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DPS Exemplary Schools Case Studies: Cross-case Analysis

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Overview of DPS UCD ELA Exemplary Schools Case Studies

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. The study 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. One case study report was produced for each of the six schools selected. Please see the reports at: <http://testing.dpsk12.org/> This report is based on a cross-case analysis of the individual cases.

NOTE: This cross-case study of DPS ELA Exemplary Schools is ongoing. These preliminary assertions and explanations are based on six case studies of individual schools, each of which drew on 6-12 interviews with staff members, photographic inventories, and archived data collected between December 2010 and March 2011 only. We anticipate that further investigation, e.g., observations in classrooms and additional interviews, will expand our understanding of the practices contributing to the success of learners of English as an additional language at these schools.

What emerged as central to the success of these schools is the attention and thoughtful integration of practices that support English language learners throughout the entire school. Each of these schools seems to have a language lens through which they view students and practice. They have developed a coherent approach to educating students, and display high expectations for students and staff, supported by a culture of engagement and instruction geared toward making the content accessible to students. The success of these schools appears to be linked to how well schools integrate ELA services and the “language lens” into the overall school culture and classroom instruction, rather than a particular program or series of programs. The following practices emerged as key components contributing to the success experienced by six diverse schools in working with English language learners:

- **General Successful School Practices:** Schools experiencing success in educating learners of English as an additional language share key characteristics of successful schools in general, including: coherence in vision, values, and actions; high expectations for students and

teachers; a climate of safety, respect, and supported collaboration for teachers; and a safe community for children.

- **Successful Practices for English Language Learners:** Schools in this study experiencing success in educating learners of English as an additional language shared, in varying degrees, the following characteristics specific to the needs and strengths of learners of English as an additional language: a “language lens;” a focus on academic language; a focus on literacy and/or bi-literacy; teachers who share an understanding of second language acquisition (SLA); active use of data to guide instruction in language, literacy, and content; a culture of continuous learning/improvement; purposeful professional development and coaching; strong distributed and/or instructional leadership and committed and well-trained teachers; and active engagement of parents.
- **Systematic, School-Wide Integration of Attention to Language Acquisition into Whole School Culture:** The school-wide second language learning/instruction practices that contribute to the success of learners of English as an additional language are supported and enhanced by practices that characterize successful schools and integrated into the schools’ cultures.

The following sections of this report include a more in-depth explanation of the cross-case study, brief descriptions of the schools, and discussion of how the practices for which we found evidence at these six schools are facilitating academic growth for learners of English as an additional language. The discussion begins on page 9.

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.

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). These schools are discussed separately beginning on page 19.

Case Study Schools

ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

Bryant Webster Elementary is a magnet Dual Language school for students in grades ECE-8 (this study focused on the elementary grades (K-5) in the school). As a Dual Language program, all students in the school receive services under the Spanish/English immersion model. Bryant Webster works to help children become bi-literate in both English and Spanish. Because Bryant Webster is not a neighborhood school, students have to apply to participate in the magnet program. All students need to provide a reason as to why they are not attending their neighborhood school. ELL student status is an acceptable attendance reason.

Force Elementary School is a neighborhood school designated as a Transitional Native Language Instruction (TNLI) school, meaning that Spanish-speaking students receive native language instruction in Spanish (ELA-S) with supported English content instruction and English language development. As students’ English proficiency increases, they move toward supported English content instruction and English language development (ELA-E). Non Spanish-speaking English language learners receive ELA-E services.

MIDDLE SCHOOLS

Merrill Middle School is a neighborhood, English as a Second Language (ESL) zone school and the only school in the study that includes a Newcomer Center. Unlike the other seven schools in the study, each of which has a predominantly Latino and Spanish-speaking student population, Merrill has over 30 languages and cultures represented. The Newcomer center provides services to

students who are new to DPS, ELL students identified as having limited or interrupted education as well as minimal literacy in their native language *and* English, and/or students who have been enrolled in a U.S. school for two or fewer semesters. ELA-E instructional services (ESL school) are provided such that students receive supported English content instruction and English language development.

West Denver Prep, Federal Campus (WDPF) is a charter middle school. It was the first of four West Denver Preparatory School charter campuses in DPS. West Denver Prep opened in 2006 with sixth grade only and added one grade per year during the first three years. It is now in its fifth year of operation, and its first graduates are now high school sophomores. Approximately 76% of the students at the school are designated as English language learners and 86% identify Spanish as their primary home language. WDPF implements school-wide practices to promote the development of proficiency in English and the educational attainment of their student population.

