

Giving English Language Learners the Time They Need to Succeed

Profiles of Three Expanded Learning Time Schools



■ Introduction: Understanding the Need	1
■ Case One: Hill Elementary School, Revere, Massachusetts	7
■ Case Two: Godsman Elementary School, Denver, Colorado	11
■ Case Three: Guilmette Elementary School, Lawrence, Massachusetts	15
■ Better Serving English Language Learners: Recommendations	19
■ Notes	21
■ Acknowledgments	22

Introduction

Understanding the Need

According to the [National Center for Education Statistics](#), the percentage of public school students who are English language learners (ELLs) was, at last count, 13 percent in primary schools¹, 7 percent in middle schools, and 5 percent in high schools. And this ELL population will likely double in the coming years. In fact, some demographers predict that by 2030 the ratio of ELL students to non-ELL students could be [one in four](#)². Meanwhile, the nation's poorest schools—those serving a population at least 75 percent low-income students—along with the whole state of California already serve that high a proportion of ELLs.

Because of the rising numbers of ELL students—and the persistent achievement gaps between ELL students and their peers whose first language is English—educators are eager to identify those strategies that will enable them to effectively address the needs of non-native English speakers. (See Figure 2.) In particular, they are eager to learn how to structure classrooms and schools to facilitate personalized learning. Likewise, policymakers are looking to support those practices that strengthen a school's capacity to educate ELL students well. To accommodate both practitioners and policymakers, many organizations

Figure 1
Percentage of public school students
who are English language learners, 2012 – 2013*
by state

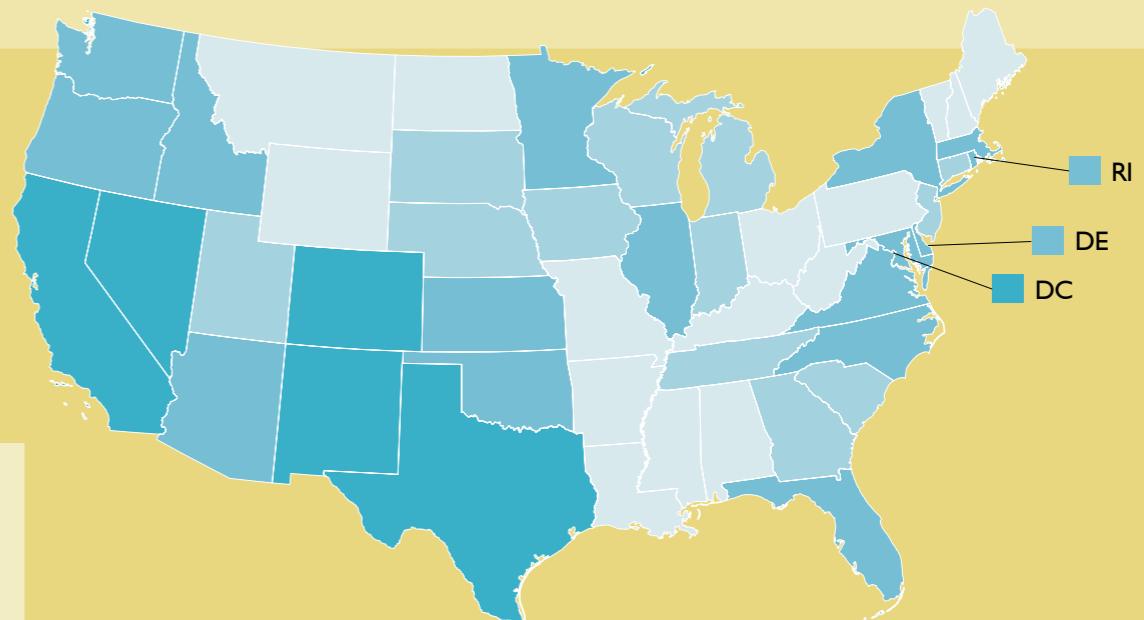
- 10.0 percent or higher (7)
- 6.0 percent to 9.9 percent (18)
- 3.0 to 5.9 percent (12)
- Less than 3.0 percent (14)



* Categorization based on unrounded percentages.

and researchers have been working to identify effective strategies and supports for ELL students and push for policies aimed at closing the achievement gaps between ELLs and their non-ELL peers.

Often overlooked in the work to help ELL students, however, is one of the most basic elements of ensuring a quality education for ELL students (as for any group of at-risk students): having more learning time than the current conventional calendar of 180 6.5-hour days allows. The National Center on Time & Learning (NCTL) has frequently



SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data (CCD), "Local Education Agency Universe Survey," 2012–13. See [Digest of Education Statistics 2014](#), table 204.20.

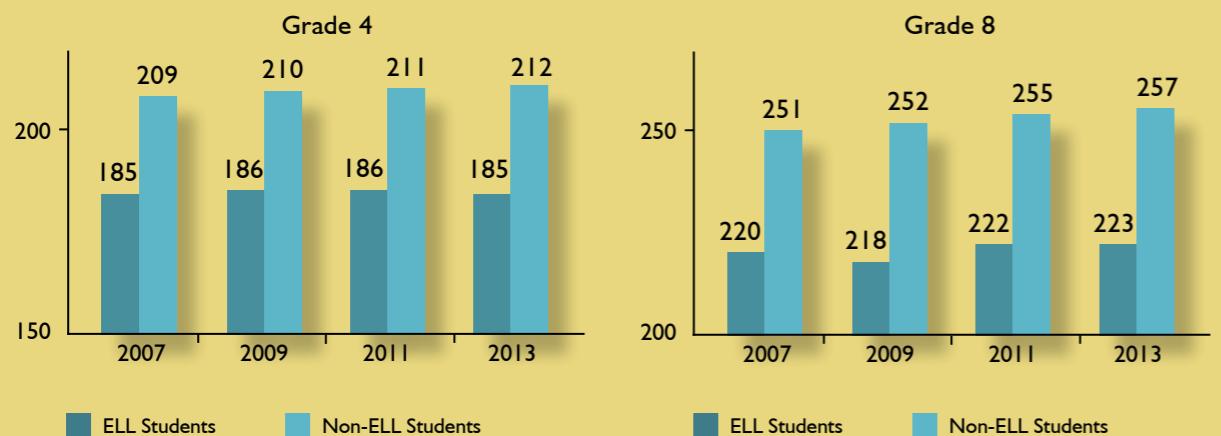
documented how an expanded schedule, when harnessed well by educators, can overcome the limitations that traditional schools face. A substantially longer day and/or year opens up opportunities to engage more deeply in learning content, to practice complex skills sufficiently, and to broaden interests and competencies beyond the conventional curriculum.³ Moreover, students gain these opportunities without having to sacrifice time in core academic classes or enrichment courses. Instead, targeted support for students (including ELLs) becomes not a punishment for poor performance, but

vital to all students' educational experience. Thus, for students who are working to meet increasingly higher educational standards while at the same time learning to become proficient in a new language, more time in school can be invaluable.

In the pages that follow, we endeavor to describe how these expanded learning opportunities take shape in three schools that have significantly expanded learning time for all students. Though the schools have each adopted their own specific means of supporting ELL students, they share many

Figure 2

Average Score on National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in Reading
ELL Students vs. Non-ELL Students, All Eligible for Free- or Reduced-Price Lunch, 2007 - 2013



SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2007, 2009, 2011 and 2013 Reading Assessments. Note that NAEP scoring is sequential and, thus, absolute score values increase with each subsequent grade band.

common practices, and, not incidentally, an overall approach of carefully identifying individual student needs and, then, applying the educational resources necessary to meet those needs. We have selected these schools from among the over 60 schools in the NCTL network—a group of schools for which we have, in recent years, provided technical assistance coaching to plan and implement an expanded school day. To showcase the pivotal role that expanded learning time, when implemented well, can play in supporting ELL students, we identified three schools from our network that met the following criteria:

- A student population with at least 25 percent ELL students;

- A record of success in promoting high academic achievement and/or closing achievement gaps; and
- Evidence of strong practices focused on serving the needs of and advancing ELL students.

These three schools are not—neither do they claim to be—uniquely capable in supporting and advancing ELL students, but, both individually and collectively, they offer many essential insights about what it takes to meet the goal of providing ELL students with high-quality educational experiences that prepare them for future success. Further, they demonstrate the value of having more time daily and throughout the year to provide the kinds of learning opportunities that are vital

for gaining proficiency in English⁴.

Following this introduction, which includes a review of key research on educational strategies for supporting ELL students, we profile the three schools in some detail. Each profile endeavors to provide a flavor of the ways in which practitioners understand and implement their mission to meet ELL student needs. The final pages offer some recommendations for practitioners and policymakers who are seeking to leverage time to better serve English language learners, just as they are aiming to provide all students with a quality education.

Interlude: In Their Shoes

Before diving into the main themes of the research, we take a brief detour to consider the challenge of doing well in school from the perspective of the English language learner. In considering the experience of the typical ELL student one can better appreciate the task of educators in serving their larger population of ELLs well. This point of view is described well in an [extended passage](#) by scholar Claude Goldenberg:

Imagine you are in second grade. Throughout the year you might be expected to learn irregular spelling patterns, diphthongs, syllabication rules, regular and irregular plurals, common prefixes and suffixes, antonyms and synonyms; how to follow written instructions, interpret words with multiple meanings, locate information in expository texts, use comprehension strategies and background knowledge to understand what you read, understand cause

and effect, identify alliteration and rhyme, understand structural features of texts such as theme, plot, and setting; read fluently and correctly at least 80 words per minute, add approximately 3,000 words to your vocabulary, read tens if not hundreds of thousands of words from different types of texts; and write narratives and friendly letters using appropriate forms, organization, critical elements, capitalization, and punctuation, revising as needed.

