



University of Colorado
Denver

**DPS Exemplary Schools Case Study:
Abraham Lincoln High School**

WORKING DRAFT 2

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DPS UCD ELA Exemplary Schools Case Study Overview

The Denver Public Schools (DPS) University of Colorado Denver (UCD) English Language Acquisition (ELA) Exemplary Schools Case Studies investigated DPS schools with a high density of learners of English as a second or additional language and high levels of students who qualified for a free or reduced price lunch that were experiencing the most success with English language learners (ELL students). The study was conducted by the DPS UCD Research Collaborative between December 2010 and March 2011. The purpose of the study was to identify school-wide practices that have been successful in supporting the achievement of these students. Six schools (two elementary, two middle, and two high schools) were identified on the basis of five criteria: (1) an open enrollment policy, (2) at least 40% of total enrollment consisting of ELL students, and at least 100 English language learners enrolled, (3) a total School Performance Framework (SPF) rating greater than 49% for elementary schools, and greater than 45% for middle schools and high schools, (4) at least 50% of students in the school qualified for a free or reduced price lunch, and (5) high gains on the CSAP and CELA tests for the past three years relative to other schools serving the same grade levels. Two additional elementary schools, which did not meet all criteria, but have good reputations among area educators were also studied. The case studies involved three sources of data: 1) photographs providing environmental scans of the language resources and supports for ELL students in the schools; 2) documents and public information (e.g., websites) as well as student performance data; and 3) interviews with school leaders, teachers, and other support personnel. This report will detail the practices uncovered at Abraham Lincoln High School.

NOTE: This case study of Abraham Lincoln High School is ongoing. These preliminary assertions and explanations are based on 6-12 interviews with staff members, photographic inventories, and archived data collected between December 2010 and March 2011 only. We anticipate that further study, e.g, observations in classrooms and additional interviews, will expand our understanding of the school's practices.

The following assertions emerged as key components contributing to the success of Abraham Lincoln High School in working with English language learners:

- School-wide combined emphases on sheltered instruction for English language learners and college readiness
- Professional development, instructional assessment, coaching, and professional learning communities coordinated to improve instruction for English language learners in all classes
- Strong principal leadership and vision coupled with opportunities for and development of distributed leadership
- Community/Parent engagement opportunities coordinated by a full-time, bilingual staff member
- Student schedule variations and instruction designed to increase student achievement, graduation rates, and the number of college-bound students

■ Plans for continued improvement

The following sections of this report will include a more in-depth explanation of the study, a brief history and demographic description of the school, and a more detailed narrative of the case study assertions and how the described practices are facilitating academic growth for ELL students at Abraham Lincoln High School (to be found beginning on page 10).

DPS Exemplary Schools Case Study: Context and Purpose of the Study

As of October 1, 2010, there were 26,761 identified English language learners (non-exited ELL students in grades ECE-12) enrolled in Denver Public Schools. Of these students, 17,544 received ELA services at a designated ELA program school. Spanish was the primary language for 15,246 (87%) of these students, while other common languages included Vietnamese, Arabic, Somali, Nepali and Karen/Burmese <http://ela.dpsk12.org/>

Denver Public Schools and University of Colorado Denver are working in collaboration on the DPS ELA Exemplary Schools Study to examine practices within DPS schools in which learners of English as a second (or additional) language are outperforming their peers in similar schools. The purpose of the study is to provide guidance to DPS and other districts in improving the educational performance of English language learners by describing practices currently used in six DPS schools in which English language learners are experiencing the most academic success. The primary research question addressed by this study is:

- *What are the school-wide practices of schools that are successfully serving a high number of English language learners?*

This study was formulated in accordance with the Department of Justice Court Order, which provides guidance to and approval of the DPS English Acquisition program, and includes guidance regarding research on the effectiveness of DPS ELA programs. One goal of this study is to identify practices that have been successful across different school contexts. This report focuses on the practices at Abraham Lincoln High School.

Study Design and School Selection Criteria

This study of school practices involved three sources of data: 1) observations/photographs of language resources in the school environment; 2) documents and public information (e.g., school websites, newsletters) as well as aggregate data on student performance; and 3) multiple interviews with school leaders, teachers, and other support personnel. In this preliminary phase, the study did *not* include students as participants.

