Evaluation Report

How a Federal Grant Program Is Training and Supporting Educators of English Learners

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How a Federal Grant Program Is Training and Supporting Educators of English Learners

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Across the nation, states and school districts face a persistent shortage of educators with expertise in promoting both the English proficiency and academic achievement of English learner (EL) students. To help improve educators' qualifications and classroom instruction for ELs, the National Professional Development (NPD) program has awarded grants for EL-focused educator professional development projects since 2002. This U.S. Department of Education-funded program allows grantees to serve the varied types of educators who work with ELs, including those preparing to join the educator workforce, and encourages grantees to focus on professional development topics and approaches supported by rigorous research evidence. In addition, the NPD program encourages grantees to engage in evaluation activities, including performance measurement and rigorous evaluations of project effectiveness, that may inform project improvement and contribute to evidence building. This study examines the extent to which NPD grantees implemented their projects in ways aligned with these program objectives, drawing primarily on a 2021 survey of all 2016 and 2017 NPD grantees.

Key Findings

- ***Given wide latitude in whom to serve, grantees focused on supporting general education teachers and EL specialists already in the classroom, compared to those still preparing to become teachers.*** *All grantees served current teachers, and just over half also served participants preparing to become teachers.*

- ***All grantees provided professional development on multiple topics, most often focusing on English language development and academic content mastery.*** *Most grantees also used a variety of approaches to providing professional development, for example, through coursework, individualized coaching, and workshops.*

- ***Almost all grantees reported using rigorous research evidence to inform their professional development, as encouraged by the program.*** *However, some had challenges implementing the practices they identified in research.*

- ***Limitations in the types of data that grantees collected may have impeded grantees' ability to address the emphasis on performance measurement and rigorous project evaluations.*** *Almost all grantees, however, reported using data in some way to inform ongoing project improvement and planned to engage in dissemination activities that may contribute to evidence building.*

English learners (ELs)—students with language backgrounds other than English who are acquiring English proficiency—are a diverse and growing student population in the United States. As of 2017-18, ELs accounted for one out of every 10 students enrolled in the nation's public schools,[1] and nearly two-thirds of public school teachers had at least one EL in their classroom.[2]

Yet educators are often underprepared and in short supply to serve these students. Most educators have received little to no formal training in how to support these linguistically diverse students. More than half of the teachers who worked with ELs in 2017-18 reported beginning their teaching career without having taken a single course on how to teach ELs.[3] In addition, a recent national survey of first-year teachers found that when they were preparing to become teachers, instruction for ELs received less focus than any other competency area.[4] This lack of EL-related preparation often persists after teachers enter the classroom and may be a factor in the shortages of teachers certified to work with ELs among districts in many states.[5] States reported that school

districts receiving federal Title III, Part A[6] funds to support their EL instructional programs in 2019-20 would collectively need 76,443 more teachers over the next five years.[7] They also reported that 21 percent of the teachers currently serving in EL instructional programs were not fully certified or licensed.

To help address the demand for effective EL educators, the National Professional Development (NPD) program, authorized under Title III of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)*, supports institutions of higher education (and other entities with relevant expertise[8]) working in partnership with states and districts to provide professional development activities designed to improve educators' ability to serve ELs. The U.S. Department of Education (the Department) awards NPD grants of up to $550,000 per year[9] for as many as five years in pursuit of two goals: (1) helping educators who work with ELs meet high professional standards, including standards for certification or licensure, and (2) improving classroom instruction for ELs. To achieve these goals, the program aims to increase the number of educators completing EL-focused professional development and to improve the quality of such professional development. The program encourages grantees to support EL family and community engagement, to use practices supported by rigorous research evidence, and to engage in evaluation activities to inform project improvement and contribute to evidence building (Exhibit 1).

Exhibit 1.   How the NPD program may help improve educator outcomes
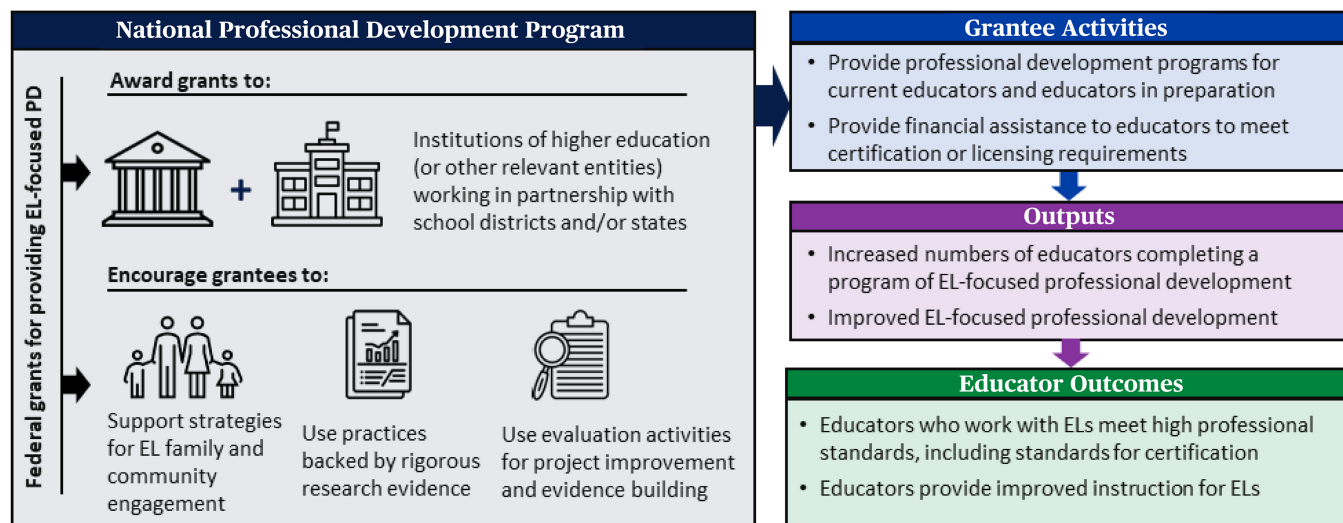
Since 2002, federal appropriations for the NPD program have totaled over $900 million, making it one of the largest federal investments in EL-focused professional learning and workforce development. At the time this evaluation began, the Department had held seven NPD grant competitions and awarded a total of 484 NPD grants.

To understand how this investment in the NPD program has been used to achieve its goals, this study examined the implementation of the NPD-funded projects carried out by the 2016 and 2017 grantees.[10] These grantees were close to the completion of their grant activities at the time of data collection for this study. Box 1 presents an overview of the study design. Appendix A provides further information about the NPD program and lists the 2016 and 2017 grantees, Appendix B provides additional details about the data sources and measures used in this study, and Appendix C provides supporting statistical details and supplemental findings related to the findings presented in the report. Appendix D provides additional findings that are not discussed in the report but may help readers better understand the findings.

Box 1. Study design

What research questions did this study address?

