



Building Systems of Support for Classroom Teachers Working with Second Language Learners

**A Report Prepared for
The Center for Strengthening the Teaching Profession**

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July 2009



This report was commissioned by the Center for Strengthening the Teaching Profession (CSTP), a non-profit organization intent on helping students achieve by ensuring they have the teachers they need. To accomplish that goal, CSTP supports research to examine the conditions of teaching and disseminates both short summaries and full reports to those interested in improving teaching quality in Washington state.

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The findings and conclusions contained in this report represent those of the authors and not necessarily those of CSTP.

The suggested citation for this report is:

Elfers, A. M., Stritikus, T., Percy Calaff, K., Von Esch, K.S., & Lucero, A., Knapp, M. S. & Plecki, M. L. (2009). *Building systems of support for classroom teachers working with second language learners*. Seattle, WA: University of Washington.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Recent immigration is dramatically altering the context of public schooling in the United States and in Washington state. Nationally, one in seven students speaks a language other than English at home. How states, districts and schools respond to this growing cultural and linguistic diversity continues to be a question of central importance for the future of education. As the numbers of English language learners (ELLs) increase, general education teachers are expected to assume greater responsibility for their learning and educational progress. As such, teachers must learn to adjust and adapt their instruction to address special learning needs and to work collaboratively with other educators, parents, and community members toward the goal of helping all second language learners succeed in school.

This report examines the assistance and support classroom teachers receive to work effectively with linguistically diverse students. In particular, we address the ways these efforts can form a “system of supports” for classroom teachers. In order to research these issues, we undertook a study of four districts in Washington state that serve different populations and proportions of English language learners. Through interviews, classroom observations and document analyses, we examined how these districts were addressing pressing questions about the education of ELL students and how to support the classroom teachers who work with them.

Framework

In this study, we examine key elements of the systems of support used by districts and schools to assist classroom teachers working with ELL students, and shed light on how leaders create the conditions for these supports to be implemented and sustained over time. Systems of support for classroom teachers are situated at a variety of levels (e.g., state, district and school) and can serve multiple purposes, such as the alignment of instructional practices, direct classroom assistance and collaborative work with other school staff. These systems of support also can increase teachers’ sense of efficacy and confidence in working with diverse learners.

The study identified four specific areas of support which impact the ability of general education teachers to work effectively with ELL students. The four areas include professional learning opportunities, staff support, collegial community and collaboration in the school, and access to appropriate curriculum and materials for second language learners. Leadership at both school and district levels also plays a critical role in creating and sustaining these systems of support. Skilled and knowledgeable leaders offer a vision for effective ELL instruction, leverage necessary resources, and strive for coherence and alignment of instructional goals. Systems of support external to schools and districts also impact teachers’ work and have a vital role to play in helping districts in their mission to improve instruction for ELL students.

Research Methods and Case Anchors

This research is based on a qualitative case study of four districts and twelve schools, which included seven elementary, three middle and two high schools. Two of the districts are located in a heavily populated and linguistically diverse area of the state and serve multilingual student populations. The other two districts are smaller and serve primarily Spanish-speaking immigrants and children of migrant workers. In each district case, we sought to describe and explain the phenomena under study through the use of semi-structured interviews at the district and school level (nearly 200 transcribed interviews), classroom observations, and the collection of relevant school and district documents. Multiple site visits were conducted over a four month period during fall and winter 2008-09. The report includes two vignettes (case anchors) of contrasting district cases in Eastern and Western Washington. The case anchors illustrate, with concrete and contextualized examples, the challenges teachers face in working with second language learners and the supports provided to them by their schools and districts. A brief example of the case anchors is provided below:

Western Washington Case Anchor: Lily teaches in a large, suburban, multilingual school whose students speak several languages. Her second grade classroom includes six Russian speakers, as part of a clustering model. Lily and most of the other teachers at her school have participated in training about language acquisition and strategies for improving instruction for ELL students which have helped them to become more intentional about the instructional practices they use.

Eastern Washington Case Anchor: Nearly half of the students in Mr. Bradley's middle school are Latino, and increasing student poverty is concern for school staff where 60 percent of all students receive free or reduced priced lunch. Four Spanish-speaking students in Mr. Bradley's 7th grade social studies class are formally identified as part of the ELL program, but many more are language-impacted and continue to need support with tasks that require them to use "academic" language.

Our analysis includes both within- and cross-case comparisons regarding how our case study districts and schools have responded to the needs of ELL students and how they have conceptualized and provided systems of support for classroom teachers.

Examining Systems of Support for Classroom Teachers

The findings from this study are organized around four central themes. Theme 1 explores changing working conditions and the instructional challenges that general education teachers face in meeting the instructional needs of ELL students. We describe the extent to which increasing cultural and linguistic diversity has resulted in a mismatch between the learning needs of ELL students and the preparation and support classroom teachers receive to work with them. We also discuss how changing student demographics imply new roles and responsibilities for classroom teachers. We

note how professional relationships among staff are also changing as instructional support staff frequently work with ELL students within general education classrooms. This creates a need for additional planning and coordination with the classroom teacher.

In the second theme, we identify four areas of support which teachers indicate help them to work effectively with ELL students:

- ***Support for Professional Learning.*** Districts and schools in the study sought to support general education teachers by providing high quality ongoing professional development. In addition to context-specific and locally-developed training and classes, districts also used nationally recognized professional development packages designed for working with second language learners.
- ***Staff Support.*** Teachers of ELL students identified ongoing staff support, particularly in the form of coaches, but also through paraprofessionals, as key in supporting their work with students.
- ***Curriculum and materials.*** Access to curriculum and materials appropriate for ELL students was identified as an important resource to classroom teachers.
- ***School Collegial Community.*** Teachers spoke of the collegial community in the school and the support that colleagues gave each other in the form of sharing knowledge and materials, planning and moral support.

The alignment, integration and coordination of these four elements can form a system of supports for teachers. However, several challenges remain for the supports to become a sustained, coherent and coordinated system, especially at the secondary level where supports are just beginning to emerge. When supports are not integrated or aligned with other school initiatives, they can result in confusion and incoherence rather than support for instruction.

Theme 3 addresses the leadership challenges in creating and sustaining a productive support system for classroom teachers working with ELL students. In districts in which the ELL program was compartmentalized and not included in general decisions regarding curriculum and instruction, leaders found it difficult to develop comprehensive systems of support that could impact the general education classroom. Another important issue was engaging district and school-level leaders in a mutual and reinforcing blending of efforts that set direction and mobilized resources. District and school leaders sought to communicate to all stakeholders that supporting teachers' efforts to serve ELL students was *central* to school and district goals and connected to other reform activities. Leaders in the case study districts were strong advocates of the use of disaggregated data to identify areas for improvement, shape training and professional development and support a culture of learning.

The final theme focuses on school and district efforts to leverage resources and build community relationships to better support teachers, students, and their families. The case study schools and districts were strategic in prioritizing staffing and use of fiscal resources to support ELL instruction. Despite budgetary constraints, districts and schools maximized their capacity by investing in existing staff, reallocating staffing when necessary, and using a variety of funding sources to support early

learning and special programs. Community outreach and partnerships expanded their capacity and resulted in greater parent participation and engagement in the schools, but could be used to a greater extent as a resource to classroom teachers.

Theme 4 further explores external supports provided by state agencies and other stakeholders that impact the work of classroom teachers serving ELL students. State agencies and others have a vital role to play in addressing the need for a highly qualified teacher workforce ready to work with diverse student populations. Evidence from the case study districts indicate that greater attention could be paid to the recruitment, professional training and credentialing of teachers to work with second language learners. State agencies also are in a good position to offer guidance to districts regarding the work of general education teachers with ELL students.

In a summary of the key findings in the report, we discuss how the form and focus of the supports necessarily vary as they are determined by and responsive to factors such as the number of students and languages represented, the nature of ELL or bilingual programs, the school and district community and the focus and direction provided by the district and school.

Implications for Policy

This report offers potential policy implications for state and local educators and policymakers. Six principles have emerged from the study, from which we offer specific challenges, questions and possible actions for schools, districts and the state. We briefly summarize the six principles here, and offer greater detail and specific challenges for educators and policymakers in the implications section of the report.

Principle #1: ELL students bring special needs to the classroom – all classrooms, not just those of bilingual or ESL specialists. These needs persist over time, even after the point at which these students exit a formal program that serves them, as in the state’s Transitional Bilingual Instructional Program (TBIP). Their learning needs pose new instructional challenges to an ever-growing proportion of teachers. Many classroom teachers are currently not well equipped to fully meet those challenges. Schools and districts should consider how well prepared their classroom teachers are to educate increasing numbers of ELL students. The state can engage with various stakeholders to determine the knowledge base and supports needed for classroom teachers to effectively carry out their responsibilities.

Principle #2: General education teachers benefit from a variety of supports that provide explicit assistance and a chance to learn about effective, appropriately differentiated instruction for ELL students. These supports include opportunities for professional learning, staff support, collaboration and school community and appropriate curriculum and materials. Support systems can be put in place in ways that integrate with other aspects of schooling and that acknowledge budgetary constraints. Schools and districts should consider how these supports may be put in place

and integrated with one another to assist classroom teachers who work with ELL students. *The state is in a good position to locate or develop appropriate curriculum and resources, and assessment tools for district use.*

Principle #3: Supporting teachers' work with second language learners is inherently more difficult at the secondary level than in elementary schools. Renewed attention and potentially different solutions are called for, along with continued innovation. Secondary schools can support their teachers in assuming responsibility for ELL students and in developing appropriate strategies and skills. The state can consider current TBIP models and how they might be better adapted for working with secondary students.

Principle #4: Effective leaders embrace the challenge of creating high-quality learning environments for ELL students. They set the direction and leverage resources necessary to support the work of their staff in meeting students' needs. At both district and school levels, leaders assume joint responsibility for improving learning environments for all ELL students. School and district leaders encourage accountability by all staff for the instruction of ELL students and communicate a clear focus on high quality ELL instruction.

Principle #5: Proactive efforts to welcome and engage families and community members are a necessary part of improving outcomes for ELL students. When schools capitalize on the linguistic and cultural resources that ELL students and their families bring, both students and staff benefit. Schools and districts can help families feel welcome in the school, as an important first step toward building relationships with the ELL community.

Principle #6: Efforts to address the recruitment and training of general education teachers to work with ELL students should reflect a shared responsibility by state and local educators and policymakers. These efforts cannot be limited to those who are new entrants into the teacher workforce. Educational leaders also should be encouraged to increase their training and expertise in meeting the needs of ELL students. State agencies can consider new models of recruiting teachers and paraeducators with an interest in working with students who are culturally and linguistically diverse, as well as encouraging current teachers to pursue an ESL or bilingual endorsement.

In summary, evidence from this study supports the concept that high-quality instruction for ELL students can take place when state, district and school leaders intentionally, purposefully, and knowledgeably create environments that can assist and support classroom teachers in this work.

SUPPORTING CLASSROOM TEACHERS IN THE CONTEXT OF LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY

This report examines the assistance and support classroom teachers receive to work effectively with linguistically diverse students. In particular, we address the ways these efforts form a “*system of supports*” for classroom teachers. In order to examine these issues, the Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy at the University of Washington, in collaboration with the Center for Strengthening the Teaching Profession, undertook a study of four districts in Washington state that serve different populations and proportions of English language learners (ELLs).¹ Through interviews, classroom observations and document analyses, we examined how these districts were addressing pressing questions about the education of ELL students and how to support the classroom teachers who work with them.

Results indicate that there are similar instructional challenges facing schools and teachers around the state, as well as regional differences based on the language groups served. In schools and districts actively seeking to address these issues, general education teachers have access to specific types of supports to help them meet the learning needs of ELL students. General education teachers² are an important part of all programs designed to meet the needs of ELL students. In Washington state, the Transitional Bilingual Instructional Program (TBIP) articulates specific roles and responsibilities for classroom teachers depending upon the program model employed. This study focuses on ways to support general education teachers in meeting those roles and responsibilities. There has been considerable research around program models and their effectiveness, but limited examination of the role of classroom teachers in the education of ELL students and the support they receive to work with them.

This study has a broad goal of expanding the knowledge base around ELL issues in Washington state. In this report, we identify strategies that state and local educators and policymakers can utilize in addressing the needs of classroom teachers who serve ELL students. Finding ways to make education work well for ELL students presents a continuing challenge to state policy, and to all who prepare or support teachers. The findings presented in this report can offer insight in addressing these challenges.

¹ Many terms have been used to describe students whose primary or home language is one other than English and for whom their English language skill deficiencies impair their learning. These students represent a broad spectrum of English language learning from “limited English proficient students” (LEP) to those who have begun to gain some proficiency in English. We use the term English language learner (ELL) broadly to encompass students for whom English is not their home language and who must gain a level of proficiency to achieve academically in school.

² In this report, we use the terms general education teacher and classroom teacher interchangeably to refer to elementary and secondary teachers whose primary assignment is teaching a range of students within a regular education classroom.

Recent immigration from Asia, Latin America, and Africa is dramatically altering the context of public schooling. Nationally, one in seven students speaks a language other than English at home. Immigrants constitute the fastest growing group of students in U.S. schools, and many demographers predict that by 2025 approximately 20 to 25 percent of students enrolled in elementary and secondary schools will have limited proficiency in English (Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco, & Todorova, 2008). How states, districts and schools respond to this growing cultural and linguistic diversity continues to be a question of central importance for the future of education. Frequently, scholarly examinations of educational policy and practice for ELL students have been nested in the area of language of instruction. Most of this research regarding ELL education has been conducted in historically impacted states such as California, New York, and Arizona, where bilingual education has been contentious. Consequently, much less is known about the nature of policy and practice in other state contexts.

While Washington is not among the top states in terms of the number of ELL students served in its schools, its ELL population has grown at a rapid pace in the last ten years. The enrollment of ELL students grew by nearly 40,000 students between 1997 and 2007. Currently, English language learners represent 9.2 percent of the K-12 student enrollment in Washington state (see Table 1).

Table 1: Growth of ELL Population in Washington Over Ten Years (1997-2007)

School Year	Total State Enrollment	Total ELL Enrollment	Percent ELL
1997-98	984,564	56,939	5.8
1998-99	993,623	62,132	6.2
1999-00	997,580	66,281	6.6
2000-01	997,487	70,431	7.1
2001-02	1,002,257	72,215	7.2
2002-03	1,006,054	73,201	7.3
2003-04	1,010,229	79,252	7.8
2004-05	1,005,882	87,347	8.7
2005-06	1,017,777	92,365	9.1
2006-07	1,028,377	89,929	8.7
2007-08	1,031,846	94,726	9.2

Note: Percent of ELL students served and the total number of students in the state. Students with multiple enrollments during the school year are counted in each district enrolled.

Source: Malagon, H., & DeLeeuw, H., (2008). Educating English Language Learners in Washington State, 2007-08.

Students Served. In the 2007-08 school year, 94,726 ELL students were served by Washington’s Transitional Bilingual Instructional Program (TBIP), the state program for English language learners. This was an increase of 4,797 students over the previous school year. Children in grades K-3 accounted for almost half of all ELL students served in Washington’s public schools.

These students attended schools in 194 of the state’s 295 school districts; thus ELL students are distributed differentially across the state. For example, in twenty-two districts, ELL students represented more than a quarter of their student population. Twenty-one of these districts are located in Central Washington, where Spanish speakers make up more than 95 percent of all ELL students. The other highly impacted district is Tukwila, a small urban district of approximately 2,900 students located along the I-5 corridor. Tukwila serves a multilingual population with 33 percent of students identified as second language learners.

Languages Spoken. Students in Washington’s schools spoke 195 non-English languages in 2007-08. Of these, Spanish was by far the most common, spoken by 68 percent of all ELL students. Nationwide, approximately 79 percent of school-age ELL students speak Spanish as their first language. Another 17 percent of Washington’s ELL students speak one of the following six languages: Russian, Vietnamese, Ukrainian, Somali, Korean and Tagalog (spoken in the Philippines). The final 15 percent of ELL students speak one of 188 other languages present in the state, the vast majority of whom attend schools in Western Washington.³

Washington State Policy. Washington state policy governing the provision of services for ELL students is defined by the TBIP and utilized by the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) to determine state and federal funding levels. Under this program, students are to be instructed in their home language and also in English while they acquire English language skills.⁴ However in 2007-08, only ten percent of ELL students received any instruction in their home language—in either dual language or transitional bilingual programs. Dual language programs are designed to foster full bilingualism and biliteracy; children receive academic content instruction in

³ In recent years, the number of speakers of Somali has seen the biggest overall increase and is now the fifth largest language group in the state. From 2007 to 2008, the number of Somali speakers increased by more than 11 percent, from 1,850 to 2,083. Twenty-three Washington districts served Somali speakers in 2007-08, but nearly all attended schools in either Seattle or one of the districts south of Seattle in the Central Puget Sound. Kent, Tukwila, Highline and Renton each served between 133 and 308 Somali students, while Seattle enrolled 729 Somali speakers during that year. The number of Spanish and Vietnamese speakers also increased during the same time period by 5.7 percent each. There were 60,593 Spanish speakers in the 2006-07 school year, and that number rose to 64,234 in 2007-08. The number of Vietnamese speakers grew from 3,269 to 3,467, maintaining its place as the third largest language group in the state’s schools.

⁴ The Transitional Bilingual Instructional Program is defined by WAC 392-160-005 as a program that:

- a. “Uses two languages, one of which is English, as a means of instruction to build upon and expand language skills to enable a student to achieve competency in English;
- b. Teaches concepts and knowledge in the primary language of the student and while the student acquires English language skills;
- c. Tests students in the subject matter in English” (De Leeuw, et al., 2008, p. 1).

both English and their home language as a normal part of their day. Transitional bilingual programs provide instruction in the home language for three to five years, while transitioning children away from the home language and toward English only instruction.

While home language instruction is the preferred model for serving Washington’s ELL students, under certain conditions in which school districts lack the resources or staff to provide bilingual instruction, they can elect to provide an alternative instructional program. These alternative programs must be designed to foster second language learning and academic competency in English. Ninety percent of Washington ELL students in 2007-08 were enrolled in alternative instructional programs, such as content English as a Second Language (ESL), in either “pull-out” or “push-in” models. Content ESL classes are conducted solely in English by teachers who have some understanding of language development issues and work to make content accessible to ELL students. In the ESL pull-out model, ESL specialists or paraeducators pull children out of a regular classroom for short periods of time several times a week to work on English language development or academic content. The “push-in” model is a relatively new approach wherein those same specialists or paraeducators work within classrooms to support ELL students as they complete the same work as their English-dominant peers. The newer models raise questions about the support and training of general education teachers to provide for the learning of their ELL students.

