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Gaining Traction through Professional Coaching:
A Partnership between the Center for Educational Leadership
and Highline School District

Interim Report #2
February 2007

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The Center for Educational Leadership (CEL) at the College of Education, University of Washington, has participated in a contractual arrangement with the Highline School District for the past four years (2003-2007), providing technical support for the district's instructional improvement initiatives in reading, mathematics, and writing. This report summarizes qualitative data collected from September 2005 through December 2006 regarding the Highline/CEL partnership. In previous years, we reported on the nature of the Highline/CEL partnership and documented changes in the leadership work of key central office and building personnel (see Gallucci, Boatright, Lysne, and Swinnerton, 2005; and Swinnerton, 2006). We also have described the embedded coaching work in Highline in other reports and publications (see Gallucci, 2006; and Boatright, forthcoming).

In this report, we characterize the Highline/CEL partnership work as shifting from a strong district-level locus to instructional coaching work that is *embedded* in schools and in classrooms. Our data suggest that Highline is gaining traction in terms of instructional improvement in some schools and classrooms. Overall, these changes in professional practice are in line with the ideals regarding powerful instruction that have been articulated by the district in partnership with CEL. As well, it is clear from data collected at our research sites (five schools) that building leadership has played a key role in guiding the growth among coaches and teachers. However, there is still much variation across schools in the district, and, within schools, there is variation across classrooms. This is a phenomenon that we would expect to find in any school district across the United States that is engaged in system-wide instructional reform work. Our goal for this report is to highlight the excellent work that we have observed in Highline and to point to some nagging concerns regarding moving the work to scale. It is important to note, however, that bringing instructional improvement to scale *is the work* for districts and schools across the country, especially given the current accountability climate. Highline, in concert with CEL, continues to learn from, rethink, and adjust their efforts in this regard from year to year.

We begin this report with a general overview of the CEL research project and study design. After providing an update on the instructional improvement initiatives in Highline, we use the main portion of this report to highlight the CEL-supported embedded coaching work in the district—describing in some depth one example from an elementary school and providing extended discussion of similar work in literacy that is taking place at district high schools. It is

our hope that these detailed examples of changes in professional practice will provide some discussion points for the district (and for CEL) about what *can* be accomplished in a relatively brief amount of time—given strong central office and building leadership and external expertise and guidance. We end the report with a list of challenges that were thematic in our data, suggesting that a key next step for Highline might be to focus on job-embedded and focused professional development among its principals.

The CEL Research Project

In the fall of 2004, we initiated a qualitative research study into how an external support provider—the Center for Educational Leadership (CEL) at the University of Washington—was engaging school districts in collaborative teaching and learning partnerships about instructional improvement. We began our study with a pilot investigation in Highline School District and, in the spring of 2005, we extended our research activities into the Norwalk-La Mirada Unified School District in California. In Fall 2005, we added a third school district (Marysville in Washington State). The data collected in Highline over the past year and a half are summarized in this report. We focused our data collection during this period on the structures that have been developed to support professional learning among building-level literacy coaches and classroom teachers. We continued our observations at district events such as leadership and coaching seminars, but focused our attention on the job-embedded coaching activities at the elementary and high school levels.

Data Collection Procedures

We conducted a total of 65 semi-structured individual interviews in Highline School District over the past year and one half. We asked informants to describe the kinds of activities in which they engaged related to the Highline/CEL partnership, and to talk about the kinds of things that they had learned from that work, as well as the challenges they faced. We conducted the following interviews:

- 13 interviews with CEL staff and consultants
- 11 interviews with central office leaders (including several with Carla Jackson, assistant superintendent for teaching and learning, and other key instructional and supervisory leaders; notably missing in our data for this time period was an interview with John Welch, the new superintendent in Highline).

- 15 interviews with building principals (across 11 schools, including six elementary schools, two middle schools, and three high schools).
- Interviews with building literacy coaches at eight schools (some were group interviews), including six elementary schools and two middle schools.
- Interviews with 12 individual teachers at two elementary schools and three high schools.

In addition, we conducted multiple (over 45), often repeated, observations of events related to the Highline/CEL partnership work, such as:

- Embedded coaching activities (studio/residency work and coaching cycles)
- District leadership and coaching seminars
- School-level staff meetings and other planning meetings
- Classroom-based coaching activities

Multiple artifacts were collected throughout the data collection period, such as web-based documents (e.g., district strategic-planning process information and annual reports, state-level student achievement data), district-generated documents related to summer school and studio/residency plans, and artifacts that were distributed at professional development events.

Data Analysis

The research team began by reading the entire data set and identifying key categories and themes (each member of the team read and open-coded a portion of the data). We then identified four main categories and sub-themes and subsequently coded all interviews and field notes using the HyperResearch qualitative data analysis program.

Following these open and focused coding processes, the research team developed a summary of the data which is represented in this report. These materials will be further analyzed by triangulating data across the various data sources and developing hypotheses on which to organize a cross-case analysis that summarizes findings across the three school districts. To minimize bias and maximize data quality, we plan to check our assertions with local scholars and informants from CEL and the school district before proceeding to final writing stages.

