACH program was." After hearing this, a colleague suggested all teachers new to REACH campuses—regardless of teaching experience—should receive a 1-day training about SLOs and other program elements.

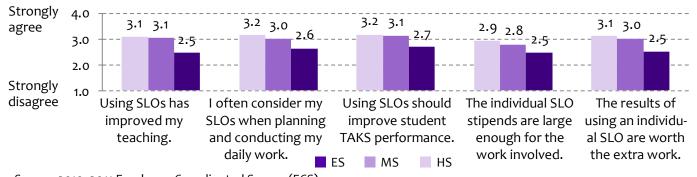> "[Because] it was our first year, the biggest problem was [that] there was a lot of confusion [about the program]… [Some] teachers were hearing one thing and [others were hearing] another. And you weren't really sure [what to believe] ….It was kind of scary making sure that you were really doing the right thing… There's still some misinformation or confusion about certain things that [we'll] definitely want to see clarification [on] in the future."

ECS survey ratings of SLO impact at the elementary and middle school level were generally positive and were significantly higher than ratings at the high school level (Figure 4). Lower ratings at the high school level, however, could reflect the fact that three of the four REACH campuses that were new in 2010–2011 were high schools, and attitudes toward REACH were generally lower during the first year of the program (Schmitt, Cornetto, Malerba, et al., 2009) but improved over time (Lamb, 2010; Schmitt, Cornetto, Lamb, and Imes, 2009). Survey responses and focus group themes suggested that schools, particularly those new to the program, would benefit from clearer information and additional support for program elements.

Figure 4. REACH Participants' Attitudes Towards SLOs, by Campus Level

Source. 2010–2011 Employee Coordinated Survey (ECS).
Note. Items ranged from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 4 = *strongly agree*. It is desirable to have a response of at least 3.0.

> Elective teachers "were given nothing to [help determine] what was the best [SLO assessment for their subject]."

Special area teachers needed additional SLO support, particularly with respect to testing. Focus groups revealed that special area teachers (e.g., art, music, physical education, elective teachers) wanted additional support and guidance with SLOs. Many reported the SLO process, particularly for team SLOs, were difficult. For example, one participant said, "Every special area teacher had to jump on board at one grade level [for the team SLO], and it had nothing to do with music, had nothing to do with art, and had nothing to do with physical education," making it difficult for teachers to support the accomplishment of their team SLO. Special area teachers also discussed the difficultly they experienced finding opportunities to test their students.

Often, students were absent or could not attend special area classes (e.g., because of core content remediation) making it difficult for special area teachers to test all their students and meet their SLOs. Special area teachers and other teachers were frustrated with the lack of clear guidelines regarding accommodations for students identified with learning disabilities. Special area teachers, in particular, had difficulty identifying which students required spe-

> "I was told I had to give [my students identified with disabilities] the same exact test the other kids got—it wasn't appropriate. They both felt a sense of failure, even though they knew the material in their own way."
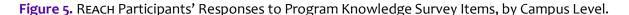
cialized testing for their SLOs, and knowing how to develop accommodated assessments. Additionally, participants were concerned about their colleagues who taught special education because, as one participant stated, "it's really hard for the special ed. teachers to do SLOs," especially team SLOs. As a result, several teachers echoed one participants frustrations when they said they felt like they were "getting penalized because I have a child who may not…be capable of performing up to the level of my SLO [assessment]" because they could not use accommodations on their SLO assessments. As stated in the _SLO Manual_ (AISD, n.d.), each student must take the same SLO assessment with any and all accommodations as required by law based on the students' needs (e.g., individual education plans, 504, English language learners). Unfortunately, some REACH participants were unaware of this information and wanted to receive clearer guidelines.
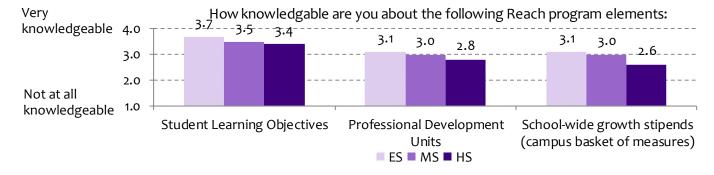
> "I don't even know what all the basket of measures are— I'm not going to lie. I have no idea what goes into them or how I can contribute to them."