Entry and exit criteria for the TBIP have been established by the State of Washington. Eligibility is determined by a home language survey which asks parents whether their child’s first language is a language other than English. If the answer to that question is “yes,” students are referred for testing on the Washington Language Proficiency Test (WLPT-II).⁵ If students qualify for the TBIP, they must be assessed annually using the WLPT-II. Students are able to exit the program when they achieve a transitional level (level 4) or pass the state’s student performance assessment, the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL), in both reading and writing. Once a student is exited from the TBIP, he or she cannot re-qualify for the program and must receive all of his or her instruction in the general education classroom.

While students may work with an ESL specialist for a portion of the day, it is likely that the bulk of the student’s time is spent with general education teachers. In the next section, we consider the changing role of general education teachers in working with ELL students based on emerging evidence from the research literature.

⁵ Upon receipt of the home language survey, the WLPT-II must then be administered within ten days. If the student’s score is 1, 2 or 3, then he or she is eligible for TBIP services.

The Role of Classroom Teachers in Working with ELL Students

As numbers of ELL students increase, general education teachers are expected to assume greater responsibility for the learning and educational progress of these students. As such, teachers must learn to adjust and adapt their instruction to address special learning needs and to work with others who serve them. Among a list of challenges classroom teachers face, a recent national survey ranked working with English language learners as fourth among their top challenges, with a greater proportion of urban teachers identifying this as a problem (Markow & Cooper, 2008). In this section, we review the findings from research regarding classroom teachers' experiences in working with second language learners and the role of preparation, training and working conditions as a support.

Teacher Preparedness and Lack of Support. According to a 2002 report from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), 42 percent of U.S. classroom teachers had ELL students in their classes, but only 12.5 percent had received more than eight hours of professional development targeted at ELL issues. This same report noted that only 20 percent of those teachers felt *well prepared* to teach such students. Similar findings were reported on a 2005 survey among a stratified random sample of teachers in Washington state in which only a third of the teachers (34 percent) indicated they felt "very prepared" to manage the diverse learning needs in their classrooms (Knapp et al., 2005).

The Washington state report noted that among the 62 percent of teachers who had English language learners in their classrooms (typically one to four ELL students), approximately half indicated that they encountered moderate or huge challenges in working with this population. Their greatest concerns included communicating with students' parents, the lack of one-on-one assistance for ELL students, the difficulty in assessing ELL students' learning, the lack of appropriate curriculum or texts and ELL students placed in the classroom before they were academically ready to do the work. These concerns were similar to challenges cited by California teachers in a large-scale survey conducted by Gándara, Maxwell-Jolly and Driscoll (2005).

There is evidence that teachers' level of experience may affect their ability to serve ELL students. Novice teachers (0-4 years of experience) in the Washington survey were more likely to report difficulties, with nearly half (49 percent) finding the lack of appropriate curriculum or texts to be a moderate to huge challenge in working with ELL students. Over half of novice teachers (51 percent) cited difficulty in assessing ELL student learning as a moderate to huge challenge compared with two-fifths of veteran teachers. The survey also examined ways in which districts provided support to teachers. Two-thirds of teachers recognized district-level staff or committees dedicated to the support of ELL students in their district, but fewer than half (47 percent) could identify district efforts promoting professional development to help teachers work with this population (Knapp, et al., 2005). Understanding these issues in greater depth is a central goal of this study.

A number of studies have identified the complexities of working with ELL students. Infrastructure components such as staffing, professional development and curriculum are critical in establishing services for ELL students (Zehler et al., 2008). Professional development is important because an

understanding of the unique needs of ELL students can help teachers make decisions about how to best serve them (deJong & Harper, 2005, 2008; Garcia, 1996; Reeves, 2006). Researchers have noted that when teachers lack complete, accurate information about certain groups of children, they become more susceptible to misinformation, which can lead to the development of negative stereotypes (Byrnes, Kiger & Manning, 1997; Walker, Shafer & Iiams, 2004). For example, when teachers believe that they don't need specialized training to help ELL students succeed, it is easy for them to blame children for their own school failure. Teachers who have received even a small amount of professional training about ELL issues are more likely to view ELL students as positive additions to their classes and to acknowledge the need to adapt their instruction for such students (Reeves, 2006; Walker, Shafer & Iiams, 2004).

Because classroom teachers are the primary instructors for ELL and non-ELL children alike, high-quality professional development specific to ELL issues is a critical support for teachers (Gándara & Rumberger, 2006). Such professional learning opportunities need to be differentiated to meet the many and varied needs of teachers who work with ELL students (Gándara, Maxwell-Jolly & Driscoll, 2005). The most common response is for schools or districts to offer training in one of a number of well-known professional development packages that focus on strategies appropriate for second language learners (e.g., Guided Language Acquisition Design or Sheltered Instructional Observation Protocol). Yet, surprisingly little is known about the effectiveness of these approaches, or differences in the ways districts support teachers during implementation. Thus, one purpose of the present study was to describe how four districts structured and followed through on professional development initiatives for general education teachers serving ELL students.

Teacher Preparation and Professional Development. Research studies that have addressed the issue of teacher preparation for linguistic diversity in general education contexts have largely done so from the perspective of teacher education. These studies have, for the most part, been university program evaluations or small-scale qualitative descriptions. Thus, the research base in this area has been limited to investigating ways to prepare preservice teachers for the linguistic diversity they will face in the future (Abbate-Vaughn, 2008; deJong & Harper, 2008; Lucas, Villegas & Freedson-Gonzalez, 2008). These preparations usually take the form of specific coursework or the addition of an endorsement to a teaching certificate in the area bilingual education or English as a second language.

In terms of effective instruction for ELL students, a base of what classroom teachers need to know and be able to do has been established over the past 15 years (deJong & Harper, 2005, 2008; Lucas, Villegas & Freedson-Gonzalez, 2008; Wong-Fillmore & Snow, 2002). For example, effective teachers of ELL students understand the difference between conversational and academic language, and teach students to understand the difference as well (Harper & deJong, 2004; Wong-Fillmore & Snow, 2002). Academic language is different in structure and vocabulary from the everyday spoken English of social interactions. It is a form of the language used in schools and other formal settings that heavily relies on the use of content specific words and vocabulary (Echevarria, Vogt, & Short,

2008). Effective teachers of ELL students understand the process of second language acquisition and integrate language development with academic learning (Garcia, 1996). They understand the importance of interaction in language learning and thus promote the active use of language for meaningful purposes. They provide input that is appropriately comprehensible given each student's development, and differentiate instruction accordingly (Lucas et al., 2008).

Research also has highlighted specific strategies that enhance the learning of ELL students such as providing students with visuals and realia, carefully pacing speech, scaffolding difficult language, and using the home language whenever possible and feasible (Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2008). Thus, we know a fair amount about what constitutes quality instruction for ELL students. However, there is little existing research that helps us understand how schools and districts support teachers in becoming more proficient in these instructional practices. Existing research offers little help with regard to ways to engage teachers in deepening their understanding of different language proficiencies or the ability to differentiate instruction to serve ELL students.

Specific factors have been identified that can help schools create effective learning environments for ELL students. For example, the clear articulation and coordination of ESL services within a school leads to a more cohesive education for ELL students (August & Hakuta, 1997; Miramontes, Nadeau & Commins, 1997). The school-wide valuing and use of home languages for formal instruction or informal communication keeps families engaged in children's learning, and fosters relationships that schools can capitalize on to enhance student learning.

Other studies have identified the nature of the workplace environment and leadership support as making a difference in teachers' ability to work effectively with all students (Rosenholtz, 1989; Seashore Louis & Kruse, 1995; Leithwood, 1994). Factors that teachers identify as a support to their teaching include a collegial school community, teacher collaboration, opportunities for professional development, effective school leadership and access to appropriate curriculum and materials (Berry, Smylie & Fuller, 2008; Johnson & Birkeland, 2003; Ingersoll, 2003; Nieto, 2003). With regard to teacher collaboration and learning communities, a recent empirical study suggests that student achievement may be improved by providing teachers with opportunities to discuss and collaborate on issues related to curriculum, instruction and professional development (Goddard, Goddard & Tschannen-Moran, 2007).

Despite the lack of precise knowledge about what supports are currently available for teachers, or how much teachers need to know to be successful in working with ELL students, many schools and districts attempt to provide support in both formal and informal ways. In this study, we describe some of those systems of support and shed light on how they may begin to address teachers' concerns in working with this student population.

Framework: System of Supports for Classroom Teachers

Across a variety of bilingual and ESL program models, general education teachers play an important role in meeting the instructional needs of ELL students within their classrooms. There also is an expectation (and requirement in the State of Washington)⁶ that classroom teachers will receive some support to carry out these responsibilities. As discussed in the previous section, when particular workplace conditions are present—such as effective school leadership, collegial community, opportunities for professional learning and access to curricular resources and assistance—teachers indicate they are better prepared to address the diverse learning challenges they face. Supports for teachers should be responsive to the unique contexts inside classrooms and the individual learning needs of teachers as they develop their expertise in working with ELL students. In this study, we pay particular attention to a formal and informal “*system of supports*” which schools and districts put in place to help classroom teachers work effectively with linguistically diverse students. A system of supports refers to a set of intentional and differentiated efforts which are focused on the continuous improvement of student and teacher learning.

ELL-specific systems of support for classroom teachers are situated at a variety of levels (e.g., state, district and school) and can serve multiple purposes. First, they can support teachers in the *alignment of instructional practices* to work effectively with second language learners. These supports can offer *direct classroom assistance* and collaboration with other school staff who provide specialized help alongside the teacher. Finally, these supports can *increase teachers’ sense of efficacy and confidence* in working with diverse learners. Helping teachers within a school to implement effective instructional practices with ELL students can go a long way toward building confidence and encourage ongoing learning for teachers. These supports can create conditions that motivate and enable educators’ best work in guiding the learning of ELL students.

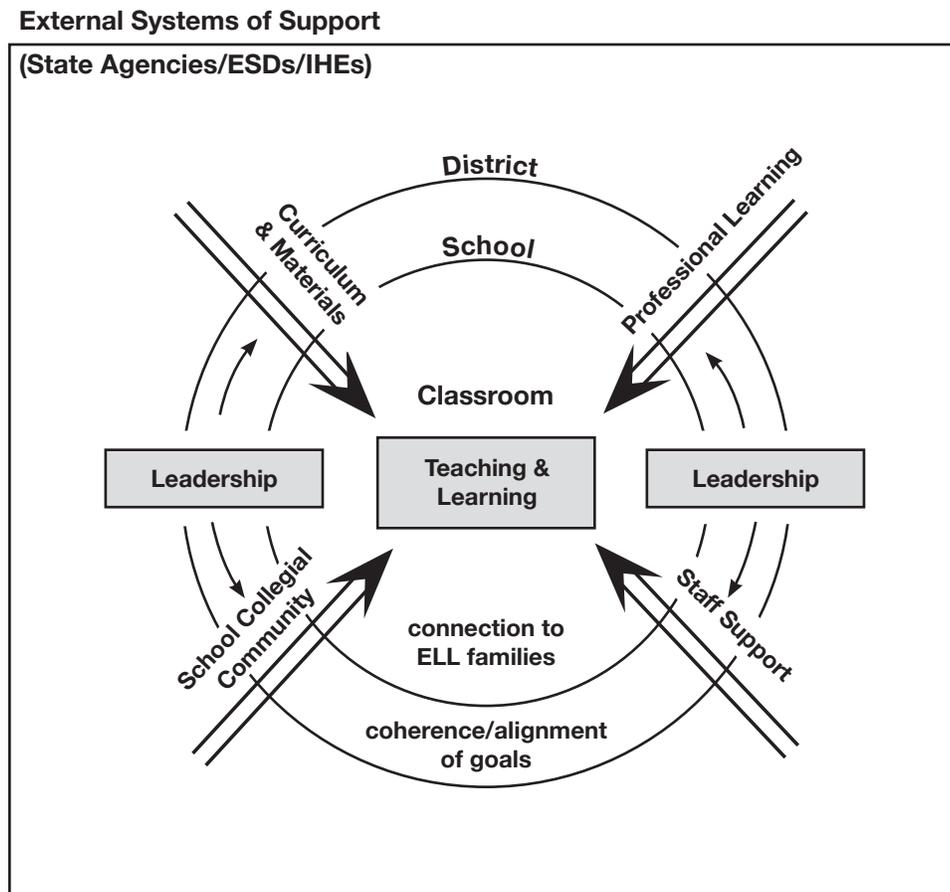
Within immediate reach of the teacher are resources, individuals, and conditions in the school, district and community that can enable their work with students to be successful. Of particular importance are school and district-based *professional learning opportunities*, which address central problems of practice. Strategic *staff support* inside classrooms from those who have specific professional expertise may play an important role in helping teachers effectively manage their work with diverse student learners. This support may take the form of instructional leadership, differentiated instruction in small groups, conducting assessments, adapting curriculum or translation services carried out by bilingual professionals, instructional coaches, paraeducators or school administrators. An essential component of support for teachers is the nature of the *school community* in which teachers find themselves. Among their colleagues, teachers find moral support, advice, reinforcing norms of practice, and other ways of assisting their work. Other forms of support include the kinds of *curriculum, materials and resources* to which teachers have access for working with second language learners. In addition, the connection and engagement that schools

⁶ Along with appropriate TBIP staff support, teachers who serve TBIP students are required to receive staff development specific to instruction of ELL students as outlined in the School Board responsibilities and duties WAC 392-160-010(3).

and teachers have with the families of their second language learners can be an important resource (see Figure 1). The bilingual or ESL program model adopted by a school or district may provide assistance to general education teachers, but for the purposes of this study, serves as a backdrop under a broader framework of supports

Leadership at both school and district levels also plays a critical role in creating and sustaining systems of support for teachers who work with ELL students. Skilled and knowledgeable leaders offer a vision for effective ELL instruction, leverage necessary resources, and strive for coherence and alignment of the instructional goals for these students. Effective leadership support can help create working environments in which teachers have the right training, staff support, curriculum and materials and opportunities for collaboration.

Figure 1: Elements of a System of Supports for Classroom Teachers



Systems of support *external* to schools and districts also impact teachers' work. The state governs entry to the profession and continued professional credentialing. Regarding entry into the profession, states have much to say about expectations for initial professional preparation of teachers and the different forms it may take. The state also is in a good position to guide or support the continued professional education of teachers throughout their careers.

Teachers' work, student learning and the array of potentially supportive conditions that are traceable to local and state leadership or policy actions sit in a multi-level context that shapes what is possible and ultimately transpires in teaching and learning. In this context, there are many constraints and enabling conditions that lie beyond the reach of policy. They reflect the nature of the communities served by schools and districts, the state of the economy, demographic trends, and political developments of all kinds. All have identifiable implications for what happens in classrooms, either directly (e.g., through what students or teachers bring with them to teaching and learning), or indirectly (e.g., by creating a climate of expectations, possibilities, and limitations that affect what happens in classrooms). These framework elements give clues regarding where to look when asking what can be done to support classroom teachers' work with second language learners.

Report Themes and Organization

This report is organized in four major sections. We begin with a discussion of the qualitative case study methodology used, the selection of the four districts and the data sources. To set the stage for the discussion to follow, two districts are presented as case anchors to highlight issues at classroom, school and district-levels. We organize the findings from the study into four major themes. Themes 1 and 2 explore the instructional challenges teachers face and the assistance schools and districts provide, in essence, creating a system of supports for working with ELL students. Themes 3 and 4 examine the leadership challenges inherent in building and aligning these supports, and the ways in which resources can be leveraged to support teachers, ELL students and their families. The concluding sections reflect on the study's findings and offers potential policy implications for state and local educators and policy makers.

SETTING THE STAGE: DATA SOURCES AND CASE ANCHORS

We begin by describing the research methods, selection of districts, and sources of evidence used to support this study. Each of the four districts is briefly described in terms of the demographics of their ELL student population, the types of ELL programs offered and the nature of the district community. Finally, we offer two vignettes, which we call case anchors, of contrasting districts in Western and Eastern Washington to illustrate the challenges teachers face in working with ELL students as a precursor to the discussion to follow.

Methods and Data Sources

This research utilized a qualitative case study approach with a strategic sample of four districts in Washington state. The case study method was selected because it enabled us to look closely at four diverse cases of the same phenomenon—supports for classroom teachers in the context of different ELL populations and programs.

This sample of cases was intentionally built by considering three criteria: 1) districts engaged in deliberate and carefully considered practices for serving ELL students, 2) districts located in geographically different areas of the state, and 3) districts that varied in the languages spoken by their ELL students. We began by identifying districts whose enrollment was at least 7.9 percent ELL students (the state average). From this master list, a series of matrices was created to categorize districts by size, concentration of ELL students, number and diversity of language groups, region in which the district was located, and nature of the local community (e.g., urban, suburban, or rural). We also examined trends in student performance for students served by the TBIP in each district. Because the goal of the study was to investigate the nature of support for teachers situated within a range of service-delivery models, we further prioritized districts by the type of ESL and bilingual programs offered, ranging from push-in and sheltered instruction⁷ to dual language immersion models.⁸ While other studies have focused a great deal of attention on determining what type of program model is best for ELL students, we do not address the issue in this study. Rather, we looked at overall systems of support for teachers within the context of various programs.

As the final step in choosing the sites, we sought recommendations from superintendents, principals, and from a network of Washington teachers with certification from the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS). These matrices and investigations enabled us to narrow our choices to districts that were in some way representative of others in the state serving

⁷ Sheltered instruction (SI) is an approach used widely for teaching language and content to ELL students in academic subjects (e.g., science, history) with English as the medium of instruction.

⁸ Dual language programs provide integrated language and academic instruction for native English speakers and native speakers of another language with a goal of language proficiency in both languages.

ELL students. The recommendations resulted in a list of schools and districts attempting to address the long-term language and learning needs of ELL students and providing support for classroom teachers who work with them.