Highline School District and the CEL Partnership 2005-2006

A new superintendent—John Welch—began his tenure in the fall of 2005, moving from another executive position within the district. In September 2005, senior staff in Highline began the process of creating a new five-year strategic plan, guided by the district vision that all

students learn at proficient levels and that all students graduate on time and prepared for post-high school education or career options. The district continued its overarching commitment to the improvement of instruction in reading (extending into the area of writing during 2006-2007). Assistant Superintendent Jackson reported that 5-6% of the district's budget is dedicated to professional learning activities related to its instructional improvement goals for principals, instructional coaches (literacy and math), and classroom teachers.

Highline is in Step 2 of federal "Improvement" status in the content area of mathematics.¹ The district has not met its AYP goals in mathematics for any of the three WASL-reported grade levels—fourth, seventh, and tenth grades—creating a situation that demands instructional response. Consequently, the district has increased its attention to improvement in mathematics instruction. Of the high numbers of tenth-grade students who did not meet standard on the math WASL test (707, or 60.8%, of tenth-grade students), Jackson told us that 53.7% of them were at Level 1—*"so we have a lot of kids who are way behind, not just a little behind."* This situation is especially critical given the district's commitment to professional learning, because it places the district at potential risk of losing important federal dollars that help support their professional development activities.

In 2005-2006, Highline officially entered a conversion process at the high school level, moving some schools to small learning communities. Evergreen High School took a gradual approach to this change, introducing small schools to one grade level at a time (beginning with ninth grade); by contrast, Tyee High School rapidly reorganized all students and teachers into three *official* small schools by the fall of 2005. Tyee used the 2004-05 year to plan for the conversion logistics and then focused their 2005-06 professional development resources on classroom-embedded coaching, moving quickly away from the operational issues that typically surface in high school conversions. Even given this careful planning, according to the principals we interviewed, the high school transformation process placed increased burdens on teachers in terms of workload. On the other hand, several study participants recognized the small-school structure as complementing—even enhancing—the instructional improvement work that had already been established through the Highline/CEL partnership.

¹ Schools are expected to make AYP in up to 37 different categories, and districts are evaluated in as many as 111 categories. Any school or district not making AYP for two consecutive years in the same subject area is identified for "Improvement" status. Until AYP is achieved in every category for two years in a row, schools and districts continue to be identified as needing to improve (OSPI, 2006).

During this reporting period, Highline continued its contract with CEL to support its instructional improvement agenda. The total dollars committed to the CEL contract have increased over the past two years. CEL subcontracts with Teachers Development Group (a group that is located in Portland, Oregon) for the math work in Highline, and continues to support the literacy work directly with six literacy consultants and one leadership consultant. In addition, the Highline contract is managed by Anneke Markholt, who spends 45% of her time as the Highline project director for CEL.

Early in the instructional improvement initiative, district-wide leadership seminars attended by key district leaders (e.g., Assistant Superintendent Jackson and the executive directors of Elementary and Secondary Learning), principals, and coaches from all schools were key vehicles for communicating the district's vision for powerful instruction. The monthly district leadership seminars continued over the last two years, although sessions were conducted separately for elementary and secondary school leaders and the content focus for the seminars was split between mathematics and reading instruction. During this time period, the seminars were held for secondary leaders at school sites (rather than at the central office). During 2005-2006, the seminars that focused on mathematics were attended jointly by middle and high school principals; the CEL consultant for high school literacy, Jenn McDermott, conducted seminars for high school principals only, while the middle school principals attended the elementary reading sessions. (During the current school year, the secondary leadership seminars have been fewer in number, but have still continued with at least two sessions focused on leadership for mathematics instruction and two for literacy.) In addition, leadership from all district schools re-gathered for two seminars that kicked off and set the vision for the district's work with writing instruction during the 2006-2007 academic year.² The district also continued to provide professional development support for their elementary literacy coaches in the form of a coaching seminar that occurred once a month. The following table describes and summarizes these structures, as well the embedded forms of professional development that CEL has supported in Highline over the past two years.

² Note that our research project limited its focus to the literacy work that Highline started in its first years with CEL, which included leadership coaching and instructional coaching in reading. Therefore, we do not report here on the improvement work being done in mathematics or writing instruction.

Table 1
Capacity-building Structures for Learning

Learning Environment	Participants	Content	Frequency	Typical Activities
District Leadership Seminars	Central office leaders, Principals, Literacy coaches, CEL consultant, CEL project director	Leadership for powerful instruction; Powerful instructional content and pedagogy in reading, mathematics, writing	One day per month	Large group presentation by CEL consultant, Small group discussions, Demonstration lessons with Highline students, Standards-based lesson planning
Building Coaches' Seminars	Elementary directors (central office), District literacy coaches, Building literacy coaches, CEL consultant	Powerful instructional content and pedagogy, Instructional coaching models	One day per month	Whole-group work with CEL consultant, Demonstration lessons, Small group discussions
Summer School	Selected literacy coaches, Principals, Teachers, and CEL consultants	Instructional coaching practice, Powerful instructional practice (literacy and math), "Workshop" models for literacy	4-5 weeks with various number of days of CEL support	Job-embedded coaching for teachers and coaches: Lesson planning, Classroom coaching, and Demonstration lessons.
Elementary Studio/Residency Project	Teachers, Building literacy coaches, Principals, District literacy coaches, Elementary Directors, CEL consultant	Instructional leadership, powerful literacy instruction, instructional coaching.	2005-2006: 6 half-days per building 2006-2007: 6-10 half-days per building (literacy) ³	Pre-conference, Lesson analysis with demonstration lessons, Post-conference
Secondary Embedded Coaching	Teachers, Lead teachers and part-time coaches, Principals (as possible), CEL consultants	Best practices for secondary literacy instruction, Creating authentic learning experiences for high school students	Range by school from 7-30 days per year	Coaching cycles with joint planning sessions