A three-step process was used to select high performing schools for English language learners in DPS. For the purposes of this study, English language learners at DPS were defined as those students who were currently receiving ELA services, opted out of services, or exited from ELA services.

Step 1: In order to select the case study schools, schools were identified at the elementary, middle, and high school level, which met four criteria:

- 1) at least 40% of the school's total enrollment consisted of English language learners,
- 2) at least 100 ELL students were enrolled at the school,
- 3) at least 50% of students at the school qualified for a free or reduced price lunch, and
- 4) the school received a School Performance Framework (SPF) rating greater than 49 for elementary schools, and greater than 45 for middle schools and high schools.

For the SPF, every school in DPS that contains at least one grade that takes CSAP (grades 3-10) is assigned one of the following accreditation ratings every September using data collected during the previous three school years: Distinguished, Meets Expectations, Accredited on Watch, Accredited on Priority Watch (added in 2010) or Accredited on Probation. Ratings then relate to how much autonomy schools are given, the support needed, corrective action taken and compensation earned by principals, assistant principals and teachers. For this study, the SPF rating was used to ensure that the schools chosen were not on probation and were meeting expectations or nearly meeting expectations (for all students, not only ELL students).

Step 2: Performance data for English Language Learners on the Colorado Student Assessment Program (CSAP) Reading, CSAP Writing, CSAP Math and the Colorado English Language Assessment (CELA) were analyzed for each school for the past three years. Schools from the initial list, which were making the largest gains were identified, weighting gains in 2010 the highest, 2009 second highest, and 2008 third. Data presented in Table 1 below show the three-year weighted averages of the CSAP median growth percentiles for each school and average gain (Z score) on CELA. Based on these criteria, three schools at each educational level, for a total of nine schools, were identified as candidates for the case study.

Step 3: The student recruitment and retention policies at the nine schools were investigated to determine whether the schools had policies for admittance or dismissal related to performance, special education needs, or behavioral problems. In narrowing the selected schools to six, researchers agreed that at least one school at each level should be a comprehensive neighborhood school, as opposed to a charter school or magnet school. The six schools included Bryant Webster Dual Language ECE-8 (study focused on the elementary grades), Force Elementary, Merrill Middle, West Denver Preparatory Charter – Federal Campus (a middle school), Abraham Lincoln High, and Bruce Randolph High.

Once the schools had been narrowed to six high performing schools, two additional elementary schools of interest were selected based on a combination of their relatively high performance and reputation among educators in the district. Both schools added additional characteristics to the pool of schools, including learners of English from diverse linguistic backgrounds and concentration on math and science. These two additional "reputational" schools were Goldrick Elementary and the Math and Science Leadership Academy (K-3).

History of Abraham Lincoln High School

Abraham Lincoln High School, located at South Federal Blvd. and West Evans Avenue in southwest Denver, a comprehensive high school founded in 1961, serves students in grades nine through twelve. Antonio Esquibel is the current principal at Lincoln High. Principal Antonio Esquibel was selected in September 2010 as a recipient of the *Spirit of Tlatelolco Award* for Education, which is awarded annually to people and organizations whose have demonstrated dedication to improving the quality of life for the local community.

Abraham Lincoln High is a comprehensive neighborhood high school that serves many Spanish-speaking students and is dedicated to serving this population of students. ALHS is a Transitional Native Language Instruction (TNLI) Zone designated school. This means that content language instruction is provided in Spanish, supported by English content instruction and English language development. As a student's English proficiency increases, he/she moves toward supported English content instruction and English language development only. Zone schools provide services to ELL students whose home school does not have ELA services.

ALHS houses an engagement center, which helps students who have struggled in traditional high school settings, including students who have dropped out. The program helps students catch up on missing school credits, accessing community supports and services, such as counseling services. Additionally, Lincoln was designated as a Board EXCEerator School (one of 27 schools nation-wide), providing numerous Advanced Placement courses and accelerated classes to prepare students for college.