In each of the four districts selected, three schools were chosen for in-depth study in collaboration with district leaders. The school sites usually included two elementary schools, and either a middle or a high school. The twelve school sites included seven elementary, three middle and two high schools. Two of the districts are located in Western Washington along the I-5 corridor, the most heavily populated and linguistically diverse area of the state. The other two districts, situated in the eastern half of the state, are considerably smaller and serve primarily Spanish-speaking immigrant and migrant children.

In each district case, we sought to describe and explain the phenomena under study through the use of semi-structured interviews at the district and school level (nearly 200 transcribed interviews), classroom observations (at all school sites and most grade levels), and the collection of relevant school and district documents. Multiple site visits were conducted over a four month period during fall and winter 2008-09. The research team visited each district and school site at least twice on separate occasions. The time lag between visits was deliberate and allowed the research team to review the data that was collected, reflect on and discuss preliminary findings, and prepare more targeted and in-depth questions for subsequent visits. Interviews were conducted with district leaders, district ESL and bilingual specialists and managers, school administrators, teachers, coaches and instructional specialists, paraeducators, parents and individuals from local community organizations engaged in the schools.

Case Study Districts

District A is located in Western Washington in the Puget Sound corridor north of Seattle. The district serves nearly 20,000 students, with approximately nine percent enrolled in the district's TBIP. The district offers ELL push-in services at all levels, as well as some sheltered instruction classes at the secondary level. Because of the small number of newcomers in the district, there is no separate program for them. Students speak over 50 different languages, the most prevalent being Spanish (39 percent), and Russian and Ukrainian (both at 15 percent). The majority of the district's ELL students (72 percent) are at the elementary level. At the elementary level, many students were born in the United States. However, at the secondary level, many students are from refugee families, and over three-quarters (77 percent) of high school-aged ELL students have been in the United States for four years or less. District-wide, 32 percent of students receive free or reduced priced lunch.

District B serves approximately 25,000 students in a Western Washington community south of Seattle. Due to a rapid increase in the immigrant population, eight percent of students are served by the TBIP. Approximately 50 languages are represented with the largest groups being Russian (35 percent), Spanish (24 percent) and Ukrainian (15 percent). At the elementary level, schools are encouraged to cluster their ELL students with specifically designated and trained teachers (4-6

students per class) with paraeducators providing push-in support. At the secondary level, the district offers some sheltered instruction classes taught by ESL-trained teachers for the most highly impacted ELL students. At all levels, newcomer centers are provided for recent immigrants who are at a beginning level of language proficiency and who have little or no previous experience in American schools. Thirty-six percent of all students in the district receive free or reduced priced lunch.

District C serves about 3,500 students in an agriculturally-based community in Central Washington. The community has changed significantly in recent years as Latinos have settled in the region and are now the largest cultural and linguistic group. Most Spanish-speakers are a mix of first or second generation immigrants and migrants. The number of migrant students has stabilized over the years and now represent 13 percent of the student population. However, the district experiences a considerable movement of students between local districts, depending on housing needs for agricultural work. Nearly 80 percent of students receive free or reduced price lunch, and 28 percent are enrolled in the state’s TBIP. Support for second language learners includes one- and two-way dual language programs at the elementary and middle school levels. Other ELL programs include push-in services at all levels, and some sheltered instruction classes at the middle and high schools.

District D serves about 6,000 students in a small town in Eastern Washington. Farming is the economic force behind the community, and in recent years farm workers have settled in the region. Today, Spanish-speaking students comprise nearly 35 percent of all students. Twelve percent of students receive TBIP services. At the elementary level, the district offers a combination of early-exit transitional bilingual education, a dual immersion two-way enrichment program, and ESL pull-out models. The secondary schools offer sheltered ESL classes in some content areas, in addition to push-in support. The district faces issues of increasing poverty and student mobility as students move between schools within district boundaries. Fifty-three percent of the students in the district receive free or reduced price lunch.

Next, we preview some of the issues which will be addressed in the report by looking specifically at examples, which we call case anchors, from two Washington districts serving different ELL populations.

Case Anchors: Views from Western and Eastern Washington Districts

In this section, we use case anchors from two districts to illustrate the challenges teachers face in working with second language learners (e.g., addressing language needs, assessing student learning, understanding the cultural context). We also highlight some of the supports that schools and districts put in place to assist teachers (e.g., professional learning, staff support, school community). The purpose of these case anchors is to provide concrete and contextualized examples as we begin to raise critical questions to be addressed later in the report.

Western Washington Case Anchor—A Case of Multiple Languages

Lily,⁹ a second-grade teacher in a large suburban district, calls her students to the rug for a reading lesson. Of her 21 students, six are Russian speakers served by the district's ESL program. She begins by reviewing the characteristics of a story with students, then gives them an opportunity to “turn and talk” with a neighboring student about what they know. As the lesson proceeds, she gives her students numerous opportunities to communicate their understanding either to her or to a student partner. Lily uses many of the instructional approaches that are known to be helpful for ELL students such as turn and talk, clear content objectives, visual cues, and frequent checks for understanding.

In our interviews, Lily identified several challenges facing her and other teachers who work with large numbers of ELL students. Among them are engaging students, the length of time required to learn English, assessing what students know, and accounting for their language needs while planning and delivering lessons. She felt that providing ongoing support was especially difficult for the school because of the state-mandated exit criteria for ELL students: “I think our biggest concern is they are taken out of the program too soon.” This point is particularly salient in terms of developing and assessing academic language. “They pass their WLPT [Washington Language Proficiency Test], so they tend to read fast and do well, [but] they still need support with the academic language. We take their support away too soon.”

Concerns about providing comprehensible and engaging curriculum to ELL students have been echoed by classroom teachers around the country and appear frequently in the research literature on the education of ELL students. In this case, a bilingual paraeducator knowledgeable about language acquisition visits Lily's classroom to work with her ELL students on a regular basis. Nonetheless, Lily noted the importance of teachers themselves understanding the principles of second language development. Lily explains, “sometimes we forget and it's just that whole talking piece, giving them time to think, giving them time to talk to one another.” As noted earlier, this is especially true once students have exited from formal ESL services. Once ELL students become the sole responsibility of the classroom teacher, issues of assessment and equitable participation often become more pronounced.

While not all teachers are as prepared to teach ELL students as Lily—this study indicates that there are ways that schools and districts can help. The school at which Lily teaches is a large, suburban, multilingual school whose students speak several languages. One way that the school leadership has attempted to deal with its language diversity is through a clustering model, in which children from the same language group are mindfully placed into classes together to provide scaffolding for each other and to streamline the support services of bilingual paraeducators. For Lily, this means that all six of her ELL students speak Russian, and a Russian-speaking paraeducator works in her classroom with them individually or in small groups several times a week.

In addition, classes about Russian culture have been made available to teachers who have these clusters in their regular classes. Clusters at Lily's school and in elementary schools across the district also exist for Spanish and Vietnamese speakers, with trained bilingually proficient paraeducators serving them. Lily and most of the other teachers at her school also have participated in training about language acquisition and strategies for improving instruction for ELL students. The principal at Lily's school discussed how this training has made a difference for teachers at the school:

I think they're getting more and more intentional about the instructional practices that they use — and their work with the staff assistants so that they're doing more pre-teaching and having the assistants do more pre-teaching, vocabulary building . . . giving them some conceptual kinds of things so that when it's presented in the classroom . . . the kiddos kind of have a sense of 'oh yea, I think I know where we're going with that.'

She went on to emphasize the importance of getting all staff members on board. “It's not just classroom teachers. And it's not just the ELL staff, it's our staff in general has really tried to do what they can, but there's always more to learn.” This is certainly true for one of Lily's colleagues, who has attended some of the district's classes. Once she gets back into her classroom and is faced with daily dilemmas, she admits to feeling overwhelmed by the demands of her Ukrainian-speaking students, and feels like she has much more to learn.

⁹ Pseudonyms are used to protect the identity of all study participants.

The approach to involving the entire school community in the education of ELL students is one that has been actively facilitated by the district's ESL staff. Its model of distributive leadership (a sharing of leadership between individuals in the school and district context) is designed to help schools meet district goals but also the needs of their immediate community. To that end, the district has made classes and resources available to teachers and other staff members but has also concentrated heavily on developing leadership in the paraeducators who are the backbone of the program. In one such district-developed program, paraeducators attend a workshop on interpreting assessment data and using the state English Language Development (ELD) standards¹⁰ to guide instruction. The twist is that elementary paraeducators do not attend training sessions alone. Rather, they invite one cluster teacher from their school to join them for subsequent workshops, where they act as experts who help teachers better understand language development and ways to serve ELL students in their classrooms.

Lily is an illustrative example of another element of the district's distributed leadership. She is only a half-time second grade teacher. The other half of her time is spent as a school-based professional development specialist. The district uses on-site specialists who design, coordinate and oversee professional development tailored to the school's needs. In Lily's case, she also works one-on-one with teachers in lesson planning, modeling lessons, and interpreting assessment information.

Lily's success at leveraging her system of supports is not to say that this has worked seamlessly for all teachers in her school and district. In fact, some teachers expressed concerns about mentoring and guidance from colleagues, attention focused on certain grade levels to the exclusion of others, or students exiting the program too early. Other teachers didn't feel they had all the support they needed to serve their ELL students effectively.

While the district provides specific supports for schools like the one at which Lily works, the two ESL specialists who run the district's program face challenges of their own. Their office is small and their resources are stretched thin. They face an additional challenge in that they must be invited into schools before they can begin their work. Teacher training regarding ELL issues is not mandatory, but professional development opportunities and support are available at the request of building administrators. Consequently, the district staff have tried to capitalize on the growing awareness of ELL needs and to engage with principals and teachers at every opportunity, in order to build a system of supports from the ground up for individual schools. Principals who have made a commitment to meeting the needs of diverse learners — like Lily's — have gotten teachers on board, provided extensive professional development and built school-wide norms around the education of ELL students. But principals who are less knowledgeable or motivated might not take advantage of the ESL department's extensive offerings and considerable expertise.

Additionally, the district offers training classes for high school teachers that are different than those for elementary teachers, provides translated documents and interpreters, makes available a library of ESL materials, and prioritizes ESL endorsements and experience with ELL students when hiring new teachers. Toward the goal of endorsing more teachers, the district has partnered with the local branch of a state university to offer an ESL endorsement program to its teachers. There is also a focus on the paraeducator pipeline as a way to increase certified teaching staff with ESL skills and training. To date, six former paraeducators have become ESL teachers in the district. This district provides an example of systems of support that have been built from the ground up in individual schools.

¹⁰ The state's English Language Development (ELD) standards are modeled after standards in California. These standards attempt to codify what students at various levels of English language proficiency should know and be able to do.

Eastern Washington Case Anchor — A Monolingual Case

Twenty talkative 7th graders pour into Mr. Bradley's social studies classroom to sit at desks pressed in clusters of five. "Stand up if your book is open and your planner is out!" begins Mr. Bradley. Four Spanish-speaking ELL students form one of the table groups. Along with the rest of the class, they draw a timeline in their notebooks like Mr. Bradley has drawn on the board, complete with squiggly marks representing breaks in the time period. Throughout the 55 minute lesson, dates are inserted and key words recorded on the timeline. Mr. Bradley keeps the class moving with a variety of activities from students reading aloud together and targeted table discussions, to pantomimes of words to help them remember. "What does the word *rebel* look like?" he prods. Fists form and faces grimace depicting the word. "Write the word next to 63 BC on your timeline." Mr. Bradley is using strategies designed to keep all students actively engaged, to reinforce vocabulary and to teach to different ability levels in the same classroom.

This middle school serves more than 600 students, of whom 43 percent are Latino. Growing student poverty is a major concern for school staff where many students have limited access to the internet, books, and other resources. Mr. Bradley, a twenty-year veteran teacher, has been offered less challenging teaching assignments, but he has chosen to stay. "I just think our school has been always looking at how we're going to meet the needs of our kids. Since we have these kids, since we have low SES and we have language-impacted kids, then I think we've been asked to be more compassionate and I think we are." The twin challenges of language learning and poverty come immediately to mind as he describes the instructional challenges he faces.

Because many of these students are fluent in conversational English, some teachers may not realize that they continue to need support with tasks that require them to use academic language. When asked about the number of second language learners he has in classes, Mr. Bradley explained, "We got a list of the ones that are considered ESL and in a typical class, on that list I probably have three or four.... But I definitely would say more than that are language impacted, which is different than the list."

Like many classroom teachers, Mr. Bradley perceives not speaking the student's language as a barrier to instruction. "I think just knowing the language is my biggest thing," Mr. Bradley explains, "I've tried a couple of times. I've gone to Mexico for three weeks." Mr. Bradley is referring to a local program in which teachers go to Mexico during the summer break and stay with extended families from the community. The principal describes the positive connection for school staff with the local immigrant community as a result of the exchange program:

When you come back, people are like, 'Oh my *tía* said she met you [there]. Do you remember that black truck that was next to the orange shop? That's my uncle's truck!' I mean, so much a part of connecting with them culturally is not being afraid and being a little bit on the adventurous [side]... If you are not culturally diverse by birthright, you have to make yourself culturally diverse by adventure.

But the district doesn't expect teachers to learn Spanish as a primary means of improving instruction. Instead, the district has invested heavily in professional development and other supports for classroom teachers. The Guided Language Acquisition Development (GLAD) training and STAR Observation Protocol have become important components of professional development support for classroom teachers, with the goal of every teacher in the district receiving training. While GLAD specifically promotes instructional strategies for working with second language learners, the STAR Observation Protocol helps educators reflect on their instructional practices to align them with educational reform efforts. According to the district's bilingual coordinator, GLAD incorporates many good teaching strategies in one package. However, the district has learned that professional development alone won't result in sustained changes in professional practice without accountability and support for teachers to use it. The district created R&R (Refresh and Review) monthly meetings for teachers who have gone through the trainings to refresh their skills, develop units and prepare materials.

Not far from Mr. Bradley's middle school, a feeder elementary offers a dual language program in which students receive literacy instruction in Spanish in grades K-2 and transition to English in 3rd grade. In this dual language program, students study math in English at all grade levels, and science and social studies in Spanish at all grade levels. The impetus to move to a dual language model from a transitional bilingual program six years ago was to turn around a school that had "flat-lined." Test scores were not improving. Teachers were using very traditional approaches and many ELL students were not making progress.

The principal and a group of interested teachers began researching dual language programs and took the opportunity when the school closed for renovation to re-open with a new approach and different programs.

A primary focus of the building has been instructional improvement and every teacher in the building has received GLAD training. Instructional coaching is a critical piece of the support for teachers. The reading coach, a veteran teacher in the building for 13 years, described the effort to support ongoing teacher learning in conjunction with the training they had received:

Now it's just continuing to use those best practices and supporting teachers how to find that balance of leaving the 'This is what I've always done, and what I'm comfortable with' to 'This is what I really need to be doing.' ... so being able to support them and encourage them and cheerlead with them and digging in there and helping them make materials that are needed and team teaching and those kinds of things to ensure that's being done.

The building leadership also works to keep supports for teachers strategically aligned. Unnecessary meetings are reduced and teaching staff are encouraged to maximize working together on instructional issues, such as a detailed review of student progress by grade-level teams: "We sit down and go through kid by kid, ...we talk about every single kid — our low kids, our middle kids, our high kids. How are we enriching the high kids? How are we moving the average kids? How are we moving the low kids? Just that big differentiation piece in reading and literacy." What do teachers in this school lack? Bilingual materials, according to the reading coach, "They spend a lot of time making their own materials. A lot of time and yes, it's time well spent, but if it were already there, could it be time better spent? Yes...so more materials is really critical. Now that we're dual K-5, materials at higher grade levels."

The district has harnessed broad community support for their programs and has been intentional in seeking to draw in the Spanish-speaking community through a night school program for parents offered November through February. The night school, held in Mr. Bradley's building, is a collaborative effort between a local community college and the school district. Approximately 300 parents annually attend GED and English classes at various levels. A unique aspect of the program is that it also brings in some native English speakers who want to learn Spanish. One of the classes includes both native English and native Spanish speakers, and instruction is provided as an "adult dual language immersion" class. The night school is seen as an important way to bridge cultural, social and linguistic gaps among adults, and for students to see their parents learning the language as well. Mr. Bradley describes the night school program:

I think our night school has been a big draw for the community, especially the Hispanic community. It gets them to come in, and these are the parents of the kids we have. I think of them just coming to the same rooms that their kids have, doing assignments. Like last night, in my room they had a history class and it's just kind of interesting that the parents of the kids are taking classes that the kids are also taking. I just think that's a great connection there.

This district in Eastern Washington provides another example of the challenges teachers face and the supports put in place to help them meet the needs of their second language learners.

The two case anchors serve as a reference point and foreshadow the themes discussed in the remainder of the report. In the case studies, we find that district and school leaders intentionally, purposefully, and knowledgeably create the conditions to support the work and learning of classroom teachers and enable high quality instruction for ELL students.

EXAMINING SYSTEMS OF SUPPORT FOR CLASSROOM TEACHERS

The findings from the study are organized around four major themes. Theme 1 explores changing working conditions and the instructional challenges that general education teachers face in meeting the instructional needs of ELL students. In the second theme, we identify four areas of support which teachers indicate help them to work effectively with ELL students. These four areas include opportunities for professional learning, staff support, collegial community and collaboration in the school, and access to appropriate curriculum and materials for second language learners. It is the alignment, integration and coordination of these four elements that can create a system of supports for classroom teachers. Theme 3 addresses the leadership challenges in creating and sustaining a productive support system for teachers. The final theme focuses on school and district efforts to leverage resources and build community relationships to better support ELL instruction.

Theme 1: Instructional Challenges Facing Teachers

In Theme 1, we discuss some of the academic learning needs of ELL students and the instructional challenges classroom teachers routinely face in working with them. Increasing cultural and linguistic diversity has resulted in a mismatch between the needs of ELL students and the preparation and support classroom teachers receive to work with them. However, many of the teachers we interviewed found support and guidance in their schools and were fortunate to be in environments that specifically addressed these issues. Nevertheless, schools and districts wrestle with providing appropriate supports to students and helping general education teachers to meet those needs.

Changing Student Populations

Over the last thirty years, the number of second language learners has risen substantially in Washington state and nationally. An elementary school principal in Western Washington described the rapid growth in the number of ELL students in her school in the following way:

...in the course of one summer, from spring to fall, we went from like two to three percent to 14 percent [ELLs] because we had a new housing development come in that a lot of Eastern European families moved into in that area. And so that really created the need to get us going in our work together.