³ Reading First schools had six half-day studio seminars, while other elementary schools had both intermediate and primary literacy work for a total of 10 half-days during 2006-2007. In addition, elementary schools had 4 half-day studio/residencies for mathematics work. Reading First is a primary-only reading program that includes a state-supported Reading First literacy coach.

The district has increasingly contracted with CEL for embedded coaching work that is located in schools and that occurs in the context of classroom practice. We have observed that work closely in two elementary schools and discussed it with four additional elementary school principals and literacy coaches. In addition, we have observed the work in the three small high schools at the Tye Complex. We report here on the embedded coaching models that have been developed in Highline over the past two years—and provide some in-depth examples of teachers' and coaches' experiences with them.

Gaining Traction through “Job-Embedded” Professional Coaching

Markholt notes that CEL's work is “*about changing the context in which people work in order to change the culture—regarding what they think their work is about and how to go about their practice.*” That culture-changing work, she believes, best occurs in “*real time*” in schools and classrooms where teachers and coaches actually work. Although CEL's work in the district always involved demonstration teaching with local students, the embedded coaching models have moved that work closer to classroom practice. Markholt complicated notions that the work is *just* about teachers, however, explaining:

Part of the rub of creating this together is that this isn't just about the teachers. It's about the coaches and it's about the principals and it's about central office. You've got these levels of the system, and issues about instructional content, and what are the coaching moves that have to happen, and the leadership. So it's multi-tiered.

Assistant Superintendent Jackson suggested that the district is committed to this form of professional development: “*I don't think we can go back. Our principals are starting to say [about other professional development structures], ‘That experience just doesn't measure up.’*” The embedded coaching work has developed in slightly different forms across elementary and secondary schools in Highline.⁴ The Elementary Studio/Residency Project began two years ago in reading instruction and has now extended into mathematics.

The Elementary Studio/Residency Project

⁴ See Appendix A for a description of the Elementary Studio/Residency Project.

In the spring of 2005, CEL took a group of central office leaders from Highline to a middle school in New York City, where they spent three days in a sixth-grade classroom. There they watched a Highline teacher and a literacy coach working ‘in residence’ with the New York teacher regarding reading and writing instruction. The result of that trip, especially of the leaders’ observations of an embedded external coach from Teachers College, was a new professional development structure called the Elementary Studio/Residency Project. Lyn Reggett, a CEL consultant originally from New Zealand, was contracted during the summer of 2005 to work as an on-site job-embedded coach at the elementary studio/residency sessions. An early document described the model to elementary teachers:

Although both STUDIO and RESIDENCY teachers will be involved in six half day in-services throughout the year, the difference will be the placement of the work. STUDIO teachers will have the consultant in their classroom working with their students in model lessons as well as teaching lessons along side the consultant. RESIDENCY teachers will participate with the consultant and the studio teacher in planning and debriefing as well as trying on the work back in their classroom. The consultant will not be working directly with the RESIDENCY students.

Schools were selected as studio schools (i.e., host schools) based on central office leaders’ assessments of their readiness to lead the instructional improvement work. At each of these schools, a focus *studio teacher* was selected and paired with a literacy coach—it was these professionals, with their principal, who selected the specific content for the embedded coaching sessions. Other members of the studio school team included another teacher⁵ and a second literacy coach (many schools in Highline had two literacy coaches, one primary level and one intermediate). *Residency* schools were matched by district leaders with studio schools based on similar demographics and their potential to learn from each other. A team of professionals from each residency school (including the principal, the literacy coaches, and one or two teachers) traveled to the studio school to observe and participate in the coaching activities. The half-day seminars included Reggett and the team members from each of the two paired schools, as well as a central office leader and a central office literacy coach (a total of 11-15 participants at each session). The school district provided substitute teachers to release the participating teachers from their classrooms.

The considerable resources that supported the studio/residency model sent a strong message from district leaders to building leaders concerning the public nature of professional

⁵ Additional teachers from the studio school were referred to as “residency teachers.”

learning and the embedded nature of instructional coaching. Central office leaders communicated to all elementary school leaders and literacy coaches that they were expected to participate in this new professional development model with a limited set of willing teachers as co-participants. Typically, the sessions occurred in the conference room at the studio school with the professionals—from classroom teachers to district supervisors—sitting together around a large table. At each session, a problem of practice related to reading instruction (usually focused on a component of Balanced Literacy such as Read Aloud or Independent Reading) was presented by the studio school. Following a discussion of that topic (with ample opportunity for Reggett to infuse expertise into the conversation), the group often went to the studio teacher's classroom for a demonstration lesson. Sometimes a video segment was shown to the group featuring the studio teacher and/or the literacy coach modeling some aspect of instructional practice.