Participants were unfamiliar with the contents of their Basket of Measures. Finally, participants were unsure about the campus basket of measures (i.e., a new program element that uses different campus metrics such as value-added growth and attendance, to reward campus-wide student growth) and would like to receive additional training about this program element. Although not every focus group discussed the basket of measures, when it was mentioned, very few participants could list all four metrics included in their campus's basket. Participants also felt teachers should work with principals to determine outcomes to include in the basket of measures. One teacher suggested that "it would be nice for the teachers to have some input" on the basket of measures. At another campus, a focus group participant more familiar with the basket of measures said, "[It] felt like [the measures] worked for us this year, but I am curious to see how it goes next year." Survey data suggest that high school respondents, in particular, were not knowledgeable about their campus's basket of measures (Figure 5).
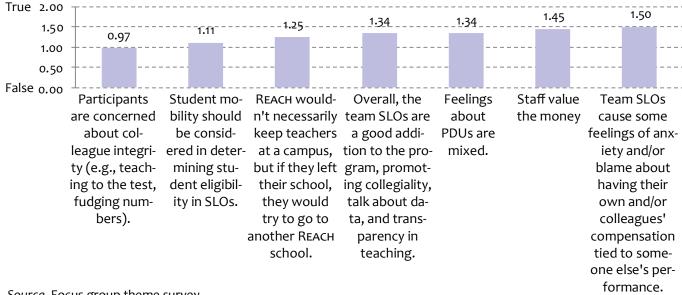
Figure 5. REACH Participants' Responses to Program Knowledge Survey Items, by Campus Level.

How knowledgable are you about the following Reach program elements:

Very knowledgeable 4.0 / Not at all knowledgeable 1.0

	ES	MS	HS
Student Learning Objectives	3.7	3.5	3.4
Professional Development Units	3.1	3.0	2.8
School-wide growth stipends (campus basket of measures)	3.1	3.0	2.6

Source. 2010–2011 Employee Coordinated Survey (ECS).
Note. Items ranged from 1 = *not at all knowledgeable* to 4 = *very knowledgeable.* It is desirable to have a response of at least 3.0.

Program Elements and Their Impact

Many of the elements and themes that emerged from focus groups related to program elements and their impact (Figure 6). The following pages provide detailed information for each of these focus group themes which are arranged from most prevalent to least prevalent in focus group discussions.

Figure 6. Average Ratings for Commonly Identified Focus Group Themes Related to Program Impact.

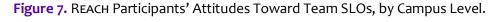| True 2.00 | | | | | | |
1.50					1.45	1.50
1.00	0.97	1.11	1.25	1.34	1.34	
0.50						
False 0.00	Participants are concerned about colleague integrity (e.g., teaching to the test, fudging numbers).	Student mobility should be considered in determining student eligibility in SLOs.	REACH wouldn't necessarily keep teachers at a campus, but if they left their school, they would try to go to another REACH school.	Overall, the team SLOs are a good addition to the program, promoting collegiality, talk about data, and transparency in teaching.	Feelings about PDUs are mixed.	Staff value the money	Team SLOs cause some feelings of anxiety and/or blame about having their own and/or colleagues' compensation tied to someone else's performance.

Source. Focus group theme survey
Note. Focus group ratings ranged from 0 = *false for this campus: no evidence* to 2 = *true for this campus: lots of evidence* with a neutral option of 1 = *some evidence.*
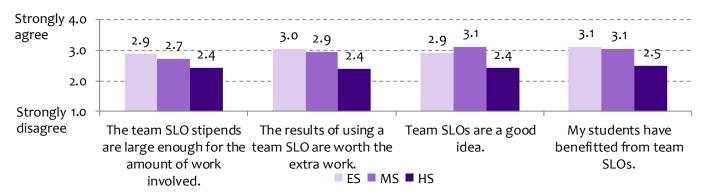
Team SLOs caused some feelings of anxiety and/or blame about having participants' own and/or colleagues' compensation tied to someone else's performance. Team SLOs were designed to promote collaboration on campuses to positively influence student learning. Although many participants felt that the team SLOs improved collaboration, feelings of uneasiness with being put in charge of someone else's money were pervasive. Some participants expressed anxiety about letting their team down, thereby preventing their teammates from receiving their team SLO stipend. More frequently, however, were participants were concerned about

> "I have some concerns about the ways the team [SLO] is run. I feel like it can be unfair to the team when one person doesn't work that hard. In some way you feel powerless. [Also], being forced into a team with a new teacher is hard."

having a team member who was a novice teacher, had low performing students, or was not motivated to work on the team SLO. In fact, several participants thought that if a team had a member who failed to pull his or her weight on the team SLO, did not turn in SLO data on time, administered the wrong test, and/or had a personal issue that interfered with the ability to complete the team SLO (e.g., getting laid off, illness), he or she should not receive the team SLO compensation. Because meeting the team SLO was dependent on the team, on participant summed up many others' experiences: "if you had an effective team, [the team SLO] was fair… but If you [did not] have a good team, then you're screwed and it's not very fair."