HIGH SCHOOLS

Abraham Lincoln High School is a comprehensive neighborhood high school and a Transitional Native Language Instruction Zone designated school. This means that for Spanish speaking students with limited or no English proficiency, content 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 neighborhood school does not have ELA services.

Bruce Randolph High School is an "autonomy" school and a Beacon school, meaning there is encouragement of innovation and reform initiated and developed by teachers and principals. Bruce Randolph recently received national attention when President Obama mentioned the school's success in his State of the Union address. This acknowledgement highlighted the efforts of staff and administration to "turn around" the school. In 2008, the school became autonomous, granting greater flexibility and control over personnel, budget, and the use of time. Bruce Randolph High School is a magnet school (not a neighborhood school) and is designated as an ELA-E school, meaning it provides supported English content instruction and English language development for English language learners.

ADDITIONAL "REPUTATIONAL" ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

Goldrick Elementary School is a neighborhood school designated as a Transitional Native Language Instruction and ESL Resource school. Though Goldrick has students whose first language is Vietnamese or Khmer, 86% of the students at Goldrick in 2009-10 were Hispanic/Latino and 62% spoke Spanish. While Goldrick did not meet the study's criteria for selection as an "exemplary ELA school," the school's performance is relatively high and its student population is more linguistically diverse than that of most schools in DPS.

The **Math and Science Leadership Academy (MSLA)** serves students in kindergarten through third grade. The school opened three years ago and is expanding one grade level at a time to be a

comprehensive elementary school. The mission of MSLA is to provide enhanced math and science education to its students beyond what is traditionally provided in neighborhood schools. MSLA is designated as a Transitional Native Language Instruction school. MSLA is a teacher led school. There was evidence that MSLA shares most of the practices of the case study schools, however, due to the newness of the school and the grades now open, CSAP data was not available.

Table 1 provides an overview of the six case study and two reputational schools along with demographic information. As noted above, the case study schools were purposefully selected based on their success in supporting learners of English as a second or additional language as indicated by high growth on CSAP and CELA. The researchers specifically chose schools with high density of ELL students and high levels of students qualifying for a free or reduced price lunch. Similarly, the team sought representation of different kinds of schools across levels, i.e., elementary, middle, and high. The additional two schools were included based on their reputations among area educators as well as their demographics or instructional characteristics. For more information on the particular schools, please see working drafts of the case studies at: <http://testing.dpsk12.org/>.

Table 1: School Information/Demographics

| | 2010 School Type | 2010 Student Population | 2010 % ELLs | 2010 % Free/Reduced Lunch | 2010 SPF | 2010 SPF Status | Met / Did Not Meet 2010 AYP | CSAP Reading Growth 3-year (08, 09, 10) weighted avg. | CSAP Math Growth 3-year (08, 09, 10) weighted avg. | CSAP Writing Growth 3-year (08, 09, 10) weighted avg. | CELA Gain (Z score) 3-year (08, 09, 10) weighted avg. |
|------------------------|---|-------------------------|-------------|---------------------------|----------|----------------------|-----------------------------|---|--|---|---|
| Bryant Webster | Dual language, Magnet, Elementary | 440 (K-8) | 58% | 94% | 61% | Meeting Expectations | No | 59.0 | 54.8 | 60.6 | 0.24 |
| Force | TNLI, Neighborhood, Elementary | 440 (K-5) | 64% | 93% | 71% | Meeting Expectations | No | 66.7 | 74.9 | 67.5 | 0.30 |
| Merrill | ESL, Neighborhood, Beacon, Middle | 525 | 58% | 80% | 47% | Accredited on watch | No | 56.6 | 51.7 | 56.6 | 0.15 |
| WDPF | Charter, Middle | 326 | 76% | 91% | 88% | Distinguished | Yes | 73.7 | 91.2 | 84.3 | 0.34 |
| Bruce Randolph | ELA-E, Magnet, Autonomy, Beacon, High | 387 | 83% | 96% | 50% | Accredited on watch | Yes | 65.0 | 61.0 | 67.3 | 0.22 |
| Abraham Lincoln | TNLI, Comprehensive, Neighborhood, High | 1,900 | 74% | 92% | 47% | Accredited on watch | No | 54.8 | 49.5 | 54.8 | 0.13 |
| Goldrick | TNLI / ELS Resource, Neighborhood, Elementary | 554 (K-5) | 69% | 93% | 61% | Meeting Expectations | Yes | 49.8 | 64.0 | 54.0 | 0.20 |
| MSLA | TNLI, Performance, Elementary | 179 (K-3) | 70% | 94% | Too new | Too new | Yes | Too new | Too new | Too new | - |