After recess you will have a similar list for math. And if you are fortunate enough to attend a school where all instruction has not been completely eclipsed by reading and math, after lunch you'll be tackling such things as motion, magnetism, life cycles, environments, weather, and fuel; interpreting information from diagrams, graphs, and charts; comparing and contrasting objects using their physical attributes;

Now, imagine that you don't speak English very well. Your job is to learn what everyone else is learning, plus learn English. And it's not sufficient to learn English so you can talk with your friends and teacher about classroom routines, what you are having for lunch, where you went over the weekend, or who was mean to whom on the playground. You have to learn what is called "academic English," a term that refers to more abstract, complex, and challenging language that will eventually permit you to participate successfully in mainstream classroom instruction. Academic English involves such things as relating an event or a series of events to someone who was not present, being able to make

comparisons between alternatives and justify a choice, knowing different forms and inflections of words and their appropriate use, and possessing and using content-specific vocabulary and modes of expression in different academic disciplines such as mathematics and social studies. As if this were not enough, you eventually need to be able to understand and produce academic English both orally and in writing. If you don't, there is a real chance of falling behind your classmates, making poorer grades, getting discouraged, falling further behind, and having fewer educational and occupational choices.

These are the stakes for educators as they seek to support ELL students in their learning.



So how do they help students to meet such a tall order? As we hope to demonstrate through the three profiled schools, the task is not easy and involves many moving parts, but with applied commitment and ingenuity, along with the essential resource of expanded time, it is possible to make the educational experience of ELL students one that enables them to achieve at the same level as their native-English speaking peers.

What the Research Tells Us

There is no shortage of research or theoretical models dealing with the complex topic of how best to educate students who are born to non-native-English speaking families, and

how to move them to proficiency not just in English, but in all subjects. What follows is a brief exploration of some key concepts that have emerged over the last few decades. This thumbnail sketch is intended to provide a framework for understanding the strategies the three profiled schools are undertaking in supporting ELL students and how they are leveraging an expanded school day to maximize student supports. We do recognize the considerable and legitimate disagreements that surround the education of English language learners, but it is not within the scope of this report to explore these in depth. Instead, this review demonstrates that for all the difference of opinion and perspective, the common aim is to maximize positive learning opportunities for English language learners, opportunities that are obviously made more plentiful and qualitatively rich if schools have more time than the conventional.

Underlying the research themes related to English acquisition is the reality that effective education for ELL students rests ultimately in the quality of instruction, and, in turn, the capacity of educators to continually hone their craft and foster the robust educational settings that ELLs need to succeed. Thus, as much as educators need to pay heed to those practices that research indicates have a meaningful impact on developing ELL proficiencies and enriching student learning opportunities, they must also set in place the structures and culture that promote vigorous professional learning. As educational psychologist Seymour Sarason famously wrote, "Teachers cannot create and sustain the conditions for the



productive development of children if those conditions do not exist for teachers."⁵ And within this context, there is considerable evidence that indicates that schools with expanded time are typically better equipped to generate the kind of continuous instructional improvement that lies at the heart of an overall quality education.⁶

Instructional Quality

The first, and perhaps most important, principle that derives from research into identifying those pedagogies that optimize achievement for English language learners is one that does not actually relate to this specific group of students. Rather, experts argue unequivocally that the best way to serve those learning English alongside

Summary of Effective Teaching Practices

- Clear goals and learning objectives
- Meaningful, challenging, and motivating contexts
- Curriculum rich with content
- Well-designed, clearly structured, and appropriately paced instruction
- Active engagement and participation
- Opportunities to practice, apply, and transfer new learning
- Feedback on correct and incorrect responses
- Periodic review and practice
- Frequent assessments to gauge progress with re-teaching as needed
- Opportunities to interact with other students in motivating and appropriately structured contexts

Source: Claude Goldenberg, "Unlocking the Research on English Learners: What We Know—and Don't Yet Know—about Effective Instruction," *American Educator*, Summer 2013, p. 5.

academic material in school is “simply” to ensure teachers employ those practices that characterize high-quality instruction in any setting and with any cohort of students. As the National Literacy Panel on Literacy-Minority Children and Youth concluded: “the programs with the strongest evidence of effectiveness [in promoting achievement among ELLs]...are all programs that have also been found to be effective with students in general.”

These effective practices include: structuring classes carefully, which entails maximizing time on task, and with a laser-like focus on what students should be learning; continuously integrating challenging, relevant content; valuing student voice and enabling students to take responsibility for their own learning; and encouraging the development of a broad range of skills and competencies. (See box for a summary of some of these characteristics.) When ELLs, as all students, experience classrooms with these elements in place, they are more likely to demonstrate positive learning outcomes. To take just one example, a team of evaluators tracked outcomes among middle school students in classrooms using a rigorous method for boosting vocabulary implemented with high fidelity and compared them to students from classrooms not using this method. They found that the first group developed stronger vocabulary skills, an effect that appeared among both language minority learners and their native-English-speaking classmates.

Native Language Literacy

Of course, there is also considerable research that does relate to the specific learning needs of ELLs, and among this body of work, the most significant is how to account for a student’s native language in moving him or her to English proficiency. On this question, the bulk of evidence has found that students are more likely to learn effectively in English if they first gain aptitude in their native language. Researchers have come to this conclusion by examining the outcomes of learning in a

model where ELL students are taught two languages simultaneously—in America, English and usually Spanish—in order to develop proficiency in both languages versus outcomes among students who learn in English-only classrooms. Several meta-analyses of the dozens of studies assessing the comparative efficacy of these two approaches have shown that students in bilingual classrooms consistently outperform students in monolingual classrooms.

The evidence has been so strong, in fact, that the National Research Council recommended in its landmark study, *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children*: “If language-minority children arrive at school with no proficiency in English but speaking a language for which there are instructional guides, learning materials, and locally available proficient teachers, these children should be

taught how to read in their native language while acquiring proficiency in spoken English and then subsequently taught to extend their skills to reading in English.”

Despite this recommendation, some research does suggest value in the immersion approach. One major evaluation, for example, discovered that among English language learners who had been randomly assigned to either a bilingual or English-only classroom in the Success for All program, the English-immersion students did significantly outperform bilingual education students, at least through Grade 3. Even so, the authors do not deem the immersion approach necessarily to be superior, but rather conclude that the real lesson lies in the principle described above: instructional quality is of paramount importance in any context.

Regardless of the method employed in



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schools (English immersion versus bilingual education), there is broad agreement that any pedagogical approach should tap into the essential human cognitive abilities related to speaking, listening, reading and writing that lie outside the particulars of any one language (i.e., the specifics related to pronunciation, vocabulary, syntax, etc.). Experts use the term “common underlying proficiency” to describe the process of developing the skills in the superstructure of language—parts of speech, sentences, phrases, and so on—together with the conversion of thoughts into words and, vice versa, using words to hone one’s thinking.

Duration of Academic Support

A third matter of how to best educate ELL students focuses on the span of time it takes to develop proficiency in English. An analysis of elementary students in California, for example, concluded that it took students three to five years to develop oral proficiency and four to seven years to develop what is known as “academic English proficiency,” the more sophisticated application of language in formal contexts like analyzing texts or

comprehending complex concepts. Similarly, a study of the writing portion of the Florida Comprehensive Achievement Test found that students needed to be in school at least three to five years in elementary school to close the gap and to have been in school six to eight years to close it in secondary school.¹³

The California research also revealed that this gap between ELLs and native-English speakers is not static, but widens as they moved through school. The authors editorialize, “The gap illustrates the daunting task facing these students, who not only have to acquire oral and academic English, but also have to keep pace with native English speakers, who continue to develop their language skills. It may simply not be possible, within the constraints of the time available in regular formal school hours, to offer efficient instruction that would enable the ELL students to catch up with the rest.”¹⁴

Additional Learning Opportunities

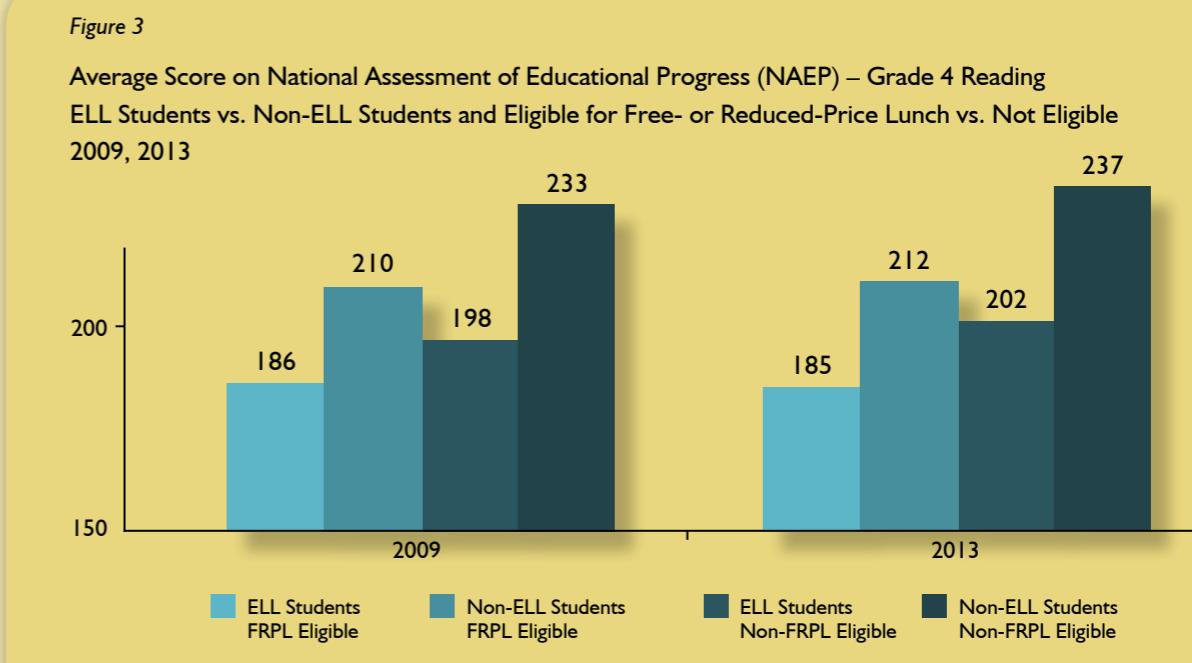
A fourth theme to emerge—and one that springs from the third—is the need for substantial amounts of practice with reading and writing, especially as it involves vocabulary acquisition. Experts from the Center for Instruction suggest, for example, that ELL students need 12 to 14 exposures to certain words to get to a level of comprehension where they can use the word in academic settings. Such exposure is particularly necessary in words with multiple meanings and which may appear in several contexts (e.g. “odd,” “root,” “field,” etc.). Considering comprehension of reading material, more

broadly, research also indicates that “repeated reading” has been shown to be effective with ELLs, as has engaging frequently in “structured academic talk.”¹⁵ The bottom line, concludes Goldenberg, is that “[ELLs] in an English instructional environment will almost certainly need additional supports so that instruction is meaningful and productive.”¹⁶

Multi-Factor Influences

The final area of research on ELL students mirrors evidence from the education world, generally, and examines those aspects outside the classroom and school that affect academic learning. Just as research consistently shows that external factors like socioeconomic status and family background wield enormous influence on any student’s

capacity to learn, the same holds true for ELL students. Some of the conditions shown to have an impact on becoming proficient in academic English include the age of students, their parents’ level of education, how long they have been living in the United States, and, importantly, whether or not they come to American schools with previous school experience.¹⁷ Poverty status of ELL students, of course, is also one of the key determinants of educational attainment. The NAEP 4th grade results, for example, show a gap almost as large between poor ELL students and non-poor ELL students as between English language learners and their native-English peers. (See Figure 3.)