Second language learners as a group are diverse. In the communities we studied — and in the state as a whole — teachers are facing one of two distinct profiles of language diversity. In the first, a single language other than English predominates, and in the second, multiple non-English languages are present. In some Washington communities, as was the case in our Eastern Washington districts, the majority of students are Spanish-speaking, while other areas of the state experience

a number of cultures and languages within a single neighborhood. Due to a rapid increase in the immigrant population in Western Washington, urban and suburban districts often serve multiple language groups.

In all of the case study sites, the districts' goals and strategic plans were not substantially different for the ELL population than for all students, because these districts view increasing poverty as one their greatest challenges. Many migrant and immigrant families face extremely difficult financial circumstances. In some communities, shifting student populations have resulted in greater socioeconomic diversity. These students represent cultures and social classes that often are different from the teacher's. An elementary principal in Western Washington explains:

We have a little more diversity in the make-up, the socio-economics of our community. Now we have everything from Section 8 housing... to some very high incomes, very high incomes and everything in between.... When we first opened, we were a lot more just a middle class suburbia kind of place and now we're much more diverse.

Schools have changed from a fairly predictable population of students to a highly complex student body with a diverse range of learning needs. This highly varied student demography is a cultural and linguistic mismatch with the state's teacher workforce. As in many states, classroom teachers in Washington are largely white (93 percent, a figure that is virtually unchanged over the last 10 years) with middle-class values, experiences and norms. The majority of teachers in the Washington workforce have been teaching in the same schools and districts for many years. *For the most part, teachers' training, skills and experience have not prepared them for working with students for whom English is not their primary language.*

Changing Expectations and Responsibilities for Teachers

Efforts to integrate most ELL students mean that teachers often encounter a broad range of learning styles and ability levels in their classes. *As districts attempt to realign services for ELL students in connection with general education, schools and teachers face the realization that these students are part of their student population and not just the responsibility of the bilingual teacher or the ESL department.* One school leader described the change as "...helping our general ed teachers understand that they serve all students, and that ELL and special ed and Title [specialists] are there to support them in that work, not to do the work for them. That's a huge shift for our people."

No one would dispute that diverse classes with a broad range of student learning needs can create a demanding teaching environment. "The difficulty from an instructional point of view," explains a high school English teacher, "is trying to instruct various populations within classes. It used to be you would have a special ed kid or two in class, an ELL kid or two in class. Now we have distinct populations within each class. You have a half a dozen ELL kids, half a dozen special ed kids, you'll have a half a dozen kids who are on track..." Pedagogically, teachers in these classrooms must learn how to adapt their instruction to address a broader range of learning abilities.

One of the biggest obstacles for ELL learners, especially in the content areas, is what ELL specialists call academic language. A second grade teacher explained, “I don’t think teachers understand that there’s a difference in the two languages: academic language and the language we speak every day — basic language.” Language acquisition is a complex, contextualized process that takes time and practice. Language research indicates that students need five to seven years to attain academic proficiency in a second language (Cummins, 1981). Many classroom teachers will have second language learners in their classrooms who may not be identified as such because they have been transitioned out of the school’s formal program. In those cases, students have passed the state’s proficiency test and are transitioned out of the program, but they are still not yet ready to fully participate in a general education classroom. Because students may be fluent in conversational English, teachers may not realize that they continue to need support with tasks that require them to use academic language.

Learning a second language can often be more difficult for students without a strong foundation in their first language, and even more so if they cannot read or write in their native tongue. A high school ESL language arts teacher described some of her students in the following way:

They are Russian, they speak fluent Russian but they cannot read or write. So they don’t have any basics in their *native language*, just the speaking knowledge. And I need to teach them to read and write in English. So this is challenging.

The increasing role for general education teachers in serving ELL students also requires a move away from a deficit model to appreciate these students’ capabilities and the difficulty of the work they are doing in a second language environment. Part of the challenge for classroom teachers can be a lack of knowledge about language acquisition or cultural differences. Students’ perceived slowness to read or respond, grasp concepts, or perform well on assessments may be misunderstood as a lack of effort or a learning disability that warrants referral to special education. Distinguishing between those students who truly need special education services from those who would benefit from language accommodation is important. An elementary principal described it this way:

Most of all, I think it’s that intentionality of being very aware of all your learners and particularly ELL kids who need different kinds of support than maybe other kids — they need a little more opportunity to process because they’re doing those translations in their head and so they need a little more wait time, they need those kinds of things.

Even in well-planned and carefully designed programs, second language learners can encounter a measure of segregation and isolation from other students and learning opportunities. Some of the participants in the study worried aloud about these issues. In offering bilingual programs, school administrators acknowledged that students may not be integrated into the school in the same way as other students. At middle and high school levels, where separate sheltered language instruction classes are often provided, school structures, class schedules, and bus schedules often aggravate opportunities for ELL students to engage with their peers in social events and activities. *Part of changing the roles and expectations of teachers is developing the ability to see the larger social needs of students and consider how aspects of the school’s program may compound these issues for students.*

Changing Instructional Practices

“If only I could speak the language of my students!” This was the first response for many teachers to the question, “What do you wish you were better prepared to do in working with your ELLs?” Most teachers readily offer that speaking the languages of their students would help them in working with second language learners. Their response makes a good deal of common sense. The ability to speak a child’s home language would allow teachers to directly utilize students’ background knowledge, a key factor in learning. Teachers also cited a lack of strategies for working with ELL students. In some cases, teachers simply don’t have the training or experience to know how to make that happen. As one high school teacher stated, “I wish I were more comfortable. I just don’t feel like I have the tools... I just don’t have any particular training in it [working with ELLs], so I struggle with it.” *The challenge is for teachers to adapt their instruction to meet the needs of the second language learners in their classroom.*

Students bring with them knowledge and experiences which may be invisible to certain teachers. The students’ culture and heritage can be part of a successful academic experience when teachers know how to build on it. What the ELL student brings from their home culture is an asset that can add value to the school community. However, when teachers fail to recognize this, they lose the opportunity for rich engagement among students and school staff.

Finding a balance between academic rigor and students’ language development can be a difficult task for teachers. Teachers may be empathic toward the learning challenges of second language learners, but low expectations or a lack of rigor in their teaching can inadvertently further disadvantage these students. There can be a misunderstanding of their students’ capabilities or an inability to tap into their academic strengths in certain areas. Scaffolding instructional experiences and balancing appropriate learning expectations are crucial for a successful academic experience for ELL students. For example, the amount of reading and writing that is required for middle and high school students can become a barrier. A paraeducator explained:

If you looked at the content of these textbooks, even native speakers, they have problems and they struggle. So our students — with that load of work that they have to do to read and to learn the vocabulary that they have no connection with at all in their native language — they struggle. Teachers frustrated, students frustrated.

Another challenge for teachers is access to grade and content-appropriate curriculum and materials for ELL students, particularly at the secondary level. A middle school teacher explained, “It would be nice to have resources that I don’t have to go hunt for.” Others cited a need for more materials to supplement or change already existing curriculum. Some teachers described the “holes” in general education curriculum and the extensive time and effort they expend to adapt the curriculum to make the material accessible to their ELL students or simply create materials from scratch because they do not have what they need for instruction. In a few cases, teachers tried to “water down” grade-level curriculum which “didn’t work — at all,” and often resorted to trying

to find materials that were below grade-level because the level of English was more appropriate. In particular, secondary teachers cited, “building the curriculum as we go,” as a major challenge to their instruction of ELL students.

Additionally, teachers need to take into account the realities of access to information and technology for ELL students when giving class assignments. Some students come in without the technical skills to be successful in a general education classroom. A high school administrator explained, “They just assume you know how to jump on [the computer] and do PowerPoint, and... the PowerPoint’s the dilemma, not the lesson.” Even with computer skills, students may not have access to a home computer, and staying after school to use a computer lab becomes complicated when bus schedules dictate transportation options.

A danger for these students is disengagement and dropping out of school. Elementary students who continue to fall behind and are unable to make progress or pass tests may be in serious danger of leaving school early when they reach high school. High dropout rates for this population are well documented. The economic reality for many of these families is that children are expected to help support the family, and completing high school or repeating a year in school can be a difficult decision. Secondary ELL students in the case study schools were fortunate to find support and guidance among teachers and staff who talked with them about future plans and helped them with a collection of evidence to meet graduation requirements and completion of a culminating project. This, too, reflected teachers making an effort to adapt their instructional practices to support the learning needs of their ELL students.

Changing Professional Relationships

The role of support staff serving ELL students has shifted dramatically in some schools, changing the nature of teachers’ professional relationships. Supporting ELL students in general education classrooms is no longer about someone else taking the student out of the room for instruction. Rather, the goal is to provide support for students within the classroom that is aligned with what is happening for all students. With the move to integrate ELL students, professional staff can become a regular part of the teacher’s classroom, coming and going throughout the day. Paraeducators, ESL specialists, and literacy and math coaches may serve in a variety of support roles within general education classrooms, which require planning and coordination with the classroom teacher. A district ESL specialist explained the challenge of push-in support in the classroom:

...the strongest program is going to happen when teachers and paras are working as instructional teams to meet the needs of the ELL students. To talk about the formative assessment pieces, to share data, observations, all that back and forth, and to draw on each other’s unique experiences — the expertise of the classroom teacher, the expertise of that ELL person that’s in there. So I think that probably the strategies of pushing in obviously is huge... but adding that collaborative piece and trying to expand that, because that’s doing more to raise the awareness in buildings of what paras can do and how to work with paras.... Like, okay, I want to use her but I don’t know what to do with her. Or I want to talk to him, but I don’t know what he knows....

Collaborative activities require time for planning and preparation, and time is often difficult to find under the best of circumstances in schools. Expectations around engagement with other professionals in the building can be challenging for classroom teachers. A paraeducator in an elementary school explained the difficulty of navigating professional relationships, especially for new teachers:

...I think it would really help us to kind of get on the same page with teachers... especially for the new teachers, to kind of educate them on what the program is about, because ... new teachers are kind of confused about what we're doing in the classroom... But it really takes time to get to know each other and get into this collaborative group.

Support staff also can be a resource for classroom teachers in helping to determine why a student may be struggling or to suggest ways to intervene. This often takes place through a diagnosis of the student's skills, using various forms of assessment. Assessment is often a particularly challenging aspect of working with ELL students. Many classroom teachers know very little about the state's primary assessment for second language learners, the Washington Language Proficiency Test (WLPT-II) or the ways in which the information gained from this and other instruments, can be used as a tool for guiding and adapting instruction. Some teachers in the study mentioned a lack of strong assessment tools to gauge students' oral language skills that can help inform their instruction of academic language in the content area.

All of the case study districts collected and used data about their ELL students in multiple ways, but not all of that information filtered down to classroom teachers, or reached them in ways that they could readily make sense of it. Information sharing isn't perfect in most schools, and a lack of even basic information about students can be source of frustration for teachers working with ELL students. One elementary teacher explained:

I think one of the gaps is.... I never received any kind of background information in regards to the students. The background information indicated, 'this student is transitioned out of the ELL program. They are now going into your classroom, be careful!' I mean that was about it. I had no idea how long, maybe they'd been in the country, I had no idea what test scores were because those were not readily available to me.

In the case study districts, data and assessment challenges were often mediated by other school staff who provided specialized assistance to classroom teachers.

Overall, teachers found their working relationships with other staff members to be constructive and supportive, but also acknowledged the time constraints in trying to coordinate with them to make things happen. When the work of support staff was aligned and integrated with ongoing school improvement efforts, teachers were able to make better use of their time.

Finally, engaging and involving parents in the school can be a critical component in meeting the needs of second language learners — and a challenge for teachers. Unfortunately, many schools don't know how to support parents of ELL students and encourage deep engagement. As a secondary teacher explained, "Every parent wants what's the best for their kid — it doesn't matter where you come from. And so with immigrant families, they want the same, they want the best for their

kid. They just don't know how to give their kid that same support that an English speaker perhaps already has." The teacher's perspective illustrates the way that school personnel can miss valuable linguistic and cultural resources that occur in the home (Moll, 1992).

Regardless of school location or context, teachers working with ELL students likely face similar kinds of instructional challenges. However, the support and guidance teachers receive to address these issues, as well as their experience and training, varies considerably. In the themes that follow, we explore how districts and schools create the conditions for formal and informal systems of support for teachers working with ELL students.

Theme 2: Supports for Classroom Teachers

The districts and schools represented in this study utilized a variety of approaches to support general education teachers in their work with English language learners. In this theme, *we identify four areas in which schools and districts have strategically provided support to classroom teachers, as previously described in the framing of the report: 1) training and professional development; 2) staff support (through specialists, coaches, paraeducators and translators); 3) curriculum and material resources; and 4) collegial community and collaboration in the school.* We highlight the manner in which these areas influenced, changed, and supported the work of general education teachers. These supports may be organized and coordinated by the district, by individual schools or in some combination.

Several of these areas of support fall under the requirements of state's Transitional Bilingual Instructional Program (TBIP). In addition to appropriate support for students by TBIP staff, staff development is a requirement for all teachers who serve these students. What distinguishes these schools' and districts' efforts from mere compliance with the measures are the ways in which they strategically integrated and implemented a set of intentional and differentiated efforts focused on the continuous improvement of student and teacher learning.

Four Dimensions of Support

Support for professional learning. The districts in the study sought to support general education teachers by increasing access to and opportunities for high quality professional development and training to work with ELL students. These targeted professional development opportunities focused on helping classroom teachers understand the cultural differences in working with specific populations, the nature and stages of language acquisition, and strategies for working with second language learners.

Across all four districts, teachers reported that training and professional development had an impact on their knowledge and instruction of ELL students. *The case study districts used a variety of professional development programs and offerings to address specific aspects of working with second language learners and were able to shape instructional practice through this means.* These efforts included context-specific and locally-developed training and materials, such as courses designed by district and school staff, or partnerships with a local refugee agency to offer classes taught by individuals from the language and cultural groups represented in the school. The districts also used nationally recognized professional development packages for working with second language learners. Two common programs included the Guided Language Acquisition Design (GLAD) and Sheltered Observation Instructional Protocol (SIOP). GLAD is a model of professional development designed to promote English language acquisition, academic achievement, and cross-cultural skills. GLAD purports to train teachers to develop instructional strategies effective for the learning of ELL students, along with the theory and research behind

the model. SIOP, another national model of ESL professional development, focuses on teaching English language development through the content areas, and as such, was used more frequently with middle and high school teachers in the four case study districts.

Many of the teachers interviewed described the professional development they received as having a strong impact on their teaching, enabling them to be more intentional in their work with ELL students. One teacher described her training in the following way, “[T]hey’ve helped. Just with my schedule, with the way I think about learning another language. My lesson delivery, the way that I talk to the kids, because I know that getting them to really engage and look at you and all these things are ELL strategies.” An elementary teacher summed up the impact of the GLAD training she received:

[H]aving gotten the training, it’s like whoa, like a huge light bulb just in how ELLs learn and how much they need to be using language and how much they need to be interacting with each other and the approach of having content language goals. I mean it’s just — my teaching completely changed I think after that as far as ELLs. I think it really changed for a lot of people because everybody is so...involved in using that, because they know that that is what’s best for kids, for sure.

For these teachers, their professional development training changed the way they instructed their English language learners. In many of their classrooms, we observed instructional strategies known to be effective for ELL learning, such as increased student talk and discussion; use of visuals, charts and diagrams; small group instruction; collaborative learning; hands-on activities; and use of tangible items (manipulatives) in illustrating and learning concepts, language and vocabulary. Other teachers noted how they were beginning to see a positive impact on students as a result of utilizing the training, such as an increase in the “depth of understanding and their engagement” and application of vocabulary to various contexts. “The students are picking up on the words and they’re using them even outside of situations.”

Teachers across the districts also explicitly pointed to additional support provided by district and/or school staff to ensure continued development of their skills and knowledge of ELL students’ needs. In one district, the district Bilingual/Migrant coordinator provided monthly “R&R” (“Refresh and Review”) sessions where teachers met at the district office to review strategies, discuss what they had implemented and to create new materials. As one teacher explained, “I mean I took this class, but I’m going to the monthly refresher courses ... it’s so important for me to continue to get training and work with my team and others to continue to have the support...” Another district provided three professional development days at various points during the school year, for follow-up where the trainers worked specifically with teachers in grade-level teams within their school. In these sessions, the trainers modeled lessons in specific teachers’ classrooms, debriefed the lesson with the teachers, and worked with grade-level teams on lesson planning and goal setting for their instruction and students’ learning.

Ongoing Staff Support. In addition to professional development, *teachers of ELL students identified ongoing staff support, particularly in the form of coaches but also through*

paraprofessionals, as key in supporting their work with students at the elementary level.

While some of the support general education teachers received to work with ELL students was provided as part of the district TBIP, the ways in which support staff were used was strategic and focused on instructional improvement. Although the coaching models varied from school to school, elementary teachers in all of the districts described how coaching had impacted their instruction of ELL students. As one teacher explained,

Well, I think whenever you have a coach that her job is specifically that, you're much more intentional.... She's tapping into what are you studying, what units are coming up, what do you need from me, here are some ideas,...if we didn't have a coach I am sure we wouldn't be nearly as involved...[or] nearly as far along... the more embedded the practices become and the more important they become to you.

In this particular example, the staff, guided by the coach and principal, had established goals of implementing the same one or two ELL strategies in each classroom. Each trimester, they focused on implementing different strategies. Thus, the coach not only facilitated the forming of these goals, but actively worked with the teachers to provide whatever they needed to implement the strategies, such as modeling, materials, and ideas for modifying the units.

Paraeducators also are a support to general education teachers of ELL students. In most of the schools, teachers spoke of the high quality support they received from their paraeducators and how the paraeducators themselves were “highly qualified.” Many of the paraeducators working with ELL students were native speakers of the students’ languages, and a good number had received training in working with ELL students or were in the process of receiving training. As an elementary coach noted,

We’ve got four [paraeducators who] have four-year college degrees. Yeah, they could be certificated teachers. They just need to do their other pieces to [do] it, but for one reason or another in life, decided not to. So we’re very, very fortunate. They’re self starters, they’re great about asking if they don’t know... most are willing to put in the time to attend trainings and go through strategies and trainings for our ELL population.