In order to describe how the studio/residency worked and to highlight the impact of the work for building coaches and classroom teachers, we provide next an in-depth example from one elementary school. This is not an unusual example; it is representative—coaches and teachers that we interviewed spoke of similar stories in other schools.

Studio work at one elementary school: An in-depth example

At one of the elementary studio schools, the principal selected a competent second-grade teacher, Caryn, as the studio teacher. She was a 30-year veteran who had a strong voice among her colleagues. Utilizing interview and observational data collected from January through June 2006, we describe Caryn's experience with the studio/residency work to highlight both the structure and the kinds of learning processes that we observed across two elementary schools in our research project.

For the two years prior to the studio/residency work, Caryn had been resistant to the school district's instructional improvement initiatives. She described her early stance toward the work:

I'd been teaching for a long time, and, although I liked the philosophy behind this reading initiative, what I didn't believe in was the reading coaches. I said, "Why are we taking good teachers out of classrooms and having them coach teachers who probably already know what they are doing?"

When approached by her principal in the summer of 2005, however, Caryn decided to “*put her money where her mouth was*” and step up to be the studio teacher. That fall, she found that being the focus of the public, professional conversation was terrifying.

It was a really weird experience because, first of all, a teacher is never taken out of her classroom for something like this. I've never been in a set-up like this before in my life. Professional development is: you go somewhere and listen to someone talk all day long and then try to do it in your classroom. But we were in this big meeting room and there were a whole bunch of people I didn't know and I was sort of the center of attention ... it was really, really uncomfortable. Well ... I'm like, whatever, as long as I don't have to teach in front of all these people.

During the first three half-days of the studio/residency work at her school, Caryn observed as Reggett demonstrated Read Aloud with her students or conferred individually with targeted students during Independent Reading. At one of the fall sessions, for example, the team from Caryn's school posed the following questions for the seminar discussion:

- Why do so many students who struggle to read fluently succeed in making meaning from text in a Read Aloud setting?
- What other strategies help students increase their reading fluency?
- What, in [Reggett's] opinion, accounts for the discrepancy Caryn notices between students with low fluency but high comprehension, and vice versa?
- How can a Read Aloud serve the purpose of helping students increase their fluency as well as develop higher level thinking skills about text?

The questions set the lens for participants to observe as Reggett conferenced with two of Caryn's students. Following the observations, the entire group of participants discussed each student's strengths and needs and potential instructional activities that Caryn might try with them. To this point, Caryn had participated in these events primarily as a team member, even though her students and her classroom were the objects of discussion.

In January 2006, things changed. At this session, her team presented a brief video segment that featured Caryn conferring with one of her students. In the segment, the child sat down beside Caryn with a bag of books and, at Caryn's request, selected and began reading a book. Caryn asked him questions such as what he liked about the book and showed him the blurb on the back of the book.

The following excerpt, recorded in field notes, describes the conversation that took place with Reggett after the video segment was viewed.

- Reggett: *There are two ways that I could reflect on what I saw ... there were some big ideas that came out as I scripted. Help me understand, though, what was your intention was when you conferenced with Tommy?*
- Caryn: *Good. I don't think I have enough intention. I just want to talk to the kid.*
- Reggett (turning to Caryn's principal):
What I just did was ask an open-ended question.
- Principal to Caryn:
You just gave an honest answer. Getting to that point is huge. Some might give a textbook answer and then it's a different issue. Willingness to be honest can't be taken for granted.
- Reggett to Principal:
But that's what we want to foster. That is a leadership issue.
- Reggett to Caryn:
Would it help if I asked: What did the child learn in that conference?
- Caryn: *I have no idea. There was no direct instruction going on. I don't really go in with intention.*

Earlier in the year, Caryn had described her observations of Reggett's working with her students as validating ("*This is what I do*"), but also disarming ("*I have no idea what she's talking about*").

I'm like, yeah, this is Read Aloud. This is the way I do it. This is a no-brainer for me. She validated kind of what research has been telling us for years—to read aloud to kids. This is no big deal.

But to have them turn and talk. That was a new concept ... that was good for me to see because it validated some of the stuff I was doing and then pointed out to me stuff what I wasn't doing, like Independent Reading and conferencing. That I couldn't understand just by reading about it.

But, regarding her experience when the video of her teaching was shared at the studio event in January, Caryn told us:

So then we started on the Independent Reading with conferencing. We videotaped. And Lyn said, "Caryn, what's your purpose here?" I go, "I don't know" ... I mean, isn't the purpose to get them to read? And I'm thinking inside my head, does she want more? I'm not understanding where she's going with this. And I go, "Actually, I don't have any idea! What am I doing with this kid, anyway?"

Her discomfort precipitated a period of investigation into these new practices.

But, because that happened to me, I learned a great deal. 'Cause do you think I'm going to look stupid again? No. Okay, so I'm like, "Oh my gosh, she's coming back." So I read a lot about it. I went and visited another teacher in our building, third grade, who was doing a really nice job. Then I came back to my

room and I tried other things. I could feel it wasn't working, but I'd change it again because my kids will do whatever ... they're great kids. They have trust in you.