- Given the wide latitude in the types of educators NPD grantees could serve, which types did NPD grantees choose to serve?

- Faced with both substantial flexibility and some federally encouraged topics or approaches, what kinds of professional development did they choose to provide?

- To what extent did grantees use rigorous research to design their activities and collect data to support rigorous project evaluations, as the program encouraged?

Who was included in the study?

- *All 2016 (49) and 2017 (43) NPD grantees.* Virtually all of these grantees were institutions of higher education (88 out of 92); three were education-focused nonprofit organizations and one was a county office of education. Total funding amounts ranged from about $1.5 to $2.8 million, with 95 percent of grantees receiving over $2 million for their up-to-five years of grant activities.

- *Variation in partnering.* One-third of grantees (33 percent) partnered with a state education agency to implement their grant activities. Most (96 percent) partnered with at least one local education agency, with the number of local education agency partners ranging from 0 to 37 and averaging about 5 per grantee. The grantees and their partners were spread across 42 states and the District of Columbia.

What data were collected?

- *NPD program grantee survey (2021).* The primary data source for this study was a survey of the project directors of all 92 NPD grantees funded in either 2016 or 2017. Administered in summer 2021, the survey asked grantees about their activities over the course of their grant projects up to the time of the survey, when the 2016 grantees were in their fifth and final year of the grant and the 2017 grantees were in their fourth year. The project directors of all but one of the 92 grantees completed the survey; the project director from the remaining grantee completed only the first few questions of the survey.

- *Grant applications.* Grantees' applications[II] for funding provided information on the number of current teachers and teachers in preparation that NPD grantees expected to serve through their grant projects. This data collection included 89 of the 92 grantees because three applications were not available on the NPD program website.

How were data analyzed?

Descriptive analyses of the survey responses and grantee applications produced summary information across grantees (for example, frequencies and percentages). Some analyses focused on individual survey items while other analyses drew on measures created from multiple, related survey items. These analyses examined the following key aspects of grantees' project implementation:

- *Educator role types.* The specific roles of educators who were reported as participating in the NPD grant projects were categorized into six broader role types: general education or content area teachers, EL specialists (that is, English as a second language teachers or bilingual/dual language specialists), early childhood educators, special education teachers, paraprofessionals or assistant teachers, and leaders/coaches.

- ***Educator grade bands.*** The grades served or intended to be served by educators who participated in the NPD grant projects were categorized into four grade bands: early childhood (birth to prekindergarten), elementary school (kindergarten to grade 5), middle school (grades 6 to 8), and high school (grades 9 to 12).

- ***Whether grantees met their target number of teacher participants.*** The number of teacher participants each grantee reported serving as of summer 2021 in the survey was compared to the expected number of teacher participants in the grant application to determine whether the grantee met, did not meet, or exceeded its target number of participants.[12]

- ***Professional development topics and approaches.*** The content of the professional development that grantees reported providing was tabulated to identify the most frequently covered topics and the breadth of topics each grantee covered. The ways that grantees provided professional development were examined to identify which approaches grantees most commonly used to provide coursework and other forms of professional development.

- ***Grantee use of rigorous research evidence.*** Grantees' self-reports on their use of rigorous research evidence were tabulated to determine the extent to which they used research evidence to inform their professional development, and whether they experienced challenges in doing so.

- ***Grantee evaluation activities.*** The evaluation activities reported by NPD grantees in the survey were characterized as most relevant to ongoing performance measurement and/or evaluations of project effectiveness.

See Appendix B, section B.2 for more details on the survey items used to develop these measures.

GIVEN WIDE LATITUDE IN WHOM TO SERVE, GRANTEES FOCUSED ON SUPPORTING GENERAL EDUCATION TEACHERS AND EL SPECIALISTS ALREADY IN THE CLASSROOM, COMPARED TO THOSE STILL PREPARING TO BECOME TEACHERS

Educators need preparation and ongoing professional learning to meet their responsibilities for serving ELs.[13] This is true for educators teaching across grade levels and for those working in different types of roles–from general education teachers providing daily instruction in core academic areas, to teachers who specialize in supporting ELs, to instructional support personnel and school or district leaders.[14] Although states and districts allocate substantial resources to professional development in general, classroom teachers providing academic instruction from kindergarten to grade 12 have limited access to professional development that increases their expertise specifically in supporting ELs.[15] Moreover, the development of an effective educator workforce for serving ELs ideally begins before teachers enter the classroom, yet instruction for ELs often does not receive adequate attention during educator preparation.[16] A shortage of EL teachers has been an enduring problem reported throughout the nation.[17]

The NPD program offers grantees substantial latitude to provide services to those who can meet the specific needs of their partnering states or school districts. The program allows grantees to serve any and all of the full range of educators who may benefit from EL-focused professional development. Grantees also have leeway to decide the overall number of educators to include in their grant-supported professional development activities– perhaps to give them the flexibility to trade off more educators served for fewer educators served more intensively.

- ***All grantees served current teachers, and just over half also served participants preparing to become teachers***. All 92 grantees served current teachers, and 50 grantees (54 percent) also served teachers in preparation (see Exhibit 2). At the time of the survey, the NPD grantees reported serving a total of 18,373 current teachers and 4,443 teachers in preparation, or about 256 teachers on average. Grantees that only served current teachers tended to include a larger number of participants (300 on average), compared to grantees that also served teachers in preparation (219 on average, including 127 current teachers and 93 teachers in preparation).[18] The majority of grantees indicated that they increased the number of educators served who were learning practices to support ELs and/or enrolled in an EL-focused certification program (see Appendix Exhibit C.1).

Exhibit 2. **Average and total number of teachers served by grantees, overall and for grantees serving only current teachers and grantees serving both current teachers and teachers in preparation**

Grantees	Average Number of Teachers Served[1]			Total Number of Teachers Served[2,3]		
	Current Teachers	Teachers in Preparation	All Educators	Current Teachers	Teachers in Preparation	All Educators
Grantees serving both current teachers and teachers in preparation (*N* = 50)	127	93	219 [2]	6,075	4,443	10,518
Grantees serving only current teachers (*N* = 42)	300	0	300	12,298	0	12,298
All grantees (*N* = 92)	206	50	256	18,373	4,443	22,816

[1] The average number and total number of teachers served are based on data reported by the 41 grantees serving only current teachers and 48 grantees serving both current teachers and teachers in preparation who responded to the relevant survey question.