The frustrations described related to team SLOs was reflected in the responses to team SLO survey items on the ECS, particularly at the high school level (Figure 7). For example, when asked if the team SLO stipends were worth the amount of work, responses were mixed: responses from elementary and middle school participants were favorable, while high school participants' responses were significantly lower (i.e., 3.0 and 2.4, respectively). Despite the uneasiness associated with team SLOs, middle and elementary school respondents agreed their students had benefitted from the addition of team SLOs; elementary and middle school respondents gave significantly higher ratings to this item than did high school respondents (i.e., 3.1 and 2.5, respectively).

Figure 7. REACH Participants' Attitudes Toward Team SLOs, by Campus Level.

Source. 2010–2011 Employee Coordinated Survey (ECS).
Note. Items ranged from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 4 = *strongly agree*. It is desirable to have a response of at least 3.0.
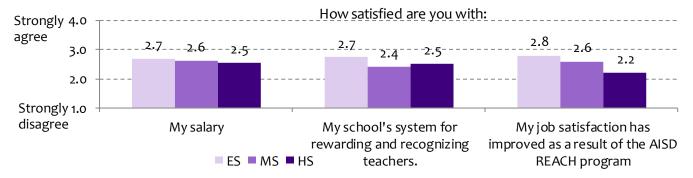
Staff valued the money. Although some focus group participants were disappointed with colleagues for whom they thought "that compensation [was] the only motive in the program," and were "not motivated to promote student achievement," a majority of focus group participants reported they felt the REACH stipends were a well-deserved reward. Several participants compared the stipends to bonuses earned in the corporate world and felt that the extra work that they did to earn the stipends (e.g., SLOs, PDUs) was worth it because it helped their

> "I've really started to realize the financial benefit [of the stipends].… When I'm working every weekend late at night [makes me] feel that the reason for the strategic compensation is to help me feel better about that. It's going to happen anyway… [and] they are recognizing some of that [work]."

students succeed. ECS survey data (see figures 4 and 8) suggested that most respondents considered SLO stipends worth the work. Participants also saw the compensation as a reward for all the hard work they had done at their high-needs campuses throughout the years. According to one participant, "Before [REACH], we felt like we do all this hard work and nobody appreciates us. And [now]…REACH is like, [patting her colleague on the back], 'Good job.'" At some campuses, stipends appeared to positively influence REACH participants' attitudes and perceptions of the program.

Still, despite these positive responses, when asked about their satisfaction with their salary and their campus's system for rewarding teachers, respondents were less than positive (Figure 8). This negativity could be a result of the recent reduction in force (RIF) and the lower salaries, on average, in AISD, compared with salaries in other similar school districts.

Figure 8. REACH Participants' Responses to Job Satisfaction Items, by Campus Level

How satisfied are you with:

My salary	My school's system for rewarding and recognizing teachers.	My job satisfaction has improved as a result of the AISD REACH program
ES 2.7 MS 2.6 HS 2.5	ES 2.7 MS 2.4 HS 2.5	ES 2.8 MS 2.6 HS 2.2

■ ES ■ MS ■ HS

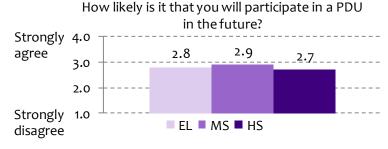*Source.* 2010–2011 Employee Coordinated Survey (ECS).
Note. Items ranged from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 4 = *strongly agree*. It is desirable to have a response of at least 3.0.

Feelings about PDUs are mixed. PDUs were new to REACH in 2010-2011 and were designed to promote campus-driven professional development activities tied to student needs. Feelings regarding the PDUs were mixed. Interestingly, participants who completed the PDU process generally spoke of PDUs as a valuable part of REACH; however, participants who started but did not complete a PDU felt the process was confusing, unstructured, and ultimately too much work. In describing experiences with PDUs, one teacher stated, "I think the reason [our PDU] fell apart was because not only were we bombarded with a whole bunch of things to do, but also there was no structure. Every time we met, there was something different that was being added…. [It] really discouraged all of us." Another participant's experiences with PDUs was quite different: "I had a great experience with my PDU ….I think [REACH] enriched the program a lot by adding those things, but…I wish my facilitator was more [supportive]."