Caryn was not the only person who took away a set of new ideas about practice from this episode. Her literacy coach, Sheryl, was also caught off-guard by Reggett's probing questions. Even in the context of that studio seminar, Sheryl shared the following with her colleagues (recorded in field notes):

When I first went into Caryn's room, I sat in the back and scripted. Then I showed her the list ... here's what I hear. Now I see our coaching as side-by-side. Now I would be sitting beside her with the student. So I see myself moving closer to the teaching. Then, for conferring, I see the implications for having intentionality, for careful choice of texts, and for scripting the conversation with the student. I'll be stepping in as it looks like I could help.

Sheryl had begun to think about *her* role as Caryn's coach and as a leader. She talked about walking down the hall with her principal after the session. He said to her, "*If that ever happens again* [referring to the way that Caryn struggled with the question about intention], *we need to step in immediately.*" Sheryl took that comment as a call to step up to her role of supporting Caryn.

Okay, then let's find out about intention, let's think about that. We're running along here on the surface, doing what we've been shown this looks like, but without an underlying understanding of intent and purpose. That's where I was, right there along with Caryn.

She began to coach Caryn on the process of conferring with students during Independent Reading. She noted later that spring that she was still "*doing more of a co-conferring rather than a coaching of the teacher as she* [was] *conferring.*" There was evidence by May, however, that Caryn (and Sheryl) had made significant changes in their reading instruction and coaching practices.

When we visited Caryn's classroom later in the spring, we observed her teaching a mini-lesson to her students with Sheryl coaching at her side.

The students have just returned from recess. Caryn quickly gathers them around her on the floor in front of the blackboard.
"This is a mini-lesson and it's going to be fast. You know those sticky notes that I've been asking you to write? Sometimes I can't read them. So I made you a sample [of how to write them]."

She shows them the sample and how to write their own names on one side of the sticky notes and the names of the books on the back side.

Sheryl asks about the term “suspect” that is written on the board.

Caryn says, “We went over that yesterday.”

She glances at Sheryl. “Oh, write the definition? Might be a good idea.”

Sheryl says, “Could we review those terms just to help me? ‘Culprit,’ ‘suspect’?”

Caryn asks the students and several volunteer the definitions of the words.

The students transition to Independent Reading; Caryn and Sheryl began conferencing together with individual students.

Several aspects of this lesson were new to Caryn’s teaching practice. First, she learned about the “mini-lesson” from reading of *The Art of Teaching Reading* (Calkins, 2001)—one of the texts that she and Sheryl began reading following the January studio session—and she was practicing them in the context of her reading instruction. Second, Caryn and Sheryl were sitting side-by-side in this lesson; Sheryl felt comfortable offering some suggestions “*in real time.*” And Caryn had developed several new strategies for conducting conferences with students.

So what my kids do. Now that we’re at the end of second grade, they have to be reading a chapter book—except for my two lowest readers. When they’re done with a book, they write their name on the board, but they can’t interrupt me during Independent Reading. Then, they will stay in my room at recess and those kids will check out a new book. There are all sorts of systems; I don’t have it down perfectly ... and I have a clipboard with their names. Did you see that?

We asked her how she decides with whom to conference:

I just go right in order. I talked to a lot of teachers about this. How do you decide who to conference with? Do you take your low-performing kids everyday? And I talked to the third-grade teacher and she said, “I think every single kid deserves to be conferenced.”

When asked if these were new procedures for her, Caryn replied, “*All of it.*”

During a visit to the school for the last studio session in April, we observed Caryn’s learning in a larger public venue. A new video was shown that morning—Caryn, with Sheryl coaching her on the side, was in a reading conference with another student. Prior to watching the video, Caryn and Sheryl talked about what the rest of the group would see:

Caryn: *This is a good example of how conferring with one student can help you with all students. He wasn’t moving ahead to heavier chapter books. We (Sheryl and I) got together and charted his strengths and gaps [something that had been demonstrated several times by Reggett during the studio sessions]. I thought, isn’t this*

good enough? [The student was a high-performing reader.] *I had been lulled into a false sense of progress with him.*

[Reggett talks here about how easy it is to not have a concrete sense of what it means to be ‘at standard’ for the end of second grade. She asks what a proficient reader would think and write about regarding a real book.]

Sheryl to Caryn: *You had an idea about a book for him?*

Caryn: *He had Star Wars. It was thick and difficult. I conferenced with him on that book to get some information. I gently tried to say, “You aren’t really reading the book.” I suggested we go to the library and he picked out a book suggested by the librarian.*

[Reggett says to the others: *“See the move that Caryn made? She got him into a more accessible book that was still interesting content.”*]

This set-up for watching the video provided Caryn with an opportunity to demonstrate her new understandings about the purposes of Independent Reading and about her previous complacency regarding student text selections. The video itself showed Caryn (with Sheryl) conducting a conference with the student regarding his new book. This time, Caryn had intention regarding this student; she showed that in the questions she posed before the video was played:

- What would progress look like for this child?
- What would you expect that a proficient child could read, discuss, and write about at year’s end in second grade?
- How do you keep students motivated and interested?