[2] For grantees serving both current teachers and teachers in preparation, the average of 127 current teachers and 93 teachers in preparation add to 219 rather than 220 due to rounding.
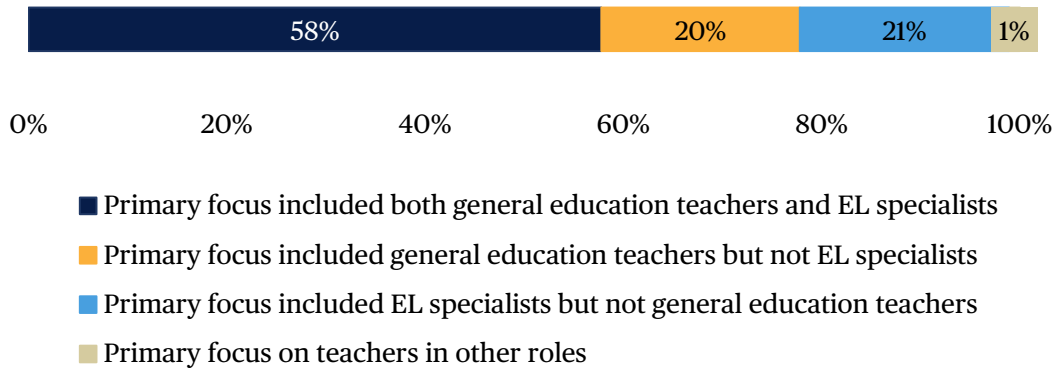
[3] The total shown in each row slightly differs from the product of the number of grantees and the average number of teachers served due to rounding.

Source: NPD Grantee Survey, Questions A2 (*N* = 89), C2 (*N* = 85), D1 (*N* = 91).

- ***As might be expected, almost all grantees emphasized serving educators who do or will provide regular instruction to ELs.*** For example, more than three quarters of grantees reported a primary focus on serving general education teachers who typically provide daily classroom instruction (78 percent) or EL specialists, such as English as a second language teachers or bilingual/dual language specialists (79 percent; see Appendix Exhibit C.2), with 58 percent focusing on both types (see Exhibit 3). In contrast, fewer than 1 percent of grantees reported focusing on educators in other types of roles. This emphasis on general education teachers and EL specialists is consistent with the requirement in Title III Part A to provide professional development to all types of classroom teachers.[19] Eighty percent of grantees reported focusing on more than one type of educator role (see Appendix Exhibit C.3).

- ***Grantees reported that the educators served were working or intended to work at a variety of grade levels, though a focus on those in elementary grades was most common.*** Only 12 percent of grantees focused their professional development on educators in just one of the four grade bands examined (see Appendix Exhibit C.4). Grantees were most likely to serve educators in the elementary grades (93 percent of grantees) and least likely to serve early childhood educators (46 percent of grantees); their likelihood of serving middle and high school grades was in between (see Appendix Exhibit C.5).[20]

Because the majority of ELs in formal schooling are elementary students,[21] it is not surprising that NPD grantees most often supported educators in elementary grades rather than pre-school or middle or high school grades.

Exhibit 3.   Percentage of grantees with a primary focus on serving different types of educators

58%	20%	21%	1%

0%   20%   40%   60%   80%   100%

- ■ Primary focus included both general education teachers and EL specialists
- ■ Primary focus included general education teachers but not EL specialists
- ■ Primary focus included EL specialists but not general education teachers
- ■ Primary focus on teachers in other roles

Note: EL is English learner. Grantees with a primary focus on general education teachers, EL specialists, or both may also have focused on other types of roles (for example, coaches/leaders, early childhood educators, paraprofessionals or assistant teachers, or special education teachers).
Source: NPD Grantee Survey, Question B1 (*N* = 90).

- ***Most grantees met or exceeded their target number of teachers to serve.*** A key output of the program is increasing the number of educators completing EL-focused professional development (see Exhibit 1). To produce this output, a key step is for grantees to serve the number of teachers as originally planned in their grant applications. Over 40 percent of grantees served the number of teachers proposed in their grant application, and an additional 28 percent exceeded the proposed number (see Exhibit 4). (See Appendix Exhibit C.7 for further details about the number of teachers served by each of the three categories of grantees presented in Exhibit 4).

Compared with grantees that met or exceeded their target number of teachers to serve, grantees that did not meet their target number were more likely to report encountering certain challenges that constrained their ability to implement their grant projects, which may help explain why they served fewer

Exhibit 4.   Percentage of grantees that did not meet, met, or exceeded the number of teachers they proposed to serve in their NPD grant applications

- ■ Did not meet target number
- ■ Met target number
- ■ Exceeded target number
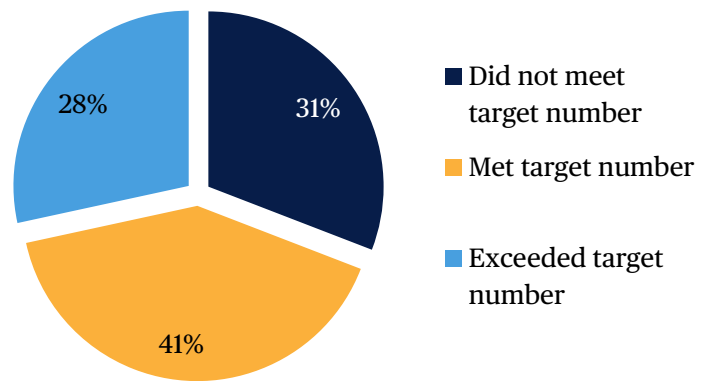
Source: NPD Grantee Survey, Question A2 and grant application data (*N* = 81).
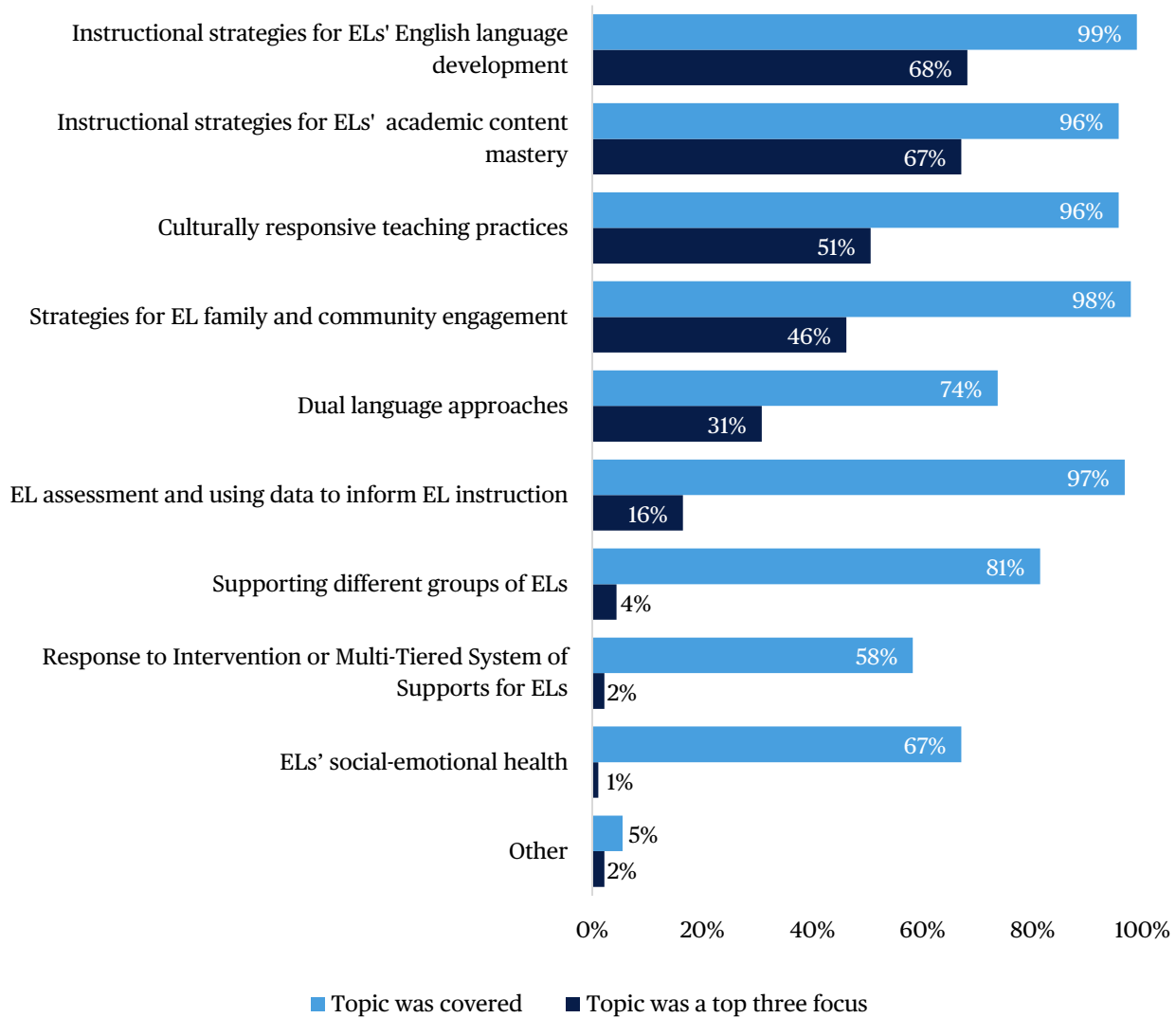
teachers than expected (see Appendix Exhibits C.8, C.9, and C.10). For example, among grantees that provided professional development other than coursework, those that did not meet their target number of teachers to serve were more likely to cite educators' lack of time to participate, shifting state or district priorities, and state or district staff turnover as challenges to their projects compared with those that met or exceeded their target number of teachers (see Appendix Exhibit C.9). Grantees also reported taking varied steps to support the implementation of their project activities (see Appendix Exhibit C.11), which may have helped offset some of the challenges they faced.