Cross-case Analysis Methodology

Fourteen researchers from UC Denver and DPS conducted the case studies of the six case study and two reputational schools in small groups, or site teams. Each site team developed a case report for the school they studied. As these reports were revised for second and third drafts, people who were not on the site teams read case reports “cold,” i.e., as outside readers, and noted themes that emerged. At two weekly meetings, the emerging themes were posted to a matrix that was projected as an organizing device to guide collective discussion of the cases. Site team members responded to the “cold” reads and comments of “outsiders,” providing explanations or clarifications and contributing to refinement of terms. For example, “coherence” was suggested as preferable to “consistency,” which was mentioned in the reports of the six case study schools, as a clarification that what had been observed was not the rote following of a top down plan, but rather the coherent alignment of multiple practices (e.g., instruction, professional development, school-wide behavior plans, parent outreach, assessment) with a vision and/or articulated set of values most often related to high expectations and ongoing learning. The most robust themes were then tested against the separate cases, in order to identify those themes that held true for all or most school cases.

Cross-Case Findings/Discussion

The six case studies suggested shared characteristics that were consistent with the characteristics of successful schools generally (ARE, Successful Schools Study, 2010). These were: coherence in vision, values, and actions; high expectations for students and teachers; a climate of safety, respect, and supported collaboration for teachers; and a safe community for children (See Table 2).

Table 2: Characteristics of Case Study Schools Generally Consistent with Successful Schools

| | School Type | Coherence/ Shared Values | High Expectations | Positive Environment for Teachers | Safe Community for Students |
|-----------------------|--|--------------------------------|----------------------|---|-----------------------------------|
| Bryant Webster | Dual language, Magnet, Elementary | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Force | TNLI, Neighborhood, Elementary | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Merrill | ESL, Neighborhood, Beacon, Middle | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| WDPF | Charter, Middle | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Bruce Randolph | ELA-E, Magnet, Autonomy, Beacon, High | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Lincoln | TNLI Comprehensive, Neighborhood, High | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |

Coherence

A characteristic that emerged strongly in each of the six cases was coherence. By coherence, we mean school-wide practices that extend beyond the surface level of consistent routines to alignment of instruction, professional development, and school policies and practices with shared and articulated vision and values. All six schools had clear expectations for behavior as well as the vision that all students, including those learning a second or additional language, *can* learn. In line with the two topics for professional development stipulated by the district in 2010-2011, four schools (Bryant Webster, West Denver Prep Federal, Bruce Randolph, and Lincoln) organized instructional and outreach activities around college preparation. Five of the six placed school-wide emphasis on academic language. At the elementary level, this was evident in word walls that were designed to flexibly incorporate academic vocabulary by content area. At the secondary level, coherence of vision that organized professional development, instructional planning, and outreach to parents was evident in explicit ways, e.g., “the Lincoln Way,” Bruce Randolph’s culture of learning and commitment to innovation, West Denver Prep’s use of a common vocabulary and “an approach to instruction that focuses classroom activities on a limited and shared set of learning objectives, which is closely aligned with tested state standards” (WDPF Case Study, p. 12),” and Merrill’s unique identity as an ESL school serving a diverse and international population. At West Denver Prep, “the purpose of establishing uniform curriculum and procedures is to provide a

supportive and familiar structure for both teachers and students that can be refined from year to year and provides clear and consistent answers to the question: “What should I do now?” (WDPF Case Study, p. 15). The practices and procedures at the case study schools were organized by and aligned with a coherent conceptual framework.