Demographic Overview of Abraham Lincoln High School

In the 2009-10 school year (the school year based on which schools were selected for the study), 1,900 students were enrolled at Abraham Lincoln High School. The majority of students at ALHS were Hispanic/Latino (90%) and nearly three-quarters (74%) of students spoke Spanish. Among the student body, 92% qualified for a free and reduced price lunch. In the 2009-10 school year, ALHS received an SPF rating of 47%, indicating that they were accredited on watch. The graduation rate at Lincoln High was 65% in the 2008-09 school year. ALHS is a NCLB sending school, meaning it did not meet Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) last year.

Of the students enrolled in Lincoln High in the 2009-10 school year, 74% (1,402) were designated as English language learners (including students currently receiving ELA services, students opted out of services, and students who have exited from ELA services). Among the ELL students at the school, 331 were designated as enrolled in ELA services, 281 as opted out of services, and 790 as exited from ELA program services. The large majority of the ELL students at Lincoln spoke Spanish.

AMAO 1 (Annual Measurable Achievement Objective) is an indicator of English language acquisition. It represents the number of students who are making progress on the CELA exam. In 2010, 34% of English language learners at Abraham Lincoln were making progress. Further, the three-year (2007-08, 2008-09, 2009-10) weighted average gain (Z score) on the CELA for ELL students at Lincoln High

was 0.13 standard deviations above the mean, meaning they showed above average growth; this is compared to a state-wide gain of 0. Three year weighted averages are included here as these data are less subject to year-to-year fluctuations.

The three-year weighted averages of the CSAP median growth percentiles for English language learners (median growth percentiles indicate how well these students are growing in comparison with other students) were 54.8 for Reading, 54.8 in Writing, and 49.5 in Math, compared to the state average of 50. The median student growth percentile is the middle score if the individual student growth percentiles are ranked from highest to lowest. A “typical” school would have a median student growth percentile of 50.

The charts below display student demographics (including primary home languages and ethnicities of students throughout the school), the CSAP and CELA growth scores of ELL students at the school, and the proficiency levels of Lincoln High students on the CELA and CSAP. All non-exited English language learners (who students who are opted out of services) take the CELA exam, which tests students on four domains – Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing. Students in grades 3 through 10 take the CSAP exam. The option to take CSAP in Spanish is available in 3rd and 4th grades.

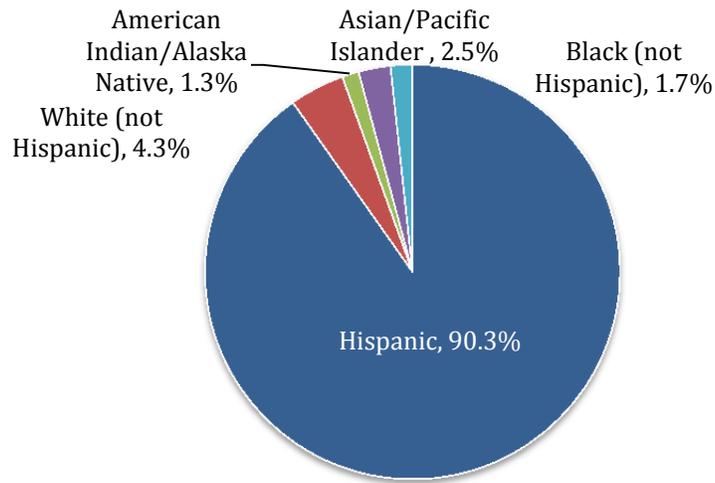
Primary Home Language Spoken by Abraham Lincoln High Students

LANGUAGE	
Spanish	74.1%
English	22.4%
Vietnamese	2.5%
Khmer	0.3%
Nuer	0.2%
Arabic	0.1%
Chinese	0.1%
Chinese, Mandarin	0.1%
German	0.1%
Navajo	0.1%
Seminole	0.1%
Somali	0.1%
Urdu	0.1%
Total (N=1,770)	100.0%

Source: Administrator Portal pulled February 22, 2011 (the Administrator Portal uses data from the 2010-11 DPS October Count, matched with current student enrollment).

Note: Data describe students throughout the entire school, not just ELL students.