Her specific purpose for the conference was to find out if the student had understood his new book. Caryn began the conference by giving the child positive feedback about his reading progress. She asked him some conversational questions about the book (*“I didn’t understand; why was he in a race? What’s that about?”*). During the conference, Sheryl stepped in a few times to model the use of more open-ended questions, such as, *“What do you think that means?”*

About a month later, Caryn again demonstrated student conferencing and Independent Reading—this time, in her classroom, before a group of her colleagues and a visiting team of professionals from another school district. There were about 10-12 adults in her room, watching while she conducted two conferences with Sheryl at her side. Caryn began with a whole-group mini-lesson on how to use sticky notes during Independent Reading (e.g., to note character traits, keep track of events, or summarize chapters). She said to her students, *“When I conference with*

you, you can use your sticky notes to organize your thinking.” As the lesson proceeded, students moved to desks and comfortable places around the room to read their books. Caryn and Sheryl demonstrated two individual conferences with children for the adult observers.

As she worked, Caryn kept notes on a clipboard set up with a 4x6 inch note card for each student. She paused between student conferences to demonstrate this record-keeping system for the visitors. Earlier in the year, Caryn had said she would participate in the studio work *“as long as I don’t have to teach in front of all those people.”* She had come a long way by the end of the year, when she eagerly invited a group of strangers into her classroom to show them how she conducted individual reading conferences with children.

Embedded coaching at the high school level

Prior to the 2005-06 school year, some of Highline’s high schools opted to eliminate their school-based literacy coach positions in order to concentrate professional development resources in an externally-supported embedded coaching model. The modification of the investment in coaches illustrated (what one central office administrator considered) a valuable—though difficult—learning experience.

... [W]e had literacy coaches two to three years before content embedded coaching came in. So the literacy coach in every secondary school was a helper ... [a gopher]. And then we said, “Oh yeah, now we’re doing this [literacy initiative] so now we want you to be expert teachers of content knowledge and pedagogy.” But just because they had the title [of literacy coach] didn’t make it so So now we have—we have an organizational level that’s not able to build the content knowledge So now what’s happening is that we’re trying—you know, how can we reposition the literacy coaches? So what high school is doing is that they’re trading in their literacy coach to have more time with [Jenn McDermott, the CEL consultant for high school literacy]. And we think that’s an okay thing because we’re building capacity with those teachers. Then the teachers become the lead learners. Then that’s the group that we’ll start to pull into district leadership.

McDermott continued working with the original cadre of ninth-grade language arts teachers with whom she began in 2004-2005 at then-Tyee High School. The rapid improvement of several of these teachers’ practices led Highline to boost their investment in CEL’s literacy coaching services so that more teachers could benefit from the job-embedded coaching. The central office leader in charge of secondary schools explained, *“I’m going to do everything I can to have [McDermott] or someone like her work with the other high schools as well next year.”*

And Project Director Markholt noted, “*They recognized that they needed to grow beyond themselves, and when I say beyond themselves, beyond just the role of coach.*” In 2005-2006 (and into 2007), across the three high schools on the Tyee complex and into other district high schools, the role of the CEL literacy consultant was expanded. The district policy shifted from a school-based “*coaching*” model to one of building *lead teachers* through embedded coaching.

The expansion of McDermott’s work to all literacy teachers at Tyee Complex in 2005-2006 more than doubled her workload because Tyee had been recently divided into three small schools. For the original teachers who were used to having uninterrupted time with McDermott, this expansion was difficult, as one teacher explained:

It’s been very hard to share her this year with the other three schools. That’s influenced the way that we work with her because it’s changed, since September, whether we have her for one whole day or we have her for four days in a row for two periods each. We haven’t really found as much of a groove as we did last year, where it was a more pure embedded coaching, where she would be here anywhere from two to four days but be here all day.

And, since the organization of McDermott’s time had her bouncing between schools each day, time for her to give teachers meaningful feedback on their teaching was compromised. In the spring of 2006 another teacher mentioned:

We had her this year when there was no debriefing time, which is the most valuable If she’s going to be in your class, you really want to debrief so that you have that chance to really be pushed, but the last two times that she was here we debriefed in class, while kids were working, and it was like debriefing on the fly. “This is what I saw” Thirty seconds and we’re back to this. So that has not been ideal so we’ve tried to sort of make accommodations for that as best as possible, but the longer the better, the deeper the better.

The district has increased the investment in CEL-supported embedded coaching for 2006-07 so that all high schools would have contact with a consultant. Some teachers and schools see their consultants more than others because individual schools have contracted with CEL for additional time. Assistant Superintendent Jackson called attention to this expansion and related it to district policy:

At secondary literacy, we had prioritized [McDermott’s] time with two schools. The other two had little time with her ... it’s not going to be equal, but everybody’s going to get some time with her, because if there’s an expectation, it needs to be an expectation everywhere.

A former middle school teacher who exhibited strong teaching and leadership skills also was hired internally to work across the district's secondary schools as a classroom-embedded coach beginning in the fall of 2006. Here, the district has essentially grown its own literacy specialist who now checks in with teachers between visits with the external consultant. In addition, in order to meet the demand for embedded coaching at the high school level in Highline, a second CEL consultant was added to work on literacy across other content areas (such as social studies or science).