Best Practices in Serving ELL Students

As one might grasp in perusing these five areas, the need for an abundance of quality learning opportunities underlies them all. ELL students enter school in America with a clear disadvantage of not understanding the dominant language of instruction. The chance of their narrowing the gap with their native-English peers is really only possible if they can consistently and methodically make connections between their native tongue and their new language, acquire and apply new vocabulary, practice using English in a wide variety of academic contexts, and do so in educational settings that emphasize both rigor and individualized attention.

The benefits of having more instructional time during the day and across the year to build in these many layers of learning and mastering English are undeniable. Having a schedule with substantially more time than the conventional American calendar of 180 6.5-hour days allows is certainly no guarantee of creating sufficient learning opportunities, but students who lack access to more time for learning find it extremely difficult to close achievement gaps.

As the schools profiled in this study demonstrate, a longer school day enables educators to embed a number of effective practices that, together, support English language learners in ways that would be given short shrift within the context of a conventional school schedule. These practices are as follows:

- **Extended literacy blocks** – Having upwards of 2.5 hours each day to focus on skills needed for reading and writing allows schools to include lots of repetition, differentiation, and engage, in one case, in a series of instructional methods that would be nearly impossible to roll out fully in a shorter time period.
- **Designated academic intervention sessions** – Using data to pinpoint student deficits and misconceptions, schools subdivide students into small groups to work with expert instructors to overcome these challenges. Further, organizing these sessions to supplement, rather than supplant, core academic classes means that ELL students do not have to miss other essential learning periods.
- **Continual support** – Even when ELL students can speak fluently and have been in the United States several years, their need to boost their academic English skills typically extend into at least the upper elementary grades, and these schools continue their individualized support of ELL students through Grade 5.
- **Teacher collaboration, planning, and professional development** – To help ensure that the first three structures are utilized to the fullest, teachers must confer with each other frequently and consistently to share best practices, identify and address individual student needs, and plan and align lessons. They must also continue to get training and support for their own learning so that their pedagogy is always improving.

In the profiles that follow, one can see how these four practices—as well as other methods intended to boost ELL student learning—are woven together to produce a holistic educational program that aids in the full development of ELL students' English skills, as well as their learning overall. All three schools are most certainly "works in progress", continually refining and adapting their practices and model to better meet students' needs, but they are also seeing considerable success now, as they have been able to leverage their expanded schedules to become exemplars. And more time helps make their success possible.

The best way to serve those learning English alongside academic material is to ensure teachers employ those practices that characterize high-quality instruction in any setting with any group of students.

Case One



As of Spring 2015, Hill Elementary School—which was then known as McKinley Elementary—occupied the same building for well over 100 years in Revere, Massachusetts, a mid-size city just north of Boston.¹ Even as the building remained the same, however, the student population has changed drastically from the early 20th century. Italian and Irish immigrants have been replaced by families from Latin America, Asia and the Middle East. In the 2014 – 15 school year, about one in every three students coming into the school were classified as ELL, nearly double that of five years ago. With the influx of students whose

first language is not English, the school has responded by increasing its number of ELL specialists and, starting two years ago, offering one dual language class in each of the primary grades. More fundamentally, Hill took the significant step in 2013 of joining the Massachusetts Expanded Learning Time Initiative, which entails redesigning the school day and year around a substantially longer schedule. With the lengthening of the school day and adding five instructional days in August, Hill has been able to move closer to its core objective of helping all students achieve proficiency regardless of their starting point.

¹ In September 2015—after the research for this report was conducted—McKinley Elementary moved to a newly constructed building nearby and the name was formally changed to Staff Sargent James J. Hill Elementary School.

Staff Sargent James J. Hill Elementary School Revere, Massachusetts



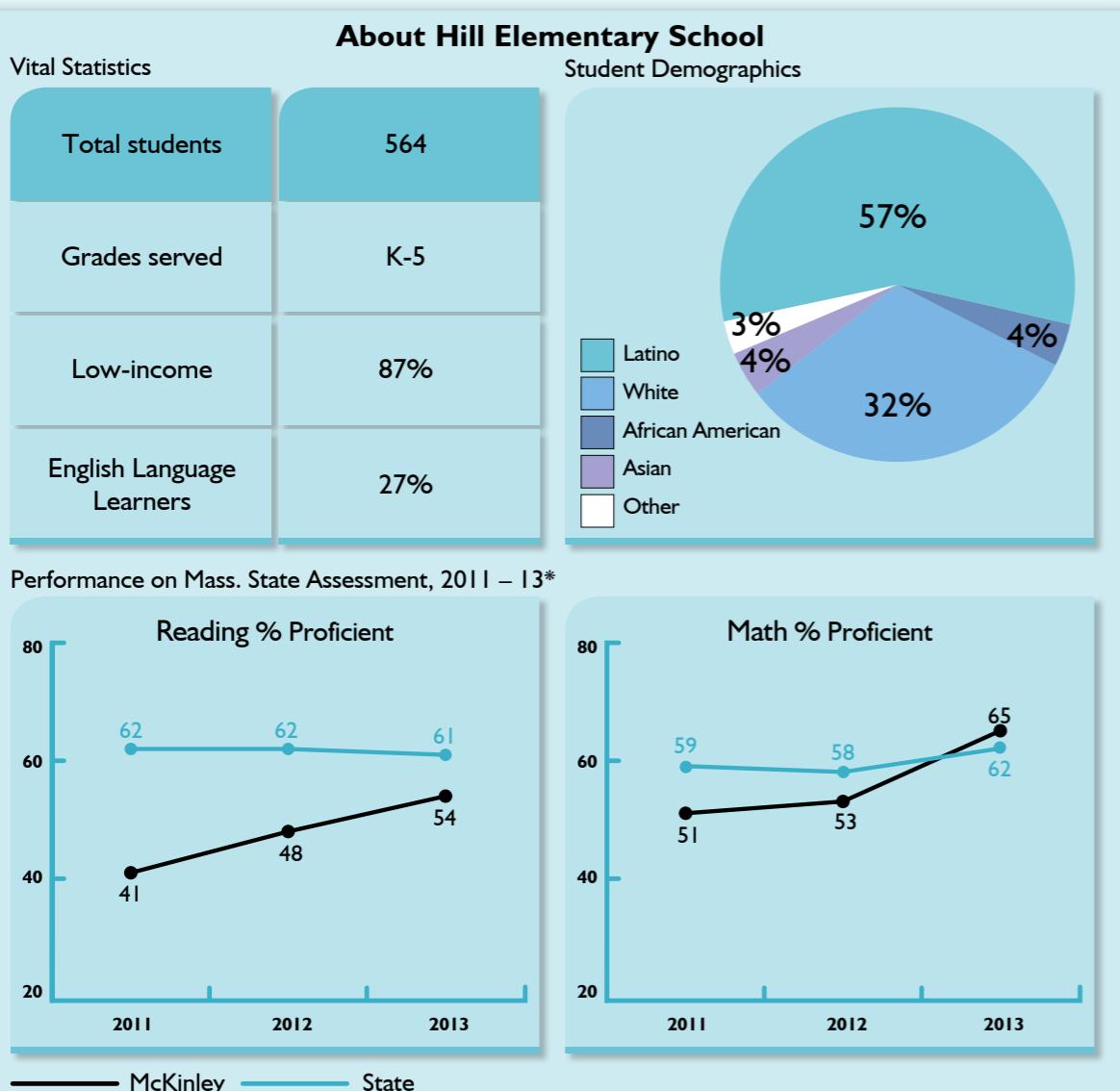
The Expanded-Time Model

The Staff Sargent James J. Hill Elementary School is one of over 20 schools in Massachusetts that has won a state grant to expand its school schedule by 300 annual hours through the Expanded Learning Time Initiative. Hill made this conversion to a longer school day (and added an extra week to the school year), following in the footsteps of two other Revere schools that had made such a conversion a few years earlier². Before adjusting the schedule, Hill undertook a months-long planning process to determine how they could best deploy time (both

existing and additional) to better meet their students' needs.

As a result of this reflection and planning, the administration and faculty decided to add two new elements into the schedule. First, all students would receive two periods per week (40 minutes each) for intensive, targeted instruction in small groups. Called AIM (for “Achieving Instructional Mastery”), the objective of these sessions is for teachers to help students master particular skills and learning objectives that are impeding their academic progress. Students are grouped on the basis of data gleaned

² The state grant provides an additional \$1,300 per student per year. (In Hill's case, this totals about \$700,000.) Much of the added funds goes to pay teachers who, adhering to the same contract negotiated on behalf of the other ELT schools in the district, earn an 18 percent salary increase for working approximately 25 percent more hours.