Teachers noted the strong support they received from their paraeducators in working with ELL students in small groups, one-on-one, or within the context of whole class instruction. Teachers frequently mentioned the paraeducators’ knowledge and flexibility in working with students and the important role they often play as a communication liaison with parents and families.

It's not just my ELL teacher [in this school, the paraeducators are referred to as “ELL teachers”] that is wonderful — they're all incredible. Just any need that comes up, there is that communication and that's huge. I mean I just feel supported with my instruction with her...and my room, and we work together, we collaborate.

Bilingual paraeducators often provided translation support for written documents, parent conferences and phone calls home. In some cases, specialists, office personnel or district staff coordinated these services. In one of the districts serving a multilingual population, some translation support was provided by a partnership with an outside organization specializing in work with immigrant and refugee families.

Curriculum and Material Resources. Intentional efforts increased teachers' access to curriculum and materials appropriate for ELL students, as well as the meaningful connection of curriculum across grades. Teachers in some districts reported having access to sets of literature books, non-fiction materials, and trade books as “very rich language” supports for the literacy instruction of their ELL students. Teachers in several schools mentioned access to libraries of native language materials from which to select materials for their ELL students. An elementary teacher explained how she was able to utilize her district’s ESL library to help a newcomer Spanish-speaking student who could read in her native language, but was still at the beginning stages of learning to read in English:

...I went over to the district — we have a huge ELL library in the district and they have Russian books and Spanish books and Vietnamese books, and I just went and brought those books in and she read during — while the kids were in their book boxes, she had Spanish books. And she just took off. She didn't pass the WASL the first year, but she didn't come in reading...And then the following year she passed.

In some schools, grade-level libraries contained books “built around ELL stories” and student materials for literacy and language instruction. Other teachers mentioned hands-on manipulatives and pictures as helpful supports:

So you have a set of about ten books to work with so that all the kids can touch it and see it. And we have a bunch of books with the blends at the beginning of words and different sounds that the kids can just see a picture and one word to build their vocabulary.

In some schools, teachers made connections within and across grades in developing, adapting, or implementing curriculum for ELL students. In another district, collaboration, curriculum development, and professional development were all aligned in a district-wide focus to improve math instruction for ELL students. At an elementary school, “vertical team” meetings, composed of teachers representing different grade levels, served as a venue through which to discuss the curriculum. One teacher explained:

...we've had vertical team meetings where we can get together and kind of talk about GLAD and get together on modifying the curriculum, that type of thing. So that's been pretty good...we're really trying to look at curriculum and how to meet learners. That's been a huge support piece...

In another elementary school, teachers chose to focus on their science curriculum, but also utilized cross-grade level collaboration to modify the curriculum and provide each other with access to materials for ELL instruction.

Secondary teachers often did not have the same level of access to grade- and subject-specific curricular support and materials for their ELL students. Due to the complex language, concepts and difficult vocabulary encountered in high school subjects, finding grade appropriate texts and materials at the right level of English for students can be difficult. Aligning professional development and curricular supports was also seen as a challenge for some secondary teachers. In response to these challenges, more attention was being paid to providing curricular and material supports for

secondary school teachers of ELL students. Another district had chosen to focus on developing a secondary level ELL curriculum using the expertise of its ELL teachers. According to an ESL teacher in this district,

[B]ased on our needs, we work during summertime creating our curriculum... We need to do something to make it work for us... One teacher from the high school participated in the program, in that work, and now...during our teaching year, we meet together and we discuss the curriculum and what's good, you know what needs to be improved and so on – we just really wanted to do that across the district.

Collegial Community. Finally, teachers frequently spoke of the collegial community in the school and the support that colleagues gave each other in the form of sharing knowledge and materials, planning, and moral support. As one teacher summed up, “We really use each other as resources too.” Opportunities for collaboration were often related to ongoing professional development efforts and supported changes in instructional practice. “[I]t’s been nice that they are making an effort to get a huge amount of us trained so that we can work collaboratively together and so that’s been a good piece, too, is the collaboration. Being able to share ideas and going okay, what works, what doesn’t work and kind of just that support piece has been huge.” Indeed, in a majority of the elementary schools in the study, school leaders had arranged for all general education teachers in the school to receive professional development training for working with ELL students. *Having a critical mass of teachers with common training around ELL issues facilitated collaboration and instructional improvement efforts across the school.*

Teachers in schools with a collaborative and student-focused culture talked about the hard-working, supportive team atmosphere as something special about their schools, and related it to their ability to consistently access support for their ELL instruction. Many teachers explained how the collaborative team structure facilitated their ability to access other supports such as professional development and materials for their instruction.

My team ended up coming in on a Sunday and we do planning kind of for the whole year in outline. We were like, let's review, let's change things around... But being able to go to the meeting and have some time to work on it and you're also collaborating because you're talking to other people that were at the class with you and saying, 'Now what are you working on, how often are you doing that? Oh I want to add that in, too,' type of thing.

This combination of professional development and teacher community seemed to be particularly powerful, as teachers were not only utilizing their school community to put into practice what they had learned, but the staff experience of training together also served to strengthen the collaborative school culture.

A strong sense of school community and working in collaborative teams facilitated ongoing communication among teachers around ELL instruction, which also enabled teachers to problem solve and make informed decisions about how to meet their students’ needs as a team. As one teacher described,

... And so it's worked better...our team is really open about talking about things if we're having trouble with something. Almost, I think all of us have taken, just about all of us, have taken the GLAD training – we've had a lot of other trainings and things through the district. So we're pretty open about saying wow, I have this kid, it's not working.

While formal Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) were recognized as a source of instructional support, some teachers noted that this was not where work regarding ELL students, their learning, and instruction was typically discussed. In a few schools, school learning communities were just being established or were in their second year of implementation. In those cases, the focus seemed to be on developing collaborative relationships among the teachers and staff and incorporating and normalizing activities as part of the school culture. In other schools, the focus of staff collaboration was on implementing school-wide improvement initiatives or the adoption of new curricula. Others indicated that time for professional collaboration was used to discuss the learning needs of all struggling students, including ELL students, but not specifically this population. The school culture and collaboration, in combination with other supporting structures, enabled these teachers to focus their work with ELL students and work effectively as a team.

Challenges in Creating and Sustaining Systems of Support

Alignment, integration and coordination are key to creating systems of support for general education teachers who are working with ELL students. In schools and districts where systems of support were focused on instruction of ELL students, teachers were able to clearly articulate what those supports were, how they could leverage them to improve instructional practice, and identify areas for improvement. In these instances, teachers could identify areas for improvement — evidence of a system of supports built on an inquiry cycle. Teachers mentioned issues such as more time with the ELL paraeducators for planning and coordination, more time to work with ELL students in the classroom, opportunities to observe others teaching, and more time to create or obtain materials.

At both the secondary and elementary levels, classroom teachers' prior experiences, training, and background in working with ELL students played a major role in their ability to seek out and leverage supports for their instruction, regardless of the level of coordination. Teachers who were successful at utilizing these supports often had personal experiences living or traveling abroad, learning a new language or had gone through the public school system as ELL students themselves. Some had prior professional experience working with ELL students from other states or received teacher training that focused on instruction for this population. In one elementary school, teachers with considerable experience working with ELL students were able to seek out and articulate how they utilized available supports. These teachers explained at length about how they actively collaborated with ESL specialists and staff, sought out coaching, and constantly searched for ways to improve their instruction.

For those teachers who had little prior experience working with ELL students, training and professional development provided by the district appeared to have a direct impact on strengthening the teachers' confidence in working with their ELL students. Beginning teachers were often part of a school or district mentoring program which sought to incorporate strategies for working with ELL students.

A number of schools in the study provided examples of a coherent, well-articulated, well-communicated system of support for teachers of ELL students — from the classroom to the school and district. A teacher explained how the district focus on professional development was not only supported in terms of time, materials, and staffing, but also aligned with follow-up and ongoing training. As a result, teachers were able to utilize these supports to work towards changing their instructional practice for ELL students:

So many different teachers on so many different grade levels at this school have either been previously trained or so many that were at this summer's training. So even at the beginning of the year when we're setting up the classroom, we're running into each other's classroom — I just made this project, what are you doing? [the ELL specialist] who works with us so much...so every time they're coming up with telling us these things, we're jotting notes and we're checking in with each other...

This example demonstrates how a coherent, aligned system of supports can help empower teachers by strengthening their ability to leverage what they need to effectively work with their students. It also illustrates how supports can be enhanced when a core of teachers within a school has received training to work with ELL students.

In another school, all of the teachers interviewed stated the school's clear focus on ELL students and how it permeated their instructional conversations and services. "So everyone in the school is very much aware of our English language population and always thinks about them as we are planning things." In answering a question about who leads the effort to support ESL instruction, for example, one teacher stated:

I don't know. That's a good question. I suppose [the professional development specialist] and [the principal] also. But I think that the ELL staff does quite a bit of that...And then I think that the entire team at [our school], that's what we all want, that's what we talk about. Our grade-level teams work together to solve those problems, you know our vertical teams work together to solve issues that come up. So I don't know if it's so much leader-follower, it's more of a whole team idea.

Supports, such as paraeducator push-in instruction of ELL students, are worked out among the teachers and paraeducators themselves, using student data and student needs and guided by an "overlying philosophy...that we deliver the services to the kids where the kids are," according to the building principal. Training was determined and guided by the school's professional development group, composed mainly of teachers, and teachers gave input to the scheduling of professional development sessions, as well as structuring collaboration time, on the school's professional development calendar. Thus teachers at this school were deeply engaged in a coherent system that was structured around their professional needs and the needs of their ELL students.

Despite these supports, several challenges remain for the supports to become a sustained, coherent and coordinated system, especially at the secondary level. While elementary school teachers could more easily identify available supports, efforts at the secondary level were just beginning to emerge. Providing and implementing effective supports for teachers of ELL students at the secondary level were complicated by issues such as the large number of students which teachers typically face each day, the demanding nature of the course content, and the wide range of needs among ELL students. Some secondary teachers mentioned how uncomfortable they felt in teaching their ELL students, as one said: “it’s a guessing game...a lot of the time.” Others identified professional development as lacking, and said that they needed help with their ELL instruction. Another teacher lamented, “Oh, how I wish I was better prepared. I’d say I take any sort of professional development that I can having to do with ELL.” Finally, poorly delivered professional development discouraged secondary teachers in one district from pursuing additional training in working with ELL students.

In secondary schools, assistance for teachers in the form of staff support and collaboration were often in place, but working with ELL students was not a priority. One high school teacher explained, “No, it seems like they’re more focused towards like the math or science or the content area, more than ways to help these kids, you know the ESL kids or just all of our kids in general.” The structure of high schools limited overall access and collaboration that specialists and general education teachers had with each other. Secondary teachers reported receiving push-in support for their ELL students from paraeducators, but they rarely collaborated with them, leaving the ELL instruction primarily in the hands of the paraeducators and ESL specialists. Secondary teachers were aware of ESL specialists, but not necessarily what they did, nor did they identify them as a source of support. A few teachers described an ESL specialist as too “overwhelmed” and busy to work with teachers.

In both elementary and secondary schools, however, supports were not necessarily aligned in systematic and integrated ways. In some schools, professional development and collaboration were established through trainings and weekly opportunities to work together, and staff were provided with coaching support. But when supports were not integrated or aligned with other school initiatives, they resulted in confusion and incoherence rather than support for instruction:

There are just so many things that are being thrown at us to try this, try this, that I don't feel like we are able to really get in and do what we need to do before somebody says well let's do this. So we've got all of these strategies and stuff that they're asking without enough prep time, enough time to give it a chance to work, for us to work out the kinks because it takes us a while...So a lot of stress that way, a lot of stress.

In other cases where supports had yet to be coordinated and articulated with a clear focus, teachers were either not aware of supports or did not know how to utilize them to help with their instruction of ELL students. One teacher explained,

I've had professional development where it was an after school training... and they taught us strategies. It wasn't really any different than what I've been taught...As for

support...I really don't...see the support structures here in place. We know who the ELL coach is but they're not in our classroom. They don't come in and give us feedback on those kids...

While it was clear that schools and districts were attempting to provide support, in some cases, teachers seemed unable to leverage the coaching, collaboration time and professional development in useful ways. This suggests that creating and integrating supports for the instruction of ELL students is complicated and requires careful integration with other school structures and initiatives.

The four areas of support — training and professional development, staff support, curriculum and materials resources, and collegial community and collaboration — were evident in the case study schools and districts. Staff in these schools identified the challenges and complexity not only in creating and maintaining these supports, but also pointed to the need for these support systems to be coherent, aligned and focused on instructional improvement. In the next section, we examine the role of school and district leadership in creating, sustaining and aligning these supports.

Theme 3: Leadership Challenges and Responses

Effective leadership is essential to the success of schools and districts. Without skilled and committed leaders helping to shape teaching and learning, there is little hope of creating and sustaining high-quality learning environments for students. Across all of the case study sites, we found school and district leaders who were knowledgeable about English language learners. In most of the districts, top-level administrators had significant training, background and experience in working with this population. District leaders were actively engaged in conversations regarding how best to serve their ELL students and the implications for their teaching staff. While there was considerable expertise at the district-level, principals and other building-level leaders in most schools also deeply understood the issues and actively sought to build staff capacity in working with ELL students.

Leadership at both school and district levels played a crucial role in creating and sustaining systems of support for classroom teachers working with students served by the district's ELL programs. In this section, we explore how district and school leaders strive for alignment and coherence in their goals for ELL instruction and support for classroom teachers. We examine elements of the support structures that were initiated at the district office, as well as those originating in individual schools. Whether changes in the support for ELL students and staff were more recent or had been being ongoing for years, leaders sought to communicate a compelling rationale to gain support for desired changes. We also explore how districts and schools used assessment data to drive home the message for change in instructional practice.

Alignment, Coherence and Integration

Moving to Integrated Leadership Efforts. Developing a strong support system for general education teachers implies, first of all, an integration of efforts among different leaders in the central office. Without attention to this issue, leadership efforts to serve a segment of the student population can easily become compartmentalized and left to the ELL/Bilingual Coordinator or Director of State and Federal Categorical Programs. *The districts we studied were searching for a more integrated approach for supporting teachers working with ELL students, some more successfully than others. At a minimum, they had recognized the need for coordinated leadership on this matter.*

The leadership at the central office played a prominent role in how each district was able to organize supports for classroom teachers. In districts in which the ELL program was placed under the umbrella of “special programs” and was not included in general decisions regarding curriculum and instruction, district leaders found it difficult to develop comprehensive systems of support that could impact the general education classroom. In the words of one district administrator, “Our ELL department at the district level is not at the same table with general ed and curriculum... I think there is a direct correlation between how we are structured at the top and how the work we do throughout the system is or isn't what we say we want it to be.” District leaders who championed issues involving ELL students were frustrated by this structure within the district-level administration

because of the marginalization it caused in decisions with regard to program structure, funding, and professional development efforts. “We have functioned, and we are not alone in this, we have functioned, and I think to a great degree, continue to function in silos....while I think we can talk about the fact that it’s about all kids, we still are structured in a way that we’re not about all kids.” Despite frustrations, this case study district included a high level administrator who understood these issues and was working to bring ELL issues to the forefront.

Central office administrators in another district had a great knowledge of ELL issues and viewed their bilingual and ELL programs as an integral part of their overall instruction. Thus, decisions that affected classroom teachers always took into account the issues that affected the instruction of ELL students. In this district, the Response to Intervention (RTI) model was used as an umbrella to focus on meeting the needs of all students, including ELL students. This approach allowed them to focus on developing a more comprehensive support system for classroom teachers that included professional development and support for improving instructional practices, access to additional interventions, and building the capacity of teachers to work with culturally and linguistically diverse students. According to one district administrator, “I’m trying to break down the silos, and RTI is the common denominator across every classroom, every kid, every level.” While the case study districts did not use the term “system of supports” to describe the ways in which they provided assistance to classroom teachers working with this population, school and district leaders could clearly articulate the efforts they had undertaken and their long-term goals.

Creating a Productive Blend of District- and School-Level Leadership Initiative

A second issue for leaders to resolve in creating a productive support system for classroom teachers serving ELL students was to engage district and school-level leaders in a mutual and reinforcing blending of efforts that set direction and mobilized resources. In the case study districts, we found examples of changes in the supports for teachers initiated at the district office as well as those originating from individual schools. In these initiatives, both the locus of decision making and communication between district and school personnel were key to the effectiveness and degree of ownership of the supports and services.

“District-driven but building-owned.” One pattern for blending district and school leadership was that while the overall initiative might lie at the central office, it engaged and energized initiatives within individual schools. In a district with a high degree of centralization in decision-making, school leaders believed that district resources were distributed equitably because of this structure. Although ELL students were not evenly distributed across schools in the district, a principal of a highly-impacted school explained,

You need to understand that a number of years ago we were all site-based and every building did its own thing. Then we had a new superintendent and [his/her] belief was that we needed to be providing equitable opportunities across the district and that

we have a lot of movement from building to building within the district, and so it's better for our students if every building is doing the same — also economies of scale in terms of purchasing, in terms of providing support and staff development.

Despite this centralized approach, school leaders felt that district administrators were responsive to their particular needs and prioritized resources to develop a support system based on that input. In describing this process of resource allocation, a principal explained how his/her school had made an appeal to the central office when they saw a need for additional resources and the central office was able to hire an ELL coach, which the school would not have been able to fund. In another district with a more de-centralized decision-making process, district leaders still managed to respond to the needs of individual schools by establishing strong relationships with school leaders and facilitating their participation in developing support systems from the bottom up.

These administrators had managed to work within the constraints of a compartmentalized program by providing a vision and creating opportunities for schools to get on board. Although some decisions, such as funding and staffing levels, were set at the district level, schools in this district had more autonomy to provide services deemed appropriate, with school-level leadership playing a central role in creating and developing context-specific supports for their teachers. This was very effective in schools with strong leaders who understood ELL issues but was less consistent across the district. Recognizing this dilemma, one administrator explained the direction he/she hoped to see in the future:

The only way to really affect systemic change is to create improvement initiatives that are district-driven but building-owned. So the district is driving it. They're saying, 'Here's where we're headed, guys, here are the goals.' But there's enough flexibility for the buildings to tailor it to meet the needs of their kids and their teachers. And that's really critical because that's the only way you're going to get system-wide buy-in.