High Expectations

Coherence suggests clear expectations for school community participants. A second and related characteristic evident in all six case study schools was high expectations, not only for behavior, but also for academic success, and, in most schools, the development of proficiency in academic English. For example, at Merrill, there is a “culture of academic excellence and high performance for all English learners embraced not only by the administration and staff, but also, it seems, by the *majority of Merrill’s diverse students and their families*, for whom school is understood as a place to learn and succeed—in English and all subjects” (Merrill Case Study, p. 3). At Bryant Webster Elementary, teachers report that the question is not, “Are you going to college?” but, “What college are you going to?” At Force Elementary as well as Bryant Webster, children are expected to develop bi-literacy, i.e., to become literate in both English and Spanish. At West Denver Prep, Bruce Randolph and Lincoln, a focus on college is clearly articulated throughout the schools, emphasizing not only that college is possible, but that students *will* achieve this goal.

High expectations at these schools were enacted not through requiring instructional materials to be “at grade level,” but rather through articulation and enactment of the belief that all students could, and in fact would, learn at a rate that would lead to both high school graduation and success in higher education. High expectations were expressed in ways that were motivating to students and did not set students up for failure. For example, at Bruce Randolph High School and Abraham Lincoln High School, students were encouraged to take challenging college preparatory courses and teachers of those courses provided supports to minimize student failure. At West Denver Prep, students who arrived without having completed their homework were required to work in the Homework Center until 5:15 each evening, but the Center was a supportive environment in which many students participated voluntarily. In addition to high expectations for students, the case study schools displayed high expectations for teachers as well as trust in their expertise. Similarly, four of the six schools had *explicit* high expectations for the schools as centers of learning for students who are acquiring English, evidenced by English language acquisition as a key area of focus as well as thoughtful and coherent practices to promote academic English proficiency (we do not have evidence that this was an explicit expectation at Bruce Randolph or WDPF, though we do have evidence of high expectations for all students as well as second language acquisition practices integrated at both schools).

Culture of Professional Collaboration and Collegiality

Collaboration was a major emergent theme suggested by teachers at all six case study schools, who described working closely and openly with colleagues to improve their individual and collective practice. Several schools, including Bryant Webster, Bruce Randolph, and Force, stressed vertical (across grade levels) and horizontal (within grade level) planning for teachers, with coordinated planning times. At West Denver Prep, there were shared grade-level office space and common planning periods, as well as summer sessions on learning the procedures of the school and revising curriculum, which helped promote collaboration and shared expectations. The climate for collaboration across these schools was enhanced by a sense of safety among teachers, who in most schools felt comfortable bringing issues to their peers, coaches, and administrators and seeking help and guidance with certain issues, while feeling like contributors on others. There was evidence of administrators' marked trust and confidence in teachers to make professionally sound decisions regarding instruction and student placement. That trust was predicated upon careful hiring practices and longevity or persistence among the teaching staff. At Bruce Randolph this climate was characterized as a culture of reciprocity, in which teachers felt comfortable seeking support, and in providing help to their colleagues. At Force Elementary, teachers initiated professional development around language and literacy and conscientiously brought new teachers into the culture of the school. Several interviewees across different schools suggested that cultures of collaborative learning among staff represented excellent models for students.

Community for Children

Five of the six case study schools focused reflectively on building familial and inclusive communities for children, and we found evidence that all were perceived as safe by their constituents. In all six of the schools, the focus on community included engagement of parents in activities such as English classes, math nights, and literacy nights. In schools like Bryant Webster, Force, and West Denver Prep, teachers and administrators reported that students had not just one teacher, but a whole school of teachers. "We know our kids" was a recurrent theme in all of the case study schools. The emphasis on building a sense of community for children was in some cases directed towards after school and community activities. More often, it was more akin to the development of communities of learners (Brown & Campione, 1990; Rogoff, 1994), in which there was reciprocal learning among students and teachers, leveraging of community resources, and clearly communicated respect for students to learn and contribute. High expectations in the case study schools were accompanied by systematic academic and linguistic scaffolding and other supports for students and teachers. Teacher persistence at schools appeared to correlate with administrators' respect for teacher contributions to curriculum and instructional design, common among most schools in the study. Building a safe environment for learning was a common theme among the teachers interviewed.