* McKinley did not participate in the Massachusetts state assessments (MCAS) in 2014, as it opted instead to be a test site for PARCC. Thus, no performance data are available for 2014.

from formative assessments and other in-class assignments, and instruction is tailored to address their particular skills deficits. Students are then re-grouped about every six weeks based on continuing assessment of their progress.

The second component added into the Hill schedule is daily grade-level collaborative

planning for classroom teachers. These sessions vary in content from reviewing student data (for the purpose of AIM grouping and in-class differentiation), planning lessons, and responding to student social/emotional needs. Also attending these meetings is the school's instructional coach—either math or literacy, depending upon the content

area covered that session³—and the grade-level ELL and Special Education specialists. Teachers rave about the opportunity to collaborate with colleagues. As one teacher explained, “I can’t imagine doing my job without speaking with the other teachers in my grade. So much happens during these meetings that I depend on to help structure my class.”

Serving ELL Students

To best support their growing ELL population, the leadership at Hill has taken an approach that aligns with their overall strategy of raising student achievement—pinpointing student academic needs and providing the resources necessary to meet those needs. And the particular resource provided to support ELLs is putting in place a strong cohort of highly-skilled ELL specialist teachers.

Additional Support for ELL Students

The combined effort of these ELL specialists assures that every ELL student has sufficient opportunity to work on language development and on honing other academic skills, especially within the context of small-group and even one-on-one instruction. To staff these sessions, the school has three full-time ELL specialist teachers and an additional half-time specialist who supports those few students who are “newcomers,” students who come to the school speaking little to no English.

The ELL specialist teachers use a combination of push-in and pull-out

arrangements, though the support looks very much the same, no matter the location. Rebecca Dowling, one of the ELL specialists, spends the first part of her day in a kindergarten class, pulling aside two groups of students during the independent work time of the literacy block. Later in the day, she sits in the back of a third grade math class, helping a group of three ELL students as they work through word problems (e.g., finding the area of various polygons) in concert with the rest of the class. She works with these ELL students after the teacher has delivered whole group instruction, when all students are working independently or in small groups, by supporting them to use math vocabulary and explain their thinking as they solve math problems.

Meanwhile, Milyasha O'Donnell, another ELL specialist and herself a non-native English speaker, pulls out three different groups of eight second grade students from their



³ Both coaches work full-time at Hill, the standard arrangement at every elementary school in Revere.

Sample School Schedule

	Sample Schedule Grade 1		Sample Schedule Grade 5
8:20	Morning Meeting	8:20	Morning Meeting
8:25 – 10:42	Literacy	8:20 – 9:50	Soc. Studies/Science
10:45 – 11:25	Specials (Art, PE, Tech.)	9:53 – 11:20	ELA
11:25– 12:15	Writing (3x/wk); AIMS (2x/wk)	11:20 – 11:40	Lunch
12:20 – 1:50	Lunch	11:45 – 12:25	Writing (3x/wk); AIMS (2x/wk)
1:15 – 2:45	Math	12:30 – 1:10	Specials (Art, PE, Tech.)
2:48 – 3:30	Soc. Studies/Science	1:12 – 2:45	Math
		2:50 – 3:30	Specials (Music, Tech, Library)

literacy class, while the remainder of the class engages in center work. (See box.) Working with these groups in the ELL office, she uses texts that are not identical to the ones used in the main class, but are aligned along a similar theme (e.g., the life cycle and properties of plants) and better suited to the students' language skills. In the pull-out section, O'Donnell focuses more than the classroom teacher might on building students' vocabularies and in reading fluency.

O'Donnell works, too, with fourth and fifth grade students. A third ELL specialist also works with first graders during literacy class. These ELL teachers also help out during the AIM period.

The result of this structure is that ELL students have multiple opportunities for direct support from an ELL teacher, each of whom is specially trained to target student learning needs associated with learning English. "Our

SPOTLIGHT: An ELL Student Support Group

The eight second graders take their seats quickly and quietly around a circular table. "OK, everyone," Ms. O'Donnell begins, "someone read for me the standards we're going to focus on today." An eager student rises from his chair, and points to the laminated page posted on the wall, which details the three or four literacy standards that the session will touch on. All read the words together, and O'Donnell checks for understanding.

"Now," the instructor continues, "let's write down what we're going to do today. First, before we start to read our non-fiction text, we're going to make some predictions about what we'll learn. Then, we'll each take turns reading. And, finally, we're going to remind ourselves of the difference between fact and opinion and explore those a bit together." With that, the class dives into discussion about the 10-page book about tomatoes, a text specifically chosen to align with the in-class lesson on pumpkins.

Throughout the 40-minute lesson there are no interruptions, no stray conversation. All students are engaged in reading the text. At those moments when a particular student struggles with pronunciation during his reading or doesn't know a specific word, the teacher will stop and seek input from other students to help. (O'Donnell has deliberately seated next to her the student who struggles most—a newcomer who arrived to the United States just two months earlier without speaking any English.)

Sticking to the agenda, the final few minutes are devoted to exploring the difference between fact and opinion. The notecatcher that the teacher has prepared helps students to organize their ideas and details. A glance at the clock shows that it is time to return the students to their classroom. "Good job, today," O'Donnell intones. "Next time, we'll definitely be able to move on to a new text."

goal this year," states Nancy Martel, Hill Assistant Principal, "was to get specialists to re-teach content in their time with students, and pinpointing what the learning needs were by using the ANet [formative assessment] data." Some struggling ELL students might end up with their ELL teacher up to three times during the day, a total of almost two hours of support. (Higher-performing ELL students will have only a single support class.)

Principal Ed Moccia explains that the amount of support ELL students need and should get is his core takeaway from his experience with the growing ELL population. "What I think we've done a better job of over the last few years is to respond more quickly and methodically in helping ELL students by making sure we have enough ELL specialists on board." O'Donnell agrees: "When I first got here to McKinley nine years ago, I was the only ELL teacher and had 90 students.



Now, I have many fewer and can spend much more time individually with each child.”

Teacher Collaboration

The daily support that ELL students receive would be far less effective if it were not carefully aligned to the content and instructional strategies employed in students' core academic classes. And the way to assure this alignment is for the ELL specialists and the classroom teachers to speak and coordinate often. They do this at their daily grade-level collaboration meetings which are scheduled so that ELL specialists can attend.

Because Hill does not have a set curriculum

or textbook for the AIM period, grade-level collaboration meetings are particularly critical. At these meetings teachers choose appropriate texts and materials, but, more importantly, figure out how to integrate school-wide priorities and methods into daily instruction, such as techniques to boost reading comprehension. “Since I work with all the other teachers so closely, I know what students are doing in their core classes. In turn, I know my students are succeeding when they are engaging in the expected work,” notes ELL specialist Rebecca Dowling. “So, for example, they’re on the right track when they annotate text on their own or with little prompting. Meanwhile, if they are struggling to annotate a particular text, this gives me a good window into how I can best support them and connect back with their classroom teacher on how they can be supported in class.”

These meetings are also where the teachers discuss various sources of data—primarily, formative assessments and in-class work—to determine student learning needs. Understanding the progress ELL students are making is a key part of these discussions, and teachers confer on how to support them both through differentiated work within the context of the core academic class, and the particular types of instruction that ELL specialist should provide, whether it is pull-out, push-in, or during the AIM period.

Dual-Language Classes

In addition to focusing on the needs of individual ELL students, the school has also

introduced a dual-language class—one each in kindergarten, grades 1 and 2. This option class has two full-time teachers, one of whom is a regular education teacher and the other who has ESL (English as a Second Language) certification. About half of the students in the dual-language classrooms are native Spanish speakers. The rest are students whose parents want them to become fluent in Spanish. Hill administration decided to begin a dual-language program in kindergarten just as the school was converting to a longer day because they realized that teachers would now have the chance to instruct in both languages for enough time. The first year was so effective—formative assessments showed significant growth in literacy skills—that the district agreed to expand the program to first and then second grade. The district commitment is necessary because the model requires hiring an additional classroom teacher. Even though the dual-language class does serve more students than the single-language classes, the ratio of students to teacher still is smaller than a class with a single teacher and, thus, is more expensive than the standard classroom.

Curriculum and teaching methods for the dual-language class do not adhere to a specific methodology or philosophy. Instead, the teachers are given the flexibility to teach their own classrooms in accordance with student needs. As of now, the class is conducted primarily in Spanish in kindergarten, with the balance shifting gradually to mostly English by second grade.

Interestingly, the ELL specialists in the

building play essentially no role in the dual language class, either in curriculum development or in supporting individual students. Less than half of the dual-language class students are ELL students. Instead, parents have selected that their child enroll in the dual-language class so that they become fluent in Spanish, just as much as they gain academic skills in English. As such, ELL students who might be in the dual-language class do not get outside support—other than through the AIM period—because support in developing their English takes place within the context of their core class. As a group, the dual-language class is higher performing than the monolingual classes.

Hill’s staff-heavy support of ELL students is both its strength and a challenge. As Principal Moccia admits, “I’m concerned that, as our ELL population increases and the money stays flat, we are going to have trouble sustaining the model we have of serving our kids.” He then explains that he and his assistant principal have already started to investigate other possible sources of instructional support, like retired teachers or teachers-in-training from local universities, just to have a backup plan in case funding stagnates. In the meantime, staff and leaders at Hill have found that by pinpointing student needs and then providing them with sufficient time and the skilled personnel to expertly address those needs, they are advancing the proficiency of ELL students, as they are the whole student body.