> "I really like the PDU much more than the SLOs. That's just me, but I loved it. I felt like it was—of the whole REACH process—I felt like that was the most rewarding part of [the program]."

Figure 9. REACH Participants' Agreement With the Likelihood They Will Participate in a PDU in the Future, by Level

How likely is it that you will participate in a PDU in the future?

EL 2.8	MS 2.9	HS 2.7

■ EL ■ MS ■ HS

Source. 2010–2011 Employee Coordinated Survey (ECS).
Note. Items ranged from 1 = *very unlikely* to 4 = *very likely*. It is desirable to have a response of at least 3.0.

These inconsistent experiences could reflect how effectively PDUs were implemented and supported on each campus. When asked if they would participate in a PDU in the future, ECS survey respondents generally did not agree (Figure 9). However, a survey of PDU participants indicated overwhelming support for this program element among those who completed the process. The lower ratings on the ECS could be due in part to the fact that the survey was administered to all REACH staff, while the PDU survey was administered only to those who had either expressed interest in or completed a PDU.

Overall, the team SLOs were a good addition to the program, promoting collegiality, talk about data, and transparency in teaching.
As described earlier, team SLOs were designed to promote team collaboration for instruction. Although many focus group participants were uncomfortable with the fact that their work was tied to someone else's money, several participants believed that team SLOs improved colleague collaboration and promoted student achievement. One participant stated, "Team SLOs make you work

> "I think that [the team SLO] taught me that we're all good teachers...and we all work together for the student....I think ...it made me [realize that] I need to ask questions. I need to find answers. I need to ask and share. That's what it taught me. To share."

towards the same goal...[and are] helping us pass TAKS." Another participant explained, "REACH has helped us refocus where our needs are, and I think that is what happened with [our students' improvements in] earth science." Another teacher explained that "Sometimes you'll teach a kid all day, [but] that kid wouldn't get [what you are trying to teach]. But if someone else [taught him or her], that child would get [what] you're trying to teach. [After your team comes] together, you talk about it, you collaborate. And then go back and revisit [the issue] or try different strategies. I like the team SLO." Participants who spoke favorably about the team SLO liked it because it forced them to work outside their own classroom, work outside their comfort levels, work with other teachers with whom they normally would not, unite grade level/subject area teachers towards a common goal, and learn from each other. The connections of these elements signified a positive program impact for some teachers.

> Financial compensations provided by the REACH program "keep a lot of teachers [at REACH campuses]."
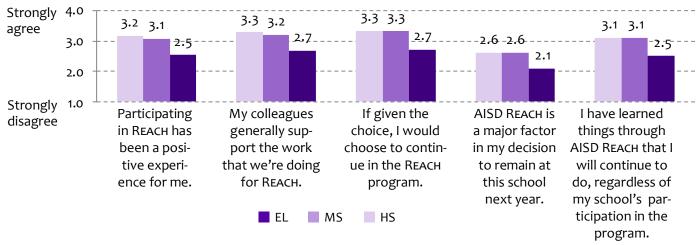
REACH would not necessarily keep teachers at a campus, but if they left their school, they would try to go to another REACH school. When asked if REACH had kept them on their campus, several focus group participants agreed that they: "I would be here whether REACH was here or not." Most participants said they stayed at their current campus because of their relationship with their students, their relationship with their campus community, their relationship with their colleagues, and the support they received from their principal—not because of REACH. However, some teachers who were on the RIF list did not have the choice of remaining on their current campus. For example, one participant who was on the RIF list was moved to a non-REACH campus, but would have preferred to remain on a REACH campus. Others expressed a definite desire to move to a Reach campus. When presented with the hypothetical choice of moving to a school without the REACH program or moving to a school with the REACH program, participants who were not on the RIF list cited money as the main incentive to stay at a REACH school. In thinking the question over, one teacher said if they went "to another school [without REACH], I might not get this couple extra thousand that I could use [even though I would] be doing the same amount of work," thereby making a REACH schools more appealing. On the other hand, several participants were frustrated that if they moved from their current campus to another REACH campus, their retention clock would have to start all over.