ALL GRANTEES COVERED MULTIPLE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT TOPICS, MOST OFTEN FOCUSING ON ENGLISH LANGAUGE DEVELOPMENT AND ACADEMIC CONTENT MASTERY, AND ALMOST ALL USED A VARIETY OF APPROACHES

Title III of the ESEA, and the NPD program in particular, seek to build educators' capacity to provide effective instruction to improve both English proficiency and achievement for ELs, [22] recognizing that educators need support in developing the needed instructional skills. While NPD allows grantees flexibility to decide on the professional development topics to cover in working toward those goals, the Department incentivized NPD applicants in 2016 and 2017 to address EL family engagement strategies by providing up to five extra points (beyond the 100 points for the main scoring criteria) to applicants who proposed to do so. The Department also encouraged applicants to address dual language instruction highlighting the approach as an "invitational priority," although no additional points were awarded for it.[23] Grantees had wide latitude to provide professional development using various approaches based on the particular aims of their grant projects, from formal coursework that could lead to certification to workshops or individualized coaching. NPD grantees also could use project funds to provide financial support to participants seeking certification or licensing.

- *While all grantees reported providing professional development on multiple topics, they most commonly focused on instructional strategies for ELs' English language development and academic content mastery as opposed to other topics such as social-emotional health, EL assessment, or the family engagement and dual language strategies the Department encouraged them to address to at least some extent.* All grantees' professional development covered at least three topics over the four- or five-year grant period and 90 percent covered six or more topics (see Appendix Exhibit C.12). Over two thirds of the grantees reported that instructional strategies for promoting ELs' English language development (68 percent) and facilitating their mastery of academic content (67 percent) were among their top three foci (see Exhibit 5), with almost half (46 percent) reporting both as being among their top three foci (see Appendix Exhibit C.13). The emphasis on these topics aligns with the goals of Title III to improve English language development and academic learning for ELs. Grantees also reported covering the topics encouraged by the Department, with almost all (98 percent) addressing family engagement strategies[24] and nearly three quarters covering dual language approaches to some extent. However, less than half of the grantees made either of those topics a primary focus for their NPD projects.

Exhibit 5.   Percentage of grantees covering specific topics in their professional development and reporting that a topic was a top three focus for their NPD projects

Topic	Topic was covered	Topic was a top three focus
Instructional strategies for ELs' English language development	99%	68%
Instructional strategies for ELs' academic content mastery	96%	67%
Culturally responsive teaching practices	96%	51%
Strategies for EL family and community engagement	98%	46%
Dual language approaches	74%	31%
EL assessment and using data to inform EL instruction	97%	16%
Supporting different groups of ELs	81%	4%
Response to Intervention or Multi-Tiered System of Supports for ELs	58%	2%
ELs' social-emotional health	67%	1%
Other	5%	2%

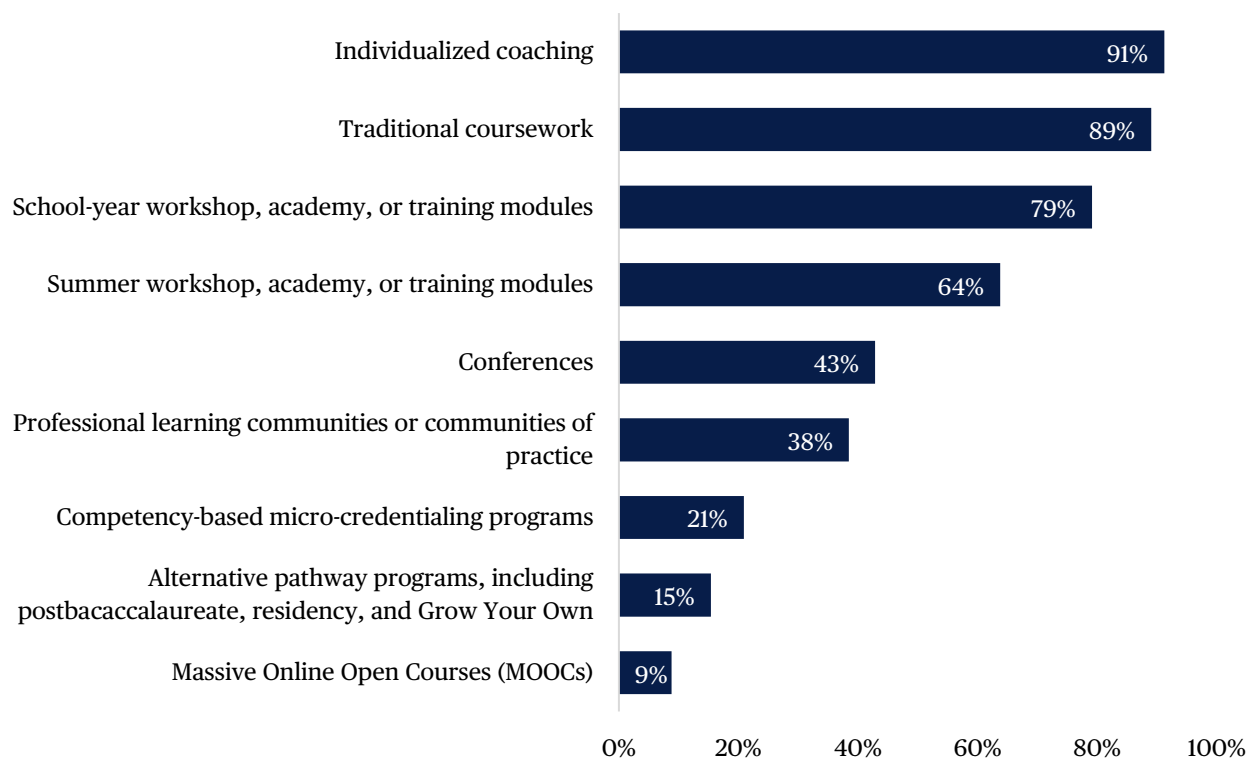Source: NPD Grantee Survey, Questions B5 and B6 (*N* = 91).