Case Two



**Godsman Elementary School
Denver, Colorado**



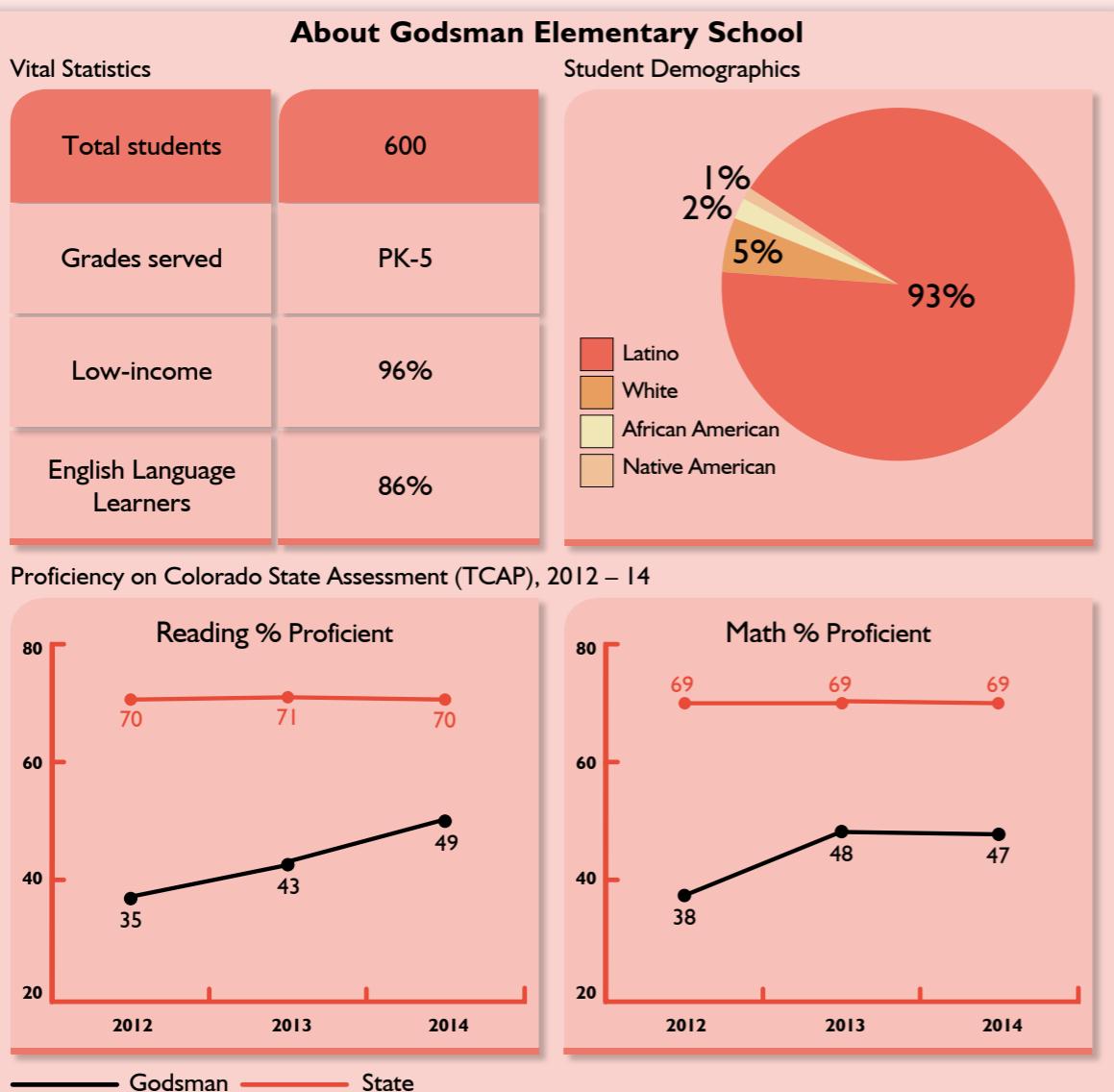
Godsman Elementary School, in Denver, Colorado, is a laboratory for educational practice. As one of over 50 schools in the state to have earned status as an “innovation school,” it now has considerable autonomy over its budget, schedule, and staffing structure so that it can, as described on the Colorado Department of Education website, “strategically align resources with their approach to teaching and learning.” One of the key changes Godsman Elementary undertook was to take advantage of its flexibility to diverge from the standard Denver school schedule by expanding its school day from 6.5 to

8.0 hours for all students. School leaders installed this significant increase in learning time so they could better accommodate and put into practice a research-based approach to dual-language education that emphasizes teaching Spanish alongside English for native Spanish speakers. With a population of students that hails mostly from families of Mexican origin—about two-thirds of whom are native Spanish speakers and one third who are American-born and English-speaking—Godsman’s teachers and administrators are striving both to enable native Spanish speakers to become proficient in English and also to develop their writing

and reading skills in their native tongue. The combination of an expanded school day and a thoughtfully implemented dual language program are allowing the school to achieve this goal while also working to narrow achievement gaps (compared to the state) for all students. As of now, these gaps are still significant, but students are showing meaningful growth, suggesting that as the new model continues to strengthen, positive outcomes will only accelerate.

The Expanded-Time Model

To achieve their vision of a robust dual language program, Godsman’s leaders knew that a priority for their redesign had to be extended literacy blocks where students could build the reading and writing skills needed to succeed academically. The schedule reflects this priority with a full three hours (180 minutes) dedicated to literacy instruction every day. In addition, students have 75 minutes for math, 45 for science or social studies, 45 minutes for specials (physical education, music, and art), and 45 minutes for so-called “D Block,” the



school's term for small-group tutoring and support in both literacy and math. (D stands for "differentiation.") Finally, the school has partnered with the local Boys & Girls Club to run the Beacons enrichment program, a 45-minute block of electives embedded into the school day. (See schedule on following page.)

The schedule applies to the two tracks of the

school—ELA-E, the English-only classes and ELA-S, the classes taught with a mixture of Spanish and English. About half of Godsman students are enrolled in each track.⁴ The inclusion of two 45-minute periods per day where classroom teachers are not with their students (i.e., during specials and the Beacons enrichment) allows teachers a full 90 minutes per day for planning. Two

times per week, teachers use these periods for their own individual planning and three time per week, teachers meet in grade-level teams (3 – 4 teachers per grade, depending on the grade) to plan together the content and objectives for the week. These planning sessions involve the teachers who teach both the dual language classes (ELA-S) and those who teach in English-only classes (ELA-E).

Serving ELL Students

In operating a school that strives to promote bilingualism and is also, of course, accountable for developing proficiency in English, Godsman educators must often balance competing demands. To meet student needs, Godsman employs four interdependent strategies and structures that help both teachers and students.

Research-based Pedagogy

The original motivation for securing Innovation Status from the state was to put in place an instructional strategy known as Literacy Squared.⁵ This program, a research-based approach to bilingual education developed by experts at the University of Colorado, differs from many dual-language programs which emphasize a relatively rapid transition from a native language—in this case, Spanish—to English. Literacy Squared instead promotes the development of strong skills in writing and reading in Spanish in the early grades, before transitioning students to learning English in a systematic way. The program then calls for the school to continue to teach native-Spanish speakers in Spanish

(at certain points in the day) even as they are pushing students to develop proficiency in English (writing and reading) in older grades (3 – 5). As Principal Priscilla Hopkins neatly summarizes, “English later, Spanish longer.”

The theory behind Literacy Squared is that students will be more likely to be proficient in English if they can first develop and feel good about their capacity to read and write in their native language. Among the particular instructional strategies used to develop English and Spanish proficiency is an emphasis on cross-language connections and what the experts call “metalanguage,” or having students think and talk about language so that they understand its basic structures and uses. In younger grades, this method takes shape through repeated readings of the same passage in both Spanish and English. In older grades, teachers will explicitly highlight differences in vocabulary in the two languages. (See “Spotlight” box.)

Interestingly, the Literacy Squared techniques are not reserved for only ELA-S classes, but have filtered into classes throughout the building. The Lotta Lara method, for example—a practice where students read the same text multiple times in the same week in order to increase fluency and comprehension—is employed by every teacher in Grades 1 – 5. Fifth grade teacher Gail Newhall, who teaches entirely in English, explains: “Students trying to learn two languages simultaneously, but really all students, need repetition in order to develop comprehension. As I’ve learned more about the Literacy Squared

⁴ All Denver Public Schools offer parents the choice of whether they want their child enrolled in an English-only track or a dual language (Spanish) track.

⁵ Denver Public Schools does not use Literacy Squared and, thus, the school needed to gain Innovation Status in order to adopt a program not sanctioned by the district.

Sample School Schedule

	Sample Schedule Grade 1	Sample Schedule Grade 5
7:45 – 8:00	Homeroom/Breakfast	7:45 – 8:00 Homeroom/Breakfast
8:00 – 9:00	English Language Development	8:00 – 8:15 Literature
9:00 – 10:00	Literature/Reading	8:15 – 9:00 D Block (Intervention)
10:00 – 10:15	Recess	9:00 – 9:45 Specials
10:15 – 11:15	Literature/Reading	9:45 – 11:00 Math
11:15 – 11:45	Lunch/Recess	11:00 – 12:00 English Language Development
11:45 – 12:45	Math	12:00 – 12:30 Lunch/Recess
12:45 – 1:30	Science/Soc. Studies	12:30 – 1:15 Enrichment (Beacons)
1:30 – 2:15	D Block (Intervention)	1:15 – 2:45 Literature/Reading
2:15– 3:00	Enrichment (Beacons)	
3:00– 3:45	Specials	2:45– 3:45 Science/Soc. Studies

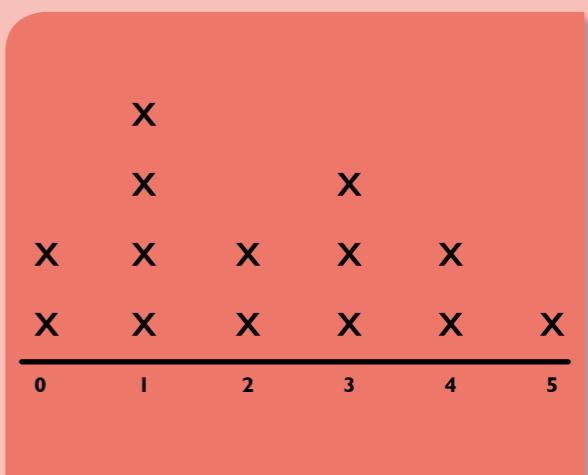
SPOTLIGHT: The Language of Math Class

The scene is a fourth-grade math class where all the students are working together to develop a data chart plotting frequency. The teacher begins the lesson by asking a simple question: “how many siblings do you have?” The teacher then calls out numbers 0 through 5 and asks each student to raise his or her hand when she states the appropriate number for their family structure. As she speaks the number “0,” two or three hands go up. With the number “1,” another four raise theirs. After each call and response, for each raised hand she plots a small “x” (in vertical columns) on a number line drawn along the bottom edge of the blackboard.