Language Oriented/Supporting Practices

In a recent study by DPS's Office of Accountability, Research, and Evaluation, successful DPS schools were characterized by a supportive and respectful learning environment among students. This cross-case analysis also found schools successful in promoting the academic and linguistic achievement of learners of English to be characterized by similar school-wide successful practices. To stop there is to misinterpret this report as suggesting that good teaching is good teaching for all students. That perspective does not recognize that students who are learning English as a second or additional language are doing double duty. They are learning both new content and a new language. Some are acquiring literacy in a "foreign" language, without the 5-6 years of oral language development in their second or additional language that supports literacy in one's home language (Genesee, Lindholm-Leary, Saunders, & Christian, 2006). Because this is the case with many learners of English as a second or additional language, particularly in low-SES (socio-economic status) schools, the researchers conducting this study were very interested in school-wide practices or characteristics associated with linguistic orientations and strategies – the primary question being, *what are the additional practices and strategies that characterize these schools as related to English language acquisition beyond what characterizes overall successful schools?* For a summary of such practices that emerged from this study, see Table 3.

Table 3: Language Oriented/Supporting Practices

| | School Type | Lang. Lens | Academic Lang. | Bi-literacy/Literacy | Second Lang. Acq. (SLA) | Data / Continuous Improvement | PD | Coaching | Leadership | Parent Engagement |
|-----------------------|---|------------|----------------|----------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------------|----|----------|------------------------|-------------------|
| Bryant Webster | Dual language, Magnet, Elementary | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ +Placement | ✓ | ✓ | Distrib. | ✓ |
| Force | TNLI, Neighborhood, Elementary | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ +Placement | ✓ | ✓ | Distrib. | ✓ |
| Merrill | ESL, Neighborhood, Beacon, Middle | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ +Placement | ✓ | ✓ | Distrib. | ✓ |
| WDPF | Charter, Middle | ✓ SIOF | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | Instruct. | ✓ |
| Bruce Randolph | ELA-E, Magnet, Autonomy, Beacon, High | ✓ | | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | Distrib. | ✓ |
| Lincoln | TNLI, Comprehensive, Neighborhood, High | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ +Placement | ✓ | ✓ | Distrib./ Instruct. | ✓ |

Schools in this study experiencing success in educating learners of English as an additional language shared, in varying degrees, the following characteristics specific to the needs and strengths of learners of English as an additional language: a “language lens;” a focus on academic language; a focus on literacy and/or bi-literacy; teachers who share an understanding of second language acquisition (SLA); active use of data to guide instruction in language, literacy, and content; a culture of continuous learning/improvement; purposeful professional development and coaching; strong distributed and/or instructional leadership and committed and well-trained teachers; and active engagement of parents. These themes are addressed in more detail below.

Language Lens

Four of the six case study schools (Bryant Webster, Force, Merrill, and Lincoln) had an explicit focus on English language development. The interviewed teachers and administrators impressed researchers with their consistent use of references to language acquisition theory, research, and strategies. These teachers appeared to understand deep level connections between acquiring a second language and simultaneously acquiring new academic content. Teachers at Bryant Webster described their approach to teaching and learning as being characterized by a “language lens.” This lens was articulated at the four schools mentioned as key to their school’s approach to teaching and learning.

A key element of the “language lens,” which characterizes both the orientation and intentional practices of the four case study schools mentioned above, is that language acquisition is a challenge and a resource. Teachers at all case study schools actively recognized that learners of English as a second or additional language were not deprived or operating at a deficit, but rather were students with academic potential who were also tasked with acquiring a new language. In addition to this orientation, at five of the six schools there was evidence of integration of language instruction and sheltered content instruction in the general education teachers’ planning and practices. At Lincoln, for example, teachers were expected to include language objectives along with content objectives for every lesson, and they were expected to communicate language objectives in ways that students could understand. Students were expected to understand and monitor their language learning as they learned content. Additionally, Lincoln’s principal stressed the importance of all teachers realizing that all of their classes have English language learners and that every lesson needed to address language learning.

At West Denver Prep, the language lens as a set of values was not articulated, but was still evident in practices like training all new hires in sheltered content instruction and explicitly emphasizing vocabulary development. Additionally, West Denver Prep’s practices of using a shared vocabulary for instructional practices across content areas and grade levels, providing visual cues, and focusing on core concepts (which reduces linguistic “noise”) are consistent with sheltered content instruction for those acquiring second or additional languages. Bruce Randolph was the only case study school in which the language lens had not yet been fully implemented. While at Bruce Randolph teachers and staff shared a perception that emerging knowledge of more than one language was an asset for students and not a deficit, school-wide training in and implementation of intentional language instruction practice is planned for next year.