- ***Grantees used a variety of approaches to providing professional development, with less than half reporting financial support for educators' certification and licensing.*** Almost all grantees (99 percent) used multiple approaches to providing professional development (see Appendix Exhibit C.15). Grantees most commonly provided professional development using individualized coaching (91 percent) and traditional coursework (89 percent; see Exhibit 6). Less than a quarter of grantees offered competency-based micro-credentialing programs, alternative educator pathway programs, or Massive Online Open Courses, representing more recent innovations to meeting educator needs in professional development.[25]

The types and duration of professional development provided to current teachers versus teachers in preparation appear to have differed. Grantees offered current teachers coursework (80 percent) and other forms of professional development (89 percent) and offered only coursework to teachers in training (see Appendix Exhibit C.16).[26] On average, grantees expected that it would take participants 16.6 months to

complete coursework and 13.5 months to complete other forms of professional development (see Appendix Exhibit C.17).[27] Thus, the smaller average number of teachers served by grantees supporting both current teachers and those in preparation, together with the longer time needed to complete coursework, may indicate that preparing new teachers involves more intensive support directed at fewer individuals than supporting current teachers.

In addition to providing professional development, 41 percent of grantees reported that providing financial assistance for meeting certification or licensing requirements–another key grantee activity shown in Exhibit 1–as a primary focus of their project (see Appendix Exhibit C.19).

Exhibit 6.   Percentage of grantees using different approaches to providing professional development

Approach	Percentage
Individualized coaching	91%
Traditional coursework	89%
School-year workshop, academy, or training modules	79%
Summer workshop, academy, or training modules	64%
Conferences	43%
Professional learning communities or communities of practice	38%
Competency-based micro-credentialing programs	21%
Alternative pathway programs, including postbacaccalaureate, residency, and Grow Your Own	15%
Massive Online Open Courses (MOOCs)	9%

Source: NPD Grantee Survey, Questions C3 (*N* = 85), Question C6 (*N* = 85), and D2 (*N* = 81).

MOST GRANTEES USED RESEARCH TO INFORM THEIR ACTIVITIES, BUT SOME WERE CHALLENGED TO IMPLEMENT PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SUPPORTED BY THE RIGOROUS LEVEL OF EVIDENCE ENCOURAGED BY THE PROGRAM

Federal education policy frequently emphasizes the importance of using rigorous research evidence to drive decision making and practice. Title III provides funding to states and districts for "effective professional development activities" for EL educators. While research suggests that teacher professional development is associated with improvements in classroom instruction and student achievement, including for EL students, professional development programs vary in the extent to which they improve outcomes.[28] Grounding professional development in evidence-based strategies is one mechanism for increasing the likelihood that it is effective.

To promote effective professional development for EL educators, NPD grantees were encouraged to use rigorous research evidence to inform the professional development they chose to carry out. Specifically, the Department incentivized grantees to offer professional development supported by "moderate evidence of effectiveness" by awarding five additional points (beyond the 100 points for the main scoring criteria) in the grant competition to applications meeting this standard, which requires satisfying one of the two conditions described in Box 2.[29] The definition of moderate evidence of effectiveness is aligned with standards set by the [What Works Clearinghouse](#) (WWC), overseen by the Department's Institute of Education Sciences.[30] Applicants were able to earn the extra points by proposing to use at least one professional development topic or approach based on research that aligned with the moderate evidence standard,[31] including studies and evidence-based instructional practices for serving ELs featured in research summaries released by the WWC.[32]

Box 2. Conditions for demonstrating moderate evidence of effectiveness as defined by the NPD program

Condition A: At least one study that:	Condition B: At least one study that:
• Meets WWC Evidence Standards without reservations • Has at least one statistically significant favorable effect (no overriding negative effects) • Is based on a sample that overlaps with the target populations or settings of the proposed project	• Meets WWC Evidence Standards with reservations • Has at least one statistically significant favorable effect (no overriding negative effects) • Is based on a sample that overlaps with the target populations or settings of the proposed project • Is based on a sample with more than one site and at least 350 individuals

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- ***The vast majority of grantees reported that the research they proposed to address the moderate evidence standard informed at least some of their project activities.*** Reflecting the NPD program's grant application incentives, almost all grantees (91 percent) indicated that the identified research informed the design of their professional development activities (see Exhibit 7). Most grantees (88 percent) also reported that the research informed their selection of outcome measures to use to evaluate their professional development projects.

