



A FOCUSED LOOK AT SCHOOLS RECEIVING SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT GRANTS THAT HAVE PERCENTAGES OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNER STUDENTS

The Study of School Turnaround examines the improvement process in a purposive sample of 35 case study schools receiving federal funds through the School Improvement Grants (SIG) program over a three-year period (2010-11 to 2012-13 school years). This evaluation brief focuses on 11 of these SIG schools with high proportions of English Language Learner (ELL) students (a median of 45 percent ELLs). Key findings that emerged from the ELL case study data collected in fall 2011 include:

- *Although all 11 schools reported providing specialized supports for ELL students, the schools' approaches to improvement during the initial phase of SIG appeared to include only moderate or limited attention to the unique needs of ELLs.*
- *District and school administrators perceived challenges related to teachers' expertise and skills in meeting the unique needs of ELLs; however, teachers' perceptions of their own capacity were more mixed. The capacity of the schools' district offices to support ELLs appeared to vary as well, with two small districts reporting no district-level staff with ELL training or experience and seven larger districts reporting district-level English-as-a-second-language (ESL) departments with multiple trained staff members.*
- *Schools that appeared to provide stronger attention to the unique needs of ELLs in their improvement process were more likely to report having school staff dedicated to ELL needs, such as ELL coordinators, ELL coaches, and ESL/bilingual teachers and tutors. Such schools also were more likely to be located in districts that reportedly provided expertise and an explicit focus on ELLs within the context of SIG.*

Introduction

Numbering nearly 5 million during the 2010-11 school year,¹ English language learners (ELLs) are a diverse and growing group of K-12 students whose varied linguistic, economic, and cultural backgrounds present unique needs and assets for the school community. Nationwide, the number of ELLs in the United States has increased by more than 10 percent in the past decade, although growth rates and percentages differ across states.² Some states (such as California, Texas, and Florida) have historically enrolled large numbers of ELLs but have recently witnessed little or negative growth in their ELL populations, whereas other states (including many in the Midwest and Southeast) have historically enrolled small numbers of ELLs but have experienced large influxes in recent years.³ Some states (such as South Carolina and Ohio) have seen their ELL populations grow by as much as 11 times from 1999 to 2010.⁴

A difference in language is the first thing that sets ELLs apart from their native English-speaking peers. Nearly 80 percent of ELLs come to school speaking Spanish as their first language, while the remaining 20 percent come from more than 400 different language backgrounds.⁵ In addition, ELLs are more likely than their English-proficient classmates to live in poverty,⁶ reside in large, urban settings,⁷ and have parents with low levels of formal education.⁸ ELLs also tend to be enrolled in schools struggling with low academic performance⁹ and placed in less-demanding courses.¹⁰

The challenges that these circumstances present can be particularly formidable at the secondary level, where an increasing number of ELLs are entering the U.S. school system for the first time,¹¹ including those with limited literacy in their native language or interrupted formal education.¹² On the other hand, "long-term ELLs" (i.e., those who have been enrolled in U.S. schools for many years without exiting ELL status) are also a challenge for many

secondary schools, as these ELLs may have received inconsistent or ineffective instructional supports in the past, inhibiting their development of critical academic language and literacy skills.¹³ Indeed, ELLs at the high-school level are less likely to pass their state’s graduation exam¹⁴ and more likely to drop out of school¹⁵ than their English-proficient peers.

Although a small but growing body of empirical research has shed some light on important considerations for teaching ELLs, many questions remain about how educators, schools, and districts can best address ELLs’ diverse learning needs.¹⁶ District administrators have reported a lack of information about which programs and curricula are most effective for ELLs,¹⁷ and a recent literature review noted a paucity of tools available to practitioners for evaluating the effectiveness of ELL programs.¹⁸ District administrators also have reported a lack of expertise among mainstream teachers in addressing the needs of ELLs, as well as difficulty in recruiting secondary-level content area teachers with this expertise.¹⁹

Given both the particular needs of ELLs and their overrepresentation in low-performing schools, it is important for policymakers and educators to understand how such schools are addressing ELL needs as they engage in efforts to turn around student performance. To that end, the Study of School Turnaround, a federally-funded case study exploration of improvement efforts in 35 schools receiving School Improvement Grants (SIG), includes a purposive subsample of 11 schools with high proportions of ELL students (see Box 1 for more information about SIG). We organized site visits in the fall of 2011 and 2012 to conduct interviews and focus groups with district and school administrators, teachers, instructional support staff, external providers, parents, and (in high schools only) ELL students (see Box 2 for a description of the study and sample).

BOX 1. SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT GRANTS

The School Improvement Grant (SIG) program was originally authorized as a small school assistance program under Title I section 1003(g) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) in 2001. SIG underwent three shifts with the passage of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) in 2009. First, ARRA targeted funds to a much smaller segment of low-performing schools—those in the bottom 5 percent of performance and that had been low performing over an extended period of time. Second, ARRA limited the acceptable reform options in these schools to a prescribed set of four intervention models with the following key requirements:

- **Turnaround.** Replace the principal and no less than 50 percent of the teaching staff; implement strategies to recruit, place, and retain skilled staff; provide job-embedded professional development; implement significant instructional reforms; promote data use; increase learning time; provide socio-emotional and community-oriented services and supports; and allow sufficient operational flexibility (e.g., allow the school to make decisions in areas such as hiring, firing, and budgeting).
- **Transformation.** Replace the principal of the school; develop a teacher and leader evaluation system that takes into account student progress; implement strategies to recruit, place, and retain skilled staff; provide job-embedded professional development; implement comprehensive instructional reforms; promote data use; increase learning time; create community-oriented schools, and provide operational flexibility and sustained support.
- **Restart.** Reopen the school under the management of a charter school operator, a charter management organization, or an education management organization.
- **Closure.** Close the school and reassign students to higher-achieving schools in the district that are within reasonable proximity of the closed school.

Third, ARRA provided a substantial increase in annual SIG funding over three years; for fiscal year 2009, ARRA added \$3 billion to the \$546 million in regular SIG 2009 appropriations. Each of these shifts has potentially significant implications for the nature of improvement efforts in schools receiving SIG.

This evaluation brief is based on data from the first of these site visits (fall 2011) and therefore focuses on the initial phase of improvement activity during the three-year SIG period. Our goal was to explore the context in which these SIG schools were situated, their approaches to the improvement process, the supports they were providing to ELLs, and the perceived capacity of schools and districts to address the unique needs of their ELL students. Through this exploration, we hope to better understand the extent and ways in which the schools' early approach to improvement included strategic attention to the unique needs of their ELL students.

BOX 2. STUDY OVERVIEW AND SAMPLE

Overview

The Study of School Turnaround is designed to describe the characteristics of SIG schools, the decisions and strategies the schools and their school districts undertake (and why), and the challenges they face as they attempt to improve school performance. Starting in 2010-11 and during a period of three years, this study is following the change process in a purposive sample of 35 case study schools in a variety of state and local contexts to document what happens in these schools. Drawn from the sample of 35 schools, the study includes three overlapping subsamples: a "core" group of 25 schools, a set of 11 schools with high proportions of ELLs (the focus of this evaluation brief), and a set of 9 schools in rural settings. This study is not intended to examine student achievement outcomes and does not include a representative sample of SIG schools nationwide. Rather, the study is an in-depth examination of how the SIG program is being implemented in a particular set of case study schools.

Study Sample

The 11 schools that are the focus of this evaluation brief were purposefully selected to include schools serving high proportions of ELLs and schools representing a range of characteristics, including geographic regions, levels of urbanicity, grade levels, and language groups. The sample included:

- Five high schools and six elementary schools from nine districts and four states that are situated in a mix of urban, suburban, and rural locales.
- Schools with a median of 45 percent ELLs in the 2008-09 school year.
- Schools with a median of 90 percent of students who qualified for free or reduced-price lunch in the 2008-2009 school year.
- Schools with a median of 95 percent of students who were classified as ethnic minorities in the 2008-2009 school year.
- Schools that reported serving students from numerous native language backgrounds, with 7 of the 11 schools reporting that Spanish was the language spoken by the majority of their ELLs.
- Schools that reported a range of ELL types served, including undocumented students, recent immigrants with limited prior schooling, refugees, children of migrant farm workers, and speakers of low-incidence languages.
- Schools that are implementing either the SIG turnaround (4 schools) or SIG transformation model (7 schools).

Overview of Schools in the ELL Sample

The 11 schools in the ELL sample were purposefully selected based on their large ELL populations, which in 2008-09, ranged from about 35 percent to 90 percent of total school enrollment, with a median of 45 percent ELL students.²⁰ Nationally, SIG-awarded schools served a median of 6 percent ELLs.²¹ The schools also were selected to include a diversity of school settings and grade levels. The schools are located in nine districts and four states, including two states that have historically had large ELL populations and two states that have experienced high growth in their ELL populations in recent years.²²

The sample includes five high schools and six elementary schools, which are situated in a mix of urban, suburban, and rural locations. All 11 schools are characterized by high levels of poverty, high percentages of minority students, and persistent low achievement. The percentage of students who qualified for free or reduced-price lunch in these schools ranged from 40 to 100 percent in 2008-09, with a median of 90 percent. A median of

95 percent of students in these schools were classified as racial or ethnic minorities, although this percentage ranged from 45 to 100 percent across the sample.²³ In comparison, SIG-awarded schools across the nation served a median of 72 percent of students who qualified for free or reduced-price lunch and a median of 88 percent of students who were classified as racial or ethnic minorities that year.²⁴

Each of the schools serves communities with a range of cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Respondents from multiple stakeholder groups in 10 of the 11 schools (see Box 3 and Appendix A for an explanation of how respondent groups are identified, as well as details about the data collection and analytic methods) reported one majority language among their ELLs, and 7 of these 10 schools reported that Spanish was the majority language. Nevertheless, respondents from all schools reported serving students from numerous language backgrounds. For example, school respondents reported student populations who spoke Tagalog, Hmong, Vietnamese, Cantonese, Mandarin, Karen, and Somali, Oromo, and other African languages. Respondents in one elementary school (with a majority of ELL Spanish speakers) reported serving students with 17 native languages. One high school, also with a majority of Spanish speakers, reportedly served students representing 47 countries of origin from Asia, the Middle East, and Latin America.

In addition to linguistic diversity, respondents in all schools described a range of subpopulations among the ELLs they served, such as undocumented students, recent immigrants with limited prior schooling, students who entered the United States as refugees, children of migrant farm workers, and speakers of low-incidence languages. Respondents also described a diversity of proficiency levels among ELLs, including newcomers at the beginning stages of learning English and long-term ELLs in high school, who had lingered in ELL status for many years.

Of the 11 schools, 7 are implementing the SIG transformation model and 4 the SIG turnaround model. As such, all 11 schools were required to replace the principal, and in addition, those implementing the turnaround model were required to replace at least 50 percent of their teachers (see Box 1 for a description of the four intervention models allowable under SIG).

BOX 3. DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYTIC METHODS

Data Collection

Study team members collected data through a teacher survey and site visits to each ELL sample school in fall 2011. Site visits lasted approximately two days in each school, during which time the study team, guided by semi-structured protocols, conducted one-on-one interviews and focus groups with district and school stakeholders. For each school, the study team interviewed an average of two district administrators, one school administrator, eight teachers, three instructional coaches, one external provider (where relevant), and five parents. (External providers offered services such as instructional coaching for teachers, leadership coaching, and professional development.) At high schools, the study team also interviewed an average of six students. Because this ELL study is part of the larger Study of School Turnaround, interviews for the ELL sample schools included questions about the general school improvement process, in addition to questions and more specialized probes to ensure that we gathered sufficient data to examine certain ELL issues of interest. Interview topics included the overall change process in each school, the capacity of staff to meet the needs of ELLs, school goals related to ELLs, professional development provided to teachers of ELLs, and services provided to ELLs and their parents. Data collection instruments can be found at <http://www.air.org/topic/education/study-of-school-turnaround-ELL-protocol-survey>.

All teachers in each school were asked to complete a brief survey in fall 2011. As with the interviews, the survey included both general questions about teaching and the school, as well as more specialized questions focused on ELLs. Questions related to the teacher's role in the school, education, experience, teaching strategies used for ELL students, and professional development. Survey data are included for 9 of the 11 schools where response rates were greater than 50 percent. Among those 9 schools, the average response rate was 76 percent.