Yet, somewhere in the process, the teacher recognizes that a few students are not responding, appearing confused by the question. She stops mid-sentence to ask “Do you know what *siblings* means?” A few heads shake. “Well, in Spanish we say *hermanos* to mean brothers and sisters, but in English the word for brothers and sisters together is

siblings. Does that make sense?” The teacher, without getting distracted from the purpose of the lesson, has employed the Aso Se Dice technique of directly pointing out the connections between Spanish and English.

As heads nod vigorously, the lesson continues in earnest, continuing until all student responses are recorded on the bar graph representing sibling frequency among this group of students. Not only do students better understand the purpose and construction of a bar graph, some have learned a new vocabulary word, as well.



techniques, I find I'm integrating them more and more into my class."

Extended Literacy Block

The result of integrating Literacy Squared into the curriculum is that teachers must weave a relatively complex web of pedagogies into their daily lessons. Having an extended literacy block—up to 3.5 hours daily in the lower grades—allows teachers the opportunity to meet the challenge. Second grade teacher, Gel Ortiz-Nieves, who teaches an all-native Spanish class describes “The long literacy block allows me to spend enough time in whole group instruction, small group instruction and even individual one-on-one. I’ve taught in schools with less time and I know that having the longer block really allows me to hone in on those skills that students may be struggling with.” Spending two hours in Spanish literacy and one in English, Nieves is able to draw those connections between the two languages in concrete ways repeatedly. “I definitely see growth in my students’ writing,” she continues. “Because I’m able to get them to be more fluent orally—all while providing a lot of structures over the course of a long lesson—they are then able to translate their thoughts more easily onto paper.”

Additional Support for Struggling Students

In addition to increasing the daily duration of the literacy block, a direct benefit of lengthening the day has been the flexibility to build in the D-block period, a structure that is not exclusive to supporting ELL students.

These small-group instruction sessions are held four days per week with a focus on ELA instruction. These blocks take place at various periods throughout the day with every classroom in each grade in D-block held at the same time. The whole grade is then subdivided into small groups by virtue of their particular academic need. Student placement is decided based on performance on various assessments—standardized and school-based—and groups are shifted by teachers every six weeks.

As for the logistics of staffing these sessions, grade-level teachers will each take one sub-group—usually a mix of students from their own class and from other classes in the grade—and tailor instruction to the particular needs of those students. In order to allow for smaller groups, a cohort of trained paraprofessionals also lends support during D-block, rotating grade by grade. “I tend to work with students who are struggling more since I have a masters in reading,” explains teacher Gail Newhall, “and other teachers and paras take the group that’s most appropriate for them.”

Just as they are throughout the day, ELL students are mixed with non-ELL students, as the groups are based on overall levels of student proficiency in literacy, not simply whether or not a student’s first language is English. The underlying principle for teachers at Godsman is addressing each student individually, assessing and supporting them where they need the most help, regardless of their original language. As a secondary support, some students

work with the software Imagine Learning to help individualize to their learning needs.

Teacher Collaboration

The final structure in place that helps to ensure the first three strategies are as effective as possible is the frequent opportunity for teachers to work with one another. These sessions have two specific purposes. First, teachers use these opportunities to plan lessons for the week ahead, specifically focusing in on how a lesson can best integrate the pedagogical techniques advanced by Literacy Squared and can meet the content expectations of the Denver Public Schools pacing guide. Teachers appreciate having the opportunity to bounce ideas off one another, and to validate that their lesson plans meet expectations of rigor. The second purpose of teacher collaboration is to review progress of individual students both for the purpose of supporting them during class and in making sure that the specific small-group tutoring they are receiving through D-block is the best it might be.

“My priority has been for valuable, effective, productive teacher collaboration time,” says Principal Hopkins. “This past year, when the district asked all schools to develop Student Learning Objectives, we were one of the few to complete the process. It really did take much longer than the district expected and was somewhat laborious, but, because we had more time together, and because it was our focus, we got it done and, in the process, it taught

our teachers how to collaborate even more effectively.”

Godsman is still in the relatively early stages of implementing its school model built on integrating the strategies and structures needed to support and develop ELL students, not to mention enabling some native-English speakers to become proficient in Spanish. Leaders and teachers recognize that the structures it has put in place—most notably, teacher collaboration and D-block—do need further refinement to be fully effective. Still, having an eight-hour day (and a three-hour literacy block) in which they can fully implement the Literacy Squared program has given the administrators and faculty considerable confidence that their students will continue to show academic growth

Godsman’s leaders knew that a priority for their redesign had to be extended literacy blocks where students could build the reading and writing skills needed to succeed academically.

Case Three



Student engagement in learning is palpable as a small group of fourth graders at Gerard Guilmette Elementary School in Lawrence Massachusetts work together on a set of math problems. One of four boys looks up and explains what they are doing: “We all need to work on adding numbers with three or four digits. That’s why we are in this group together. We made up problems for each other to solve. I made up this really hard one for him,” he smiles pointing to a peer next to him who is scribbling intently on his paper. This level of student awareness about their learning process is common in many classrooms at Guilmette, where

teachers are engaging students in setting goals and discussing their own learning.

Staff and students at Guilmette Elementary School have experienced tremendous change in the past two years since the Lawrence Public School system was placed into state receivership by the Massachusetts Board of Elementary & Secondary Education. At the time, nearly half of all students in this small city—the poorest in Massachusetts—were failing to graduate on time and achievement scores were among the lowest in the state. Oversight of the district was granted to a

Guilmette Elementary School Lawrence, Massachusetts

state-appointed receiver, Jeff Riley, who completely restructured the district to provide schools with new autonomies over staffing, scheduling and budgeting and radically reduced the role of the district’s central office. One of the few requirements Riley placed on all schools serving grades K – 8 was the need to expand learning time for all students by 200 to 300 hours per year.

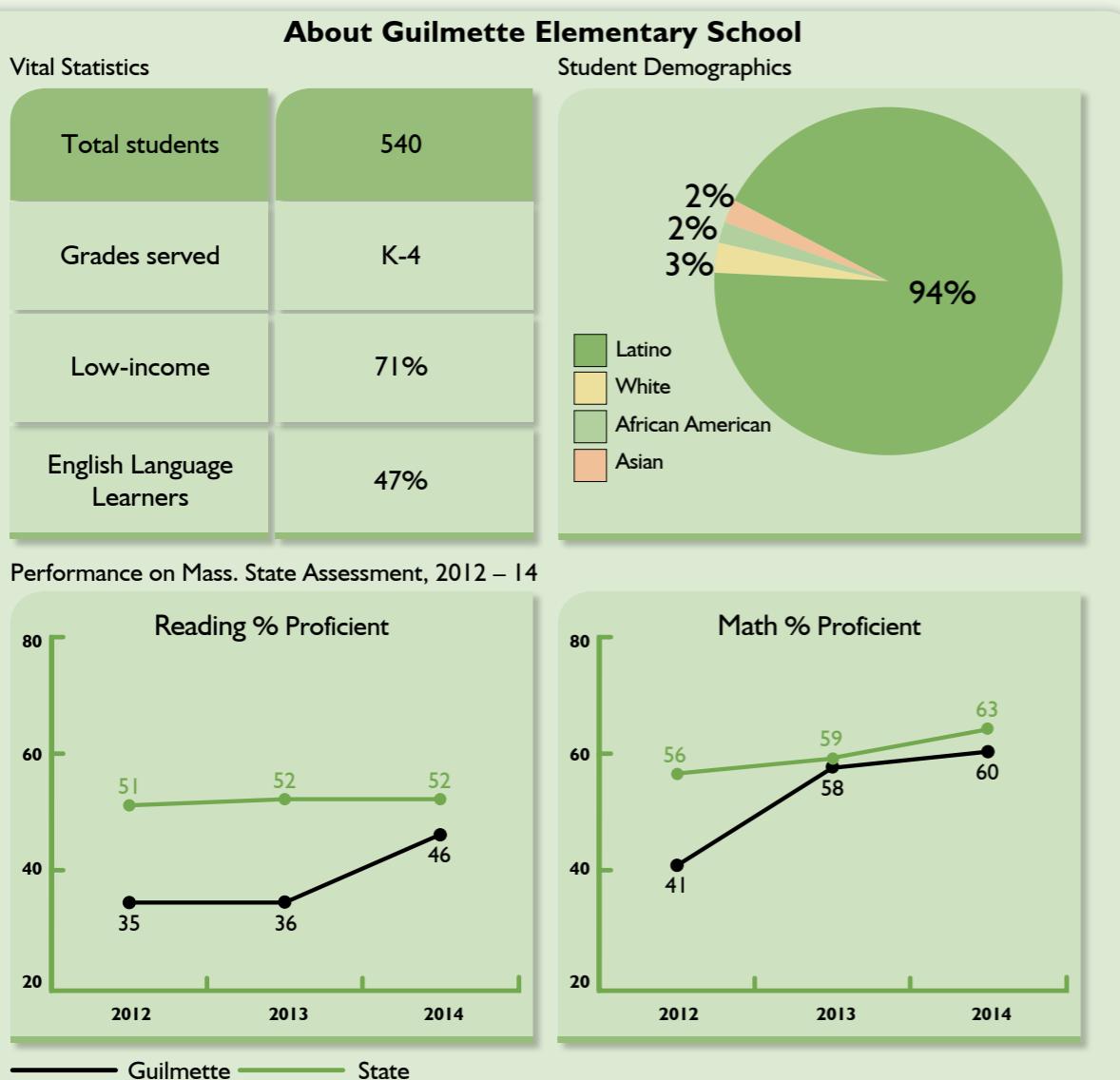
Guillmette Elementary school is one of the early success stories of the Lawrence transformation. The school has flourished under the new autonomous structure. Principal Lori Butterfield has leveraged



her school’s autonomies and its expanded school day to produce double digit gains in student proficiency rates in both Math and ELA. The changes at this school have had a particularly positive impact on the school’s large English Language Learner population, which has grown to comprise 47 percent of the student body compared to just 17 percent ten years ago.