Exhibit 7.   Percentage of grantees reporting use of rigorous research evidence to inform project activities
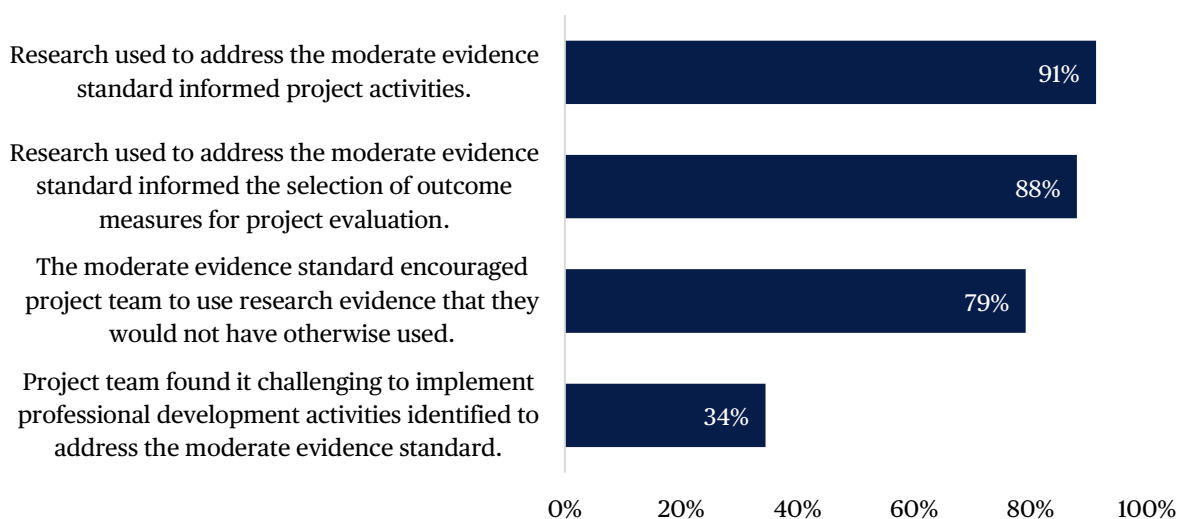
Source: NPD Grantee Survey, Question B9 (*N* = 91).

- ***However, some grantees had challenges implementing the professional development activities they had identified to address the moderate evidence standard encouraged by the program.*** About a third (34 percent) of the grantees found it challenging or impossible to implement the professional development topics or approaches they had initially proposed to address the moderate evidence standard (see Exhibit 7). This may be at least partly due to grantee or partner capacity issues (for example, limited EL-related expertise among institution of higher education faculty, shifting state or district priorities for professional development) and lack of educator time to participate in professional development, which were among grantees' most commonly reported challenges to implementing their grant-supported professional development activities (see Appendix Exhibits C.8 and C.9).
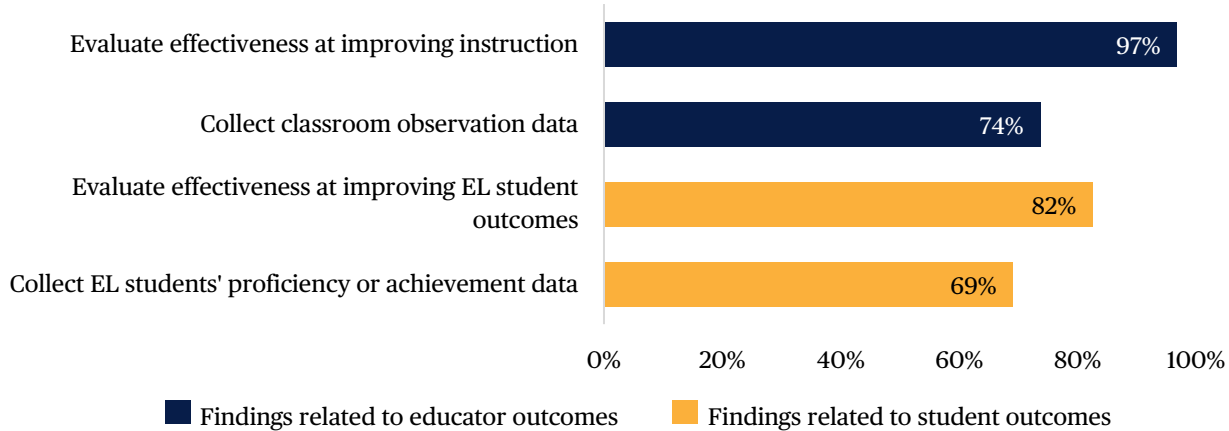
LIMITATIONS IN GRANTEE DATA COLLECTION MAY HAVE IMPEDED THE PROGRAM'S GOAL TO EXPAND THE EVIDENCE BASE ON EL-FOCUSED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

In addition to increasing the *use* of evidence, federal education policy also increasingly emphasizes expanding the *amount* and *availability* of evidence on effective practices. Rigorous evaluations of project effectiveness are critical to learning what works to improve educator skills and student outcomes and to inform educators' decision making. Ongoing performance measurement is important to help understand whether programs are meeting their goals. Performance measurement focusing on relevant outcomes can help programs identify areas in which to make improvements.

The Department encouraged grantees to conduct rigorous evaluations of project effectiveness as a way to expand the knowledge base on effective ways to serve ELs. Specifically, the Department incentivized grantees to propose rigorous program evaluations by allocating 20 out of 100 points to the quality of the proposed evaluation in scoring grant applications. The application scoring criteria for this section of the application focused on whether the proposed project evaluation was designed to meet the WWC evidence standards with or without reservations, generate valid and reliable data on outcomes relevant to project goals,[33] and provide performance feedback to support ongoing project improvement (see Appendix Exhibit A.3). In addition, the Department required all grantees to report on a set of prespecified performance measures annually (see Appendix Exhibit A.4).

- ***Over a quarter of the grantees did not collect or plan to collect the data needed to rigorously evaluate project effectiveness in improving classroom instruction and EL achievement.*** Almost all (97 percent) grantees evaluated or planned to evaluate their projects' effectiveness in improving instruction (see Exhibit 8). However, only 74 percent of grantees reported collecting or planning to collect classroom observation data, the most objective data for measuring instruction. While 82 percent of the grantees planned to evaluate their projects' effectiveness in improving EL outcomes, only 69 percent collected or planned to collect data on ELs' English proficiency or other achievement outcomes.[34] Moreover, a little over half of the grantees collected information such as teacher performance on certification exams or knowledge assessments (see Appendix Exhibit C.21). Together, these findings indicate that even when grantees intended to evaluate their projects' effectiveness in improving educator and student outcomes, not all were likely to have the data needed to do so.

Exhibit 8. **Percentage of grantees that evaluated or planned to evaluate project effectiveness and percentage of grantees that collected or planned to collect the outcome data needed**
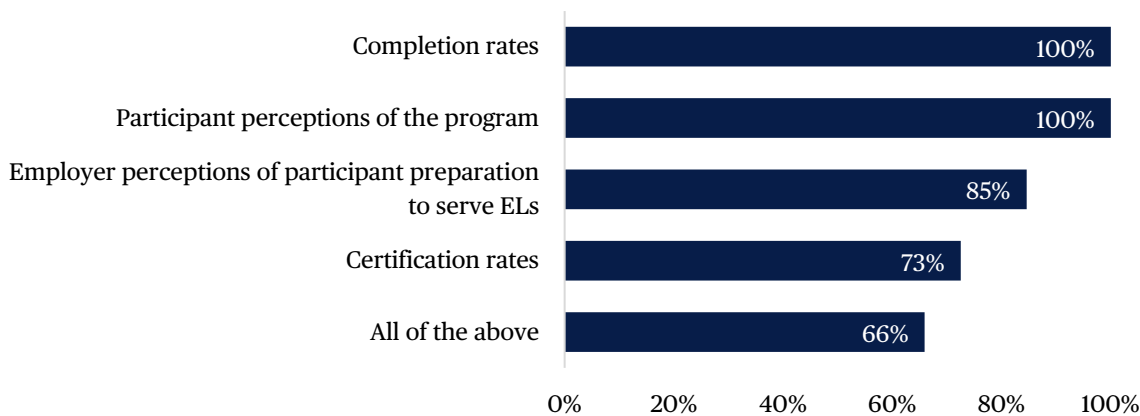
Evaluate effectiveness at improving instruction — 97%
Collect classroom observation data — 74%
Evaluate effectiveness at improving EL student outcomes — 82%
Collect EL students' proficiency or achievement data — 69%

■ Findings related to educator outcomes   ■ Findings related to student outcomes

Note: EL is English learner.
Source: NPD Grantee Survey, Questions G1 (*N* = 91) and G2 (*N* = 91).