Focus on Academic Language

Supporting academic language was one of two district professional development initiatives in 2010-2011. Five of the six case study schools focused on helping students to acquire academic language. Even the schools that chose to focus on college readiness rather than academic language as their district professional development initiative for the year provided support for the acquisition of academic language. Explicit instruction of academic language is consistent with sheltered content instruction and support for language acquisition. If it is not explicitly supported, academic language

can take language learners 5-7 years to acquire (Genesee, et al. 2006). As noted above, this focus was appeared to have been embraced by five of the case study schools, even when they committed to the other focus area (college as an expectation).

Focus on Bi-literacy and Literacy

Teachers and administrators at Force Elementary and Bryant Webster Elementary were very explicit in advocating for their students to develop as bilingual and bi-literate. Staff at these two schools emphasize that Spanish is a resource and not an obstacle. This position is consistent with language theory and research that have demonstrated that children (and adults) who become literate in their first language acquire literacy in second and third languages much more readily and thoroughly (Genesee, et al. 2006). When development of bi-literacy at home is hampered to some extent, support for oral academic language development in the second language provides a scaffold for literacy. This support for either bi-literacy or scaffolded literacy was part of the school culture at Bryant Webster, Force, Merrill, and West Denver Prep.

At Bruce Randolph, there has been extensive work on literacy across the curriculum. For example, the Spanish instructor at the school designs her curriculum around the English Language Arts curriculum. At the school, additional literacy time is allotted and there are instructional coaches completely dedicated to literacy supports, as well as leveled class libraries in every content area classroom. If students are using a certain reading strategy in their English class, they are using the same one at the same time in their Spanish class. As with the schools mentioned above, there is significant emphasis on literacy transfer that can occur across languages, and substantial support for students to develop high levels of both literacy and bi-literacy.

Teachers Knowledgeable about Second Language Acquisition (SLA)

Teachers at Bryant Webster, Force, Merrill, and Lincoln appeared to be well-prepared in the theory, research, and strategies of second language acquisition, which relates directly to the foci on literacy and bi-literacy as well as the language lens. These teachers and school leadership sought out training and funding to increase their knowledge in this area. They recognized it as integral to their instruction and their students' learning, and went above and beyond the minimum requirements to increase their knowledge of Second Language Acquisition (SLA). For example, teachers attended national Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) training seminars and teacher-led SIOP training were incorporated in on-site professional development activities. Teachers and school staff talked professionally about specific students' language development and used data they had collected to coordinate placement of students in the right language levels and to move them as soon as new proficiencies were reached or when further support seemed needed to maximize growth.

Active Use of Data

Teachers at each of the case study schools actively used data about students' progress to guide content learning. Also, staff members at several schools presented data to students regarding their own progress and/or the progress of their class as a way of encouraging them to be aware of their own rate of progress and to set personal learning goals. At Force, for example, teachers used the

whole wall of a resource classroom to track literacy and language development and achievement. Those schools that emphasized and/or were characterized by teachers well-prepared in SLA, including Bryant Webster, Force, Merrill, and Lincoln, supported teachers in carefully placing students in appropriate language environments. At West Denver Prep, students are homogeneously placed in their sixth grade reading course based on performance in the lower grades. Based on summative, but also extensive formative assessment, it was a school-wide practice to very judiciously place students in first or second language literacy classes. For example, schools placed students based on proficiency/performance in order to maximize their language and content learning. In most of the case study schools, data on both language proficiency and content knowledge were integrated and used to inform instruction.

Continuous Improvement

All six of the case study schools behave as “learning organizations” in the sense that they are actively and intentionally making use of information about their past performance to improve. They are seeking to become more proficient at what they do, especially with respect to teaching. At Bruce Randolph, a culture of continuous improvement was clearly articulated. At Lincoln, the staff has implemented a practice—Tuesday Tutorials—to intervene with students who are struggling to learn content. The consensus among leaders and teachers is that the practice needs refinement in order to maximize effectiveness. Lincoln coaches made statements about the need to change school culture and that school culture changes take time and continuous work toward articulated goals. Data collected in the Case Studies suggested that this culture of ongoing learning and improvement was shared across all six case study schools. The culture of continuous improvement extended to both teachers and students, as well as the whole school. This perspective on continuous improvement is characterized by a statement made by the leadership and faculty at Bruce Randolph: “we would never say we have arrived; we say, we’re on our way.”