Analytic Methods

The study team analyzed and synthesized qualitative site visit data and quantitative teacher survey data for each school. The synthesized data were entered into a secure online repository to examine themes and trends across schools.

BOX 3. DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYTIC METHODS

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Analysts categorized the schools along specific topics of interest and confirmed the categorizations with site visitors. All data regarding school practices are based on respondent self-reports and reflect no external verification or assessment of the quality of those practices. Respondents' perceptions could be based on a number of factors, including but not limited to their own experience working at the school, conversations with others who have previously worked at the school, experiences living in the community and understanding the school's reputation, or inferences about what the school may have been like based on what it currently looks like.

To examine the prevalence of particular issues across schools in the sample, analysts generated simple school counts, such as the number of schools where respondents reported a specific practice, contextual feature, or challenge. To produce such counts, analysts applied a set of decision rules that outlined clear standards of evidence for inclusion: for a school to be included in a given count, either the school principal or at least two other respondents had to report the given practice or phenomenon, with no dissent from other respondents. For issues related to parent engagement, schools were included in counts if the principal, parent liaison, or at least two other respondents reported a given practice or phenomenon, with no dissent from other respondents. In cases where respondents reported divergent views, those differences are noted in the text. Decision rules for more complex school classifications are outlined in Appendix B. When reporting information provided by only one respondent group (e.g., principals, teachers), the respondent group is identified as the source of that information. The general term "respondents" is used when reporting information provided by more than one respondent group. Descriptive statistics on the survey data are provided for the nine schools with sufficiently high response rates (greater than 50 percent).

Throughout this evaluation brief, we incorporate direct quotations from study respondents as they enhance the clarity and relevance of the study, which is based largely on qualitative data. These data uniquely provide detailed, contextual information that can convey meaning through illustrative examples. Quotes were purposefully selected to enrich the findings arrived at through systematic, carefully-documented analyses. These quotes are not representative of all quotes in our data, and they are only meant to enrich a particular finding, not to formally justify it. See Appendix A for additional information on the data collection and analytic methods.

Perceived Strengths and Needs of ELL Students

Respondents in each school described the perceived strengths of their ELLs, as well as the perceived challenges they face in meeting ELL needs. School respondents described the cultural and linguistic diversity that ELLs bring as a positive feature of their schools. As a teacher at one elementary school²⁵ explained:

The strength they bring is a new perspective; they bring their own experiences from wherever they came from, and it really opens up the room for great conversation to establish everyone's background knowledge...they bring their own opinions to the classroom.

Multiple respondents in each school described their ELLs in positive terms. They described ELLs as eager to learn and hard working, and that their families believed education would enable them to lead a successful life in the United States. As one teacher remarked:

They are very eager learners and very supportive of education and teachers, and they have a high level of motivation from students and families to learn and get the best education they can.

Although school staff described positive characteristics of ELL students, they also perceived multiple challenges in meeting their diverse needs. In eight of the nine schools with reportable survey data,²⁶ a majority of teacher survey respondents reported that they sometimes feel overwhelmed by the challenge of teaching ELLs. Respondents at one high school—which prided itself on having students from all over the globe—described the challenges they faced in serving ELLs, who spoke low-incidence languages (i.e., Tibetan, Thai, and Arabic), and arrived with little prior schooling. As one teacher said:

The struggle is with the kids that don't speak any English at all and who are brand new to the country, and may not have gone to class before. They don't know how to use a pencil and write, or what a notebook is and what you use it for, and what a textbook is.

Respondents in five schools expressed particular concern for the large number of long-term ELLs, who were fluent in social English but “stuck” at the intermediate level of English proficiency, unable to meet district criteria for exiting from ELL status. Consistent with nationwide studies,²⁷ school respondents reported a lack of adequate support for the unique needs of long-term ELLs. One high school administrator noted:

I think the group that I'm the most concerned about are the long-term [ELLs] because I think most of those students are the ones who aren't as successful in standardized testing...and I think they're also a little bit hidden because a lot of those students don't have an accent when they speak English or don't present the same way like a newcomer student. So, I think people might forget that they have different learning needs.

Finally, respondents in all five high schools felt that some district and state requirements for ELLs create barriers to graduation. For example, respondents at one school noted that sheltered content classes at the lower levels count as elective credit, not academic credit, making it difficult for beginning-level ELLs to accumulate enough credits to graduate. Respondents at a second school noted that ELLs were required to pass four levels of ESL classes in addition to the requisite four years of English language arts classes, also making it difficult to complete the number of courses needed for graduation. Respondents at a third school explained that because of their limited proficiency in English, many ELLs had difficulty passing the state graduation exam.

School Supports for ELL Students and Their Families

Instructional supports. To support ELLs who are learning English while mastering academic content, schools and districts may provide a range of types of programs and classes.²⁸ These can include separate classes designed for ELLs, such as ESL or sheltered instruction classes, as well as mainstream content classes where instruction is adapted to the needs of ELLs. Mainstream content teachers can help ELLs access grade-level content by scaffolding their instruction to address the English language levels of their students or by providing support in the students' native languages.²⁹

Although approaches varied, all 11 schools reported providing some type of specialized instruction for ELL students. Respondents in all five high schools reported placing ELLs into ESL classes based on their level of English proficiency. Respondents in all five high schools also reported offering sheltered content classes for ELLs, as well as mainstream content classes that included ELL and English-proficient students. Respondents in four high schools reported offering specialized supports designed for ELLs who had recently arrived in the United States, such as newcomer centers and newcomer classes.

Administrators and teachers in all six elementary schools reported placing ELLs in mainstream grade-level classrooms alongside their English-proficient peers, with content instruction provided by the classroom teacher. Respondents in four of the six elementary schools reported that ESL teachers³⁰ or tutors provided individualized support for ELLs. Respondents in the remaining two elementary schools reported that mainstream classroom teachers provided ESL instruction for ELLs during a designated portion of the school day. Teachers in all 11 schools described a variety of instructional strategies to make content accessible for ELLs. Respondents in three schools reported that teachers had been trained on a common set of sheltered instruction strategies to be used schoolwide; two of those schools specifically mentioned the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) model.³¹ Respondents in five schools indicated that bilingual teachers and tutors provided support in students' primary languages, where needed, to make content accessible for ELLs. Respondents in two of those five schools reported offering content classes to beginning-level ELLs in their native language, and respondents in one school reported offering classes on the native culture and language of its largest ELL language group.

Supports for ELLs were enacted within the context of federal ELL policies and programs, district ELL initiatives, and other factors influencing funding and local programming for ELLs—and were not necessarily the direct result of SIG. However, in some cases the programs and supports offered for ELLs were reportedly enhanced by the presence of SIG. For example, in one of the schools that was using the SIOP model, respondents indicated that teachers received specialized training in this model as part of a district initiative with support from SIG funds. Although all teachers in the district participated in training with a SIOP coach, the teachers in SIG schools received more time with the coach as a result of their SIG status.

Parent engagement. Prior studies have identified a number of challenges to engaging parents of ELLs in their children’s education in the U.S. For example, parents of ELLs may have low levels of English proficiency, limited native-language literacy skills, different cultural perceptions of their role in their child’s education, and a lack of familiarity with the American education system.³² Teachers and administrators at all 11 schools reported challenges associated with parent engagement among ELL families. Respondents in four schools reported facing challenges in providing translation for the diversity of languages represented by ELL families—particularly for low-incidence languages. Respondents described parent work schedules as a challenge in four schools, and at four other schools, transportation was described as a challenge for ELL parents. Respondents in two schools reported issues with undocumented parents—one school required volunteers to go through background checks, which prevented undocumented parents from volunteering.

Prior studies also have suggested that schools may mitigate challenges associated with engaging parents of ELL students by hiring bilingual staff to provide translation and interpretation services,³³ offering culturally relevant parent outreach programs, and conducting home visits.³⁴ Respondents in all 11 schools reported hiring (or retaining) someone who served as a parent-community liaison as part of their parent engagement efforts. In nine schools, the parent-community liaison was reportedly bilingual in the language of the majority of ELL parents and provided translation services to bridge communication between the school and home. Respondents in eight schools indicated that the parent-community liaison worked at the school full time and focused on organizing parent events, activities, workshops, and classes. Respondents in each of these eight schools indicated that the school offered courses geared toward the needs of ELL parents, such as ESL classes, English literacy courses, or parenting programs aimed at providing ELL families with a guide to the American education system.

School Community and Context

In addition to challenges in meeting the instructional needs of ELLs, all 11 schools reported facing broader contextual challenges in their efforts to turn around a history of low performance. For example, respondents in 4 of the 11 schools reported high student mobility and transience, factors that interfere with students’ ability to form relationships with teachers and other students,³⁵ and put them at risk of dropping out.³⁶ Respondents at one school reported high numbers of migrant students, who moved with their parents based on the agricultural season, creating educational gaps. Respondents at another school reported that some ELLs left school for several months of the year to visit family in other countries. A teacher at another school said most families in the area rented their homes, which meant “they are in constant movement,” and “they move to another high school because rent is cheaper in another place.”

Respondents at four schools described recent shifts in the demographics of the school’s community, and respondents at three of those schools pointed out related challenges. For example, respondents at one of the four schools reported declining enrollment due to a lack of job opportunities and housing development in their economically-depressed area. Similarly at another school in a different district, respondents stated that Hispanic families were leaving the community while young professionals without children were moving in, a change that they felt resulted in low enrollment figures and posed challenges for obtaining sufficient funds to keep the school functioning.

Finally, all 11 schools served students from high-poverty backgrounds (as noted earlier, a median of 90 percent of students qualified for free or reduced-price lunch), and 8 of the 11 schools were in areas respondents described as “low-income neighborhoods.” Respondents in those schools perceived challenges associated with homelessness, poor nutrition, health issues, incarcerated parents, and families with little formal education. Respondents in four of the eight schools located in a central city described high levels of violence or racial tensions in their community.

ELLs in the Improvement Process

The research base on improvement in schools with large percentages of ELLs is very limited. However, there is some suggestive evidence that consideration of the unique needs of ELLs in this process may be important (see Box 4 for a discussion of these unique needs). For example, in one study of nine California schools that had successfully turned around a history of low performance, the improvement strategy most frequently mentioned by the school principals was to target instructional improvements to student subgroups, especially ELLs.³⁷ Six of the nine principals in the study reported implementing instructional changes in their schools, such as adopting new strategies to promote English language development, training teachers in a specific sheltered instruction model, employing a response to intervention framework, and providing intensive language programs to support ELLs and other low-performing student subgroups. The study included a mix of elementary, middle, and high schools in urban, suburban, and rural settings.