- ***A third of grantees did not collect or plan to collect all the information required for performance measurement.*** All grantees collected or planned to collect data on the percentage of participants who completed their professional development and participant perceptions of how well the projects prepared them to serve EL students (see Exhibit 9). Fewer grantees (85 percent) reported collecting or planning to collect employer perceptions of participants' preparation to serve ELs. An even smaller share of grantees (73 percent) collected or planned to collect information on participant certification rates, though helping participants meet certification criteria is a key step in achieving NPD's larger goal of having more EL-certified educators in the classroom. Only 66 percent of grantees reported that they either collected or planned to collect all four types of data, despite the program's requirement to report on these types of data annually.

Exhibit 9. **Percentage of grantees that collected or planned to collect specific types of data required by the program for performance measurement**

Completion rates — 100%
Participant perceptions of the program — 100%
Employer perceptions of participant preparation to serve ELs — 85%
Certification rates — 73%
All of the above — 66%

Note: EL is English learner.
Source: NPD Grantee Survey, Question G1 (*N* = 91).

- *Almost all grantees used or planned to use their data to inform project improvement, and most also planned to share findings from their project evaluations.* Virtually all grantees (98 percent) reported that they had used or planned to use their data to inform project improvement efforts (see Exhibit 10), which included refining program curricula, better tailoring the professional development to the needs of participating educators, and better aligning the professional development activities with state or district needs. Eighty-two percent of the grantees also reported that they had revised project activities in response to the data that they had collected.

Exhibit 10. Percentage of grantees using data for project improvement purposes
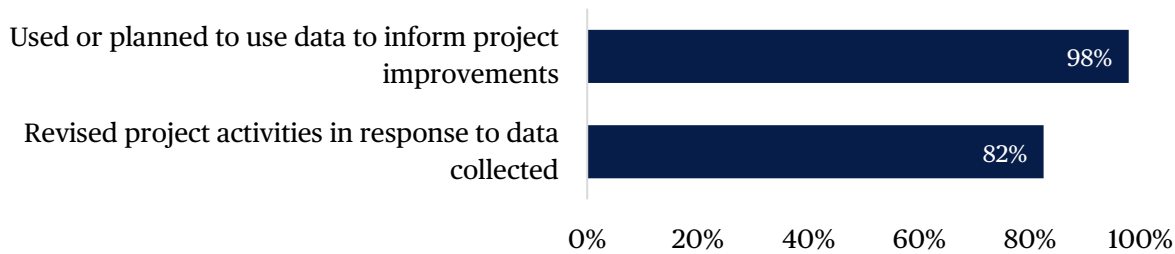
Source: NPD Grantee Survey, Questions G2 (*N* = 91) and B9 (*N* = 91).

In addition, most grantees (79 percent) planned to share their evaluation results publicly, which is a critical step in building the evidence base on effective practices for improving the outcomes of EL educators and students (see Exhibit 11). However, as of the time of the grantee survey in summer 2021, only 12 percent of the grantees had already made their evaluation results public, and 9 percent had no plans to do so.

Exhibit 11. Percentage of grantees that had shared, were planning to share, or were not planning to share evaluation results publicly
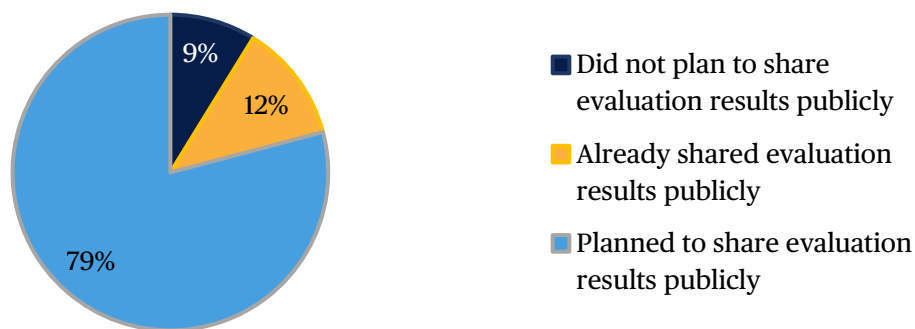
Source: NPD Grantee Survey, Question G3 (*N* = 91).

LESSONS LEARNED AND LOOKING AHEAD

The findings from this study of NPD projects highlight some diversity in project implementation and aspects of success, as well as areas where grantees faced some challenges. The NPD program continues to be a key source of funding support for EL-focused professional development across the country, intended to address an ongoing need for more educators who are prepared to provide effective instruction for ELs. It is therefore important to use what was learned from this study to inform improvement of the NPD program as well as the efforts of those providing professional development to enhance instruction for ELs.

NPD program leaders and those who provide professional development to educators of ELs might want to consider the following questions:

- **Are there potential tradeoffs between breadth and depth when grantees provide NPD services?** The NPD program did not require each individual grantee to serve a wide variety of educators through multiple activities, but it allowed grantees flexibility to respond to local needs and determine which and how many educators to serve and how to provide them with professional development. While this study did not have in-depth information about the topics and approaches of the grantees' professional development, grantees appeared to use the program's latitude to implement a broad set of activities including many different types of educators. The breadth in grantee project activities may also have been reflected in the wide range of various steps they took to support implementation, from incorporating technology to developing collaborative partnerships. This could create difficulties for grantee capacity to attract participants, carry out activities, and ensure their quality, compared to focusing on fewer types of participants or a smaller set of topics or approaches. In fact, almost one third of grantees were not able to serve their intended number of educators, and the majority of the grantees experienced challenges with educator time and buy-in. In addition, less than half of grantees had a primary focus on providing financial assistance for participants to meet certification or licensing requirements, suggesting that grantees faced tradeoffs between increasing the number of educators served and providing financial assistance for credentialing. These problems might be mitigated if each project responded more closely to a single high-priority local need or needs for a single type of educator. Program leaders may want to consider encouraging applicants to use a needs assessment to determine which specific type(s) of educators they would like to serve and can serve well. Professional development providers may similarly want to consider whether providing more focused professional development would enable better implementation and stronger support for participation.