Purposeful Professional Development and Coaching

The culture of continuous improvement was particularly evident among teachers at the case study schools who regularly initiated professional development in the area of second language acquisition. Teachers at Force, for example, with the support of a literacy coach, have embraced and continued to use elements of Literacy Squared two years after funding for the project ended. They volunteered to participate, without compensation, in additional literacy training in the summer. They actively sought out and made use of DPS literacy resources. Teachers engaged in coaching and being coached in most of the case study schools, where the roles of literacy and ESL coaches appeared to be strong and to provide models that supported collaborative communities of learning among teachers.

At Bruce Randolph, teachers regularly work with an instructional coach for their content area, focusing on continuously improving their practice. School leaders and teachers at the school commented that an openness to coaching is one of the primary questions they raise with prospective new-hires. At Bruce Randolph there is a professional culture such that everyone gets coached and classrooms are open to be observed at any time. Coaches, some of whom are also classroom teachers, work with teachers to reflect on their strengths and set goals to improve on

areas of weakness. Every month teachers have professional development opportunities in which they participate that were created by the instructional coaches, in consultation with teachers and staff to learn what is most needed. Teachers at Bruce Randolph reported feeling valued through this work and commented that there is a safe space for innovative practice and honest reflection.

Strong Leadership and Committed Well-Trained Teachers (Distributed, Instructional)

All six case study schools appear to benefit from strong, visionary leadership characterized by high expectations for teachers and strong support for meeting those expectations. While it seems at first contradictory, the leaders of the case study schools appear to have implemented cultures of high expectations that are also safe for teachers who seek to learn and improve their content and language instruction in collaboration with their peers. Interestingly, the leadership styles vary. For example, at West Denver Prep, the school leader clearly takes on the role of instructional leader. At the other schools, leadership appears to be more distributed. At Lincoln, researchers saw both instructional leadership and distributed leadership. At Bryant Webster, Force, Merrill, and Bruce Randolph, teachers collaborate to lead instructional design and often take leadership roles in initiating professional development in SLA and literacy. Additionally, at Merrill, the principal shows trust in the ELA teachers' expertise, which leads to teacher-led PD and relative autonomy for the ELA teachers. At Force, the principal collaborates often with the Humanities Coach, who was there when Literacy Squared began at the school. The coach is a leader at the school around ELA practices, literacy practices, and use of the data wall. At all of these schools, the function of leadership that most often emerges is that of maintaining a focus on shared purposes, continuous improvement, and over-arching coordination of activities, and less so on supervision and evaluation. These schools tended to focus on high expectations and scaffolding using formative assessment, versus expectations of and monitoring for poor performance.

Active Engagement of Parents

Most, but not all, case study schools actively support the engagement of parents in their children's learning. Staff at Force Elementary characterized the school as a "community school" and actively engaged parents and community members. At Bruce Randolph, non-English speaking parents are actively engaged. A social worker is employed at the school to explicitly work to engage and empower parents as active school and community participants. At West Denver Prep, parents are engaged as active allies in the efforts to keep students working toward the long-term goal of college and the daily goals of completing work and staying focused. At Bryant Webster, staff concentrates on developing a familial community for children within the school.

Synergy/Interwoven Constellations of Practices

The school-wide second language learning/instruction practices described in the prior section appear to contribute to the success of learners of English as an additional language. At the case study schools, these language-specific practices are supported and enhanced by practices that characterize successful schools. The case study schools have school-wide practices that distinguish them overall as successful schools, yet they display additional features that point to their success among English language learners. These schools embrace and attend to the ELL student population

and thoughtfully integrate practices that promote the success of these students as part of a coherent approach to scaffolding the learning of all their students.

The case study schools are operating like well-oiled machines, making fine-tuned adjustments to ensure that students are always in the right group, including the right language group, to meet their instructional needs and help them make progress. The grouping is flexible and ever-changing. The teachers and school leaders work together cooperatively and demonstrate how RTI (Response to Intervention) concepts and locally relevant language interventions can be applied in settings with high numbers of ELL students so that students achieve powerful growth in both language and content.