Another study of six low-performing middle schools in New York City reached a similar conclusion. This study suggested that possible strategies for targeting student subgroups such as ELLs may include hiring new staff, strategically assigning staff to particular classes, and offering specialized programs to address academic and nonacademic needs.³⁸ Finally, in a case study of three rural California high schools with high poverty rates and high student performance, school leaders in all three schools emphasized establishing stronger relationships with Latino and non-English-speaking parents and community members as a priority, and they highlighted steps taken to address potential barriers to communication and engagement among parents with diverse language backgrounds.³⁹

BOX 4. ADDRESSING THE UNIQUE NEEDS OF ELLS

Although ELLs share some educational needs with other learners and may benefit from instructional supports that are directed to all students, ELLs also present distinctive sets of cultural and linguistic needs as language learners and, in some cases, as immigrants. Thus, to be academically successful, ELLs may require additional supports and services that would not be required for non-ELLs. Some of the “unique needs of ELLs” that schools might target as part of their improvement efforts include the following:

English language development and access to the academic curriculum. ELLs face the unique challenge of developing proficiency in English while simultaneously mastering grade-level academic content. Thus, in addition to learning social English, ELLs must develop the academic language and literacy skills needed to meaningfully access the grade-level curriculum. As ELLs are developing such skills, they require appropriate instructional modifications and supports to make academic content comprehensible. To improve ELL outcomes, schools might take actions to ensure that both ESL and content-area teachers are well prepared to employ effective instructional strategies that support ELLs’ dual English language development and academic needs.⁴⁰

Culture and socialization needs. ELLs come from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, and schools may be able to enhance ELLs’ educational experiences by taking that diversity into account. For example, schools might strive to support ELLs’ reading comprehension by choosing instructional texts with culturally-familiar content or by preparing ELLs with appropriate background knowledge when using texts with less familiar content. Furthermore, by fostering an appreciation for diversity within the school’s culture, schools may help to facilitate ELLs’ transition from home to school and make them feel valued for their cultural heritage and experiences.⁴¹

BOX 4. ADDRESSING THE UNIQUE NEEDS OF ELLS

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Parent and family engagement. Parents and families play important roles in promoting positive student behavior and achievement, but language barriers and a lack of familiarity with the U.S. system of schooling may make it difficult for parents of ELLs to stay informed about their children’s progress and become involved in school decisions and activities. Schools can take steps to ease obstacles to parent involvement by providing parent outreach supports, ensuring that school-related communications are disseminated in a language and mode that parents understand, and offering services such as ESL classes and workshops on navigating the school system.⁴²

Issues of isolation and segregation. Interactions with model English speakers can help facilitate ELLs’ English language development, yet for ELLs who reside in linguistically-isolated households or communities, attend segregated schools, or participate in classes separately from English-proficient peers, access to model English speakers can be limited. To increase this access, schools might choose to incorporate more inclusive teaching practices, use more heterogeneous student groupings, create structured opportunities for ELLs to engage with English-proficient peers, and train ELLs and non-ELLs in strategies for productive peer-to-peer interactions.⁴³

Interruptions in schooling or limited formal schooling. Some ELLs have experienced interruptions in their schooling, or arrive in U.S. schools with limited prior schooling. Such students possess varying levels of literacy in their native language and may need intensive and accelerated learning supports to help prepare them to participate meaningfully in academic classrooms. Schools may look for ways to better assess and address these students’ individualized learning needs and help them adjust to academic settings by offering short-term newcomer programs or other specialized strategies.⁴⁴

Exiting from ELL status. An important goal in serving ELLs is to help these students become proficient enough in English that they no longer require specialized supports to engage productively with academic content and can therefore exit from ELL status. Schools might use focused strategies to help ELLs—particularly those who have been in ELL status for many years—satisfy ELL exit criteria, which vary across states and districts but can include such factors as performance on the state English language proficiency assessment, performance on state content assessments, teacher recommendations, and classroom grades. Furthermore, once students transition out of ELL status, schools can continue to monitor their progress and provide tutoring, academic counseling, and other supports to former ELLs who need it.⁴⁵

High school completion. Adolescent ELLs face a limited time frame in which to develop English language and literacy skills, master academic content, and satisfy course requirements for graduation. Fitting in coursework that supports their English language development and acquisition of appropriately rigorous academic content can pose challenges. Schools can help mitigate those challenges by creating instructional supports that accelerate ELLs’ acquisition of English and academic content, afford opportunities for credit recovery, allow flexible scheduling, or provide extended instructional time.⁴⁶

We have already noted that all 11 schools in our study had some supports in place for ELLs and their families. However, because of the suggestive research cited above, we wanted to know the extent to which addressing ELL needs was an integral aspect of these schools’ strategies for turning around their history of low student performance. We thus examined the extent to which these schools appeared to pay attention to the unique needs of ELLs in their improvement efforts during the initial one-and-a-half years of SIG. Although there are numerous ways that schools’ improvement efforts might reflect attention to ELL needs, our analysis focused on six dimensions, described in the next section, that were selected to include elements of the SIG program as well as other improvement strategies that were identified after a preliminary analysis of the school interview data.

Criteria for Determining Attention to ELLs in the Improvement Process

There were two parts to this analysis. In the first stage, the schools were rated on each of six dimensions. In the second stage, the ratings on each dimension were aggregated to create a single rating for each school. The process is described below, with more details in Appendix B and Box 5.

Stage 1: Rating Schools on Each of the Six Dimensions. Based on responses to questions about the general school improvement process as well as ELL-specific questions, the 11 schools were reviewed on the following six

dimensions to determine the extent to which each school's improvement efforts included targeted attention to the unique needs of ELLs:

1. School improvement goals that explicitly target ELLs
2. The use of disaggregated data for ELLs or data on English proficiency to inform ELL instruction
3. Extended learning time (ELT) targeted toward meeting ELL students' needs
4. Instructional practices that open access to content or address socialization needs of ELLs
5. Professional development for teachers on addressing ELL needs
6. Targeted strategies for engaging ELL parents

The first dimension, school goals that target ELLs, examined the extent to which the underlying objectives shaping each school's improvement process included a focus on ELLs. Respondents at each school were asked about the reasons for their school's history of low performance, the school's goals for improving performance, and the strategies used to reach those goals. Providing extended learning time and using data to inform instruction were general requirements of transformation and turnaround schools, which were the SIG models being implemented by all 11 schools. Thus, the next two dimensions examined whether any of the schools' efforts related to data use and ELT specifically reflected a focus on ELL needs. The remaining three dimensions involve improvement practices that the literature suggests may be particularly important in addressing the needs of ELLs.⁴⁷

For each dimension, the study team developed a rubric with ratings of "strategic attention" to the unique needs of ELL students (the highest category), "moderate attention," "limited attention," or "no specific attention" (the lowest category). The rubric is explained in Appendix B. Ratings on each dimension reflect the reports of respondents within each school.⁴⁸

Stage 2: Categorizing Schools Into the Four Groups. Ratings on each dimension were aggregated to generate a composite score for each school ranging from 6 to 24 points (see Appendix B for a detailed explanation). Based on the rating scheme, the study team defined the following four levels of overall attention to ELLs as part of the change process:

1. ***Strategic attention to meeting the unique needs of ELLs.*** When asked about improvement efforts, respondents in these schools identified ELLs as a subgroup whose unique needs were a primary component of the improvement plan (21 to 24 points).
2. ***Moderate attention to the unique needs of ELLs.*** When asked about improvement efforts, respondents in these schools identified some ELL needs and indicated that their schools made efforts to address those unique needs as part of their improvement activities; however, ELLs did not receive primary attention in the schools' improvement efforts (16 to 20 points).
3. ***Limited attention to the unique needs of ELLs.*** When asked about improvement efforts, respondents in these schools reported that their school implemented a few improvement efforts to address the unique needs of ELLs; however, those efforts were not perceived to be widespread in number or scope (10 to 15 points).
4. ***No specific attention to the unique needs of ELLs.*** When asked about improvement efforts, respondents in these schools did not report that their school took the unique needs of ELLs into account when identifying or implementing improvement efforts, *or* reported that their school did not take the unique needs of ELLs into account (6 to 9 points).

BOX 5. SIX DIMENSIONS OF ATTENTION TO ELLS IN THE IMPROVEMENT PROCESS

To determine the level of attention to the unique needs of ELLs in each school's improvement process, the study team reviewed respondent data and rated each school on a four-point scale for each of six dimensions. Divergent responses within a school would have complicated the determination of these ratings; however, in none of the schools was there dissent among respondents with regard to these particular dimensions. Once ratings for each school was completed for each of the six dimensions, each school's rating was summed across the six dimensions for an aggregate score ranging from 6 to 24. Based on this aggregate score, schools were classified as paying "strategic attention to meeting the unique needs of ELLs" (21-24), "moderate attention to the unique needs of ELLs" (16-20), "limited attention to the unique needs of ELLs" (10-15), or "no specific attention to the unique needs of ELLs" (6-9). More details about these four classifications and about the process for rating schools along the six dimensions are provided in Appendix B.

Each of the six dimensions is described below, including a brief explanation for the inclusion of each dimension, a summary of the 11 school ratings on each dimension, and an example of one school that received the highest rating among the sample for each dimension.

- **School goals.** To receive SIG, districts and schools were required to describe planned improvement efforts in their grant applications. Those planned efforts were based on priorities and goals for improvement. Therefore, the analysis examined the extent to which respondents reported having school priorities and goals that included addressing the unique needs of ELLs. Based on the analysis, 10 schools were rated as paying moderate attention to the unique needs of ELLs in their goals (a rating of 3), and 1 school was rated as paying limited attention (a rating of 2). In the 10 schools that were categorized as paying moderate attention to ELLs in their goal setting, respondents reported focusing on goals that pertain to all students, and either (1) included goals specific to ELLs, or (2) took the unique needs of ELLs into account when setting goals for all students. For example, respondents at four schools reported on goals that pertained to all students, but also explained that one of their goals was to strengthen instructional practices for ELLs.
- **Using data to inform instruction.** Because SIG schools implementing the transformation and turnaround models were required to use data to inform instruction,⁴⁹ the study team reviewed the extent to which respondents reported using specially-targeted data to inform instruction for their ELLs as part of their improvement effort—such as achievement data disaggregated for ELLs or data on English language proficiency. Four schools were rated as paying moderate attention to using data to improve instruction for ELLs, three schools were rated as paying limited attention, and four schools were rated as paying no specific attention. For example, one school rated as paying moderate attention in its use of data reported placing a schoolwide emphasis on using data to inform instruction in all subjects and with all students. All teachers reportedly participated in professional learning communities (PLCs) in which they discussed using pre- and post-tests to assess students' learning. In addition, the school had a data team that was in charge of collecting and analyzing data, as well as facilitating teacher use of data. The data team used annual spring test scores to identify gaps in students' learning and discuss how teachers could improve or adjust their instructional practices to address those gaps. Within these PLCs and data team meetings, the ELL teachers discussed their students' progress based on district-developed assessments. Through this process, the ELL department identified academic vocabulary as a particular gap for ELL students.
- **Extended learning time (ELT).** SIG schools implementing the transformation and turnaround models are required to provide ELT, and can do so by adding time to the regular school day or by providing before- or after-school programs or summer programs.⁵⁰ Therefore, this analysis examined the extent to which each school's respondents identified activities to address the unique needs of ELLs in their ELT. Based on this analysis, four schools were rated as paying moderate attention to the unique needs of ELLs in ELT, and seven schools were rated as paying limited attention. For example, one high school that was rated as paying moderate attention reportedly provided three types of ELT—a 20-minute extended school day, afterschool tutoring, and summer school—one of which (afterschool tutoring) included activities to address the unique needs of ELLs. Specifically, the ESL teacher reported providing an extra support class for ELLs after school, which was exclusively intended to support the unique needs of ELLs.
- **Instructional practices.** Prior research suggests that ELLs benefit from programs or classes that provide supports for their language development and access to core content; therefore, the study team reviewed the extent to which respondents reported efforts to improve instructional practices that address the unique needs of ELLs as part of their improvement efforts. Seven schools were rated as paying moderate attention to the unique needs of ELLs in their instructional and curriculum improvement efforts, and four schools were rated as paying limited attention. For example, at one school categorized as paying moderate attention to the unique needs of ELLs, the principal, coaches, and

BOX 5. SIX DIMENSIONS OF ATTENTION TO ELLS IN THE IMPROVEMENT PROCESS

(continued from previous page)

teachers described five key efforts under way to improve instruction (for all students), two of which attended to the unique needs of ELLs. One such reported strategy was to increase the use of peer collaboration in math classes. The other reported strategy involved math department teachers using grouping strategies to provide increased language support to ELLs.

- **Professional development for teachers.** Studies suggest that teachers need better preparation with regard to ELL-specific practices and that this preparation should begin in preservice programs and continue through ongoing professional development. Therefore, the study team analyzed the extent to which respondents reported access to professional development that included topics aimed to help teachers address the unique needs of their ELLs. Based on the review, four schools were rated as paying moderate attention to the unique needs of ELLs in their professional learning efforts for teachers, five schools were rated as paying limited attention, and two were rated as paying no specific attention. For example, in one school rated as paying moderate attention to the unique needs of ELLs, the district administrator, principal, and teachers indicated that the district provided teachers across the district with a range of professional development opportunities aimed at improving their ability to effectively provide instruction to their ELLs, such as implementing a coteaching model for instruction or using SIOP strategies. However, little of the professional development was reportedly available at the school, which limited teachers' access to it.
- **Parent engagement.** Research suggests that high levels of parent engagement among both English-proficient and non-English-proficient families is associated with improved student achievement, better attendance and behavior among students, and reduced dropout rates.⁵¹ The study team analyzed respondent data to determine whether schools' efforts to engage parents addressed the unique needs of ELL parents, through elements such as translation services, bilingual parent liaisons, or classes designed for parents of ELLs. Based on the analysis, five schools were rated as paying moderate attention to the unique needs of ELL parents in their engagement efforts, and six schools were rated as paying limited attention. For example, at one school that paid moderate attention to the unique needs of ELL parents, the school reportedly sought to increase parent engagement for all students. The school used a parent liaison for the parent outreach efforts who focused on serving all parents; however, because the parent liaison was bilingual, she also reported providing some services that attended to the unique needs of ELLs, such as offering correspondence in multiple languages, providing English classes to parents, and holding a few parent classes in their native language.