It is important to note that participants were motivated to remain on a REACH campus for reasons other than the financial benefits. For example a novice teacher said, "The reason I would choose another REACH school is because I had a REACH mentor this year and I had her last year and she's just been phenomenal in helping me accelerate the learning curve." For participants to see the benefits of REACH in their teaching, in addition to seeing the financial benefits of the program, suggests the program has had a positive impact on their campus environment.

Examinations of ECS survey data support the feelings described on the previous page (Figure 10). Specifically, elementary and middle school respondents affirmed that participating in REACH had been a positive experience, they were supported by colleagues in their work with REACH, they would continue working on a REACH campus if given the choice, REACH had influenced their decision to remain on their current campus, and they would continue to use things they learned from participating in REACH regardless of their school's future participation in the program. Responses at the high school level were significantly less favorable, on average, than were responses at the elementary and middle school level. Importantly, results from the focus groups and survey data generally were favorable toward REACH and suggest the program positively influenced campus staff's decisions to remain on REACH campuses, if the option were available.

Figure 10. REACH Participants' General Satisfaction with REACH, by Campus Level.

Source. 2010–2011 Employee Coordinated Survey (ECS).
Note. Items ranged from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 4 = *strongly agree*. It is desirable to have a response of at least 3.0.

Student mobility should be considered in determining students' eligibility in SLOs. Although a less pervasive theme, several focus group participants discussed their ongoing frustration with student mobility, student drop-outs (either dropping out from their class, or dropping out from their school),

> "You have a kid move in, a kid move out, [but because of the student mobility,] you can't meet your SLO."

and attendance as it related to setting and meeting their SLOs. The inability to connect with students who were included on their SLO roster made it difficult for the program to positively influence students, and prohibited some teachers from meeting their SLO. Several participants felt it was not fair to include on their SLO roster students who had left their class for a period of time between the SLO pre-test and post-test, or were new to their class in the second semester. One teacher who "lost a large number of students from one semester to the next" blamed the high number of students who moved when SLOs were not met. Similarly, another teacher described difficulty in meeting SLOs because their school had "a lot of attendance issues…. A kid might be dropped and then they come in [later in the semester]….If you couldn't retest them, they count it against you [on your SLO]"; conversely, if students took the pre-test but they "miss the [post-]test date, it messes you up." To combat this issue, participants thought students who dropped out of their class, moved out of their class, or joined their class late should not count in final SLO calculations. These participants—particularly at secondary campuses—thought that for the program to have greater impact, additional guidelines should be developed to address student mobility issues and their negative influence on SLOs.

Participants were concerned about colleague integrity (e.g., teaching to the test, fudging the numbers). Participants were concerned with their colleagues' integrity with SLOs. For example, participants described seeing a colleague "accidentally" leave his or her SLO post-test displayed on

> "A manipulation is taking place [in order] for our students to meet their SLOs."

an overhead projector while away from the classroom so students could see the test before they took it. Other participants reported witnessing colleagues practicing the post-test with their students prior to administration of the post-test, and administrators adding his or her own name to a team's SLO without doing any associated work, knowing the team would meet their SLO. One concerned participant stated "There need to be more parameters set as to what cheating is, what constitutes cheating, what doesn't constitute cheating" to ensure equality and fairness of SLOs. In an effort to avoid any question of cheating, one teacher reported making "the choice to not make an essay for my SLOs because I didn't want to have something so subjective. I could be in a situation where it comes down to just two students who need to pass in order to make the SLO, and I just didn't want to be in that situation….So I made a multiple choice SLO [assessment]" (which she considered more difficult for her students). Fortunately, concerns with colleague integrity were not pervasive in the focus groups at all campuses.

Concluding thoughts. Despite some participants' criticisms, responses from the focus groups were generally positive. Several participants described how they were beginning to see the program change their campus for the better—particularly as a result of SLOs. Several participants felt the real benefit of the program was seeing their students grow:

> "I tried to…tell the kids that the reason we were doing [SLOs] was to see if they grew or got better. So when I showed them their pre- and their post-tests, a lot of kids were excited that their score got better….To see that some of them really did try to make their score better…was probably the best part."