The Expanded-Time Model

Guilmette Elementary School was one of four Lawrence schools that elected to expand student schedules by 300 hours per



year. (All schools were required to add at least 200 hours per year, but were given the option to add more.) Guilmette worked to plan for the redesigned school day during the 2012 – 13 school year and then implementing the plan beginning in Fall 2013. Under the redesigned schedule, students attend school for 90 more minutes per day than in prior years. The expanded

schedule allows for three essential and highly interdependent additions: (a) a daily 60-minute intervention period for all students called “Learning Lab,” (b) additional enrichment programming and (c) extended opportunities for teacher collaboration. The additional time for enrichment, when students participate in specialized programming at the Lawrence

Boys & Girls Club, provides teachers with dedicated time for collaboration and professional development, including an uninterrupted three-hour block on Friday afternoons. The additional time for collaboration also affords teachers the opportunity to analyze and respond to student data and discuss student needs, a key task in ensuring that the Learning Lab period is optimized to address specific skill and knowledge gaps. The collaboration periods are also essential to ensuring a consistent pedagogical approach and dependable instructional quality in Learning Labs across the school.

Serving ELL Students

Principal Lori Butterfield is clear that Guilmette’s redesigned school day allows teachers to better support the school’s growing ELL population. Her autonomy to make decisions on staffing and budgeting has also helped significantly. Test scores from the last two years’ ACCESS tests (the annual test taken by ELL students in Massachusetts) revealed that Guilmette’s ELL students had the strongest gains in the district. The median student growth percentile for Guilmette ELL students who took the test this year was 66, a score that ranks it among the top 15 percent in the state.

Instructional Coaching and Modeling

With autonomy over her budget, Lori Butterfield decided to create a new position for one of her strongest classroom teachers, Emily Vielicka, to become the school’s ELL

coach. This decision required Butterfield to make other trade-offs, but, in her opinion, having a dedicated ELL coach to work on improving the educational experience for close to half her school’s population has been an essential investment. Vielicka focuses her time on modeling effective instructional practices geared specifically for ELL students to less experienced teachers, while also providing all teachers with strategies and guidance for better addressing ELL student needs.

With slight variation in her day-to-day routine, Vielicka’s overall tasks are fairly consistent. Much of her job entails supporting new teachers. For example, one morning, during a 90-minute reading and phonics block, Emily works alongside the new second grade teacher who teaches one of the school’s four Sheltered English Immersion (SEI) Classrooms. (These classrooms are composed of both students who are recent immigrants to the U.S. and have very limited English language skills and peers with stronger English proficiencies.) In that classroom, Vielicka either teaches a portion of the lesson, modeling key instructional practices, or sits

Teachers have ample opportunity to analyze and respond to student data, a key task in ensuring the Learning Lab addresses specific skill and knowledge gaps.

Sample School Schedule, Grade 3

	Monday - Thursday		Friday
7:30 – 8:00	Morning Meeting	7:30 – 7:55	Morning Meeting
8:05 – 10:20	Reader's Workshop Writer's Workshop	8:00 – 9:00	Intervention & Acceleration ("Learning Lab")
10:20 – 11:30	Specials / Common Planning	9:00 – 9:45	Reader's Workshop
11:30– 12:15	Lunch	9:50 – 10:30	Specials / Common Planning
12:20 – 1:50	Math	10:35 – 11:50	Math
1:50 – 2:35	Science or Social Studies	11:50 – 12:30	Lunch
2:40 – 3:35	Intervention & Acceleration ("Learning Lab")	12:30 – 3:00	Enrichment / Professional Development

with a small group of students to work on a particular skill. Later in the morning, she spends an hour in a fourth grade SEI classroom supporting a teacher around writing instruction. In the afternoon, she supports the first-grade SEI teacher on math, and then returns to the fourth and second grade classrooms to provide further reinforcement.

She also teaches a Learning Lab intervention block and actively participates in the second grade team's planning meetings. Teachers throughout the school, and now from other schools in the district, have the opportunity to observe Vielicka as she models lessons and instructional strategies that have been highly effective in building the language skills of ELL students.

SPOTLIGHT: The Continual Intersection of Language and Math

In a first grade classroom, Emily Vielicka, Guillmette's ELL coach who is co-teaching a math block, sits with one group of six first graders at a small table. Next to the table is a flip chart with the goal: "Today we will create three dimensional shapes in order to describe them by their attributes." Below, a sentence reads: "A _____ has _____ faces and _____ vertices."

On the table stand an array of colorful games and props, including a number of three dimensional objects. Vielika picks up one large red block and turns to a boy next to her. "What is this shape?" He pauses, uncertain. Two other children bounce on their seats, eager to reveal the answer. "Can you help him Lena?" "Rectangular Prism" she responds proudly. Vielika turns back to the shy boy at her side. "Can you say that for me 'Rectangular Prism'? That is a mouthful." The boy quietly tries to repeat the words, but struggles. After having the full group repeat

the term several times, Vielika then points to the flip chart, "Now who can tell help me answer my question? How many faces does a rectangular prism have? Can everyone say the word 'face.' Eduardo, can you point to the face on this rectangular prism?"

As children talk excitedly about the number of faces on the block, she passes several solids around so everyone can have a chance to count for themselves. Throughout the lesson, Vielika annunciates and emphasizes those words that she wants the children to learn. This math lesson is as much about developing vocabulary and language skills as it is about advancing students' comprehension of math concepts.

After each student has ample opportunity to talk about the three dimensional shapes and describe them, Vielika announces they are going to play "Go Fish" with geometric shapes. "I have a deck of cards here. Can you say 'deck of cards'?" Each moment is a precious opportunity to build language skills and emphasize new vocabulary.

Opportunities to Personalize Learning to Student Needs

The Learning Lab periods have been an essential component of the additional support ELL students receive at Guillmette. This additional dose of ELA or math tailored precisely to the skill areas where students need the most support allow ELL students to get additional language support without



and direct translation. Teachers have found that the data the Imagine Learning program generates is key to tracking student progress and challenges. For example, the program records students' oral language proficiency and allows teachers to track how oral language skills are progressing over time. Guilmette was one of the first schools in Lawrence to pilot Imagine Learning, in school year 2013 – 14. “We were astounded by the results,” explains Butterfield. “Our ACCESS scores skyrocketed.” Now fourteen schools in Lawrence are employing Imagine Learning to support their ELL students.

For ELL students not in the SEI classes—that is, generally higher-level ELL students—the Learning Lab has also been an important avenue for students to hone language and literacy skills and build confidence in their ability to express themselves in oral and written English. Like other students in the school, these students are placed in flexible student groupings based on specific skill needs. In ELA, for instance, Learning Lab students work on more advanced language skills like identifying supporting details in a text, comparing and contrasting texts, and identifying text features.

Teacher Collaboration and Planning

The school’s extended blocks of time for teacher collaboration and planning—and in particular the two-and-a-half-hour block on Friday that entails both collaborative planning and professional development—have been essential for the ongoing focus on improving instruction, not just for ELLs but

missing the grade-level content taught during the regular literacy blocks. For Learning Lab, ELL students in the SEI classrooms predominantly use Imagine Learning, a computer based educational program specifically designed to support ELL students, struggling readers, and students with disabilities. The program emphasizes the development of oral language and vocabulary, teaching words through videos, pictures

for all students. It is during these sessions, for example, that ELL coach, Emily Vielicka, shares instructional practices and helps teachers identify potential solutions for challenges they are facing as they support ELL students. Similarly, other lead teachers use these sessions to provide support and guidance in their areas of expertise.

During collaboration periods, teachers use common protocols to determine student groupings for interventions and collaborate to determine how to focus objectives, skills, and activities during Learning Labs. “We get into breaking apart a standard, looking through data, really unpacking what it means and then work together to plan,” Mike Swift, a third grade teacher explains. “You don’t just have one person’s take, you have everyone’s so it becomes a better product.”

Further, Guilmette teachers have been working to hone a set of common instructional practices linked to the school’s instructional priorities including accountable talk, sentence stems, graphic organizers, guided practices. “All of these practices, which are particularly good for ELL students, are really good for all students,” explains Lori Butterfield. “You might not be able to tell which classrooms are ELL and which ones aren’t because a lot of what teachers are doing is the same across the school.” Guilmette educators take seriously the idea and the research that the primary means of supporting ELL students specifically is by aiming to implement robust instruction across the board.

“All of these practices, which are particularly good for ELL students, are really good for all students. In fact, you might not be able to tell which classrooms are ELL and which ones aren’t.”



Better Serving English Language Learners

Recommendations for Policymakers and Practitioners

For State and District Policymakers

The policy mechanisms that have allowed the three schools in this report to be effective revolve around two core principles: more learning time (through an expanded schedule) and school autonomy. The policy recommendations that follow offer different ways of advancing those principles so that practitioners at the school level have the resources and support to bring their full capacity to bear in educating English language learners.

1. Support the expanded learning time movement, which enables schools to allocate adequate time for personalized support for students and a variety of teacher professional development opportunities. The National Center on Time & Learning has identified over 2,000 schools nationwide that have an expanded school day and/or year. The additional time at these schools can be leveraged in powerful ways to provide students with a more rigorous and well-rounded education and teachers with more time for collaboration and professional development. To implement their expanded schedules, these schools are using federal funding (such

as Title I allocations, 21st Century Community Learning Center funds, and School Improvement Grants); state and district funding (such as budget line items that directly support schools to expand learning time); and/or budget and operating autonomies. Policymakers can support increased access to such funding and encourage high-quality implementation of expanded learning time. An expanded school day and/or year, as implemented at the schools profiled in this report, provides more time overall for student learning through targeted support and longer core academic classes and enables schools to expand time for teachers' professional development as well. For ELLs, who especially need additional time and support to catch up to their native-English peers, an expanded schedule can open up essential learning opportunities.