Despite having high percentages of ELL students, the 11 schools appeared to pay only moderate or limited attention to ELLs' unique needs in their approaches to improvement during the initial phase of SIG. Our analyses placed all 11 schools in one of the two middle categories: "moderate attention" (three schools) or "limited attention" (eight schools) to the unique needs of ELLs in their improvement efforts. None of the schools fell into the highest ("strategic attention") or lowest ("no specific attention") categories. The level of attention paid to ELLs did not appear related to the proportion of ELLs in a school. For example, the school with the lowest proportion of ELLs in our sample was rated as having "moderate attention" to the unique needs of ELLs, whereas the two schools with the highest proportions of ELLs in our sample were rated as having "limited attention" to the unique needs of ELLs.

As illustrated in the examples that follow, schools demonstrating "moderate" attention were those that identified ELL needs and made some explicit efforts to address those needs as part of their improvement efforts. Schools with "limited" attention to ELLs were those that had few improvement efforts in place to address ELL needs, and whose efforts were limited in scope. It is important to note, however, that paying greater attention to the unique needs of ELLs does not necessarily translate into higher-quality school practices.

Across the schools, the ratings on individual dimensions did not appear to cluster in any discernable pattern. Schools that rated high on one dimension did not necessarily rate high on other dimensions. Thus, although the ratings provide a tool for comparing schools, the individual context of each school needs to be considered to fully understand how and to what extent ELLs are targeted in the school's improvement process.

Schools with Moderate Attention to ELLs in Their Improvement Efforts

Schools with moderate attention to the unique needs of ELLs in their improvement efforts were those in which respondents identified ELL-specific needs and a corresponding set of actions to address those needs as part of their turnaround process, but did not put a primary focus on ELLs in the schools' improvement efforts. The three schools in this category vary in their reported contexts, student and staff needs, improvement goals, and efforts to improve student achievement. Their composite scores are similar (ranging from 17 to 18), but there are differences in how each school addressed the unique needs of ELLs in its improvement efforts. Below, we describe two of the three schools. One is an elementary school, the other a high school. The elementary school received a rating of 17, and the high school received a rating of 18. Their improvement efforts focused on improving outcomes for all students, not subgroups. Even so, respondents in both schools could describe some strategies within their larger improvement approach that were designed to address the unique needs of ELLs.

Blue Brook Elementary School. Located in a high-poverty neighborhood in a large urban district, Blue Brook Elementary serves a community of students who predominantly come from Caribbean backgrounds, and in 2011-12, about half of Blue Brook's students were ELLs. Many students had reportedly experienced traumatic events in their home countries and received limited schooling before coming to the United States. Furthermore, teachers described crime (prostitution, drug use) on the streets in the immediate vicinity of the school.

The principal and all interviewed teachers were positive about their students, describing them as "bubbly," "happy," eager to learn, easy to engage, and motivated. The principal reported that about a third of the teachers were new to the school in 2011-12 and new to the teaching profession. Two successive waves of hiring Teach for America (TFA) teachers resulted in nearly half of the teachers being from TFA. Only a handful of teachers reported having five or more years of teaching experience. The faculty reported having relatively limited expertise with regard to ELLs, in part because they were new to the profession, with little previous training.

Just two years prior, the school had been described by one instructional coach as "dirty, sad, the students were running wild...it was just in really bad shape." In 2009-10, the district appointed new administrators to the school who implemented both structural and instructional changes. The reported structural changes included cleaning the school, establishing a school uniform policy, setting expectations for student discipline, and changing the name of the school. During the first year of the turnaround process, instructional changes reportedly required teachers to follow step-by-step instructional guidelines and required administrators to be a regular presence in the classrooms to ensure fidelity to the instructional requirements. Since then, the instructional coach reported being able to "lighten up a bit," as the instructional foundation had been established.

School respondents did not describe paying attention to the unique needs of ELLs during the intense changes in 2009-10 (the year prior to SIG) and 2010-11 (the first year of SIG). However, in 2011-12 (the second year of SIG), the principal, instructional coaches, and some teachers described increased attention to ELLs as part of the improvement process. In particular, they reported that the new push came from the district office that managed SIG schools, which paid for an ELL coach (who was on-site once a week) as well as an ELL coach supervisor. The role of the ELL coach was similar to that of other instructional coaches: she provided embedded professional development and specific guidance on instructional strategies to meet the unique needs of ELLs. The ELL coach reported participating in regular instructional planning meetings and data analysis meetings. She indicated that these were not focused on ELLs, but that her attendance helped bring teachers' and administrators' attention to the unique needs of ELLs. In addition, during the summer of 2011, teachers described professional development explicitly focused on instruction for ELLs, and during the school year, administrators reported high rates of ELL parent participation in at least some of the parent engagement activities.

Blue Brook Elementary: Attention to ELLs in the Improvement Process Ratings

Dimensions	Rating
School Goals	3
Data Use	3
Extended Learning Time	2
Instructional Improvements	3
Professional Development	3
Parent Engagement	3
Composite Score	17

In summary, the attention given to the unique needs of ELLs at Blue Brook appeared to have intensified as other organizational and instructional issues were being addressed.

Atwater Creek High School. A large, inner-city high school with predominantly Latino students, Atwater Creek provides a second example of a school paying moderate attention to ELLs in its improvement efforts. The school differs from the other schools in the ELL sample in that its improvement efforts are reportedly rooted at the school level (whereas efforts in the remaining 10 schools tended to be initiated at the district level). Its school-based improvement plan was reportedly developed by school staff and community members in 2009 to avoid a district takeover, and SIG was later used to fund key elements of the plan.

Atwater Creek High School: Attention to ELLs in the Improvement Process Ratings

Dimensions	Rating
School Goals	3
Data Use	3
Extended Learning Time	3
Instructional Improvements	3
Professional Development	3
Parent Engagement	3
Composite Score	18

Atwater Creek’s plan reportedly drove the school’s approach to change, priorities, and goals. Respondents consistently referred to the plan when describing the school’s improvement efforts. Although elements of the plan sought to address the unique needs of ELLs, who made up nearly half the student body, most of the plan’s efforts targeted all students.

Respondents at the school indicated that in the years prior to SIG, the school experienced high levels of violence in the building and surrounding community. To address the violence, the school reportedly introduced measures to increase personalization, such as improving parent outreach, conducting home visits, and establishing small learning communities (SLCs). Several respondents attributed the improvement in school climate to the establishment of the SLCs.

Staff and students at the school were grouped into SLCs, each with its own theme (such as art or business). Each SLC had its own administrator, lead teacher, and bilingual parent liaison. Students were reportedly provided with instructional activities, including internships, centered on the theme of their SLC, in addition to their regularly-required coursework. Newcomer ELLs were placed into a designated SLC. Within the “newcomer SLC,” beginning-level ELLs were reportedly placed into bilingual classes for content instruction until they were ready for mainstream classes (where content instruction was provided in English). All other ELLs were enrolled in the SLC of their choice.

Respondents indicated that the school’s improvement plan was intended to strengthen instructional practices across the SLCs by implementing consistent instructional strategies in all classrooms. One of those instructional strategies—sheltered instruction—targeted ELL needs. The teachers in a focus group explained that as part of the sheltered instruction approach, they scaffold content instruction for ELLs through the use of visual aids, movement, technology, graphic organizers, and vocabulary review. Although the other instructional strategies in the plan were not explicitly designed to support ELLs, respondents noted that some of them (such as project-based learning) helped to make content accessible for ELLs. District and school administrators reported that teachers received training on instructional strategies for ELLs. However, they observed that teachers were not necessarily applying the strategies in their teaching.

In addition to the strategies outlined in the school plan, respondents reported following district guidelines for ELL instruction. Although respondents did not mention any school goals with explicit attention to ELLs, they reported complying with the district’s requirement to establish a goal for increasing the number of ELL students reaching proficiency on state content tests and English proficiency tests. In keeping with that goal, the ELL coach reported working with teachers and long-term ELLs and their families to support them in improving their performance on state tests. Respondents indicated that ELL students who passed all of their ESL classes but were not ready to be transitioned out of ELL status were enrolled in an extra intervention class designed for their needs.

In response to the school’s history of violence, respondents reported focusing on improving personalization as part of their school-based plan for improvement. With the establishment of SLCs, all students—including ELLs—reportedly had the benefit of more personal attention.

In summary, the school’s plan for improvement included efforts to implement some instructional strategies targeting the unique needs of ELLs—the mark of a “moderate-attention” school.

Schools with Limited Attention to ELLs in Their Improvement Efforts

In contrast to the three schools that were rated as paying moderate attention to ELL needs, the other eight schools were rated as paying limited attention (composite scores ranged from 11 to 13) during the initial period of SIG implementation. Schools in this category did not appear to neglect ELLs entirely. They did report providing services to ELLs in accordance with state and district regulations, and they also described taking steps to improve school practices and conditions in ways that could potentially benefit all learners, including ELLs. However, ELL-specific needs appeared to be on the periphery of these schools’ efforts to improve student outcomes.

Two ELL schools within the same district (one elementary and one high school) are examples of limited-attention schools. Administrators from the district in which these schools are situated reported that the district was going through significant changes in 2011-12. The district’s ELL director was new to the position and in the process of developing a new strategic plan for ELLs. In addition, the district administrators reported that the state in which the district is located had recently implemented new English language proficiency (ELP) assessments and standards. However, they reported that the changes related to the new standards and assessments were still under way and had not necessarily filtered down to the schools. Therefore, according to the district and school administrators, attention to ELL-specific needs was largely absent from the schools’ improvement efforts. As one district official said about the district’s consideration of ELLs in its SIG application:

In all honesty, I’m not sure that it impacted our decision-making....I think the focus was so much on the core [curriculum] and so much on helping to have quality instruction in all of our classrooms. I’m not sure we pulled forward our ELL...students.

Crimson Maple Elementary School. The school is located in a low-income area on the outskirts of a large city. Most students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, and a majority are ELLs from Asian backgrounds. The school’s administrators and teachers indicated that prior to SIG, there was no sense of urgency to address the school’s consistently low performance, in part because students were well behaved and parents rarely voiced concerns. Since receiving SIG, teachers and administrators noted a new sense of urgency and attention to student performance and the quality of instruction, but the administrators and teachers reported that the improvement efforts had not addressed the language development needs of the school’s large ELL population. The principal indicated that he planned to put more emphasis on ELL needs in the future but was not doing so this year because the district administrators wanted him to focus on addressing the more pressing challenges at the school before moving on to other issues. District and school administrators attributed the school’s low performance to low teacher expectations and poor teaching quality. The school administrators and teachers described three goals for 2011-12: raise teacher expectations for students, improve instructional practices (with a particular focus on reading instruction), and improve the school’s fledgling efforts to provide instruction on Asian culture.

Crimson Maple Elementary School: Attention to ELLs in the Improvement Process Ratings

Dimensions	Rating
School Goals	3
Data Use	1
Extended Learning Time	2
Instructional Improvements	3
Professional Development	2
Parent Engagement	2
Composite Score	13

Aside from the efforts to build the Asian culture program, the school’s improvement activities during the first year-and-a-half of SIG reportedly paid little attention to the unique needs of ELLs and instead focused on

promoting more general improvements to instruction and school culture. The school administrators described using workshops, coaching, mentoring, and professional learning communities to raise teachers' expectations for students. To improve instructional practices, the school administrators and teachers reported implementing guided reading groups during reading instruction and a new supplemental oral language development program. The principal described spending a majority of his time working with teachers (conducting observations, teaching model lessons, or coteaching) to improve classroom practices and make instruction more student centered. To improve the Asian culture program, the principal reported developing a scope and sequence for a yearlong program—something that did not previously exist.