- **What might make it easier to use practices backed by rigorous research evidence?** Given the program's intent to encourage practices backed by rigorous research evidence, it is concerning that about one third of the grantees reported challenges in carrying out the practices they proposed to meet the program's moderate evidence standard. Although this study revealed certain challenges that grantees commonly experienced with project implementation in general (for example, limitations in capacity and educator buy-in), the NPD program may find it informative to gain a deeper understanding of the specific challenges grantees faced when implementing evidence-based

professional development. Such understanding may allow the NPD program to provide more targeted assistance to grantees to support successful implementation.

- **Can NPD help build the evidence base about professional development for educators working with ELs?** It has taken decades for high quality research on professional development to accumulate, but the evidence remains limited for supporting specific groups of educators and students—including practices for supporting ELs. Conducting studies that build high-quality evidence about effective professional development requires expertise in not only the content and delivery of professional development but also the research methods needed to produce findings about effectiveness that decision makers can use with confidence. As this report does not address the quality or impact of the professional development grantees provided, this could be an area for future research. Moreover, while the NPD program encouraged grantees to conduct rigorous evaluations of project effectiveness that could contribute to evidence building for the field, findings from this study suggest that grantees were not necessarily poised to do so successfully. The NPD program may consider further exploring the data collection challenges experienced by individual grantees in conducting rigorous project evaluations. The NPD program may also wish to review the quality of the final evaluation reports grantees submit. It is possible that either more guidance and support is needed on the evaluation component of NPD grants or the requirement should be reconsidered.

ENDNOTES

[1] In fall 2017, 10.1 percent of students enrolled in U.S. public schools were ELs (National Center for Education Statistics, 2021).

[2] National Center for Education Statistics (2020).

[3] Ibid.

[4] Goodson et al. (2019).

[5] Coady (2020); Hansen-Thomas et al. (2016); Hiatt and Fairbairn (2018).

[6] Title III, Part A of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)* provides funds to support districts' instructional programs for ELs. In 2019-20, over 96 percent of ELs enrolled in U.S. schools were served in programs supported by Title III, Part A funds.

[7] U.S. Department of Education, ED*Facts* File Specification 067, Data Group 422: Title III Teachers, 2019-20, and Consolidated State Performance Report Element 1.4.4: Teacher information and professional development, 2019-20. Retrieved from https://eddataexpress.gov.

[8] Examples of entities other than institutions of higher education that have received NPD grants include nonprofit organizations, regional education service centers, and county offices of education.

[9] This maximum amount was for the 2016 and 2017 grant competitions that are the focus of this report. For the NPD program's more recent grant competitions in 2021 and 2022, the maximum grant size increased to $600,000 per year, and for the competition for 2024 it increased to $700,000 per year.

[10] The 92 grantees from 2016 and 2017 were awarded a total of $224 million in grants, which represents about one fourth of the total amount that had been appropriated to the NPD program as of 2022 when the grant period for the 2017 grantees was slated to end. The five-year grants awarded to these grantees ranged from $1.6 million to $2.8 million, with an average award of approximately $2.5 million.

[11] To apply for NPD funds, grantees had to submit applications to the U.S. Department of Education that describe the key features of their proposed grant project, including the number and type of participants projected to be served by the project as well as research citations to identify practices that were supported by rigorous research evidence. The NPD funding applications submitted by the 2016 and 2017 grantees are available on the NPD program's website at https://www2.ed.gov/programs/nfdp/awards.html.

[12] The study did not independently verify the counts of the number of participants served, and so they may be subject to reporting errors such as duplication of records.

[13] Bacon (2020).

[14] Bunch (2013).

[15] Jacob and McGovern (2015); Zuo et al. (2023).

[16] Goodson et al. (2019).

[17] Cross (2017).

[18] The averages of 127 current teachers and 93 teachers in preparation add to 219 rather than 220 due to rounding.

[19] ESEA Section 3115(c)(2).

[20] For both cohorts of grantees, the NPD grant competition offered an optional, invitational priority focused on supporting early childhood educators. For the 2017 competition, support for school readiness and transition to elementary school was added as an allowable use of funds (see Appendix A). See Appendix Exhibit C.6 for the percentage of grantees that supported educators in each grade band by cohort.

[21] National Center for Education Statistics (2023).

[22] The stated purposes of Title III of ESSA include helping "ensure that English learners … attain English proficiency and develop high levels of academic achievement in English" as well as assisting all ELs "to achieve at high levels in academic subjects so that all English learners can meet the same challenging State academic standards that all children are expected to meet" (ESEA Section 3102).

[23] The Notice Inviting Applications of the 2016 and 2017 NPD grant competitions did not provide a specific definition for dual language instruction, but this type of instruction typically involves language and academic content instruction in both English and a partner language (for example, Spanish, Mandarin, or Vietnamese), with the goal of developing students' proficiency in both languages. For further information, see Chapter 2. Tools and Resources for Providing English Learners with a Language Assistance Program (http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/oela/english-learner-toolkit/index.html).

[24] In addition to covering EL parent and family engagement strategies in their professional development for educators, most grantees provided learning opportunities for parents or families of ELs (see Appendix Exhibit C.14).

[25] Bonafini (2017); DeMonte (2017); Guha et al. (2016); Hunt et al. (2020).

[26] The grantee survey featured a broad definition of coursework ("either credit bearing or non-credit bearing provided through an institute of higher education (IHE) or similar entity"), and some of the specific types of coursework that the survey asked about could have been provided through either a university or other entities.

[27] Coursework programs leading to a degree or certification typically required more courses to complete than programs offering continuing education credits or other ongoing professional learning opportunities. See Appendix Exhibit C.18.

[28] Garrett et al. (2019); Garrett et al. (2021); Kraft et al. (2018); Lynch et al. (2019).

[29] The standard for demonstrating moderate evidence of effectiveness was defined in the Notice Inviting Applications of the 2016 and 2017 NPD grant competitions. See Appendix Exhibit A.2.

[30] The What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) is an investment of the Institute of Education Sciences within the U.S. Department of Education. The goal of the WWC is to help teachers, administrators, and policymakers make evidence-based decisions. The WWC reviews published evidence of effectiveness of education programs, policies, or practices using a consistent and transparent set of standards.

[31] Applicants could propose to incorporate instructional practices for ELs that met the moderate evidence standard or effective approaches to preparing teachers that met the moderate evidence standard. The Notice Inviting Applicants did not specify one or the other, although it noted there are limited studies

about how to best prepare and support EL educators and highlighted that the evidence base on effective instruction for ELs has been growing.

[32] For example, see Baker et al. (2014).

[33] The criteria to generate valid and reliable data on outcomes relevant to project goals was included in the 2017 application criteria but not 2016.

[34] These percentages were higher among 2017 grantees than among 2016 grantees (see Appendix Exhibit C.20), which may at least partly reflect the fact that the NPD program's 2017 Notice Inviting Applications added the use of valid and reliable performance data on relevant outcomes to evaluate project activities as a criterion for scoring applications for NPD funding.

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