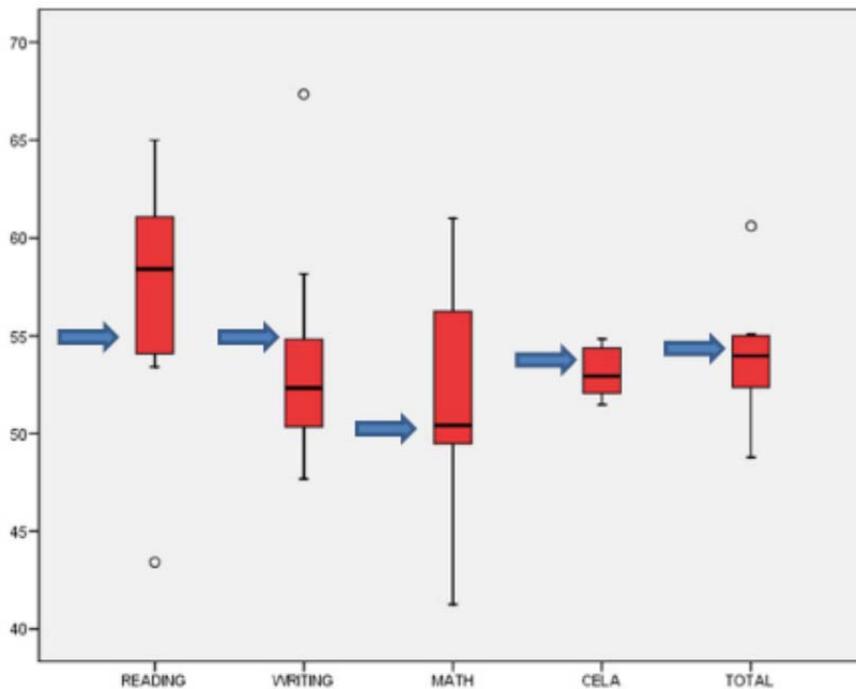
Ethnicity of Students at Abraham Lincoln, 2009-10



Source: DPS Strategy Department, Count of Student Membership by Ethnicity by School, 2009-10 from October Count 2009.

Note: Data describe students throughout the entire school, not just ELL students.

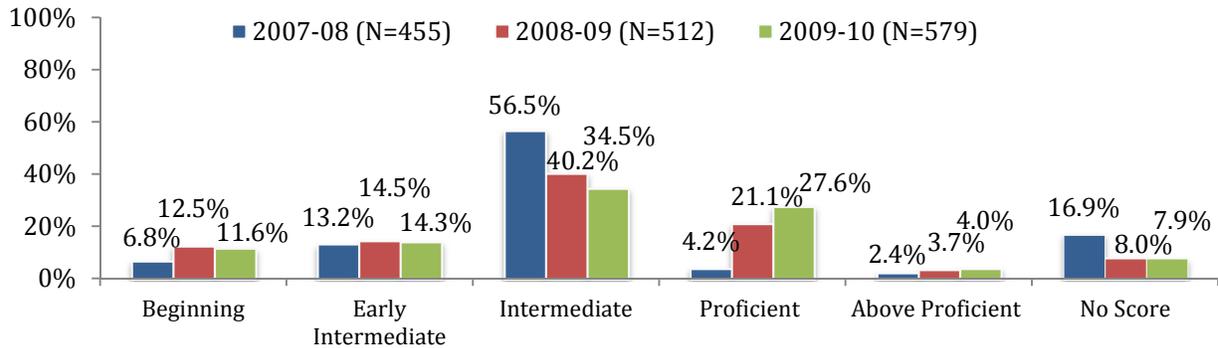
Achievement Growth of English Language Learners 2008, 2009, 2010 (arrows refer to Abraham Lincoln)



Source: Developed using data from the DPS AllScores repository.