Although the school's improvement efforts revealed limited attention to ELL-specific needs, the principal and teachers explained that they complied with district policies for ELL instruction. For example, as part of a districtwide mandate, in 2011-12 the school administrators and teachers shifted to providing ELL instruction through push-in (rather than pull-out) services, whereby ESL teachers supported ELLs in the mainstream classroom. However, teachers described resistance to the push-in model because of the lack of common planning time to effectively implement it and because they reportedly had not received training in the model. Although teachers had been offered opportunities to attend professional development on collaborative instruction between ESL and mainstream teachers provided by regional ELL experts, teachers suggested that few had attended. Furthermore, although the principal noted that about 30 percent of the teachers were bilingual and could scaffold instruction in the students' native language when necessary, teachers described no schoolwide expectation for when and how native language should be used. In fact, bilingual teachers in the focus groups reported that in past years they were explicitly told not to scaffold instruction in the students' native language and, as a result, were reluctant to do so now, even though this practice was no longer discouraged.

In summary, Crimson Maple Elementary was rated as paying limited attention to the unique needs of ELLs in its improvement efforts because there were few reported efforts designed to address needs specific to ELLs, particularly with regard to English language development. In addition, although the school reported complying with district mandates regarding ELL instruction, teachers noted resistance to the changes and indicated that implementation was uneven.

Hoefl High School: Attention to ELLs in the Improvement Process Ratings

Dimensions	Rating
School Goals	3
Data Use	1
Extended Learning Time	2
Instructional Improvements	2
Professional Development	1
Parent Engagement	2
Composite Score	11

Hoefl High School. A large high school in the same district also was rated as paying limited attention to the unique needs of ELLs in its improvement efforts. The school is located in a low-income area on the outskirts of a city, where most students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, about a quarter are homeless, and about a third are ELLs. The size of the ELL population had reportedly been declining for several years prior to SIG, while violence and misbehavior among students had reportedly been increasing.

The school serves a diverse population, including students from Latin America, Asia, and Africa. The school reportedly prides itself on its cultural diversity and holds its ELL students in high regard. As one ESL teacher said, [the ELL students have]

“drive, purpose, and motivation. They bring a lot of hard work. They know what it's like to come from a country where there is a want for opportunity, but not necessarily the availability. So, a lot of the ELL students are hard workers.” Another teacher said, “People say diverse, meaning you don't have a lot of white kids. But we are really, truly diverse.”

Although about a third of the school's students are ELLs, the school's two improvement foci (the International Baccalaureate program and improving student behavior) included no components that addressed the unique needs of ELLs. The school's ELLs reflected a wide range of English proficiency—ranging from newcomers with almost no knowledge of English to students who were almost English proficient—but the school did not appear to

be implementing improvement efforts with those needs in mind. Rather, the school reportedly focused on addressing instructional programming and student discipline for all students.

The district and school administrators reported that the district implemented dramatic turnaround efforts at the school three years prior to SIG, including replacing the principal and most of the school staff. Since that time, administrators and teachers reported that a large number of reform efforts had been implemented, putting pressure on school staff. When SIG began, the school enhanced several of the ongoing efforts (such as providing additional professional development for teachers and academic supports for students) and added a few more efforts (such as lengthening the school day, hiring additional staff, and providing social and emotional supports for students). In addition to the reform efforts, the school served as a center for newcomer ELLs in the district, but the principal, coach, and teachers reported implementing relatively few improvement efforts to explicitly address the unique needs of ELLs. Consistent with a districtwide mandate, the ESL teachers provided instruction to ELLs through coteaching among ESL teachers and mainstream content teachers so that ELLs could receive more instruction in mainstream classes.

Most teachers interviewed at the school reported having insufficient resources and support to meet the needs of their diverse ELL student body. Consistent with this finding, more than half of teacher survey respondents reported not having sufficient materials to address the unique needs of the ELLs in their classes. In addition to the lack of materials, teachers also reported a lack of training to prepare them to provide instruction to ELLs. The ESL teachers said there was no formal ELL-specific professional development available to them, and they instead received informal support from the school's lead ESL teacher. Some mainstream content teachers reported having a limited knowledge base on ELL instruction as a result of attending training on SIOP at some point in their education or career, but few reported attending it as part of their work in this particular school or district. The school's lead ESL teacher explained that she was the only person receiving ELL-specific professional development, which the district provided to each school's lead ESL teacher five times a year.

School and District Capacity

The study team explored whether a school's perceived level of attention to the unique needs of ELLs appeared to be related to its perceived capacity, or its district's perceived capacity, to address ELL needs. We conceptualize school and district capacity to address ELL needs as being each entity's collective ability to serve ELLs well. This can encompass a wide array of resources and conditions, such as the available human capital, social capital, program coherence, and other resources.⁵² However, for the purposes of this analysis, the study team examined capacity solely in terms of the perceived skills and experience of school staff as well as the number of staff dedicated to addressing ELLs' needs. More specifically, the study team used teacher survey data to examine teachers' reports of their skills and knowledge with regard to ELL instruction, their years of experience teaching ELLs, their proficiency in their students' home languages, and their educational backgrounds. The study team also used interview data to examine school and district staff perceptions of the capacity of their teachers and principals to address ELLs' needs and the number of staff dedicated to ELLs' needs. Analyses of perceived school and district capacity were designed to be distinct from the analyses of schools' perceived attention to the unique needs of ELLs. Therefore, none of the dimensions featured in the measure of schools' attention to ELLs' unique needs were included in the measures of school or district capacity.

In the section that follows, we examine the relationship between measures of perceived capacity and perceived school attention to the unique needs of ELLs in their improvement efforts. An important caution for this analysis is that our measures of capacity and school attention are based on respondent perceptions, but even if these measures accurately reflect true capacity and attention levels, our analysis still would not necessarily describe a causal relationship. For example, a school with a strong capacity to address the unique needs of its ELLs may place more attention on these needs when developing plans for improvement. Another possibility is a school that focuses on ELLs' unique needs in its improvement efforts may place a higher priority on employing staff with strong capacity in this area. Yet another possibility is that a third unmeasured factor may affect both a school's

capacity and level of attention to ELLs' unique needs. For instance, a school's proximity to an institution of higher education may broaden the pool of area teachers with specialized ELL degrees or language training, while also increasing the school's access to ELL-focused professional development opportunities, data analysis resources, and instructional strategies to incorporate into its improvement efforts. We are unable to definitively determine with the data we have whether one of these possible reasons is driving any relationship that we may observe between our ratings of perceived capacity and attention. Thus, appropriate caution should be taken when interpreting our findings.

School Capacity to Address the Needs of ELLs

As the number of ELLs in U.S. classrooms grows, so does the need for school staff who are knowledgeable about ELLs, and for appropriate instructional and organizational strategies to ensure their success. In the past decade, the proportion of teachers with at least one ELL student has nearly doubled;⁵³ however, efforts to prepare teachers for these changes have not kept pace.⁵⁴ Lack of expertise among mainstream teachers in addressing the unique needs of ELLs has been noted as a particular challenge.⁵⁵ Previous studies of teachers with ELLs in their classes have shown that teachers do not feel prepared to meet the needs of their ELLs and other culturally-diverse students.⁵⁶ Recent research suggests that principals play a vital role in ensuring that teachers receive the training and support they need to provide high-quality content area instruction to ELLs,⁵⁷ but principals themselves often feel underprepared to meet the needs of ELLs.⁵⁸

Teacher capacity. Consistent with the studies cited above, school administrators in this study reported struggling with low levels of staff experience and expertise in addressing ELL issues. When asked about teacher capacity, school and district administrators in all 11 schools described their teaching staff in positive terms—as being hard working, willing to learn, and committed to the students. However, administrators in 10 of the 11 schools perceived challenges with teachers' expertise and skills for meeting the unique needs of ELLs. Administrators reported that some teachers had limited prior teaching experience in general and little experience with ELLs in particular. For example, as noted earlier, mainstream content teachers at Hoefl High School reported having a limited knowledge base of ELL instruction and insufficient access to resources to improve their knowledge. Teachers at another elementary school explained that they were familiar with ELL strategies, but found it difficult to implement in their teaching practice.

In three schools, respondents perceived high teacher turnover (whether or not it resulted from the SIG intervention model the school was implementing) to be a factor contributing to low teacher capacity. In one of these schools, the principal indicated that ELL experience was not a factor in hiring new staff, and it was further reported that teachers who had received ESL training were among those who had recently left the school. The principal noted that some of the new teachers "...literally had not taught [ESL] ever before. They came from schools where they had been successful in the classroom, but with a different kind of population."

In contrast to administrators' reports of teacher capacity challenges, data from teacher focus groups and the teacher survey suggest that teachers' perceptions of their capacity to meet the unique needs of ELLs were more mixed. Teachers in some focus groups were confident of their own capacity to address ELL needs. For example, teachers at Atwater Creek High School indicated that having similar backgrounds to their ELL students—some were graduates of the school, some were Spanish-speaking, and one was formerly undocumented—helped them empathize with their students.

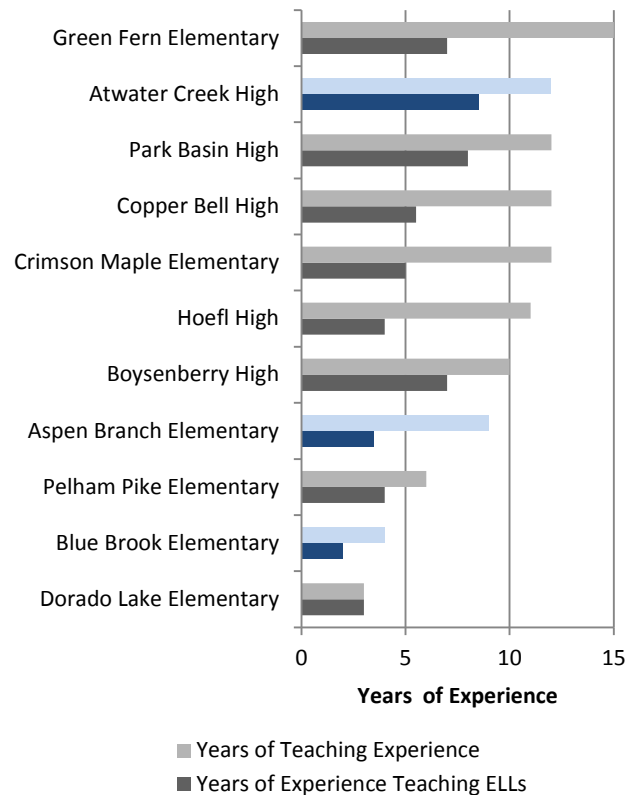
Teacher survey data suggest that teachers held a mixed but generally favorable view of their own expertise regarding ELLs. In all nine ELL sample schools with reportable survey data,⁵⁹ a majority of teacher survey respondents reported having adequate knowledge about how students learn an additional language. (The percentage of teachers in all nine schools who reported *not* having adequate knowledge ranged from 8 to 36.) In eight of the nine schools with reportable survey data, a majority of teacher survey respondents reported having strong knowledge about their students’ home cultures. (The percentage of teachers in all nine schools who reported *not* having strong knowledge ranged from 16 to 54.) A majority of teacher survey respondents in eight of the nine schools reported having adequate support from other personnel (e.g., instructional aides or a resource teacher) to address the unique needs of ELLs in their classes. (The percentage of teachers in all nine schools who reported *not* having adequate support ranged from 18 to 59.) A possible explanation for differing perceptions of teacher capacity is that staff may not be aware of what they do not know. In other words, if school staff do not have a strong understanding of the unique needs of ELLs, and the requisite skills and knowledge to address those needs, they may not be able to accurately assess their own knowledge gaps.

In addition to teachers’ and administrators’ general perceptions, the study team also considered more concrete indicators of capacity: their reported fluency in their students’ home languages, educational background, and years of experience teaching ELLs.