"It's never been demystified... why is it like this?" Providing a vision for effective ELL instruction is key for district-level leaders, but equally important is the ownership at the building level. In one district, strong district-level leadership was evident in setting a clear direction for the design of the bilingual program and support systems for classroom teachers, but teacher buy-in at the school level varied. Although some teachers in this district were appreciative of the support they received, teachers' receptiveness to these supports was uneven and seemed to be closely linked to the amount of communication they had experienced around various district initiatives to support ELL students. In relation to the adoption of a particular program, one teacher explained, "It's never been de-mystified. Why is it like this? We're just doing it."

Clearly the link between individual schools and central office administrators can have a profound effect on the degree to which support systems influence instruction of ELL students. The best-case scenario in these examples came from a combination of integrated district leadership in which the ESL department was a key player in decision-making that included strong two-way communication,

allowing schools to have a voice and take ownership of these initiatives. These two conditions set the stage for the successful development of support systems for teachers that could transform ELL instruction in the general education classroom.

Communicating a Compelling Rationale

Alongside efforts to move beyond a compartmentalized approach to serving ELL students, *district and school leaders searched for ways to communicate to all stakeholders that supporting teachers' efforts to serve ELL students was central to school and district goals and connected to other reform activities.* Regardless of where the ELL department resided within the central administration, districts in this study were focused on improving instruction and developing a strong system that would meet the needs of “each and every” student. District and school leaders often used rhetorical devices to maintain the focus on the district vision and goals, and to facilitate buy-in from teachers as they initiated changes. Many of these communication strategies were also designed to help teachers begin to see ELL students as part of the regular student population and to take ownership of them, in addition to reminding them that ELL instructional strategies were good for all students.

“Serving each and every student.” Although reluctant to employ the overused rhetoric of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), district leaders mimicked this idea through similar phrases to remind teachers to provide instruction to meet the needs of each and every student, including ELL students. “I don't care where you are in the district — if you're a para, a teacher, a superintendent, a principal, a curriculum leader — whatever your role, all needs to mean all, so everything you do has to take into account the needs of all students.” Although school leaders often downplayed a particular emphasis on ELL students, using the rhetoric of “each and every student” allowed them to develop buy-in for supports that would help classroom teachers in working with ELL students, along with other students who might need differentiated instructional strategies to be successful.

“It's good for all kids.” In a similar way, leaders emphasized the broader pay-off of developing instructional practices that worked particularly well for ELL students. At a time when classroom teachers were already feeling overloaded by the demands of increased accountability, ever-changing curriculum, and a growing ELL student population, it was difficult for school leaders to rally teachers to attend additional professional development workshops or put in extra time to change their instructional practices for their ELL students. However, when ELL strategies were framed as being helpful for *all* students, general education teachers were more likely to buy-in to these supports. District and school leaders, aware of the need for improved instructional practices, employed this strategy to align instruction with district goals, to bring reluctant teachers on board, and to facilitate coaching, follow-up trainings, and peer collaboration. In describing an upcoming professional development series for secondary teachers, one district leader explained, “We're not calling it ELL specifically because we want to get buy-in from everybody, so we're framing it as

cross-curricular best practices for English language development, which ultimately when you think about our population, that really is all of our students because we have a high level of poverty here in our community.”

The statement “good for all kids” was also heard across all of these districts in relation to use of GLAD strategies. As one district administrator related, “I think teachers want to be successful and I think GLAD strategies are successful for ELL students, but they're also successful for every other kid, so they apply across the board. So I think it's good teaching.” Some districts used variations of this theme to align ELL initiatives like GLAD with their overall district goals. For example, in one district where the RTI model provided an umbrella for serving all students, GLAD was presented as a set of strategies that can help meet the needs of all Tier 1 students, including ELL students, so teachers can reach “85% of all learners.” In another district in which ELL students were spread throughout a large number of schools, the “good for all kids” argument enabled district leaders to provide specialized training to secondary core content teachers so that ELL students who may have limited access to sheltered content classes at a given school could receive appropriate instruction.

School leaders in all four districts agreed that the ELL strategies they were seeking to implement were “good for all kids.” However, there was a realization that the strategies were *essential* for ELL students, in accessing grade-level appropriate content while acquiring English. Some school and district leaders also acknowledged that the GLAD model included just one set of strategies among many that are needed to fully meet the needs of ELL students, although many considered it a good starting place in helping teachers improve instructional practices. “We think it's a good starter...but no, it's not enough...we've got the awareness level, we've got some strategies...and what's missing is the SIOP lesson planning piece...And just a little bit more sophistication in how do you understand what the needs of the kids are, the language needs and how to provide that in the context [of] the classroom.”

Matching Support System to Programs at Elementary and Secondary Levels

Integrating leadership efforts and communicating a compelling rationale was half the battle, but constructing a support system that worked in direct and specific relation to the ways that the ELL program model was configured was also necessary. One of these challenges was developing appropriate systems of support within the confines of various programs at both the elementary and secondary school level and determining how to distribute support in a way that was equitable and prioritized access for teachers. Leaders also responded to the needs of teachers and support staff in schools as the ELL population fluctuated and programs were implemented or adjusted.

Access to Support Systems at the Elementary Level. School leaders in the case study districts generally agreed that elementary students in the district's ELL program were best served in general education classrooms, either taught bilingually when feasible, or taught in English using strategies to make the language and learning comprehensible for all students. These students often received additional support from ELL specialists, paraeducators, reading specialists, and other educators

for specific interventions, but the majority of their time was spent in a general education classroom. While there was ample research to support the inclusive nature of these programs, some district leaders admitted that this had not always been the reasoning behind inclusion of ELL students in general education classrooms.

Well, we would like to include them, and it's interesting because we do that and that's really an outgrowth of we used to have very few kids, and so we included them... And I'd love to say that yeah, we designed it that way but it's really, I think, an artifact of having such diverse groups and low numbers, it's the only way we could do it.

Although elementary-aged ELL students have been included in general education classrooms for decades for this reason, an important instructional change had occurred. The classroom teacher was now seen as the primary person responsible for these students, whereas in the past, students were often viewed as the responsibility of an ESL teacher or paraeducator. For some program alternatives, TBIP guidelines identify the basic education certified teacher as the teacher of record responsible for the delivery of primary, direct instruction to ELL students. This places additional responsibility on the districts to ensure that general education teachers who instruct these students have the necessary training and support. One district leader related how the locus of ownership had changed in the three decades that she had been an educator. She explained that in the past, ELL and special education students were “taken away” by specialists and dealt with separately but that today, “We all own the kids. Those aren’t my Title students, those aren’t the general ed students, those aren’t the special education teacher’s or resource room students. We all own them.” *School leaders were using this change in structure — specifically, the increasing numbers of ELL students in general education classrooms — to encourage teachers to take ownership of ELL students and to enable them to meet their students’ needs through these systems of support.*

The nature of the elementary setting lends itself more easily to support that could be equitably distributed across classrooms. If all classrooms include some ELL students, then all classroom teachers would need access to the same support system. District and school leaders had varying perspectives on student placement and equity, that was based both on student needs and the learning needs of teachers. The overall pattern was this: where ELL students were spread fairly evenly among classrooms, the support system for teachers (through professional development, coaching, etc.) was also evenly spread; where ELL students were clustered, teacher support efforts were disproportionately targeted to those teachers who worked with the greatest number of ELL students.

ELL students were distributed fairly equally within each grade level at one elementary school with a high ELL population, but this distribution may have been influenced by the school’s diversity of languages which made it difficult to cluster students in any meaningful way. District leaders also mentioned a collective bargaining agreement that required equitable distribution of students with special needs of any type in general education classrooms. In another district with multiple languages, ELL students were clustered into classrooms by language group so that bilingual paraeducators could support them in the classroom using their native language. However,

the principal at that elementary school had also attempted to support teachers more equally by clustering ELL students and special education students in different classrooms so that all teachers could share the load in some way. This principal reasoned,

We've tried to cluster kids so that they have some supports, and when we've clustered, if we could match some languages we tried to do that and we tried to match those kids who are maybe a little further down the road in their English with kids who maybe were just getting started so that they could have somebody that could help them understand some of the things.

In both of these schools, teachers had been given equal opportunities to participate in professional development training and were all provided with similar support from paraeducators and coaches in their classrooms.

In schools with bilingual program models, content instruction was provided in the native language by a bilingual classroom teacher. In one school with a transitional bilingual model, all of the Spanish-speaking students remained in the same class together from kindergarten through third grade. While school leaders admitted that this was not an ideal arrangement and had taken steps to ensure that these students were integrated with native English speakers for certain subjects each year, this placement allowed them to provide meaningful instruction in the native language. The unequal distribution of ELL students in schools organized around a bilingual program also influenced the support system, often with greater support provided for the teachers most heavily impacted by ELL students in their classrooms and with specialized training for bilingual teachers.

The same held true for teachers in dual language schools in which bilingual students were placed into a classroom with 50 percent ELL students from one language group (often Spanish) and 50 percent native English speakers. In the case study schools, teachers clearly pointed out that those serving in the bilingual settings had greater access to supports such as professional development and staff assistance in their classrooms. This posed a challenge for school leaders who had to explain and justify an unequal distribution of resources based on the areas of greatest need:

Principals are getting really good at placing support where the kids need it...Five or six years ago, an elementary school might have 20 hours of para-pro time and you have ten teachers, so everybody gets two hours...Now when I get master schedules and talk with principals, they're looking at where the need is...So that's a paradigm shift.

Administrators also suggested that they may place teachers in bilingual programs strategically, allowing both for self-selection and selection by the principal of those most willing to work with ELL students and the most likely to take full advantage of training opportunities and other supports offered. One principal explained her selection process in starting a dual language program this way, "As I looked at people, at that time we didn't have the GLAD strategies, but what I tried to do is evaluate how much teachers had taken from the different trainings we'd done, and interest and enthusiasm because we let them know up front, the first couple years at each grade level was

going to be more work. You're now teaching second language learners all day long." According to administrators at the district level, you "go with the goers" and prioritize training for those most likely to take up the strategies in their classrooms.

Access to Support Systems at the Secondary Level. At secondary level, the fundamental challenge for leaders remained the same — helping teachers assume ownership of ELL students and taking steps to develop appropriate strategies and skills — but the challenge was more difficult to address. First, more general education teachers potentially were involved in any given ELL student's program of study. Second, the nature of most ELL programs in secondary schools provided fewer opportunities for general education teachers to take ownership of ELL students than in elementary settings. In the case study districts, ELL students at the middle and high school level were served primarily through a combination of sheltered English classes — most often in language arts and history — in which students worked with an ESL teacher in a separate classroom, and inclusion in regular education classes, most often math, science, and electives, but sometimes for all subjects if their language proficiency was at an intermediate to advanced level. This has been a common model for secondary ELL instruction in Washington state and around the country. Some schools also provided additional support to ELL students by paraeducators who "pushed in" to their general education classes to monitor their progress and assist them as needed. However, the range of preparation and support of the secondary classroom teachers who served students in the ESL program varied widely between districts and schools.

In the secondary setting, where teachers were more specialized and view teaching and learning through the lens of their particular subject-matter expertise, teachers were more likely to see ESL as separate from their instruction. This posed a particular challenge for district and school leaders in trying to design support systems for classroom teachers to work effectively with students in the ESL program. However, even when classroom teachers were interested in professional development on ELL strategies, opportunities to participate were often limited due to a variety of factors. One high school administrator mentioned conflicts with other department-specific trainings or collaboration time as an issue. Others suggested that limited resources within the district were often funneled to the places with the highest need or where they believe trainings would have the most impact, which generally meant that elementary teachers would have priority in professional development opportunities since the number of ELL students was often greatest in the early grades.

School leaders were also aware of the strengths and weaknesses of their teachers. One high school principal explained: "We've philosophically tried to disperse them and you get what you get, so that teachers don't become known as the teacher who doesn't have to deal with those kids." This posed a real conundrum as school leaders weighed the benefits of placing ELL students with the most qualified teachers versus placing ELL students equally and encouraging all teachers to rise to the challenge of serving them. This dilemma was impacted by limitations on the amount of paraeducator support available to these teachers. As elsewhere in the country, much work remains to

be done to solve the problem of effectively serving ELL students at the secondary level. Nevertheless, the schools and districts in the study had taken initial steps to recognize the problems and were searching for solutions that would get beyond the lines of least resistance.

Disaggregating Data to Inform Systems of Support

In addition to efforts to provide a more integrated approach to support classroom teachers working with ELL students and a compelling rationale for this work, *leaders in the case study districts were strong advocates of the use of disaggregated data to identify areas for improvement, shape training and professional development and support a culture of learning.* Multiple formal and informal assessments of student learning were used in the case study schools and districts. Monitoring of student progress through testing was designed to provide feedback for possible modifications to determine where further assistance or training was needed. In one elementary school, a learning specialist kept a “data wall” in her office that the staff used to track the progress of every student in the school. Students’ individual cards were moved across the wall as their assessment data showed them progressing toward meeting or exceeding grade-level expectations in reading and math. No ELL student could remain invisible in this setting. Another district used the three-tiered Response to Intervention (RTI) model to look at the type of instructional support and interventions needed to meet the needs of every child. Teachers met with a team of specialists and administrators at least three times each year to discuss the progress of each child and determine if the current supports were adequate. Site-based professional development such as planning time and assistance from coaches was mentioned frequently as an important venue for discussing assessments, especially in elementary schools. However, the paucity of assessment instruments for ELL students was problematic, especially at the secondary level.

In one district, school-wide trainings were used to highlight assessment issues. An interactive presentation with de-identified student data was used as a conversation starter to discuss the needs of particular groups of students, from the school, to the classroom, to the individual student level. Having multiple sources of assessment and background data was helpful to assess accurately the needs of ELL students. In this district, the director of assessment spoke of moving to the concept of a growth model with regard to second language learners explaining, “Why not look at it from a growth point and see where did they start and where did they end up?”

Despite complaints about the negative consequences of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and the sanctions imposed when schools do not make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), school leaders in the case study districts generally agreed that disaggregating the data for ELL students had brought these students into the limelight and fueled their cause in advocating for more resources, and stronger supports for teachers working with these students. “I would say the success is partly attributable to No Child Left Behind. I do not like the consequences of No Child Left Behind...but the fact that it exists and it has raised these students to a visible level is what I appreciate.” Not making AYP was a wakeup call for some schools, as they began to discover which groups of students weren’t reaching standards on state assessments. Several district leaders described how this opened doors

to work with schools in examining instructional practices and supports for ELL students. A district administrator described how the initial announcement of several schools not meeting AYP moved from “hand-wringing” to frank discussions about the instructional needs of special populations:

...it does force us to look more carefully at our data. So we’re now really having explicit conversations around equity. The superintendent has made disaggregated data part of the district work plan. That wasn’t happening a couple of years ago. ...So I think only good can come of that with respect to our ELL program because you can’t fix it unless you know about it, and you can’t know about it until you look at the data.

In short, the case study districts and schools used data and assessment to inform the conversation about student learning and to drive home the message for change in instructional practice. Use of data was only one of the strategies employed by school and district leaders to create and sustain systems of support for general education teachers. In addition, leaders sought an integrated and coordinated approach to assist classroom teachers, articulated a clear message regarding the importance serving ELL students, and aligned supports for teachers in relation to their specific ELL programs at elementary and secondary levels.

Theme 4: Leveraging Resources and Engaging Communities

The final theme in this report focuses on resources and the engagement of various participants, both internal and external to the school system, that impact the support general education teachers receive to work with ELL students. Actions taken by leaders in the case study districts demonstrated ongoing engagement with external agencies and stakeholders in an effort to find support for ELL staff and students. These districts and schools also provide examples of community outreach and partnerships that have resulted in greater parent participation within the schools. While school connections with the families of ELL students are crucial, we found few examples of how they were used directly to support classroom teachers. As part of an external system of support, state agencies and others have a vital role to play in helping districts in their mission to improve instruction for ELL students.

Priorities and the Allocation of Resources

For the case study schools and districts, the allocation of resources with regard to serving ELL students was a priority. The economic downturn and budgetary constraints meant that school and district leaders were facing difficult choices with regard to funding staff and programs, and the allocation of resources to support these priorities. A variety of funding sources were used for ongoing professional development, special programs, support staff and early childhood education programs, which were viewed as essential to support ELL students in these districts.¹¹

Support for Professional Learning. The case study districts invested considerable time and expense in professional training for teachers and support staff, and understood that follow up was essential to insure the implementation of ELL strategies and improve instructional practice. ELL training that involved nationally recognized professional development packages was a significant expense, often requiring three to nine days of training time and travel, as well as substitutes if teachers attended these programs during the school year. An administrator explained the district's commitment to ELL training for staff: "I'm convinced that if we get everybody through GLAD training and follow-ups and check implementation for fidelity, knowing that teachers all along that continuum, that if we did nothing else, all kids would benefit and ELLs would benefit the most."

The implementation of professional learning around ELL issues was not left to chance. Several districts recognized that without follow up, the initial training might never be taken up in practice. One district paid teachers per diem and offered clock hours to attend monthly review sessions after hours, which provided teachers the opportunity to discuss the ELL strategies they were using in their classrooms. The bilingual coordinator explained, "We thought, 'how can we get the message

¹¹ Financial support for ELL programs and staffing often comes through a variety of sources including the state's Transitional Bilingual Instructional Program (TBIP) and Federal Title III — Language Instruction for Limited English Proficient and Immigrant Students, under NCLB. Many ELL students also qualify for support under Title I and the state's Learning Assistance Program (LAP).

across — the importance that this is?’ And somehow, if you compensate it, it puts value to it.” Several districts made extensive use of instructional coaches who worked individually with teachers in their classrooms following ELL trainings.

Another district provided an extensive training program for ELL paraeducators, many of whom spoke the languages of their students. Newly hired paraeducators were required to participate in a series of trainings, and all paraeducators met monthly for follow up and professional development activities. At the elementary level, topics included the use of student data and state standards, student management, and instructional support strategies. At the secondary level, the training focused on culturally relevant practices and student management, record keeping, and collaboration with teachers. This district also encouraged classified staff participation in the paraeducator pipeline as a way to increase the number of certified teaching staff with ESL skills and training.