2. Expand the capacity of schools to make curricular and instructional decisions. Godsman Elementary School took advantage of Colorado's state program that grants increased flexibility to individual schools (i.e., they are authorized to implement curricular, staffing, and scheduling practices that may diverge from district policy) to implement the research-based ELL program, Literacy Squared.

Guilmette Elementary and Hill Elementary hold no such state legal authority, but reside in districts where the central office grants individual school leaders and their faculties considerable leeway in putting in place the educational program that best fits their students' needs. With this autonomy, Guilmette created the position of an ELL instructional coach and Hill hired 3.5 full-time ELL specialists. Other districts and state policymakers can follow the lead of these schools—and others in similar situations—by shifting from a compliance model overseeing individual schools to a support model. In this framework, the district serves to coordinate some activities—formative tests, for example—but leaves key staffing and scheduling decisions to educators at the school level. For ELL populations, which often have highly specialized needs, attending a school that can better pinpoint their support brings sizeable educational value.

3. Support job-embedded professional learning as part of the teacher work day. In most school districts across the country, professional development funding is typically directed toward district-wide or external courses or workshops that do not necessarily coordinate with the instructional

priorities of individual schools. An approach that provides more job-embedded and teacher-led professional learning opportunities at the school level can bring much greater value, as they usually align more tightly to educators' daily needs: planning lessons, differentiating instruction, and assessing and analyzing student data. In schools with more time, job-embedded professional development—not to mention regular collaboration and data review—is far more common because the schedule allows for such expanded learning opportunities for teachers (just as it does for students). For expanded-time schools (and even in schools with conventional schedules), school districts should prioritize funding and learning opportunities for teachers that take place at the school level and in direct coordination with their daily lesson planning and instructional needs. Because the best instruction generally helps ELL students specifically, the benefits will flow directly to this population, as well.

For Practitioners

As indicated in the recommendations for policymakers, educators should have some flexibility to design and implement the educational practices and strategies that best meet the needs of their ELL students. Within

the range of choices to make, schools seeking to better serve their ELL students should prioritize the practices that the three schools in this report have implemented and a large body of research validates.

1. Build in extended literacy blocks. As research indicates and practice confirms, two keys to developing strong skills in English fluency and comprehension are repetition of content and broad application of knowledge. To help ensure that teachers allow their students the opportunity to practice reading, writing, and communicating orally, while also transferring their learning to multiple contexts, schools should structure the day with class periods of sufficient length to make such opportunities possible.

2. Target instruction to student needs in small groups. In classes of 25 students and up, it is often difficult for teachers to provide the kind of intensive support that students need to overcome very specific stumbling blocks, especially in learning related to the acquisition of language. Subdividing students into much smaller groups of students who display similar needs (e.g., vocabulary, fluency, etc.) and pairing them with a teacher who has received training in how to overcome these specific obstacles can be an efficient, effective way to advance their overall learning. Because English language learners are more likely to need extra support, this strategy is especially necessary to enable them to achieve proficiency, but students

of any type can benefit. Moreover, if schools are able to build in support sessions as a dedicated support period for all—instead of as a remedial session for only a few—then struggling students, including ELLs, who need additional help will not be penalized by having to miss other curricular opportunities that only students at proficiency could enjoy.

3. Provide support until students reach full academic proficiency. One of the myths of educating ELL students is that once they can speak fluently then they no longer need additional interventions to be successful in academic subjects. The truth, however, is that aptitude in reading and writing typically trails oral proficiency and, thus, schools must be careful not to withdraw additional supports (of the kind noted in item #2) before students have demonstrated themselves proficient across multiple domains. The schools in this report ensure that ELL students (and others who may struggle) have access to small group instruction and other forms of differentiated support in all grades, until they consistently achieve to high levels and across multiple subjects. Also, though not relevant for elementary schools, practitioners must also consider how to best support those ELLs who arrive to the U.S. as teenagers. For “late-entrant ELs,” defined as those students who begin their English instruction in the U.S. in the 9th grade or later, conventional classrooms in public schools may not be enough. Not only would these learners benefit from an

expanded school day, but also could gain from collaborations with local community colleges to provide additional supports and open pathways to higher education.

4. Focus on improving instructional quality through effective teacher collaboration, planning and professional development.

As the [National Staff Development Council \(NSDC\)](#) has asserted, “Efforts to improve student achievement can succeed only by building the capacity of teachers to improve their instructional practice.” In turn, the most likely way to elevate instructional quality is for teachers to work together to dissect standards, plan lessons, share pedagogical techniques and ways to assess student learning, and, perhaps most important, hold each other accountable to high expectations. Because research shows that effective education of ELL students is, at base, about developing robust instruction generally, any efforts to improve instruction across the school can only help those who are learning not only a rigorous curriculum, but English, as well. The schools in this report have certainly set teacher collaboration and instructional improvement as their top priority, knowing that anything they can do to strengthen education in any one classroom will undoubtedly boost learning among all students, including their ELLs. These schools have been able to leverage their expanded schedules to assert such prioritization by providing teachers considerable time each day and week to

professional learning, planning, and collaboration—time they often devote to focusing on how to better address the needs of ELL students.

A Final Thought

We justifiably hold very high expectations for students in the United States. The recent adoption of higher learning standards in most states will mean that today’s students will be expected to analyze texts, solve complex problems, communicate orally and in writing, and apply knowledge to a greater degree than ever. For students who will be held to these expectations and who simultaneously must learn a new language in order to meet them, the challenge is enormous.

Yet, educators who maintain a laser-like focus on structuring their schedule, their staffing, their curricula, and their instructional methods in supporting these students will find that their steep climb can be surmounted. For these schools, English language learners graduate with the knowledge, skills, and confidence to become proud representatives of the next generation of American leaders and citizens.

Notes

- 1 Amy Bitterman, Lucinda Gray, and Rebecca Goldring, *Characteristics of Public and Private Elementary and Secondary Schools in the United States: Results From the 2011–12 Schools and Staffing Survey* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, National Center on Education Statistics, August 2013), p.3.
- 2 From Claude Goldenberg, "Teaching English Language Learners: What the Research Does—and Does Not—Say," *American Educator*, Summer 2009 citing National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition, retrieved April 2008. ELL Demographics by State. Washington, DC: NCELA
- 3 For a summary of the research, see David Farbman, *The Case for Improving and Expanding Time in School: A Review of Key Research and Practice* (Boston, MA: National Center on Time & Learning, February 2015).
- 4 It should be noted that the three profiled sites are each elementary schools. Secondary schools would likely add insights to this investigation, but none within the NCTL network met the criteria we set.
- 5 Seymour B. Sarason, *The Predictable Failure of Educational Reform* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1990), p. xiv.
- 6 For a summary of this research, see Farbman, *The Case for Improving*, pp. 6 – 8.
- 7 Diane August and Timothy Shanahan, eds., *Developing Literacy in Second-Language Learners: Report of the National Literacy Panel on Language-Minority Children and Youth* (Matawan, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2006).
- 8 Nonie Lesaux, Michael J. Keiffer, S. Elisabeth Faller, and Joan G. Kelley, "The Effectiveness and Ease of Implementation of an Academic Vocabulary Intervention for Linguistically Diverse Students in Urban Middle Schools," *Reading Research Quarterly*, 45:2 (2010), pp. 196-228.
- 9 Goldenberg, "Unlocking the Research on English Learners: What We Know—and Don't Yet Know—about Effective Instruction," *American Educator*, Summer 2013, p. 9. "The five meta-analyses ... found that, on average, teaching reading in the home language could boost children's English literacy scores by approximately 12 to 15 percentile points in comparison with children in the control conditions. This is not a trivial effect, but neither is it as large as many proponents of bilingual education suggest."
- 10 Catherine E. Snow, M. Susan Burns, and Peg Griffin, Eds., *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children* (Washington, DC: National Academy Press, 1998), p. 11.
- 11 Robert E. Slavin, Nancy Madden, Margarita Calderón, Anne Chamberlain, and Megan Hennessy, "Reading and Language Outcomes of a Multiyear Randomized Evaluation of Transitional Bilingual Education," *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 33, no. 1 (2011): 47–58.
- 12 Jim Cummins, *Interdependence and Bicultural Ambivalence: Regarding the Pedagogical Rationale for Bilingual Education* (Arlington, VA: National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education, 1982).
- 13 R.A. Moore and H. Zainuddin, *ESL Learners, Writing, and the Acquisition of Academic Language*, 2003. ERIC No. ED475746)
- 14 Kenji Hahta, Yuko Goto Butler and Daria Witt, *How Long Does It Take English Learners to Attain Proficiency?* (Santa Barbara, CA: University of California Linguistic Minority Research Institute, 2000).
- 15 D. J. Francis, et al, *Practical Guidelines for the Education of English Language Learners: Research-based Recommendations for Instruction and Academic Interventions* (Portsmouth, NH: Center on Instruction, 2006).
- 16 Goldenberg, "Unlocking," p. 6.
- 17 Edvanta, *Research Review: What Research Says About Preparing English Language Learners for Academic Success* (Center for Public Education, October 2007), pp. 7 – 11.
- 18 These recommendations reflect and incorporate what NCTL offered in *Time for Teachers: Leveraging Expanded Time to Strengthen Instruction and Empower Teachers* (Boston, Mass.: National Center on Time and Learning, 2014), pp. 64 – 69.
- 19 Linda Darling Hammond, et al, *Professional Learning in the Learning Profession: A Status Report on Teacher Development in the United States and Abroad*, (Dallas, TX: National Staff Development Council, 2009), p. 7.



The National Center on Time & Learning (NCTL) is dedicated to expanding learning time to improve student achievement and enable a well-rounded education. Through research, public policy, and technical assistance, NCTL supports national, state, and local initiatives that add significantly more school time to help children meet the demands of the 21st century and prepare for success in college and career.

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