The percentage of teachers who reported having some knowledge of any of the (non-English) home languages of their students ranged from 8 percent to 60 percent,⁶⁰ whereas the percentage of teachers who reported having academic proficiency in one of those home languages ranged from 0 percent to 45 percent. In interviews, teachers and administrators in four schools noted that in their view, although some staff were bilingual, their schools did not have the capacity to meet the needs of all of the diverse language groups represented by ELLs at their school. They described challenges in meeting the needs of speakers of low-incidence languages. Among the nine schools with reportable survey data, 70 percent of teachers reported having adequate ability to communicate with the parents of their ELL students, whereas 30 percent reported that they did not. Interview and focus group respondents at 6 of the 11 schools reported that the language barrier was a major impediment in communicating effectively with ELL families.

The percentage of teacher survey respondents who indicated having a specialized degree in the education of ELLs ranged from 0 percent to 14 percent.⁶¹ The school with the highest percentage of teachers with a specialized degree in the education of ELLs (14 percent) also was the school with the highest percentage of ELLs. However,

Figure 1. Median Total Years of Experience Teaching and Years of Experience Teaching ELLs, Reported by Teachers in Case Study Schools, 2011-12



Source: Study of School Turnaround, Fall 2011 Teacher Survey

Note: The schools with blue bars (Atwater Creek, Aspen Branch, and Blue Brook) were rated as paying moderate attention to the unique needs of ELLs in their improvement efforts. The other schools in grey bars were rated as paying limited attention. Boysenberry and Green Fern had less than 50 percent response rates.

looking across the schools, the percentage of teachers with a specialized degree in ELL education did not appear to be related to the percentage of ELLs enrolled.

Schools varied in terms of their teachers' years of experience teaching overall and teaching ELLs specifically (see Figure 1). In 7 of the 11 schools, teacher survey respondents reported a median of between 10 and 15 years of experience in the classroom, which is similar to the national median of 10 to 14 years of experience, according to the 2011-12 Schools and Staffing Survey.⁶² Teachers in the remaining four schools reported having less than 10 median years of teaching experience and, in two of those schools, the median was less than five years. Teacher survey respondents in all schools indicated that they had a median of fewer than 10 years of experience teaching ELLs, and teachers in 6 of the 11 schools reported having a median of 5 or fewer years of experience teaching ELLs.

The study team found no discernable relationships between any of the aforementioned measures of teacher capacity and schools' attention to the unique needs of ELLs. For example, although teachers in Atwater Creek High School, one of the schools rated as paying moderate attention to ELLs, had the highest median number of years of experience teaching ELLs, teachers in Blue Brook Elementary School, another school with moderate attention, had the fewest median years of experience teaching ELLs (see Figure 1).

Principal capacity. One of the principals in the ELL sample reported having a specialized degree in the education of ELLs. The remaining 10 principals did not report any specialized training. Eight principals did mention aspects of their background that contributed to their capacity to meet the unique needs of ELLs, such as experience working with high-ELL populations, experience in the community, or proficiency in the languages of their students.

Principals in schools rated as paying moderate attention to ELLs did not appear to differ systematically from principals in schools with limited attention. For example, among the schools with moderate attention, one school was led by a principal with no ELL training, no prior experience with high-ELL populations, no second-language proficiency, and no background in the neighborhood or community of the school. On the other hand, among the schools with limited attention to ELLs, one school was led by a principal with a master's degree in teaching English and prior experience providing leadership for ELL programs, in addition to proficiency in the predominant native language of ELLs at the school and experience in the community.

School staff dedicated to ELL needs. From these data, the reported capacity of individual principals and teachers in schools with moderate attention to ELLs did not appear to differ systematically from that of schools with limited attention. However, qualitative data suggest that schools with stronger attention to ELLs were more likely to have school staff dedicated to ELL needs, such as school ELL coordinators, ELL coaches, and ESL/bilingual teachers and tutors.

For example, all three schools with moderate attention to ELLs reported having multiple ESL teachers on staff as well as bilingual teachers or tutors. Two schools reported having an ELL coordinator. All reported having at least one ELL coach (provided by the school or district), although staff at one school indicated that their ELL coach was assigned to five other schools, which they felt limited their access. At all three schools, most staff positions dedicated to ELL needs had reportedly been in place prior to SIG and were funded using other sources (such as federal Title III funding or district resources), with a few exceptions. At one school, the district reportedly provided an ELL coach using SIG funds and another school reportedly hired tutors (including some bilingual tutors) using SIG funds.

In contrast, among the eight schools with limited attention to ELLs, two schools reported having no staff explicitly dedicated to ELL issues. Respondents at these two schools reported that responsibility for ELL students was shared among staff. The mainstream classroom teachers provided all instruction for ELLs as there were no ESL teachers. Both schools reported having coaches that provided some support for ELL needs, but school respondents indicated that it was not the coaches' primary role. Respondents in three other limited-attention schools felt that there were too few staff with ELL expertise or that the few staff with ELL expertise were spread too thin, given the

high proportion of ELL students at the school. One of these three schools reportedly had two ESL teachers and a lead ESL teacher (for nearly 300 ELLs), but no other ELL support.

Although the analysis suggests a potential relationship between a school's attention to ELLs and the presence of dedicated ELL staff, it does not indicate whether the presence of dedicated ELL staff leads to more attention to ELLs' unique needs in their improvement efforts—or the reverse. For example, it is plausible that having more dedicated ELL staff raises a school's awareness of ELL needs and the importance of integrating those needs into the improvement process, but it is also plausible that a school that focuses on the unique needs of ELLs in its improvement efforts would place a higher priority on employing school staff with ELL expertise (e.g., ELL coordinators, ELL coaches, and ESL/bilingual teachers and tutors). We are unable to distinguish between these potential explanations with the data we have, so appropriate caution should be taken when interpreting this finding.

District Capacity to Address the Needs of ELLs

District officials may assume many responsibilities with regard to ELLs, including setting procedures for the identification and exit of ELLs, administering ELP assessments, recruiting and retaining teachers with appropriate qualifications, setting instructional and curricular policies with regard to ELLs, and providing support for low-performing schools.⁶³ A study of a nationally-representative sample of Title III districts found that staffing and ELL-related expertise at the district level varied, with approximately 40 percent reporting that a lack of ELL expertise within the district central office was a challenge.⁶⁴ Perceived ELL capacity also varied among the 9 districts in which the 11 case study schools were located, with respondents indicating that two districts had no district-level staff with ELL training or experience, while seven districts had a district ELL department with multiple trained staff.

Schools with greater attention to ELLs' unique needs in the change process were more likely to be located in districts with stronger perceived capacity to support ELLs. District capacity included the extent to which the district office had designated staff to address ELL issues and the provision of ELL supports through SIG, as well as the perceptions of school-level staff regarding the expertise of and guidance from the district. All three schools rated as having moderate attention to ELLs in their improvement process were located in districts with both an ELL coordinator and an ELL department, whereas two of the remaining eight schools rated as having limited attention to ELLs were located in districts that lacked an ELL coordinator or ELL department.

Having an ELL coordinator and department did not guarantee that these districts were perceived as having adequate expertise to support schools. For example, respondents from four schools—each of which was rated as paying limited attention to the unique needs of ELLs in their improvement efforts—perceived that their district offices lacked ELL expertise. One of these districts was reportedly undergoing a substantial effort to improve its district ELL department in 2011-12 to provide better guidance, raise expectations, and improve the quality of instruction. However, in fall 2011, ESL teachers at the school served by this district were unaware of any concern for ELLs at the district level. Three of the four ESL teachers we interviewed described feeling isolated, without direction, and dependent on one another for support. At another school with limited attention to ELLs, the principal felt that the lack of ELL expertise at the district level was a challenge.

The three schools rated as having moderate attention to ELLs in their improvement efforts were located in districts in which the district office reportedly provided expertise and an explicit focus on ELLs within the context of SIG. These districts also were the three largest districts in the study sample based on total student enrollment. The district for one of the moderate-attention schools had designated a separate office to focus on SIG schools and within this office, four staff supported ELLs. One provided oversight, and the others were instructional coaches who provided direct support to schools. As the SIG ELL director explained:

We realized that the reading coaches in the schools were really good at supporting reading and literacy overall, but there wasn't enough of an ELL focus, and sometimes the ELLs were getting left behind—or the right strategies weren't being identified and utilized.

Another moderate-attention school is located in a district that expanded its ELL office over the past decade. In 2003, there was just one person to support ELLs, and an external audit noted this as a district shortcoming, recommending development of a full ELL office. By 2011, the district ELL department included 12 full-time staff, including instructional coaches, interpreters, an ESL auditor, an ESL test administrator, and a database manager. The director of the ELL office in 2011-12 explained that this had “taken time to build” and said that “we have seen growth in ourselves.” As part of the SIG planning process, the district office reportedly sought participation from the community and provided interpreters for parents of ELLs to describe their aspirations for their children as well as their challenges at the school. According to the district ELL director, they also consulted research on best practices for ELLs: “As we were writing the SIG grant, we were looking from the outside in. What are some of the things we can change on the inside?...What does the research say? The research is saying SIOP. That is one of the things we embraced.” School respondents indicated that they turn to the district office for assistance with translation, classes for parents, and training for teachers. The principal referred to the district ELL director as “a big advocate for the ELLs.”

The third moderate-attention school is located in a large urban district with two layers of administrative support, both of which provided assistance for serving ELLs. Several district initiatives reportedly played a role in incorporating attention to the unique needs of ELLs into the school’s improvement efforts. For example, all schools in the district were required to set their own target for increasing the number of ELL students reaching proficiency on state content tests and English proficiency tests. In addition, the school’s site-based plan for improvement called for schoolwide implementation of specified instructional strategies, one of which was an ELL-related instructional approach. All teachers who participated in interviews and focus groups could easily cite these instructional strategies and describe the ways in which ELLs fit into the change process.

Conclusion

In this first of two evaluation briefs that are focusing on the improvement process in the 11 ELL schools of the Study of School Turnaround, we examined the improvement efforts in schools that are striving to turn around a history of low performance. Although all 11 schools had high proportions of ELL students and offered some type of specialized instruction for ELLs, none was rated as paying strategic attention to the unique needs of ELLs as part of their improvement efforts. Schools reported following state and district guidelines regarding instructional practices for ELLs, and implementing changes to their instructional practices for ELLs in response to revised district policies designed to improve instructional practices for ELLs. However, these changes were not an integral part of the schools’ improvement efforts under SIG. Rather, in the initial phase of the grant, schools focused on more widespread efforts that would affect all students, such as implementing new reading or mathematics curricula, strengthening teacher instructional practices, or enhancing school climate by improving student behavior or increasing personalization. Although these activities are consistent with SIG requirements, which do not explicitly call for schools to address the unique needs of ELLs in their improvement efforts, schools seeking to turn around a history of low performance may find it important to improve supports that target ELL-specific needs to promote higher ELL achievement. Even the schools that paid moderate attention to the unique needs of ELLs either did not report establishing improvement goals that explicitly focused on ELLs or did not report customizing improvement actions in various areas to account for ELL-specific needs.

Several factors may have contributed to most of the schools’ limited attention to ELLs in their improvement efforts. For example, capacity limitations at the school and district levels may have hampered stakeholders’ ability to recognize or act on ELL-related needs. Our interview and focus group data suggest that schools with limited attention to ELLs were less likely to have school-level staff explicitly dedicated to ELL issues and also tended to be located in districts that appeared to have weaker capacity to address ELL needs. Given that these schools served diverse students with a range of needs, they may have chosen to prioritize improvement actions for students perceived as having the most acute learning needs, which may not have included ELLs. One principal explained, “One thing I’ve noticed over the past couple of years is that our [ELL] students who are Hispanic students are outperforming the Hispanic subgroup [which includes ELL and non-ELL Hispanic students]. Obviously, we’re doing

a good job with the [ELL] students.”

Another potential explanation for the lack of strategic attention to ELLs in these schools trying to turn around may be that priorities evolve over time and at this stage of their improvement work, schools may have been directing their attention to other needs seen as more pressing or central to their chronic performance problems. For example, respondents at six of the schools perceived the school context—level of crime, student poverty, and associated social challenges—as being among the main reasons for their school’s history of low performance. Respondents at three schools perceived teacher turnover, poor instruction, school culture, and lack of student discipline as the main reasons for their school’s history of low performance. As these pressing needs are addressed, the schools may turn increased attention to their ELLs. The principal of one of the moderate-attention schools described taking such an approach, relating how his school had focused on establishing important foundational conditions before targeting strategies to address specific student needs. He explained, “There needs to be programs done with fidelity; there needs to be quality teachers. Once you have these things in place, you can talk about professional development activities and how to attain proficiency with low-performing students.” Likewise, the principal of one of the limited- attention schools described his intentions to incorporate a stronger emphasis on ELL needs during subsequent years of the improvement process after first targeting what he deemed to be fundamental needs regarding instructional quality and expectations for students. If other schools in the sample choose to follow a similar evolutionary approach to school turnaround, we may see specialized attention to ELL needs increase over the next few years as the schools proceed with their improvement efforts.