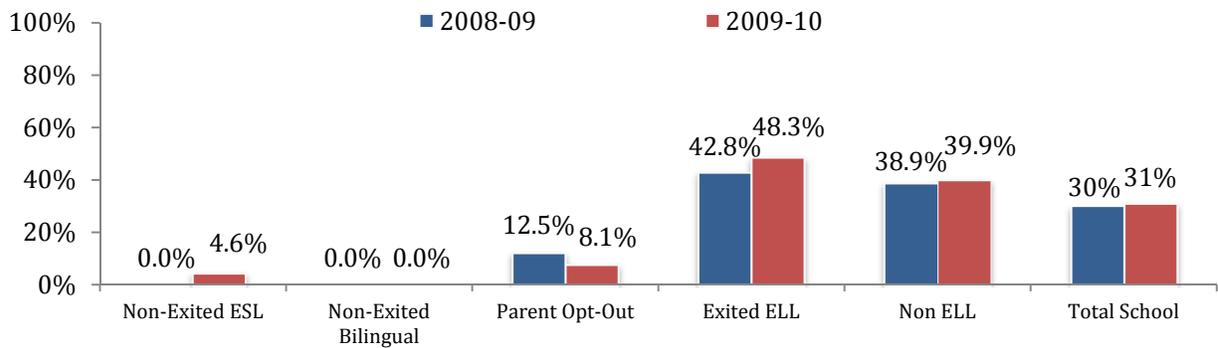
Note: Comparison includes 18 DPS high schools with more than 68 English language learners with CSAP growth percentiles.

English Language Proficiency Level, CELA Overall



Source: DPS Department of Accountability, Research and Evaluation, CELA Report 2010.

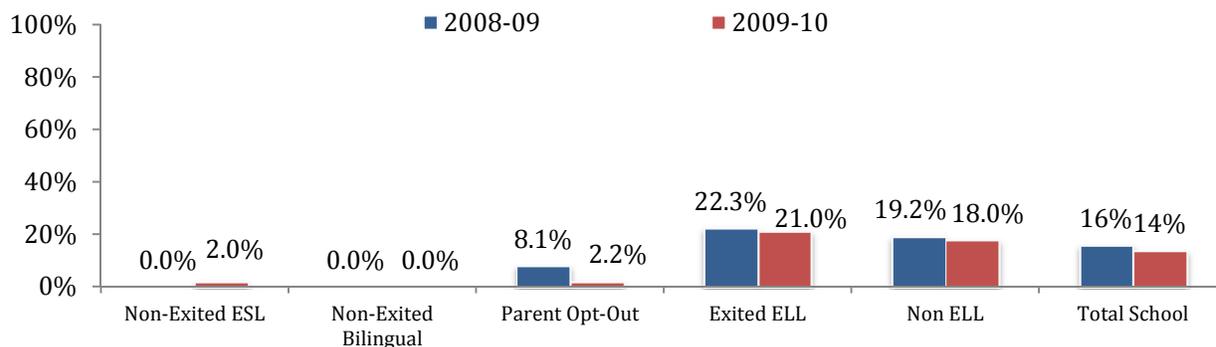
Percentage of ELL Students Who were Proficient or Above on CSAP Reading



Source: DPS Department of English Language Acquisition, November 2010.

Sample Sizes: 2009 – Non-Exited ESL N=99; Non-Exited Bilingual N=31; Parent Opt-Out N=160; Exited ELL N=400; Non ELL N=229; 2010 – Non-Exited ESL N=151; Non-Exited Bilingual N=48; Parent Opt-Out N=136; Exited ELL N=385; Non ELL N=261

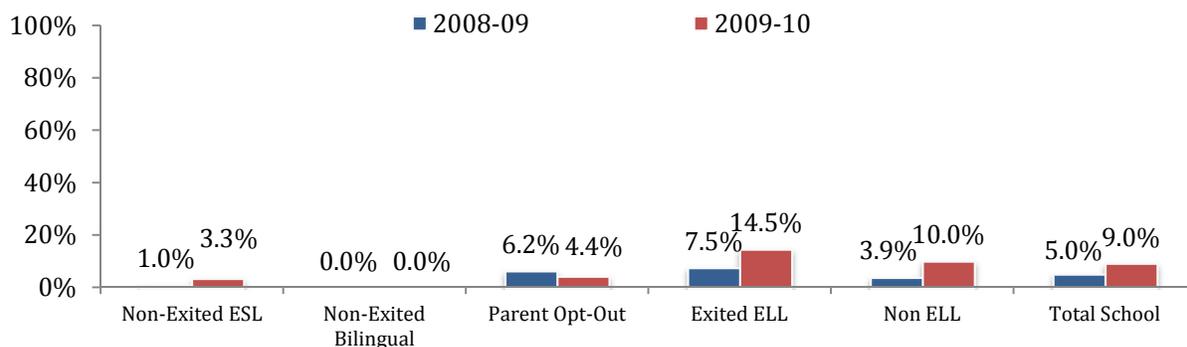
Percentage of ELL Students Who were Proficient or Above on CSAP Writing



Source: DPS Department of English Language Acquisition, November 2010.