Studio work at the high school level: Extended coaching cycles with teachers

Unlike the elementary model, which explicitly brought two, sometimes three, schools together, the high school embedded coaching model included studio and residency teachers from the same school. The coaching model that developed for high school teachers was a cyclical, three-part professional learning opportunity that involved planning for a lesson, observing or co-teaching that lesson, and a debriefing period to inform the teacher's future practices. In general, coaching cycles at the high school level ranged from two to four full days per school. Although one teacher was designated each month as the focus teacher of study, all literacy teachers in the same small school participated in the coaching cycle and had the opportunity to learn from McDermott's specific discussions with the focus teacher (Boatright, 2006, 2007).

While in the classroom, McDermott often pauses to explain to teachers her actions and thought processes. The following vignette illustrates what job-embedded professional learning opportunities look like for a ninth-grade language arts teacher in her third year of working with McDermott. The teacher and McDermott have established a strong relationship of trust over the years, enabling McDermott to offer her suggestions "*in the moment.*"

Opening the door to Rosa's classroom, we see students tightly arranged in a half-moon shape, and a large easel defining today's mini-lesson: "Ways We Respond to Texts." As Rosa introduces the topic, McDermott's eyes sweep the room for evidence of how students are engaging with the content of this mini-lesson. Once Rosa reads a few pages from a book and asks students at different points in time to discuss in pairs (within the half-circle) how they are responding to the text, it becomes clear that some students are already responding in sophisticated ways, inferring or predicting details about the story.

Meanwhile, four of Rosa's colleagues—including the two language arts teachers new to McDermott's coaching—have been observing this class. Once the students are reading independently, McDermott and all the teachers sit down

in a small circle with Juan, a student, who smiles at the group but looks unsure why there are suddenly six adults focused on him. McDermott and Juan reacquaint themselves (they met in summer school) and Rosa explains that we are there to learn how we can help him be a better reader. As Juan begins to talk about his book, Always Running, McDermott points out to him that he chose a similar book in summer school. He explains, "I like stories about Latinos and how they kinda make their lives better. You know, like when they get out of gangs sometimes." McDermott explains to Juan (and the rest of the group) that, since he is particularly attracted to books about successful Latinos, he could become a resident expert on this genre for the class. Juan smiles shyly in approval. As Rosa prompts him to talk about his responses to this text, using the terms from today's mini-lesson, McDermott comfortably jumps in. "See, here is what I'm thinking for Juan to develop as a reader." She continues, suggesting that Juan could use one of the bins in the classroom to start a book collection of this genre for other ninth graders, or give a presentation on Latino success stories and invite people in from his community to talk about how they left their gangs. Rosa agrees that this is a great idea, and she and Juan come up with some next steps. As Juan leaves the circle, McDermott says to Rosa and the group, "So what you saw here is a kid who can really do more. We want to be leveraging kids' responses for a bigger purpose, not just the day's lesson."

As this vignette portrays, the job-embedded coaching cycle provided a potential professional learning opportunity for *all* the adults involved. McDermott intended this classroom observation to serve more than one purpose. First, it was a basis for giving Rosa feedback on her teaching. Second, it was an opportunity for two teachers who have never been coached in this way to observe a colleague who is comfortable with being coached and to see what coaching entails before they try it. The latter purpose was made explicit by McDermott to these two teachers before the observation:

So I want you to look at the student role and the teaching role. We're not here to work on the curricular content focus as much as student/teacher roles and students' level of independence. We want to see how they [students] identify themselves as students, and then as readers and writers.

Following Rosa's class, the adults gathered to debrief what they had seen. One new teacher noted classroom structure, norms, and Rosa's pedagogy, though it was clear that she also had questions about how to create this kind of learning environment for her own students:

Teacher: *I was noticing the classroom set-up, the physical structure ... with all the students in close at the front of the room. I saw that Rosa shared her own thoughts about the lesson and the text with her students after they had shared theirs. There were clear norms*

established, and you could see them on the wall. One thing I'm wondering is ... do we confer with students every time there is an Independent Reading? I need some help also on deciding which student to confer with and when. Also, did the student want to do a book bin? And another question I have is ... should I confer with my students in Spanish? What is the student's job and what is the teacher's job in the conference? How much scaffolding should I do? What should I cover? And in what sequence?

McDermott: *These are great questions, and we're going to help you answer them over time. [To the group]: So you see how this process is constructivist. We're coming up with the agenda together.*

McDermott's response suggested that the professional learning opportunities for teachers were ongoing and individualized to specific classroom contexts. As illustrated by McDermott's use of the word "together," these learning opportunities also had the potential to reinforce teachers' work within a community of practice.

Summer school as a professional development opportunity

Summer school in Highline traditionally has offered students remedial classes, under the theory that more experiences with traditional curricula would give students an opportunity to get a jump start on the upcoming year. Over the past several years, however, Highline's summer school programs have become a site for both student *and* teacher learning. In partnership with CEL, Highline central office leaders began developing a new set of ideas about summer school at the high school level as early as 2003. At that time, summer school became a professional learning opportunity for a group of ninth-grade literacy teachers from Tyee High School, as well as an opportunity to provide powerful instruction for students who were performing below standard.

Since that time, about six to eight teachers have taught in each high school summer session and participated in intensive professional learning at the same time, working with McDermott. During the summer of 2006, this work included two classrooms with three teachers each. McDermott provided eight days of embedded coaching over the five-week summer session.