A long-term strategy to maximize district capacity was to invest in existing staff. Most of the case study districts had decided to train their own staff to deliver the ELL professional development packages that they were committed to using long-term. They also viewed staff training as a way to develop their professional learning communities through teachers who could become trainers of other teachers. A district administrator explained, “So our district philosophy... [is] how many people in our district can we get highly qualified or trained... so that we have the trainer model and it’s very sustainable in our district.” A secondary principal described the costs of professional development and the decision to train their own trainers, “It’s a high ticket dollar to have to send our staff out. And so I think the district has been very visionary in terms of building a system where we get the training. We help other districts by paying at first, and then we make it part of... how we are going to do business here.”

Reallocation of Staff. Another indication of the schools’ priorities was found in the administrators’ willingness to move staff and change assignments to better support ELL students and the teachers who serve them. At the elementary level, schools sought to provide additional support within the general education classroom. A bilingual coordinator explained, “We try harder in the regular classrooms and so we have a lot more paras and instructional Title I, LAP [Learning Assistance Program] people working right in the classroom in providing that small group instruction before they [students] are ever pulled out for something.” In another district, a district-level administrator explained:

...at elementary level they no longer have the resource room or the pull-out model and the kids are mainstreamed, so we don’t have those rooms anymore, and those teachers or those FTEs were freed-up to pay ELL coaches on the ground in the rooms to help coach mainstream teachers...And that’s paid off — that’s paid off a lot, because they really have the ELL kids on their mind.

Secondary schools used classified staff to support a push-in model for ELL students in specific content classes. Bilingual staff or staff with expertise in a particular content area were sometimes reassigned to another school to better support these students. In particular, district leaders were constantly watching as student populations located and relocated within their district boundaries

and moved staff around accordingly. In one district, the student population had shifted to more Latino families and fewer Russian-speaking families in the last two years. The district moved both certificated and classified staff to ensure that the schools had individuals who could speak the languages of their students and connect to the families.

Another issue for schools serving ELL students was finding enough qualified educators. When the case study schools and districts were unable to hire qualified staff, they often were forced to make tough decisions. A secondary principal provided an example:

We've had to make a compromise this year. We did not have an adequate pool of ESL / ELL-endorsed candidates that applied for the position that was vacated... so we had to compromise our instructional coaching model to have our instructional coach, coach only in the morning and have [him / her] be our ESL / ELL teacher in the afternoon.... So we compromised our professional development and our support to do the work for our teachers so that our ESL and ELL kids could really get some quality instruction.

Additional Staff Support and ELL Programming. The case study districts and schools were staffed with a wide range of individuals hired specifically to support ELL students and their families. These staff included intervention specialists, social workers, bilingual paraeducators and community liaisons. At the high school level, one school used certificated staff to support a class for ELL students working on a collection of evidence to meet graduation requirements around the culminating project. Some staff positions were partly or fully supported out of grant funding or a combination of district and state monies. These individuals often provided direct support to students and their families, but also were a resource to classroom teachers. An elementary building principal described using available resources to support specific activities for ELL students in her school:

We've used... a variety of resources to do academic clubs, or before and after school clubs for our second language learners. We've had two first grade teachers who would do breakfast clubs and have kiddos come in the morning, and then pretty soon siblings are coming. It's great, and they do all kinds of really fun activities but are really developing those language skills for kids and then tied in to literacy.

Investments in Early Learning Programs. Several districts invested heavily in early childhood education programs and kindergarten because they believed these programs would provide assistance to young children in need of language support. A district administrator explained the priorities of his district:

We have a strong preschool that's almost all Hispanic. We went to all-day kindergarten — we cut other programs... because we thought we would get the most bang for our buck...so anyway, early childhood is really good — that's one program that I absolutely, no matter what cuts they give us this year, we are not going to touch our all-day kindergarten.

In the midst of the economic downturn and concerns about funding, all of the districts were able to clearly articulate priorities around their ELL programs, such early childhood learning, professional development and staffing.

Coping with Funding Inadequacies. Leaders in the case study districts felt that support for ELL programs and staffing was insufficient to meet the increasing need. In response, some districts have used monies from Initiative 728 to support ELL professional development activities and staffing for ELL students. In addition, local districts networked with each other, shared information, and collaborated on some activities, such as professional development, as a way to cut costs. School and district leaders in the case study districts also sought support from grants, community organizations and agencies. The connections with local agencies and community organizations provided not only additional resources but also opportunities for partnerships and outreach to better serve the families of ELL students.

Community Partnerships and Outreach

Community outreach and partnerships resulted in increased parent participation and engagement with the case study schools. District and school communication and outreach within the ELL community was an important area of focus for the districts in the study. Several building principals identified helping ELL families to feel welcome in the school as a main challenge for supporting their children. An elementary principal explained, “We’re trying to be real proactive and provide opportunities for families to come in and feel safe. I think a lot of our families, based on their experiences in their own cultures with government and with structures of school, you [parents] didn’t go to school for good things. You didn’t go to school because you were going to hear good news.” This building principal tried to bring families into the school through a variety of activities, from family potlucks to ELL classes and computer labs. In several schools, parents and staff emphasized the importance of bilingual school secretaries and other staff in welcoming parents. A bilingual parent explained what it meant to have a Spanish-speaking secretary in her daughter’s school:

That’s another thing that they always make a point of having at this school, is a Spanish-speaking secretary. If the first person you see when you come in speaks Spanish, that definitely helps people feel comfortable. And then of course all those teachers who speak Spanish, and aides that speak—lots of aides here speak Spanish... So I think that definitely helps to get the parents in because they understand.

An administrator described the district’s successes in terms of building a strong base of trust and involvement with parents and families of ELL students:

I think this district does a very good job even down at the preschool level — we have the Head Start preschool program... parents have access to family advocate people who can draw them in — can bring them into a school system and make them feel comfortable. We have kindergarten home visitor programs in our elementaries...the families feel that that is their school. They are there for their own education and for their children’s education. And I think that’s pretty true throughout our district. So I would say one of our successes is getting families involved in the school system and knowing that it’s there for all of them. Another good example is our night school program at the

middle school. It's a huge success. And parents come, again for their own learning. Students are able to participate in that process, sometimes tutoring their own parents. So I think the strong piece has been getting our ELL population involved.

The night school program, one of the three we found among the case study districts, illustrates ways in which the local community can be involved in supporting ELL students and their families, and for families to give back. At the night school mentioned above, high school students from the Latino Club trained with the paraeducators to help deliver the Spanish preschool program, while ELL parents and other adults attend GED, English and other classes. District leaders talked about the involvement of Latino parents and community members in the schools, in the PTA, tutoring and after-school programs. "You'll see more and more of their involvement in our PTA programs, and the PTA looks a little different than it used to in schools. They've helped us change.... Our Hispanic leaders in our community value the educational process and get very involved in what they can do to make sure that our ELL kids are getting involved in the system and... have the support to get through it." Another district administrator talked about how their community had transitioned to respecting and valuing those of other cultural and linguistic backgrounds:

I think one of the keys for us was bringing the culture into the school system so that we as those middle class white Americans that don't have a second language — we can learn what the strengths are of bringing in a diverse culture. So I think this community, again — maybe size-wise but also with just leadership we've had in our district — bringing in and saying, 'These are our kids. This is who we are. Let's find out what we can do together.'

Community outreach efforts were context-specific, based on local networks within the ELL community. Several districts saw the need to actively partner with community organizations. In a district seeking ways to improve support for students and families from the former Soviet Union, one of the schools held a basic Russian class which was attended by about 20 certified and classified staff. An ESL coordinator described other efforts:

...we've tried to reach to, particularly to our Slavic churches. Last year several of us went and visited one of our Slavic services and had an opportunity just to share a bit about the district, we've had that connection. Our two family liaisons work out in various community groups. We work some with Youth and Family Services, particularly with our Slavic community.

All of the districts provided translations of major documents in the languages of their students, and several offered phone message lines for parents in Spanish and Russian. Several districts tapped into student volunteers from local colleges and universities to work in classrooms; one district trained college students as tutors through the America Reads and America Counts programs. To encourage ELL student athletes to participate in sports, a secondary school provided transportation to sports physicals, helped ELL parents fill out the paperwork, and found ways to cover the costs. An administrator explained, "A lot of our medical people will give free physicals...." At the secondary level, student-led conferences with ELL students and their parents, with support from bilingual paraeducators or translators, were reported to be well-received and well-attended by parents.

The case study schools wanted their ELL parents and students to be authentically engaged in the life of the school. An elementary principal explained, "...we wanted them to view school not as only a place for their children but a place for them." For example, in an elementary school without Spanish-speaking staff, a parent who didn't speak English was invited to come in and read in Spanish to their young Spanish-speakers. The ESL coordinator explained why this was important, "...we know that we need to keep that L-1 [first language] literacy growing in order for that second language to fall into place, to build upon." As case study schools and districts sought to engage with local communities, they found support both for and from ELL students and families. Despite these efforts, stronger connections could be made, specifically to develop supports for classroom teachers with ELL families and communities.

External Systems of Support — How They Help and Hinder Schools and Districts

While schools and districts can create internal systems of support for classroom teachers working with ELL students, state agencies also provide some forms of support. In this section, we explore *external* supports provided by the state and the ways in which schools and districts find them to be a help or hindrance in their work with second language learners. Federal agencies and funding also play a role in terms of external supports, but this discussion focuses specifically on the perspectives of school and district leaders regarding their interactions with the state. *Districts and schools with a high degree of commitment and attention to the needs of ELL students leveraged what they could from existing external systems of support, but moved beyond them to create their own systems of supports when necessary.*

Not Enough Qualified Teachers. Over the last thirty years, there have been persistent teacher shortages in high demand areas such as English as a Second Language (ESL) and bilingual education. Additionally, concerns have been raised about the need to cultivate a more racially, culturally and linguistically diverse teacher workforce, one that could work effectively with an increasingly diverse student population. In the case study sites, staffing was an acute issue, particularly for districts offering transitional bilingual or dual language instructional programs, and for schools seeking to support students with culturally diverse staff.

At issue is the need for highly qualified bilingual, multicultural teachers, and teachers of color. In this regard, teacher education programs in Washington state currently do not produce enough graduates from their programs to meet the state's needs. School and district leaders in all four of the case study sites actively recruited new teachers from local and regional colleges and universities. Administrators emphasized that teachers who were not from the local area tended only to stay a few years before looking for an assignment closer to home. The shortage is not merely in the number of qualified graduates produced, but also in the preparation graduates receive. Several administrators indicated that the preparation of graduates from the state's teacher preparation institutions was, at times, inadequate for new teachers working with diverse student populations. Among the new teachers interviewed for this study, few indicated that they had received specific training in their pre-service programs to work with second language learners.

Even among teachers with ESL and bilingual endorsements, there was no guarantee that they had adequate preparation to work with the ELL students, according to administrators in these districts. In one location, some teachers enrolled in a local ESL endorsement program quit because they felt their district provided better training than the credentialing program. Some administrators felt that encouraging teachers to pursue an ESL endorsement was an important strategy to build staff capacity. Particularly at the secondary level, one district level administrator wanted to see a critical mass of teachers endorsed within each school: “I would love to see, as I said, a critical mass in each content area. I mean I want us to have science teachers ESL-endorsed, history teachers ESL-endorsed, math teachers ESL-endorsed, so that we can really meet the needs of all kids.”

Several district administrators suggested that for school leaders to effectively support ELL students and staff, principals and other building administrators should themselves receive ELL training. Principal preparation programs were mentioned as a possible venue to introduce leaders to critical issues in serving ELL students and staff. Several districts strongly encouraged building administrators to attend ongoing ELL trainings with their staff.

Attention to hiring practices was one way in which districts showed their commitment to ELL staff and students. Several of the case study districts created their own screening mechanisms for hiring ESL and bilingual staff. One Eastern Washington district developed an elaborate assessment, both oral and written, for certificated teachers, but also for paraeducators. The evaluation of written and oral Spanish skills was deemed important to ensure that these individuals were not put into instructional situations in which they weren’t fully fluent or couldn’t write well themselves in the language of instruction.

Some districts embraced the notion of local pipelines to certification or grow your own programs, while others did not. One district, in particular, developed an extensive system for training paraeducators and encouraged them to pursue teacher certification. Given the challenging teaching assignments in the case study schools, administrators were clear about the kind of applicants they were looking to hire. Other districts worked in collaboration with local universities to offer current teachers classes for ESL endorsement at district locations and negotiated funding assistance with state agencies.

Support from State Agencies. While recognizing the difficulties facing state agencies, district ELL leaders gave mixed reviews of the support they received from the state for their ELL programs. The ELL staff we interviewed had considerable expertise and had participated in state associations and conferences, regional and national networks of bilingual and ESL educators, and worked on Washington state committees, such as writing the English Language Development (ELD) standards and cut scores for the WLPT-II. Some had experience working with second language learners in other states and abroad. Some were frustrated by a lack of support with regard to technical assistance, reporting requirements, and timelines that were difficult to meet because of the way state systems

were set up. An ESL manager described how they were often ahead of the state because they had already encountered the problem and figured out how to solve it. This ESL specialist offered a broader perspective:

It seemed like for many years, I kind of got mixed messages as far as what we could and could not do — you know, some of those regulations and understanding those regulations. But in the last year or so, there's been some new staffing that has been added to the state level, and our teleconferences.... have been more efficient, more organized and that has become a pretty productive way of transmitting information to us.

Other district ELL staff suggested that the state should provide differentiated professional development and technical assistance for districts regarding ELL issues, and opportunities to collaborate with others working on similar issues. An ESL coordinator described recent state-sponsored trainings she had attended:

I mean they were not useful to our district at all. That being said, I'm sure they were to a lot of districts which are just beginning this journey. But I think knowing your districts, and saying, 'Okay, hey we've got districts x, y and z who are way over here with this stuff. What can we do for them? And we've got the 1, 2, 3 districts who are going to need a lot of scaffolding, and they're just starting' But I think, just like you differentiate in your classroom, I think you need to differentiate [training] for your districts.

Several districts mentioned that working with ELL students at the secondary level was particularly challenging, and an area in which they could use some guidance. A growing number of ELL students at middle and high schools have substantial gaps in their formal education. Of some concern was how to support adolescent ELL students who enter the school system preliterate. ELL staff in several districts suggested that it would be helpful if the state could design a different program model at the high school level to accommodate students who come in with limited language skills.

In summary, the case study schools and districts were strategic in prioritizing staffing and the use of fiscal resources. Community outreach and partnerships expanded their capacity and resulted in greater parent participation and engagement in the schools, but more could be done to create connections and supports for classroom teachers. Evidence from the case study districts indicate that systems and agencies *external* to districts provided assistance, but that greater attention could be paid to the recruitment, professional training and credentialing of teachers who work with second language learners. In the concluding sections, we review the findings from the study and offer potential policy implications.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The districts and schools in this study reflect many of the common challenges that teachers and administrators face as they move to adapt and change to meet the needs of increasing numbers of English language learners in their schools and classrooms. For teachers, the challenges stem from a role shift from general education teacher whose responsibility lay in ensuring his/her ELLs receive appropriate services from an outside source — bilingual teacher, ESL teacher, and ESL department — to general education teacher now primarily responsible for the English language development and academic instruction for his/her ELL students. For many, this also entails a dramatic shift in bringing ELL students to the forefront of their thinking about how they are addressing the needs of their students. In order to adapt to this role shift, take “new” ownership for their ELL students’ learning, and feel confident and empowered enough to be able to meet the needs of their ELL students, teachers find they need much more support in the form of further training and professional development; grade-level, language-appropriate materials; and more staff support in the classroom, such as paraeducators and translators. Many struggle when these supports are not clear, sporadic, or still developing.

For administrators, developing supports and systems of support for general education teachers in this shift in roles and responsibilities produces its own unique challenges. Administrators themselves must also take ownership of the learning and achievement of their ELL students. They face structural changes in carving out space for and including the instruction of ELL students among the district’s and school’s priorities. They must develop and shift resources and effective supports for ELL students and their teachers within the confines of a variety of ELL/bilingual programs, taking into account other reform initiatives and policies that have been put into place, and ensuring that state TBIP requirements are being met. When resources are limited, as is often the case, difficult decisions must often be made in how to distribute teacher support and access to it in an equitable, but prioritized way.

Yet, as shown throughout the report, the districts and schools in the study found effective ways to confront these challenges when developing supports for general education teachers. Indeed, in those schools and districts that are successful in providing effective systems of support for general education teachers of ELL students, professional development, staff support, collaboration, and curriculum and materials are clearly articulated, focused around a common vision of learning and achievement for ELL students, intentional in how the supports were developed and for what purpose, and coherently aligned with each other. Clear communication among all stakeholders — district officials, principals, teachers, and support staff — and strong district and school leadership are other key factors in developing and implementing supports for classroom teachers.

The form and focus of these supports necessarily vary as they are determined by and responsive to factors such as the demographics of the ELL students, the presence or absence of ELL/bilingual programs, the nature of the school and district community, and the focus and direction provided by the district and the school. For example, in the Western Washington case study districts, the ELL

student populations are extremely diverse linguistically and culturally. Instruction was provided by the general education teacher with ELL push-in services at the elementary level and content ESL at the secondary level. Most of the supports for teachers focused on building their capacity to teach ELL students through extensive, ongoing professional development and related ELL coaching to facilitate implementation of the strategies and development of materials. This was coordinated with ELL paraeducator support through the push-in model and enhanced through a culture of collaboration in the elementary schools. In both districts, staff support, professional development, and collaboration are organized around a cohesive, shared focus on ELL learning and achievement at the district and elementary school levels, allowing easy teacher access to supports provided by the schools and the districts.

The districts in Eastern Washington developed different models in response to their more monolingual populations. Both districts' ELL student populations were almost exclusively native Spanish-speaking, and as such, they implemented a combination of programs including early-exit transitional bilingual, dual language, and content ESL models. Due to limited resources and a developing awareness of ELL needs among the teachers, one district strategically centered their professional development around the dual language program, as well as paraeducator and Spanish literacy coaching support at the elementary levels. The other district capitalized on a common focus on ELL instruction and strong collaborative school and community environments to build the capacity of their teachers. Ongoing professional development provided through the district and school was aligned with staff support in the form of ELL specialists, and bilingual paraeducators and coaching.