Sample Sizes: 2009 – Non-Exited ESL N=99; Non-Exited Bilingual N=31; Parent Opt-Out N=160; Exited ELL N=400; Non ELL N=229; 2010 – Non-Exited ESL N=151; Non-Exited Bilingual N=48; Parent Opt-Out N=136; Exited ELL N=385; Non ELL N=261

Percentage of ELL Students Who were Proficient or Above on CSAP Math



Source: DPS Department of English Language Acquisition, November 2010.

Sample Sizes: 2009 – Non-Exited ESL N=99; Non-Exited Bilingual N=31; Parent Opt-Out N=161; Exited ELL N=400; Non ELL N=229; 2010 – Non-Exited ESL N=152; Non-Exited Bilingual N=49; Parent Opt-Out N=136; Exited ELL N=386; Non ELL N=260

Summary of Findings from Case Study

Key Findings

- School-wide combined emphases on sheltered instruction for English language learners and college readiness
- Professional development, instructional assessment, coaching, and professional learning communities coordinated to improve instruction for English language learners in all classes
- Strong principal leadership and vision coupled with opportunities for and development of distributed leadership
- Community/Parent engagement opportunities coordinated by a full-time, bilingual staff member
- Student schedule variations and instruction designed to increase student achievement, graduation rates, and the number of college-bound students
- Plans for continued improvement

School-wide combined emphases on sheltered instruction for English language learners and college readiness

Teachers and administrators share an understanding that students in all classes, designated ELA students or not, are English language learners who require support in acquiring academic English proficiency while learning content. Recognizing that improvement in student achievement is tied to improved instructional support for English language learners, the school has focused on professional development in sheltered instruction (SIOP) by sending teachers to national SIOP training seminars and incorporating teacher-led SIOP training in on-site professional development activities. When hiring teachers, the principal looks for teachers who have experience working with language learners. In interviews, applicants may be presented scenarios involving English learners and asked how they would address their needs.

The use of SIOP strategies is expected in all classrooms, including ELA classes, 9th grade academy classes, and Advanced Placement (AP) classes. Classroom photos taken as part of the study provide evidence of the SIOP focus in many classrooms: posted content and language objectives, word walls, other visual supports for learning, e.g., posters, smart boards, and document camera technology, clickers to facilitate assessment, and seating arrangements that encourage student interaction. Interviewed teachers gave examples of the use of SIOP and college-readiness strategies as a daily part of their teaching practice. PD sessions had the combined emphasis of SIOP strategies and tasks requiring higher order thinking.

The emphasis on SIOP strategies is paired with an instructional focus on college readiness. The principal explained, “We can do all these great things with second language learners, but if it’s not rigorous, and if it’s not with the backbone of the expectation that these kids are going to go to college, . . . what are we doing it for? . . . I want them to read, write, and speak so they’re successful in college.” As with SIOP, college readiness has been a focus of off-site professional development for teams of teachers and administrators, who then assist in planning and facilitating on-site professional development for all staff. The on-site professional development and instructional focus for the 2010-11 school year is “higher level tasks utilizing second language instructional strategies.” Teachers and administrators reference the PISA model of 6 levels of tasks, working to implement more high level tasks into lessons. Photos show evidence of the college emphasis: college and university banners in the entry hall; posters in classrooms, hallways, and outside counseling and GEAR UP offices. The Media/Library, GEAR UP, and AVID Centers along with AP classes create a college readiness hub with messages for grade 10-12 students on the 2nd floor of the building. Achievement data are available to students in many classrooms and in the hallway. Posters in some hallways and classrooms display college readiness standards. The Lincoln Lesson Plan template includes space for teachers’ descriptions of the SIOP and college readiness standards to be used in the lesson. The “Lincoln Way,” a teacher-authored document posted in some classrooms and referred to in professional development sessions, includes SIOP and college readiness standards. Freshman Academy teachers, who are organized in cross-content teams that share 9th grade students, are named for metro area colleges.