Appendix A

Data Collection and Analytic Methods

The Study of School Turnaround is a set of case studies examining the school improvement process in a diverse sample of schools receiving funds from the SIG program. For three years starting in 2010-11, this study has been documenting the change process in a purposive sample of 35 schools from a variety of state and local contexts. It is designed to describe the characteristics of these SIG schools, the decisions and strategies the schools and their school districts undertake (and why), and the challenges they face as they attempt to improve school performance.

The study includes three overlapping subsamples drawn from the sample of 35 schools: (1) a “core” group of 25 schools, (2) 11 schools with a high proportion of English language learners (ELLs), and (3) 9 schools in rural settings. This evaluation brief focuses on the 11 schools with a high proportion of ELLs, which were purposively selected to include schools representing a range of geographic regions, levels of urbanicity, grade levels, and language groups. The sample includes five high schools and six elementary schools from nine districts and four states, with a median of 45 percent ELLs during the 2008-09 school year.

Data collection for the Study of School Turnaround has relied on two data sources: (1) site visits to the schools and (2) a teacher survey. This evaluation brief uses data from site visits and teacher surveys conducted in fall 2011.

Site Visits

Site visits to the 11 ELL schools took place in October and November of 2011, each lasting about two days. Two researchers from the study team visited each school, with one conducting the interviews and the other taking notes. With the permission of respondents, conversations were also audio-recorded. All but 1 of the 113 interviews and focus groups were recorded.

At each school, the study team conducted one-on-one interviews and focus groups with district and school stakeholders. The study team interviewed an average of two district administrators, one school administrator, eight teachers, three instructional coaches, one external provider (where relevant), five parents, and six students.¹ Respondents were selected in coordination with district and school personnel to solicit a variety of perspectives on the schools’ history and current change strategy. In other words, respondents were not randomly selected, so it should not be assumed that their perceptions are necessarily representative of their entire respondent groups.

Interviewers followed semi-structured interview protocols that provided key questions for interviewees and critical probes to ask if necessary. However, to build rapport with school staff, the interview structure allowed for conversation and discussion. Interviewers also remained flexible to follow up on themes that emerged during interviews that they felt warranted more attention. Interviewers sought to collect respondents’ input on the topics on which they were most knowledgeable, as well as their perspectives on key issues identified by the study team in advance. Interview and focus group topics included: the overall change process in each school, the capacity of staff to meet the needs of ELLs, school goals related to ELLs, professional development provided to teachers of ELLs, and services provided to ELLs and their parents.

This evaluation brief encompasses a study of *low-performing SIG schools* that have high proportions of ELLs, as opposed to a study of ELL students more generally. Our primary aim is thus similar across the “core,” ELL, and rural samples: to learn about the improvement process in these low-performing schools. So we used a similar

¹ Only high school students were interviewed.

battery of questions across the three samples that covered general topics of interest, such as perceptions of performance problems, improvement strategies, challenges to improvement, and leadership. We wanted to provide all respondents with an open opportunity to share their views on these issues related to school improvement more generally. Nevertheless, because we hypothesized that the schools' particular ELL context could be relevant, we also included questions and probes specifically related to the school's approach to meeting the needs of their ELLs. For example, the interview protocol for principals included questions such as:

What do you see as the primary strengths that ELL students bring to your school? What do you see as the primary needs of your ELL students? Do these differ substantially among different groups of ELLs? How are those needs addressed?

What challenges and constraints do you face in addressing the needs of ELL students at your school? And how do you address them?

What opportunities or advantages do you have in addressing the needs of ELL students at your school? (e.g., a particularly knowledgeable staff, active parents, community-based organization, etc.)

At your school, are there any goals or priorities specific to ELL students? If so, what are they?

Questions such as these allowed us to examine issues that were particular to the improvement process in low-performing schools with high proportions of ELLs.

This evaluation brief drew on interviews and focus groups from a total of 254 respondents across the 113 interviews and focus groups, as follows:

- 14 district-level staff
- 11 principals
- 4 assistant principals and other school administrators
- 7 ELL coordinators
- 92 teachers (individually interviewed and focus group participants)
- 24 instructional coaches
- 8 external providers
- 9 community-parent liaisons
- 54 parents²
- 31 students (from five high schools)

Audio-recorded interviews and focus group notes were transcribed to "near-verbatim" quality. The interview and focus group notes were reviewed by the senior site visitor and were revised until they met the quality standards established for the study team. That is, senior staff reviewed the notes to ensure they were very close to a transcription, explained acronyms, identified the role of individuals described in the interviews and focus groups, and included consistent background information about each data collection activity.

² The number of parents participating varied across schools. The school staff recruited parents to participate in our discussions. Thus, these parents were likely those who were already more involved in the school than other parents. It should not be assumed that their perceptions are necessarily representative of all parents at the school.

The qualitative site visit data were analyzed using the following three-stage process (for more detailed information on the process, please see Le Floch et al. [forthcoming]³):

Stage 1—Preliminary Data Capture. Shortly after each site visit, researchers entered descriptive information about the visit (e.g., number of completed interviews, data collection challenges, a description of school context) into a web-based preliminary data repository.

Stage 2—Data Repository. Site visitors reviewed notes from interviews and focus groups to enter school-specific data in a web-based, password-protected data repository in a web-based platform. The data repository consisted of open- and closed-ended questions for which site visitors summarized the data for each school.

Stage 3—Analysis. Analysts conducted cross-case analyses and categorized the schools along topics of interest based on the repository data in conjunction with the transcribed interviews. All information on school practices is based on respondents' self-reports and reflects no external assessment of the quality of those practices. To examine the prevalence of particular issues across schools in the sample, analysts generated simple counts (such as the number of schools where respondents reported a specific practice, contextual feature, or challenge). To produce such counts, analysts applied a set of decision rules that outlined clear standards of evidence for inclusion: for a school to be included in a given count, either the school principal or at least two other respondents had to report the given practice or phenomenon, with no dissent from other respondents. For issues related to parent engagement, schools were included in counts if the principal, parent liaison, or at least two other respondents reported a given practice or phenomenon, with no dissent from other respondents. In cases where respondents reported divergent views, those differences are noted in the text. Decision rules for more complex school classifications are outlined in Appendix B. When reporting information provided by only one respondent group (for example, principals or teachers), the respondent group is identified as the source of that information. We use the general term *respondents* when reporting information provided by more than one respondent group.

Throughout this evaluation brief, we incorporate direct quotations from study respondents as they enhance the clarity and relevance of the study, which is based on qualitative data. These data uniquely provide detailed, contextual information that can convey meaning through illustrative examples. Quotations were purposively selected to enrich the findings arrived at through systematic, carefully-documented analyses. These quotations are not representative of all quotations in our data, and they are meant only to enrich a particular finding, not to formally justify it.

Teacher Survey

To complement the site visits, which included qualitative interviews and focus groups with a limited number of purposively-selected teachers, all teachers in each school were invited in fall 2011 to complete a brief survey. The survey was administered from November 2011 through February 2012 in web-based and hard-copy formats, with a total of 371 teacher responses in the 11 ELL schools. There were no monetary incentives provided for participation in the survey.

The average response rate was 74 percent and ranged from 40 to 100 percent in each school. For this evaluation brief, survey data were analyzed for 9 of the 11 schools where response rates were greater than 50 percent. Among those 9 schools, the average response rate was 76 percent.

³ Le Floch, K.C., Birman, B., O'Day, J., Hurlburt, S., Mercado-Garcia, D., Goff, R., Manship, K., Brown, S., Therriault, S.B., Rosenberg, L., Angus, M.H., & Hulseley, L. (forthcoming). *Case studies of schools receiving School Improvement Grants: Findings after the first year of implementation*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance.

Schools in the Study of School Turnaround’s core, rural, and ELL subsamples received a standard set of survey questions, which included items related to the research questions for those components of the study. The full survey instrument was developed from surveys administered in other studies and used items with reliable scales. (For more information, please see Le Floch et al. [forthcoming].) It included questions asking teachers to respond to topics such as school roles and experiences, school climate and culture, school improvement efforts, and perceived challenges with the school and teaching environment. Teachers in the ELL subsample also received a supplemental set of questions about topics related to ELLs, such as experience, knowledge and skills related to teaching ELLs, teaching strategies used for ELL students, school goals related to ELLs, and professional development.

Given the focus of this evaluation brief, teacher survey data were primarily used to examine: teachers’ educational backgrounds, years of experience teaching ELL students, skills and knowledge related to teaching ELLs, access to supports and materials for teaching ELLs, and challenges in teaching ELLs (see below for the survey items).

Selected Items from the Teacher Survey

Question 2. *How many years of teaching experience do you have? Provide the number of years teaching in total and the number of years teaching at this school.*

Question 7. *Counting this year, how many years have you taught at least one class with 15% or more ELLs?*

Question 10. *Not including English, do you speak any of the home languages of your students? If yes, please specify the language(s).*

Question 11. *Do you have academic proficiency in any of the languages you listed in question 10 (i.e., able to read and write in an academic setting using these languages)? If yes, please specify the language(s).*

Question 13. *Please indicate the extent to which you agree with each of the following statements. The response options are strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree.*

- a. I have adequate instructional time to effectively address the needs of ELL students in my classes.
- b. I have adequate preparation time to effectively address the needs of ELL students in my classes.
- c. I have received adequate training on effective instructional practices for teaching ELL students.
- d. I have access to adequate curriculum and instructional materials to address the needs of ELL students in my classes.
- e. I have adequate support from other personnel (such as instructional aides or a resource teacher) to address the needs of ELL students in my classes.
- f. My school and district provide adequate support services for ELL students and their families (such as translation services, parent outreach programs, parent classes, parent liaisons, home visits, etc.).
- g. My school and district provide adequate academic supports for ELL students (such as tutoring, academic counseling, before and after school programs, etc.).
- h. My school has a clearly defined plan for providing instruction to ELL students.
- i. I am able to adequately communicate with the parents of my ELL students.
- j. I have adequate knowledge about how students learn an additional language (second language acquisition).
- k. I sometimes feel overwhelmed by the challenges of teaching ELLs.
- l. I have strong knowledge about each of my students’ home cultures.

Question 22. *Do you have a bachelor’s degree? If yes, write in year bachelor’s degree was received.*

Question 23. *What was your bachelor’s field of study?*

Question 24. *Do you have a graduate degree? Please answer “Yes” if you have a master’s degree, doctorate or professional degree (e.g., Ph.D., Ed.D., M.D., J.D., etc.). If yes, write in year graduate degree was received.*

Question 25. *What was your graduate degree’s field of study?*

The complete teacher survey can be found at <http://www.air.org/topic/education/study-of-school-turnaround-ELL-protocol-survey>.

Appendix B

Analytic Approach for Assessing ELL Attention

This analysis seeks to identify the extent to which schools paid attention to the unique needs of ELLs when setting goals and implementing improvement efforts. It is important to note, however, that the level of attention paid to the unique needs of ELLs does not necessarily translate into higher-quality services for ELLs, and an examination of the quality of ELL services at these schools is outside the scope of this analysis. See section on *ELLs in the Improvement Process* for analysis results.

Data Sources

- Interviews with district administrators, school administrators, teachers, coaches, and parent liaisons
- Focus groups with teachers, students, and parents

The complete set of interview and focus group protocols can be found at <http://www.air.org/topic/education/study-of-school-turnaround-ELL-protocol-survey>.

Stage 1: Rating Schools on Each of the Six Dimensions

Each of the interviews and focus groups was transcribed. Based on the transcripts, the site lead for each school answered questions in the repository that captured qualitative data about the extent to which the unique needs of ELLs were considered for each of six dimensions. For all open-ended questions in the repository, site visitors were given guidance on how to respond to the question and which respondent types were likely to provide information on the question. Site visitors also were instructed to provide information about how the indicator related to the school's ELL population.

