

# Building Systems of Support for Classroom Teachers Working with English Language Learners

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# Introduction

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- What are the major challenges your school or district faces with regard to supporting teachers who work with EL students?

# Study Purpose

- Examine how schools and districts create “systems of support” for classroom teachers working with EL students which have the potential to influence learning outcomes.

# Research Methods

## Qualitative Case Study Design

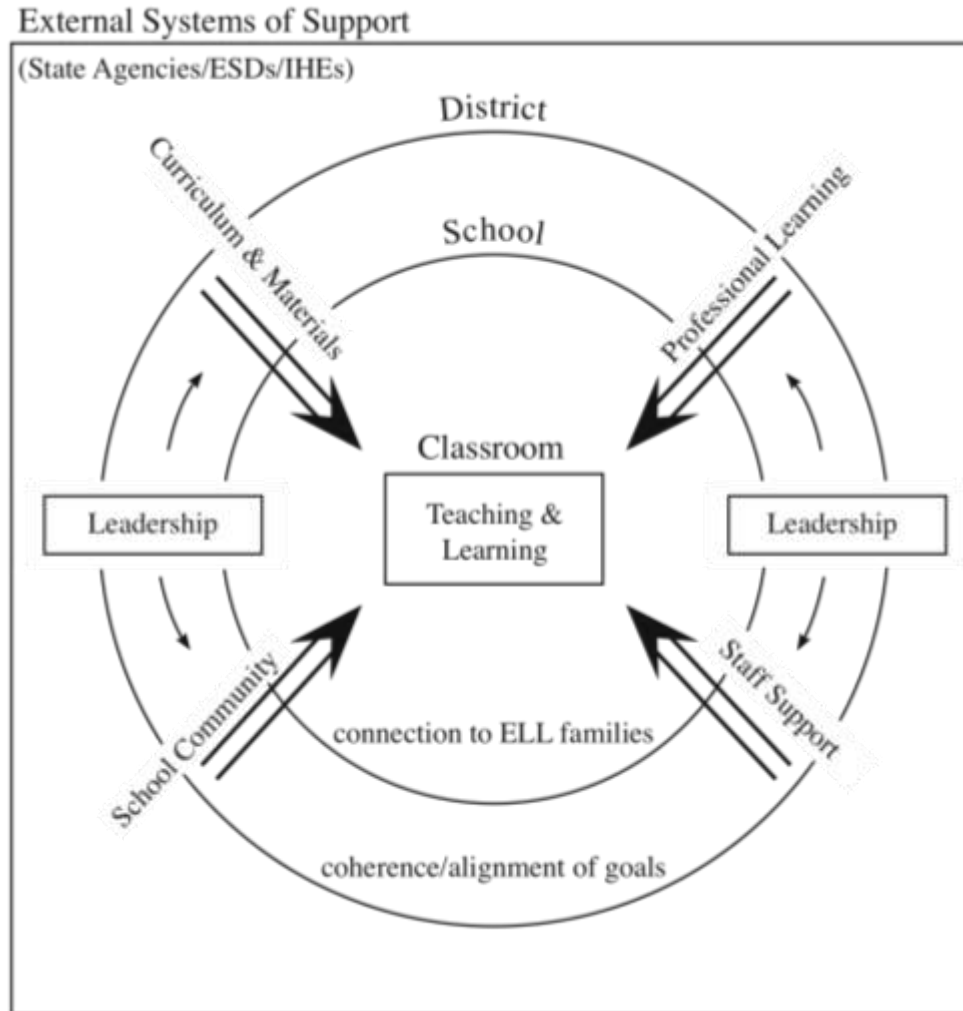
- Strategic sample of WA districts based on 3 criteria:
  1. District size and concentration of EL population
  2. Language diversity in the EL population
  3. Deliberate efforts to support EL students and their teachers

## Case Study Districts

- District A: suburban, 20,000 students, 9% EL, 58 languages
- District B: suburban, 25,000 students, 8% EL, 63 languages
- District C: rural, 3,500 students, 28% EL, Spanish
- District D: small town, 6,000 students, 12% EL, Spanish