Professional development, instructional assessment, coaching and professional learning communities coordinated to improve instruction for English language learners in all classes

Teacher-facilitated, on-site professional development, instructional assessment and coaching, and professional learning communities are coordinated to improve instruction. Much of the on-site professional development involves instructional strategies to support the dual emphases on English language learning and college readiness. Three teacher leadership teams—SIOP, AVID/College Readiness, and PLC—plan and deliver much of the weekly professional development. The school has 4 instructional coaches, 3 of whom are funded by the site-based budget. Frequent observations of teachers by coaches, principal, and assistant principals provide data for feedback loops to teachers and coaches. Coaches work with teachers who are identified as needing support. Professional development sessions are planned in response to what administrators and coaches see or do not see happening in the classrooms they observe. Despite budget cuts, school leadership continues to see coaching as a necessity for continued improvement, and therefore, a very high budget priority.

Teachers meet daily in teams, formerly called common planning teams, now called Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), to plan instruction, assessment, and interventions. The coaches, principal, and assistant principals meet regularly with the PLCs. All teams focus on answering 4 questions in their work together: What do we want students to learn? How will we know when

each student has learned? How will we respond to difficulty in learning? How will we respond to students who are learning? After having worked with templates and schedules provided by leadership teams, each PLC has refined the process in ways that fit the needs of their group.

Don Trickel, one of the instructional coaches, described the ways in which teachers work together in PLCs have developed over time. In the first year of implementation, common planning time usually meant that teachers sat in the same room as they worked on their individual lesson plans. Today, while variation in degree of effective implementation continues, all teams have made progress toward the kind of collaboration described in literature about Professional Learning Communities.¹

The interviewed teachers provided detail about how they currently collaborate in their PLCs. One teacher described her PLC work as a time in which teachers decide on common learning objectives, share lesson plans they have found effective, develop common assessments, and work together to provide interventions for students based on what each student is learning or not learning. She emphasized the degree to which she is able to collaborate with other teachers in meeting the instructional needs of English language learners in her content area classes. She also said that all learners are expected to learn core content concepts, while gaps in their knowledge or English language proficiency are being addressed.

A second teacher said that this year her PLC has taken the “baby step” of agreeing on “the big ideas” for units of instruction, but that they have not yet developed the level of trust needed to compare student assessment results and to work collaboratively on responding to the instructional weaknesses those results might reveal. The teacher expressed confidence that her team would “get there.”

Professional development activities include learning from peers, especially as demonstrated in the implementation of Learning Walks, Learning Labs and Instructional Rounds, all examples of professional activities in which teachers observe each other in the classroom. This year, a group of 10 teachers who teach students who are still in English language development classes are working together in their PLC, in learning labs, and through intensive coaching, with the goal of improving their implementation of SIOP strategies. Instructional coach Amy Thomson, who works with the team, notes that as a result of the group’s reflection and discussion, the team is working to improve cross-class and cross-level coordination of the ELA curriculum and assessment of individual student progress, as well as making recommendations to leadership for improved scheduling and student placement procedures.

Assistant principal Josefina Petit-Higa, who is in charge of scheduling and placement, welcomed the discussions with teachers, has already begun to implement some of their recommendations, and is planning for more changes in the next school year. In addition, she is requesting additional

¹ DuFour, R, DuFour, R., Eaker, R., & Karhanek, G. (2010). *Raising the bar and closing the gap: Whatever it takes*. Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree Press. This book is this year’s “school-wide read” and the topic of small group discussions among teachers each month.

information about each student be included in Infinite Campus, so that they can do a better job of placing students, especially those entering 9th grade from DPS middle schools. She plans to work with counselors to support them in being better informed about appropriate placement of English language learners.

Strong principal leadership and vision coupled with opportunities for and development of distributed leadership

Abraham Lincoln High School's principal Antonio Esquibel is particularly well-prepared to meet the challenges of leading this school. His knowledge of the school and community goes back to his days as a high school student at Lincoln. His knowledge of schools and learning is grounded in both the classroom and administration at the elementary and secondary school levels. After teaching Spanish and social studies, he served as assistant principal at an elementary school and at Lincoln. He credits his elementary school experience as key to his understanding of ways to focus on English language learning and to lead teachers to work collaboratively on behalf of their students.