Because the literature on improving student achievement in schools with relatively large percentages of ELLs does not include a measure of the level of attention paid to the unique needs of ELLs in the improvement process, the study team identified six hypothesized dimensions of attention to ELLs. These dimensions were based either on specified elements of SIG (i.e., school goals, using data to inform instruction, and extended learning time [ELT]) or were identified after preliminary analysis of interview data (i.e., instructional practices, professional development, and parent engagement). The six dimensions and accompanying sample of repository questions were:

1. *School goals.* The extent to which respondents reported having school priorities and goals that included addressing the unique needs of ELLs.
 - Did school stakeholders describe a set of school goals to anchor their work for 2011-12? If so, please describe below. Be sure to include your data sources.
 - How did stakeholders describe their goals for ELLs, specifically? What strategies were identified for meeting these goals? Please note which respondents provided data on this issue.
2. *Using data to inform instruction.* The extent to which respondents reported using specially targeted data to inform instruction for their ELLs—such as achievement data disaggregated for ELLs or data on English language proficiency.
 - Please describe what the principal and teachers did to get ready for the school year. Did they consult data to plan for 2011-12? Did the teachers attend professional development? Did they engage in other joint activities? Please note which stakeholders provided data on this topic.
 - Please provide a brief overview of all change strategies in place at the school. Specify if any are new or notable in 2011-12.
 - For each change strategy focused on curriculum or instruction listed below, please identify which strategies are being implemented during the 2011-12 academic year.

3. *Extended Learning Time.* The extent to which each school's respondents identified activities to address the unique needs of ELLs in their Extended Learning Time (ELT).
 - Please provide a brief overview of all change strategies in place at the school. Specify if any are new or notable in 2011-12. (In addition to informing analysis on ELT, open-ended responses to this question captured information about other key dimensions, including instructional practices, parent engagement, and professional development.)
 - For each change strategy focused on use of time listed below, please identify whether the principal (and/or other stakeholders) identified this strategy as being implemented during the 2011-12 academic year and whether the strategy is offered (but not required), required for some students, or required for all students (check as many as apply).
 - Of the strategies described above, which were the most salient to teachers and administrators? Please use this space to communicate other details about change strategies described in fall 2011.
4. *Instructional practices.* The extent to which respondents reported efforts to improve instructional practices for ELLs.
 - For each change strategy focused on curriculum or instruction listed below, please identify which strategies are being implemented during the 2011-12 academic year (check as many as apply). (Question included a range of instructional practices.)
 - Of the strategies described above, which were the most salient to teachers and administrators? Please use this space to communicate other details about change strategies described in fall 2011.
 - How is instruction organized for ELLs in this school? Please address the extent to which ELLs are included in classrooms with native English speakers, the use of students' native language(s), pull-out or push-in English language development (ELD) support, or other interventions for ELLs.
 - What strategies do teachers use to make content accessible for ELLs? What was the rationale for using these strategies?
5. *Parent engagement.* The extent to which schools' efforts to engage parents addressed the needs of ELL parents, through elements such as translation services, bilingual parent liaisons, or classes designed for parents of ELLs.
 - For each change strategy focused on parents and the community listed below, please identify which strategies are being implemented during the 2011-12 academic year (check as many as apply).
 - Of the strategies described above, which were the most salient to teachers and administrators? Please use this space to communicate other details about change strategies described in fall 2011.
 - In what ways does the school encourage involvement of the parents of ELLs? What programs and supports are available to parents of ELLs at the school?
6. *Professional development.* The extent to which respondents reported access to professional development that included topics aimed to help teachers address the unique needs of their ELLs.
 - For each change strategy focused on teacher capacity below, please identify which strategies are being implemented during the 2011-12 academic year (check as many as apply).
 - Of the strategies described above, which were the most salient to teachers and administrators? Please use this space to communicate other details about change strategies described in fall 2011.
 - Are there any special supports, training, or professional development for teachers of ELLs? (Indicate any differences between those that are available for content-area teachers versus ELL specialist teachers.)

Three analysts analyzed responses to all of the questions above. First, one analyst reviewed the data and assigned initial ratings for the six dimensions for each school using a rubric that defined the four possible rating categories. The rubric featured tailored rating criteria for each indicator, but used the following general approach:

For each indicator and each school, the analyst assessed the evidence in the data repository to determine whether a school's efforts featured any level of attention to the unique needs of ELLs. If there was no evidence that the school paid attention to the unique needs of ELLs, the school was assigned a rating of 1. Next, if there was evidence that the school paid some level of attention to the unique needs of ELLs, the analyst determined the extent to which attention was paid and, based on that assessment, assigned the school a rating from 2 to 4. A school was rated as a 2 for a given indicator if a sufficient number of respondents in the school reported implementing a few improvement efforts to address the unique needs of ELLs, but those efforts were not widespread in number or scope. A school was assigned a 3 if a sufficient number of respondents in the school identified ELL-specific needs and some efforts to address those needs as part of their improvement activities; however, ELLs were not the primary focus of the school's improvement efforts. A school was assigned a 4 if a sufficient number of respondents in the school could identify ELLs as a subgroup whose unique needs were a primary component of the improvement efforts.

Once initial ratings were assigned, two other analysts reviewed the ratings and associated evidence. Because open-ended questions include a degree of subjectivity, analysts communicated with site leads if they needed clarification on any data repository responses. In addition, in cases where analysts produced divergent ratings, the site lead was asked to provide more detail so that a consensus on the rating could be attained. The ratings on each dimension were then reviewed by the site lead, principal investigator, and project director, and then finalized after all reached a consensus.

Respondent groups received similar but not identical sets of interview questions, as the protocols were designed to include questions that respondents would likely be able to speak to. Questions were generally open-ended, which also enabled respondents to focus on what they felt they were most able to speak to. Thus, in most cases, only a few respondents spoke about each dimension. Nevertheless, there were respondents from each of the study schools who reported data for each of the six dimensions, and there were no conflicts in respondent reports.

Stage 2: Categorizing Schools into the Four Groups

Once a school was rated on all six dimensions, analysts summed the numerical ratings across the six dimensions. To receive the highest aggregate rating (strategic attention), a school needed to receive a rating of 3 or 4 on each dimension and receive the highest possible rating (4) on at least half of the dimensions (i.e., at least 21 points total). To receive a rating of moderate attention, a school needed to receive at least 16 points total. To receive a rating of limited attention, a school needed to receive at least 10 points. Schools receiving 9 points or less received the lowest rating, "no specific attention," which meant a rating of 1 or 2 on each dimension, with at most three dimensions receiving a 2. The overall ratings were confirmed with the site leads.

Classification	Definition
<i>Strategic attention to the unique needs of ELLs</i>	When asked about improvement efforts, respondents in these schools identified ELLs as a subgroup whose unique needs were a primary component of the improvement plan (21 to 24 points).
<i>Moderate attention to the unique needs of ELLs</i>	When asked about improvement efforts, respondents in these schools identified some ELL needs and indicated that their schools made efforts to address those unique needs as part of their improvement activities; however, ELLs did not receive primary attention in the schools' improvement efforts (16 to 20 points).
<i>Limited attention to the unique needs of ELLs</i>	When asked about improvement efforts, respondents in these schools reported that their school implemented a few improvement efforts to address the unique needs of ELLs; however, those efforts were not perceived to be widespread in number or scope (10 to 15 points).
<i>No specific attention to the unique needs of ELLs</i>	When asked about improvement efforts, respondents in these schools did not report that their school took the unique needs of ELLs into account when identifying or implementing improvement efforts, or reported that their school did not take the unique needs of ELLs into account (6 to 9 points).

Caveats

This is an exploratory analysis for which the study team could not find a precedent in the existing literature. Although we have attempted to ground our research in the SIG policy and existing literature, the indicators identified may or may not be the most reliable indicators of low-performing schools' attention to ELLs in their improvement efforts. In addition, other indicators, such as the capacity of staff to meet the needs of ELLs, are not included in the rating system.

Endnotes

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²¹ Ibid.; The national median percentage of ELLs served in SIG-awarded schools is based on data from 2008-09 for 953 schools out of 1,243 SIG-awarded schools from Cohort 1 (FY09 SIG competition round) that had adequate data available across 49 states and the District of Columbia. It does not include data for SIG-awarded schools in Hawaii or the Bureau of Indian Education.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.; The national median percentage of students who qualified for free or reduced-price lunch and the percentage of students classified as racial or ethnic minorities in SIG-awarded schools are based on data from 2008-09 for 1,234 schools and 1,242 schools out of a total of 1,243 SIG-awarded schools from Cohort 1 (FY09 SIG competition round) that had adequate data available across 49 states and the District of Columbia. They do not include data for SIG-awarded schools in Hawaii or the Bureau of Indian Education.

²⁵ All school names in this evaluation brief are pseudonyms, and some details associated with the schools have been obscured to avoid identification.

²⁶ Nine of the 11 ELL sample schools met the 50 percent response rate threshold for the teacher survey. The two schools that did not meet this threshold were excluded from the teacher survey analysis. (See Box 3 for an explanation of the survey data analysis.)

²⁷ Spaulding, S., Carolino, B., & Amen, K. (2004). *Immigrant students and secondary school reform: Compendium of best practices*. Washington, DC: The Council of Chief State School Officers.

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³⁰ Although districts vary in their use of terms, for the purposes of this evaluation brief, the term “ESL teacher” is defined as any teacher with a certification or degree in ESL who specializes in the instruction of ELL students. ESL teachers may teach ESL classes, content area classes, or both.

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⁴⁵ Tanenbaum et al., Op. Cit.

⁴⁶ Francis et al., Op Cit.

⁴⁷ Although there are a number of practices that could have been used as additional dimensions (such as the recruitment and placement of teachers with the skills and knowledge needed to teach ELLs), these six dimensions were selected because they are consistent with the analysis in the Study of School Turnaround's full (35-school) sample, many of these dimensions were prescribed by the SIG models, and the study collected consistent data on all. When determining whether improvement efforts were focused on ELLs, we considered both those explicitly designed to address the unique needs of ELLs and those that took the needs of ELLs into account within an effort that was targeted to a wider group of students.

⁴⁸ Respondents were asked to describe their schools' efforts related to the six dimensions, not just their personal efforts as individuals. In most cases, respondents within each school reported consistently on the dimensions and their intention. For example, all respondents who discussed goals at one school reported the same set of school goals. However, in the few cases

of disagreement (e.g., three respondents reported goals, and two respondents reported the same goal, whereas a third respondent mentioned a different goal), the goals for the analysis were based on either (1) only those reported by the two respondents if one of the two included the principal, or (2) those mentioned by all three respondents if the third (and inconsistent) report came from the principal.

⁴⁹ U.S. Department of Education (2012). *Guidance on fiscal year 2010 School Improvement Grants: Under section 1003(g) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education.

⁵⁰ SIG schools implementing the turnaround or transformation models are required to implement extended learning time. All schools in the ELL sample are implementing turnaround or transformation models.

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⁵⁴ Ballantyne, K.G., Sanderman, A.R., & Levy, J. (2008). *Educating English language learners: Building teacher capacity*. Washington, DC: National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition. Retrieved from <http://www.nclia.us/files/uploads/3/EducatingELLsBuildingTeacherCapacityVol1.pdf>.

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⁵⁹ Survey data are reported for the nine schools where response rates were greater than 50 percent. (See Box 3 for more detail.)

⁶⁰ Teacher survey respondents most commonly reported Spanish as the language they spoke, but also reported proficiency in Arabic, Chinese, Haitian Creole, Hmong, French, Filipino/Tagalog, Lao, Oromo, Portuguese, Thai, Somali, Swahili, and Vietnamese.

⁶¹ Teacher survey respondents were considered to have a specialized degree in the education of ELLs if they reported having a bachelor's or graduate degree and ESL, bilingual, or multicultural education as their field of study.

⁶² U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), "Public School Teacher and Private School Teacher Data Files," 2011-12.

⁶³ Tanenbaum et al., Op. Cit.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

For more information on the full study, please visit:

http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/projects/evaluation/other_schoolturnaround.asp



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