*12 school sites included 7 elementary, 3 middle and 2 high schools*

# Elements of A System of Supports for Classroom Teachers



# Challenges for Teachers and Leaders

## For Classroom Teachers

- Role shift – responsibility for and ownership of EL students' learning
- Inadequate training and skills to serve this population
- Lack of time and opportunity to work with other school staff

## For Leaders

- Making EL learning a district and school priority
- Developing resources and supports within the confines of various ESL/Bilingual programs
- Redistributing supports in an equitable and prioritized way

# Study Findings for Supporting Teachers

## *Instructional Supports for Teachers*

- *Support for teachers' professional learning*
- *Ongoing specialized staff support*
- *Instructional resources*
- *Collegial community and collaboration*

# Support for Teachers' Professional Learning

## Intentional and responsive to student needs

- Meeting the needs of teachers working with certain student populations (e.g., language groups, proficiency)

## Differentiated depending on teacher needs

- Grade level, level of experience, content area and prior professional knowledge

## Designed to build capacity

- School-based leadership around ELL issues
- Ongoing and embedded training for entire staff at elementary
- Secondary settings focused on content areas (less cohesive)

# Ongoing Specialized Staff Support

School-based and targeted (coaches and specialists, paras, EL teachers)

- Collaborative planning and implementation with individual teachers or teams (e.g., through entire units of instruction)
- Involved in pd (for own professional learning) and also training teachers
- Elementary: working directly with students in mainstream classes
- Secondary: Providing sheltered instruction and individualized student support

## Quote about Staff Support

*“If we didn’t have a coach, I’m sure we wouldn’t be nearly as involved . . . [or] nearly as far along . . . The more embedded the practices become the more important they become to you.”*

- Elementary classroom teacher

# Instructional Resources

- Access to appropriate curriculum and materials for use in general education classrooms
- Meaningful connections of curriculum across grades within school
- More resources typically located at elementary than secondary level

# Collegial Community and Collaboration

Collaborative and coherent school-wide efforts to address EL student learning among general education teachers and specialized staff across grades and subject areas

- Collective focus on ELL issues
- Sharing resources and knowledge
- Structured collaboration time, joint planning time
- Critical mass of teachers with common training and understanding of issues

# Small Group Discussion

- Key dimensions of creating support systems for teachers
- Extent to which these supports in place in your school or district (handout)

# Study Findings for Leaders

## Central Themes for Leaders:

- *Resolving fragmentation: Focus on high quality instruction*
- *Blending school and district leadership initiatives*
- *Disaggregating data to inform systems of support*

# Resolving Fragmentation: Focus on Instruction

- Agreement on the importance of high-quality instruction for EL students
- Bilingual and ELL programs as an integral part of overall instruction

***“Our ELL department at the district level is not at the same table with general ed and curriculum....”***

# Blending School and District Leadership Initiatives

- Mutually-reinforcing school and district efforts to direct and mobilize resources
- District leadership as a key player with strong two-way communication allowing schools to have a voice and take ownership

***“The only way to really affect systemic change is to create improvement initiatives that are district-driven but building-owned.... But there’s enough flexibility for the buildings to tailor it to meet the needs of their kids and their teachers.”***

# Disaggregating Data to Inform Systems of Support

- Use of disaggregated data to identify areas for improvement, shape training and support a culture of learning

*(on not meeting AYP) “...it does force us to look more carefully at the data. So now we are having explicit conversations around equity....”*

# Leadership Activity

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- Key Dimensions of the Leadership Challenges and Opportunities (handout)

# Summary of Instructional Supports

- Teachers benefit from a variety of supports that provide explicit assistance and a chance to learn about effective, appropriately differentiated instruction for EL students.
- These supports include:
  - opportunities for professional learning
  - ongoing specialized staff support
  - instructional resources
  - collegial community and collaboration
- These supports can be aligned and integrated with other efforts to support student learning

# Summary of Leadership Findings

- Leaders engage staff in conversations with a clear focus on high-quality instruction for EL students
- Consideration of a blended approach with regard to school and district initiatives
- Renewed attention and potentially different solutions for secondary schools

## For more information....

This research was sponsored by the  
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Copies of the report are located on the CSTP website:

*<http://www.cstp-wa.org/>*

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