High value is placed at Lincoln on studying and resolving its own challenges. This is accomplished through the principal's creative leadership and innovation, in collaboration with leadership teams and staff. The principal gave examples of guiding school leaders and other teachers to look beyond district resources for guidance. These included drawing on national research on Latino, high ELL, high poverty schools, sending school leaders and teachers to out-of-state professional development opportunities, and bringing national experts to the school. Concerned that student growth and achievement is still not high enough, the principal wants more freedom from district and state rules to implement new ideas that would increase intensity and rigor in order for more students to be college ready. He uses district and federal moneys and grant funding creatively to secure material and technology resources to support literacy and content development of ELL students and professional development for teachers. The principal was a strong advocate of a new state law prohibiting the direct placement by school districts of teachers who have not performed well in other schools into Title I schools. His position on the law grew out of his mostly negative experience with direct placement teachers and mostly positive experience with teachers chosen by his hiring team to teach at Lincoln.

Since the beginning of his tenure, the principal has enlisted teachers in a "Leadership Cadre," a SIOP Leadership Team, an AVID/College Readiness Team, and a Data/PLC Leadership Team. These teams plan and lead professional development sessions throughout the school year. The principal, assistant principals, instructional coaches, and teacher leaders have taken opportunities to participate in national training and conferences. They also participate in setting school-wide goals and planning and implementing school-wide processes.

Principal Antonio Esquibel emphasized the importance of building the administrators' knowledge of effective instructional practice so that they can fully participate in school-wide efforts at raising student achievement. He laments the lack of what he sees as effective professional development for principals and assistant principals at the district level.

Community/Parent engagement opportunities coordinated by a full-time, bilingual staff member

Lincoln reaches out to meet the needs of Spanish speaking students and parents. The school employs a “Parent Engagement Coordinator.” Parent newsletters are published in English and Spanish. Much of the school website is also in both English and Spanish. The principal and most APs are Spanish speaking, as well as many of the front office staff. Students’ first languages, communities, and cultures are honored while they are also learning English in order to become college ready.

A parent involvement goal is to create leadership, volunteer, and learning opportunities for parents. The assistant principal charged with coordinating parent engagement activities described the “Lincoln Family System.” The process of changing the ways in which school faculty and staff worked to involve more parents included an examination of root causes for low rates of parent involvement, as well as the “funds of knowledge” that the school, community, and family can share. The current “Lincoln Family Plan” includes classes and workshops for parents, volunteer opportunities, social integrating activities (for example, a bowling night), educational activities (for example, Denver Art Museum and college campus visits), and a communication system, which includes a bilingual newsletter. The effectiveness of the plan is continuously monitored through parents’ evaluations of each activity, attendance counts, and parent reflections on their learning. The count of parent participants in the wide array of activities has increased dramatically from 2,091 in the 2008-2009 school year to 4,800 (as of February, with 3 months remaining) in the current school year.

Student schedule variations and instruction designed to increase student achievement, graduation rates, and the number of college-bound students

All 9th graders are part of Freshman Academy. Teachers in the Freshman Academy work in teams to coordinate instruction across subject areas, to track individual student progress, and to design interventions for under-performing students. Low-achieving Freshman Academy students have 90-minute blocks of instruction in English and Math, designed to keep them on-track with grade level work while they work with teachers to fill gaps in content understanding. ELA students have 90-minute blocks to work on English language development.

Tuesday tutorials and a Student Success Center have been implemented this year to connect students in all grade levels to tutoring from teachers in subject areas in which they are struggling. According to the interviewed teachers and the instructional coaches, teachers recognize the value of the Tuesday tutorials and are actively engaged in suggesting ways to improve the process next year.

Lincoln also operates a Night School and offers credit recovery options for students who have failed classes.

Plans for continued improvement

Despite Principal Antonio Esquibel's plan to leave the principal position at Lincoln in June, school leaders and coaches are looking forward to continued improvement in school-wide practice and student achievement next year. Esquibel intends to remain engaged in work at Lincoln as he takes a district position in which he has leadership responsibilities for 11 schools including Lincoln High School. One way in which he will remain involved is through the work of the Lincoln Collaborative, a grant-sponsored initiative begun this school year, to work on the goal of college readiness for students in a feeder pattern that includes Godsmen Elementary, CMS Elementary, Kepner Middle, and Abraham Lincoln High Schools.