A Note on the Two Reputational Schools

We have not included the two reputational schools in this cross-case analysis because neither met the selection criteria. Goldrick's growth scores were not quite high enough. MSLA, due to its newness, does not yet have CSAP scores. However, due to the positive reputations among area educators, we believe both schools deserve attention. Goldrick, for example, while not meeting the growth criteria, did make AYP and is Meeting Expectations on the district SPF. Additionally, both schools have interesting characteristics. Goldrick's learners of English as an additional language include native speakers of Khmer and Vietnamese (14% of ELLs). At MSLA, there is a strong focus on math and science as a form of advocating high expectations for Latino students.

The preliminary studies of these two schools also indicate that they share many of the school-wide practices observed in the six case study schools. The Math Science Learning Academy (MSLA) was established with the express expectation that Latino students, who are under-represented in higher levels of math and science, will become mathematicians, scientists, and engineers. As a teacher led school, MSLA is the clearest example of a distributed leadership. The teacher-led model at MSLA includes ongoing peer evaluation and coaching. At MSLA, teachers said that students have a whole school of teachers, not just one. The Climate and Culture Committee at MSLA works to extend its family school model to parents in the children's communities as well.

The language lens was observed at Goldrick, where teachers carefully placed students in appropriate language environments. Decisions about grouping for literacy (reading and writing) instruction took into account students' language proficiencies as well as their literacy proficiencies, in order to target students' language **and** literacy needs in specific and appropriate ways. The school leaders took on the role of instructional leader, but also cultivated a culture of reciprocity among teachers. The teachers were all reading Gibbons' *English Learners, Academic Literacy and Thinking* (2009) as well as *Using Science Notebooks* (2008) in order to find ways to support students' academic/content English language development. See <http://testing.dpsk12.org/> for the reports on these two reputational schools.

Researchers observed practices of horizontal and vertical planning at both Goldrick, and MSLA. Interestingly, at both MSLA and Goldrick, Lily Wong Fillmore has been serving as an external consultant. Wong Fillmore is an internationally known expert in second language acquisition. She emphasizes the importance of the first language for acquiring English. Staff at MSLA and Goldrick reported emphasizing that Spanish is a resource and not an obstacle. Teachers at Goldrick and MSLA appeared to be well-prepared in the theory, research, and strategies of second language acquisition. The researchers believe that both schools merit further study.

Implications

The six schools selected for this case study are different in academic level and approach to guiding the learning and development of learners of English as a second or additional language. As different as they are, they share many school-wide practices. All of these schools report finding ways to create a climate or “culture of engagement” in which students embrace goals of academic language learning and participate as willing learners often with strong support from parents. Similarly, most schools identified the central role of language in the instruction of students in all subjects, and, using this language lens to varying degrees, all of the schools found ways to make content learning accessible to students while enacting high expectations and developing language skills concurrently. Finally, all six schools found ways to manage their own improvement and learning as organizations from year to year, exhibiting continuity and not “reinventing the wheel.” They spoke of a long-term process of becoming successful schools for ELL students, gradually cultivating shared practices they had found to be successful, minimizing turnover of personnel, and in some cases seeking a degree of autonomy, in part to protect themselves from disruptions.

What appears to matter in terms of the success of these schools is how well the different ELA program(s) that the schools adapted and integrated into their instructional approaches have been implemented as part of a coherent approach to educating learners of English as a second or additional language as whole and capable people. Success in educating learners of English as an additional language at these schools is not about the particular program, or a series of programs or projects; it is about thoughtful, collaborative attention to curricular planning and implementation with a rigorously developed and applied language lens.

Next Steps

The researchers who developed this report look forward to examining classroom level practices at the six case study schools and the two reputational schools in order to understand more deeply what practices are contributing to their success in educating ELL students. We are also undertaking a longitudinal study to explore the learning and ELA service trajectories of students in these schools and the district as a whole. On the basis of this report, we make two recommendations to the district:

1. Invite teachers and coaches from the case study schools to collaborate with the DPS ELA Department in designing a framework for teachers and schools to develop their language lens based on theory, research, and strategies for SLA (second language acquisition); and
2. Invite school leaders from these schools to participate in designing a framework for developing coherent school cultures that include both the language lens and the empowerment of trained and engaged teachers to co-design adaptations to district curricula that address the specific language and content strengths and needs of their schools' students.

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