These relative successes, however, were mainly found across the districts at the elementary level. As shown throughout the report, secondary schools wrestle with their own issues of providing supports for general education teachers. Compartmentalized programs, the presence of more stakeholders, the need for professional development relevant to more intensive secondary school instruction and the challenge of finding grade- and language- level appropriate materials all point to a strong need for not only further development and elaboration of general education classroom teacher supports, but coordination and easier access to these supports, centered on a common vision of ELL learning and achievement.

Leadership at school and district levels is crucial to sustain a focus on meeting the needs of ELL students and support for classroom teachers. In the case study districts, the goal was to communicate to all stakeholders that supporting teachers' efforts to serve ELL students was *central* to school and district goals and connected to other reform activities. In this regard, data and assessments were used to inform and shape the culture of professional learning and identify areas for improvement. School and district leaders allocated staff and used fiscal resources in strategic ways. Most notably all of the districts invested heavily in professional learning and were not hesitant to reallocate staff to better serve ELL populations within their buildings. Many of the case study schools and districts also recognized the importance of the parent engagement and actively encouraged their participation in the school community.

These efforts centered on creating and sustaining systems of support within the context of local schools and districts. But this work was not conducted in isolation from the services and supports provided by state agencies and other policy actors. Districts and schools leveraged what they could from external systems of support but went beyond them when necessary to find the means to support ELL programs and staff. Evidence from case study districts suggests that greater attention by state agencies could be paid to recruitment, professional training and credentialing of teachers who work with second language learners and the technical assistance provide to districts. As educators continue to wrestle with increasing numbers of ELL students and establishing supports for the classroom teachers who serve them, the schools and districts in the study provide positive examples of the possible strides forward that can be made in developing strong, knowledgeable teachers who provide quality education for our state’s ELL students.

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY

The key findings of our inquiry suggest some underlying themes that have potential implications for policy and practice. Within each of the sections below, we provide anchoring principles from the research and raise questions regarding possible actions to be taken by state and local educators and policymakers.

Responding to a Linguistically More Diverse Student Population

Teachers are facing new challenges in serving an increasing number of ELL students in their classrooms. This challenge stems in part from a role shift in which general education teachers often are now responsible for the primary instruction of ELL students, alongside ELL staff and specialists. *A first area of concern and action is to recognize what the changing student population implies for teachers, especially general education teachers. What do educators know about serving ELL students, and what do they need to know?* In relation to this emerging area of concern, the study findings suggest the following principle:

Principle #1: ELL students bring special needs to the classroom – all classrooms, not just those of bilingual or ESL specialists. These needs persist over time, even after the point at which these students exit a formal program that serves them, as in the state’s Transitional Bilingual Instructional Program. Their learning needs pose new instructional challenges to an ever-growing proportion of teachers. Many classroom teachers are currently not well equipped to fully meet these challenges.

Given this situation across classrooms throughout Washington state, particular challenges, questions, and possibilities for action arise for schools, districts, and the state:

- **A challenge to all schools and districts:** *Consider how well prepared your general education teachers are to educate increasing numbers of ELL students. In what ways might administrators assess their staffing and resource capacity for working with ELL students? The question is especially important to ask in those instances where the total number of English language learners is small, the problem may be less visible and resources may be limited. However, the challenges are similar since each ELL student must be provided with appropriate high-quality curriculum and instruction.*
- **A challenge to the state:** *Given the shift in responsibilities in which general education teachers are playing a larger role in serving students who are part of the state’s TBIP, the state—not only the office of Bilingual and Migrant Education, but also other units responsible for curriculum, professional development, teacher preparation and support—can engage with various stakeholders to determine the knowledge base and sup-*

ports needed for classroom teachers to effectively carry out their responsibilities. The state might clearly articulate the level of training and expertise that is expected, and develop appropriate mechanisms to support general education teachers. In what ways could technical assistance be differentiated to address the various needs of districts across the state?

- **A challenge to small districts and the support systems (e.g., ESDs) they rely on:** Small and rural districts or districts with emerging ELL student populations may lack the infrastructure to support services for these students or may have limited resources for building systems of support. *Small and rural districts, in partnership with ESDs or other entities, can adapt existing infrastructure and systems of support to increase staff capacity to serve even small numbers of ELL students.* In what ways is this issue on the district's or ESD's agenda?

In addressing these challenges, educators and others will want to pay attention to the following:

Key Dimensions of the New Instructional Challenge

- **The numbers of ELL students in any given classroom**
- **The proportion of classrooms with ELL students in them**
- **The concentrations of ELL students in schools, classrooms, or programs**
- **The diversity of languages spoken**
- **The ELL students' prior experiences with schooling, both in the home country and in the U.S.**
- **The teachers' prior experience with ELL students, and learning about effective instruction for these students**
- **The teachers' knowledge of strategies for differentiating instruction**
- **The schools' understanding of ELL students' home contexts**
- **The "visibility" of the school's or district's ELL population**

Creating Systems of Support for Classroom Teachers

A key finding from this study is that schools and districts can create systems of support that help teachers more effectively meet the needs of their ELL students. These systems of support enable teachers to align their instructional practices, receive assistance from ELL staff and specialists, and increase their sense of efficacy and confidence in working with second language learners. *A second area of concern and action relates to the potential presence of four kinds of supports for general education teachers' work.* The basic principle appears to be this:

Principle #2: General education teachers benefit from a variety of supports that provide explicit assistance and a chance to learn about effective, appropriately differentiated instruction for ELL students. These supports include opportunities for professional learning, staff support, appropriate curriculum and materials, and collegial community and collaboration. Support systems can be put in place in ways that integrate with other aspects of schooling and that acknowledge budgetary constraints.

Based on this principle, other more specific challenges arise for actors at different levels of the system.

- **Challenges to schools and districts:** Because teachers benefit most when these supports are strategically aligned, integrated and coordinated, schools and districts can ask: Have we considered how these dimensions of support may be put in place and integrated with one another, to assist classroom teachers who work with ELL students? If these supports are not in place, are there ways to adapt existing infrastructures to accommodate them? Beyond these questions, several specific considerations seem especially pertinent, based on the work of the case study districts:
 - a. *Having a critical mass of teachers with common training around ELL issues can help facilitate collaboration and instructional improvement efforts.* In what ways can schools and districts expand ongoing professional learning opportunities in ways that take into account teachers' varied contexts? How might administrators target ELL training for a core group of teachers within a school or department?
 - b. *Teachers can benefit from the use of assessment data to track the progress of ELL students and inform their instruction.* In what ways can general education teachers be supported to better understand assessment issues with regard to ELL students and receive regular updates on their students' progress? How can school and district data systems be fine tuned and better utilized to support teachers and ELL staff in the instruction of ELL students?
 - c. *Creating regular occasions for joint work on ELL issues enables teachers to think through how to better serve their student population.* How might time be provided for ELL staff and general education teachers to collectively plan and prepare instruction for their ELL students?
- **A challenge to the state:** *The state is in a particularly good position to do the groundwork on locating or developing appropriate curriculum and assessment tools that many districts could use.* What potential role could the state play in identifying and offering curriculum and materials, and assessment models that are aligned with state standards to help ELL students meet grade-level standards?

Key Dimensions of Creating Support Systems

- Time set aside for teachers to learn from each other and other facilitators about teaching ELL students
- The design of particular professional learning experiences that are targeted to these teaching issues
- Strategic staff support by ELL specialists and paraeducators inside general education classrooms
- Access to curriculum, materials and resources for working with ELL students
- Supportive school community that pays attention to ELL issues
- Opportunities for teachers to learn about the assessment of ELL students and access to data regarding their students
- School and district leadership focused on the alignment, integration and coordination of supports

Serving ELL Students in Middle and High School

As this study highlighted, the needs of secondary ELL students are significant, hard to address and often not well understood. Given that secondary schools are organized around subject-specific departments, and that ELL students enter with a broader range of learning needs, teachers are more likely to see language development as separate from their instruction. This poses a particular dilemma for schools and districts in designing systems of support for classroom teachers while also meeting students' needs. Schools have wrestled with whether to provide push-in support in regular content classes or to create separate subject-specific classes, and struggle with how best to address both the pedagogical and content challenges that are involved. The experiences of the case study districts underscore the following principle:

Principle #3: Supporting teachers' work with second language learners is inherently more difficult at the secondary level than in elementary schools. Renewed attention and potentially different solutions are called for, along with continued innovation.

This principle underscores the need for continued work at the secondary level to address the pedagogical and content challenges in serving a wide range of adolescent ELL learning needs.

- **A challenge to schools and districts:** *Support secondary teachers in assuming responsibility for ELL students and in developing appropriate strategies and skills.* What steps are school leaders taking to get buy-in from secondary teachers to work with ELL students and create models that enable both a rigorous curriculum and language

appropriate supports? Do leaders have the tools they need to engage in conversations regarding the differentiation of instruction for ELL students at the secondary level?

- **A challenge to the state:** *Schools and districts struggle to implement effective models for secondary ELL instruction.* In what ways are the state’s current TBIP models appropriate for working with secondary students and in what ways do they need to be adapted? How might the state — and other policy actors — be engaged in supporting high school teachers more broadly in their work with second language learners?

Key Dimensions of the Instructional Challenge at the Secondary Level

- **Academic rigor while supporting students’ language development**
- **Differentiated instruction to support ELL students in subject-matter areas**
- **Secondary teachers’ awareness of and responsibility for the learning needs of ELL students in their subject matter classes**
- **Availability of supports for secondary teachers to implement effective strategies in the classroom context**
- **Access to content-specific curriculum and materials appropriate to the students’ language ability**
- **Instructional approaches which take advantage of students’ home language and culture**
- **Intentional examinations of tracking, scheduling or other practices which may isolate ELL students from the academic and social life of the school**

Recognizing Leadership Challenges and Opportunities

Leadership at both school and district levels plays a critical role in creating and sustaining systems of support for teachers who work with ELL students. Skilled and knowledgeable leaders offer a vision for effective ELL instruction, leverage necessary resources, and strive for coherence and alignment in the development of instructional goals for these students. Key findings from this study suggest that leaders with knowledge of and commitment to ELL issues can make a difference in leveraging supports for classroom teachers that ultimately impact the quality of instruction for ELL students. The following principle is derived from an examination of how effective leadership is exercised in the case study districts:

Principle #4: Effective leaders embrace the challenge of creating high-quality learning environments for ELL students. They set the direction and leverage resources necessary to support the work of their staff in meeting students’ needs. At both district and school levels, leaders assume joint responsibility for improving learning environments for all ELL students.

Arising from this principle are specific challenges for administrators and other school leaders:

- **Challenges for school and district leaders:** *Mutual accountability by all staff for the instruction of ELL students.* Opportunities exist for accountability to be internalized by all members of the school community, especially individual teachers, and embedded in the professional culture of the school and district. This includes the recognition of bilingual and ESL programs as part of the overall instruction provided the district. Beyond this, several additional issues bear consideration:
 - a. *Communicating a clear focus on high quality ELL instruction is central to creating and sustaining a system of support for classroom teachers.* In what ways are district and school leaders communicating a consistent and compelling rationale for serving ELL students? How do district leaders articulate their instructional improvement strategies so that the needs of ELL students are fully integrated into district wide improvement efforts?
 - b. Even with limited resources, *administrators can establish priorities that align and coordinate resources to better support general education teachers working with ELL students.* In what ways are resources being leveraged and where might there be opportunities to better align them?
 - c. Effective leaders recognize the language continuum and unique needs of ELL students with regard to placement and support for both students and staff. *School leaders are in a good position to continue to monitor and ensure appropriate supports for students who have formally left the ELL program but may still need support to succeed academically.* How can school leaders inform and support teachers with regard to the instructional needs of students who have recently exited an ELL program?

Key Dimensions of Leadership Challenges and Opportunities

- **Leaders assume responsibility for helping staff understand and accept responsibility for serving ELL students**
- **ESL and bilingual leaders are included in discussions with other instructional and instructional support staff**
- **Clear communication of priorities for the instruction of ELL students across the district at all levels**
- **Leaders actively seek or leverage resources to support classroom teachers working with ELL students**
- **Attention to the placement of students**
- **Monitoring students' progress both during and after formally exiting programs**

Engaging Parents and the ELL Community

A key finding from this study is that community and school outreach can result in greater parent participation within schools. Efforts to engage parents are often context-specific and based on local networks within the ELL community. The study findings suggest the following principle:

Principle #5: Proactive efforts to welcome and engage families and community members are a necessary part of improving outcomes for ELL students. When schools capitalize on the linguistic and cultural resources that ELL students and their families bring, both students and staff benefit.

- **A challenge to schools and districts:** *Helping families to feel welcome in the school is an important first step to building relationships with the ELL community.* In what ways can districts and schools be engaged in community outreach that encourages parents' participation in their children's schooling? Do schools have the linguistic and cultural resources to connect with parents in deep and sustained ways? Other actions for consideration include the following:
 - a. *Students can benefit from instructional approaches which make substantial use of their home language and culture.* In what ways can schools and districts provide teachers with access to culturally-appropriate materials? If the district does not have the capacity to run a bilingual program, what are other options for addressing the issue of students' home language?
 - b. *Districts can make use of external partners to leverage support for ELL students. There are likely to be opportunities for parental engagement to become part of a system of support for teachers.* How can these efforts be further directed to help classroom teachers in their work with ELL students?

Key Dimensions of Engaging Parents and the ELL Community

- **The school as a welcoming place for all families**
- **Appreciation of the contribution of bilingual and multicultural children and families in the school community**
- **Teachers comfortable level in communicating with parents of ELL students**
- **Access to bilingual staff or language phone lines for parents to contact the school**
- **School materials printed in the major languages represented in the school**
- **Opportunities for service that genuinely engage parents' skills and interest**
- **Language accommodation for student conferences**

Addressing the Shortage of Qualified Teachers and Staff

As this study notes, finding qualified staff to work with ELL students is a challenge. Apart from the training which districts provided, relatively few general education teachers had specific preparation to work with ELL students. This is understandable given that many teachers were prepared in an earlier time, but it begs the question of what should be done now. *A final area for concern and action is the consideration of strategies to support the preparation of a well-trained teacher workforce ready to work with ELL students.* The nature of the situation in Washington state reveals that a “one size fits all” approach to addressing these challenges likely will not be effective. Findings from this study support the following principle:

Principle #6: Efforts to address the recruitment and training of general education teachers to work with ELL students should reflect a shared responsibility by state and local educators and policymakers. These efforts cannot be limited to those who are new entrants into the teacher workforce. Educational leaders should also be encouraged to increase their training and expertise in meeting the needs of ELL students.

Possible actions for consideration by state agencies, colleges and universities, ESDs and local districts include the following:

- **Challenges for state agencies:** The increasing linguistic and cultural diversity in the state’s schools provides a renewed opportunity for the state to engage with various stakeholders in determining what all teachers should know and be able to do in working with ELL students and how to increase the number of teachers with these skills. Several specific matters seem pertinent:
 - a. *Consider the minimum preparation that teacher education programs can and should provide for a general education teacher to work with students who are linguistically and culturally diverse.* Student teaching placements could be targeted to classrooms with ELL students in order to better prepare future teachers for working with diverse student populations.
 - b. State agencies and institutions have supported programs aimed at increasing the number of teachers who are highly qualified to work with ELL students. In what ways have these programs succeeded and how could they be adapted? *How might the state be engaged in articulating new models of recruiting teachers or paraeducators who have demonstrated high levels of proficiency in both English and other languages spoken in Washington?*
 - c. School and district leadership is crucial in creating and sustaining systems of support for classroom teachers to work effectively with ELL students. *In what ways could educational leadership preparation programs include training and discussions of critical issues for ELL students and staff?* In what ways can these efforts help the existing teacher workforce further develop their expertise and credentials in meeting the needs of ELL students in their classrooms?

- **A challenge for local districts and others:** School districts are in the unique position of being the employing agency, with specific knowledge of the local context and a strong vested interest in recruiting and supporting well-qualified teachers for teaching positions within the district. *In what ways might districts benefit from partnering with local colleges and universities to create or support alternative route, ESL or bilingual endorsement programs or paraeducator pipelines to increase the supply of locally qualified staff? In what ways can they encourage current teachers to pursue an ESL or bilingual endorsement?*

Key Dimensions of Addressing the Shortage of Qualified Staff

- **Minimum preparation needed for all new teachers**
- **Clear articulation of the process for obtaining a teaching credential with an ESL or bilingual endorsement and potential sources of support**
- **Regional differences and distributional inequities with regard to staffing**
- **Exploring new recruitment strategies and approaches**
- **Opportunities for educational leaders to gain knowledge about serving ELL students and staff**

This study is grounded in the concept that high-quality instruction for ELL students can take place when state, district and school leaders intentionally, purposefully, and knowledgeably create environments that support the work and learning of teachers to address the needs of ELL students. Findings suggest that schools and districts which seek to support general education teachers discover a range of useful approaches that reflect program choices, community characteristics, and the specific student populations they serve. While “systems of support” (professional development, support staff, school community and collaboration and curriculum and material resources) manifest themselves in various ways, the case study districts have demonstrated leadership and high levels of commitment to support classroom teachers in this work. The findings from this study and the issues they inform involve both state and local leadership and policy. Together, their efforts can begin to address the challenge of adequately supporting classroom teachers in their work with ELL students.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

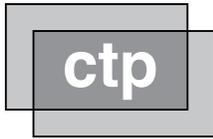
The research presented in this report was primarily supported by the Center for Strengthening the Teaching Profession (CSTP), an independent, non-profit organization in Washington state that focuses on teaching quality. This study could not have been conducted without the cooperation of the districts and schools who participated. We deeply appreciate their contribution and realize what it meant to accommodate our visits. Their candor in sharing their experiences in working with ELL students was crucial in providing a grounded understanding of what is necessary to create a system of supports for general education teachers working with these students. However, we acknowledge that the findings and conclusions contained in this report are the sole responsibility of the authors.

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Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy A National Research Consortium

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CTP studies the way policies and conditions in schools, districts, states, and teacher education institutions shape the quality of teaching and learning in the nation's elementary and secondary schools. The Center pays particular attention to the ways these policies and conditions interact with each other to influence the teaching profession and its practice.

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This report reflects the ongoing collaboration between CTP and the Center for Strengthening the Teaching Profession (CSTP) in Washington state. (See inside front cover.)

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