This motivation to see student growth was reflected in Reach participants' responses to professional learning community (PLC) items on the ECS (Figure 11 displays elementary school level data only; a table including data for all Reach school levels and their comparisons are presented in Appendix A). PLC items assessed the frequency with which Reach respondents engaged in various activities with their campus department/team, and were compared with responses at similar non-Reach comparison schools. At the elementary school level, respondents at Reach campuses were significantly more likely to engage in several activities with their department/team than were respondents at comparison elementary campuses (Figure 11).
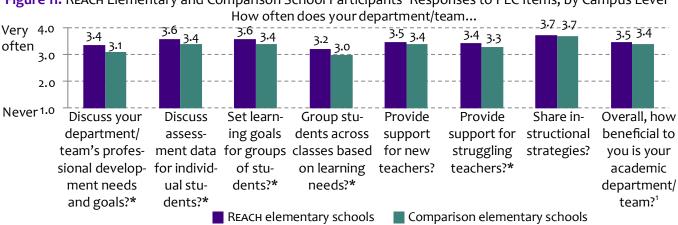
Figure 11. Reach Elementary and Comparison School Participants' Responses to PLC Items, by Campus Level

How often does your department/team…

	REACH elementary schools	Comparison elementary schools
Discuss your department/team's professional development needs and goals?*	3.4	3.1
Discuss assessment data for individual students?*	3.6	3.4
Set learning goals for groups of students?*	3.6	3.4
Group students across classes based on learning needs?*	3.2	3.0
Provide support for new teachers?	3.5	3.4
Provide support for struggling teachers?*	3.4	3.3
Share instructional strategies?	3.7	3.7
Overall, how beneficial to you is your academic department/team?[1]	3.5	3.4

Source. 2010–2011 Employee Coordinated Survey (ECS).
Note. Items ranged from 1 = *never* to 4 = *very often*. It is desirable to have a response of at least 3.0.
* Average score was significantly higher at Reach elementary schools than at comparison elementary schools; *p* < .05.

[1] Items ranged from 1 = *not at all beneficial* to 4 = *very beneficial*. It is desirable to have a response of at least 3.0.

Themes from the focus groups provide important feedback for REACH program staff. Although information provided during the focus groups and responses to most ECS items were generally less favorable at the high school level than at the elementary and middle school level, this finding is consistent with results from past reports documenting that schools new to the program tended to have negative attitudes towards REACH during their first year (Schmitt, Cornetto, Malerba, et al., 2009), but improved over time (Lamb, 2010; Schmitt, Cornetto, Lamb, & Imes, 2009). Although attitudes appeared to

> "I like the fact that… the SLO… show[s] growth. It's not just a one chance deal…. You can actually show from [pre]-test to post-test how [much the student has learned]."

improve, program staff should continue to provide clear communication to new campuses because a lack of clear understanding about how strategic compensation programs work can lead to poor program implementation and lessen the overall effectiveness of these programs (Goldhaber, et al., 2011). Despite these issues, participants were beginning to make the connections between their work with REACH, and improvements in collaboration with colleagues and student achievement. As one participant stated, "I think [REACH] is a really good program, not just because of the money, but because of the progress you can actually see in the kids."

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Appendix. Responses to PLC items by campus level and Reach status

Table 1. Reach and Comparison School Participants' Responses to PLC Items, by Campus Level

How often does your department/team…	Elementary		Middle		High	
	Reach	Comparison	Reach	Comparison	Reach	Comparison
discuss your department/team's professional development needs and goals?	3.4*	3.1	3.2	3.3	3.2	3.2
discuss assessment data for individual students?	3.6*	3.4	3.3	3.4	3.3	3.4
set learning goals for groups of students?	3.6*	3.4	3.3	3.4	3.3	3.4
group students across classes based on learning needs?	3.2*	3.0	3.0	2.8	2.7	2.9
provide support for new teachers?	3.5	3.4	3.2	3.1	3.3	3.3
provide support for struggling teachers?	3.4*	3.3	3.1	3.1	3.3	3.2
share instructional strategies?	3.7	3.7	3.5	3.6	3.5	3.5
Overall, how beneficial to you is your academic department/team?[2]	3.5	3.4	3.3	3.2	3.2	3.2

Source. 2010–2011 Employee Coordinated Survey (ECS).
Note. Items ranged from 1 = *never* to 4 = *very often.* It is desirable to have a response of at least 3.0.
* Average score was significantly higher at Reach elementary schools than at comparison elementary schools; *p* < .05.

[2] Items ranged from 1 = *not at all beneficial* to 4 = *very beneficial.* It is desirable to have a response of at least 3.0.