Lead high school teachers (those who had been working with McDermott for two to three years) were paired with less experienced teachers so that the *lead teachers* were leading the work in those classrooms. Additionally, McDermott worked with the teachers and students in the

context of the summer school classrooms. At the end of each day, the teachers met with the coach to debrief and plan next teaching steps. These after-school sessions were supportive, according to one teacher:

In summers ... we do literacy study groups after school, and that was helpful to put a structure in place to foster conversations across schools that are doing the [instructional improvement] work.

The rationale behind pairing teachers from the same school was grounded in a belief that establishing a collegial relationship built on instructional improvement could: (1) build teacher community for the upcoming school year, and (2) provide an “*existence proof*” for teachers from the host site to observe the coaching process and the Reader’s/Writer’s Workshop model in action. Several teachers from other schools observed at times during the summer of 2006, and some central office leaders visited the classrooms. One teacher reflected on her experience in summer school several months later:

I think what I’m learning in general, and this is probably directly from my work with [McDermott] this summer, is to do a lot more pre-assessing before I teach, for me personally. So, and I think also that we are doing that now as a staff, as a group.

Based on what they had learned from the Elementary Studio/Residency work and from the high school summer school program, district leaders developed a similar embedded coaching model for the elementary programs that was launched during the summer of 2006. Over 70 teachers participated in the elementary summer school programs, working in teaching teams of two teachers per classroom at three school sites (there were approximately 30 classrooms with two teachers each, plus four English Language Learners classrooms). At each site, there was a summer school principal and a literacy coach, and a CEL consultant worked with the summer school teaching force, meeting with them for three days prior to summer school and for debrief sessions at the end of each daily session. Steve Grubb, one of the executive directors of Elementary Learning, described the professional learning activities that were incorporated into the elementary summer school program:⁶

- 1. Teachers (alongside the three summer school principals and central office staff) attended content sessions related to aspects of the Workshop Model (Calkins, L. 2001). These sessions convened at the central office and were led by CEL*

⁶ Steve Grubb described the summer school professional development work in an article for a CEL newsletter published in the fall of 2006.

- consultants during a two day conference prior to the start of summer school and twice a week (1.5 hours each) during the four week summer school session.*
2. *Teachers visited one another's classrooms and observed and debriefed model lessons conducted by the CEL consultant. Each of the three schools participated in several of these sessions.*
 3. *Building level literacy coaches (one per building) provided in-service related to the content focus three days a week at the school site. These sessions were responsive to the unique needs of each summer school building.*
 4. *Teachers and building level coaches engaged in "job embedded" coaching conversations, demonstrations, and lesson planning at each site.*
 5. *Teachers received feedback and daily observations from their teaching partners.*

The program went beyond what had been the norm—"Read Naturally" and "Open Court" intervention programs. Summer school was viewed in 2006 by district leaders as an opportunity to *"select coaches and teachers who are willing to try this work, willing to fit in professional development, and are ready to take this back to their schools in the fall."*

Leading for change through job-embedded coaching

We've identified in previous reports on Highline's reform efforts that leadership practices such as *"being present"* at key professional development events and *"using leadership voice"* (e.g., openings and closings at public events, written communications) were skills that principals were learning in Highline School District (Gallucci, Boatright, Lysne, and Swinnerton, 2005). Data collected during 2005-2006 suggested that these and other leadership practices were critical for supporting individual and collective learning processes and connecting them to the district's instructional improvement initiatives. Related to the studio/residency work in elementary schools, for example, Caryn's principal (1) selected the studio/residency participants, (2) supported individual and small group learning through ongoing dialogue, and (3) reallocated resources to support continued work.

Caryn's principal was strategic in his selection of Caryn as the studio teacher. He talked about how the language of *"going with the goers"* (that is, targeting resources for professionals who were early adopters) had never actually *"set well"* with him.

Actually, there is some wisdom, I think, that leaders can and should pay attention to [those who are resistant to change], especially if they've been around a while ... if we are ever really going to be successful with the initiative, it couldn't just be with what were often very young people in the profession that maybe haven't seen the cycles of change. So selecting Caryn was about selecting someone who I thought would be receptive to the work, but who was also veteran enough to have

experienced cycles of change. She would be a good test case for how much traction or gravity there really is around this work.

She would filter out the faddish aspects of it and she would connect with the pieces that would ring true. And if they ring true to her, she would have the credibility with others to give this another look, more of a try. And that's been the best result of the residency model. There was some gravity to it.

The principal was also strategic regarding resource allocation. He held back monies that would typically be allocated for professional development activities prior to the start of the school year so that he could “*take advantage*” of opportunities as they arose. Consequently, he was able to contract with Reggett for eight extra days of job-embedded coaching work at the school as it became apparent to him that she was “*the perfect person to show us how to bring kids to the table in this coaching work in a more intentional way.*” He further planned to send two groups of teachers and coaches to Teachers College during the summer of 2006; one of the groups included himself, Caryn, and the third-grade teacher that she had observed regarding Independent Reading. These leadership actions created conditions that enabled changes in Caryn’s and Sheryl’s practices through support for their ongoing dialogue and exposure to new ideas.

One of the key questions for Highline central office leaders was how the elementary studio/residency work connected to the rest of the district’s professional development work—either with building coaches in other content areas such as mathematics or in their leadership work with principals. As follow-up to their learning regarding the first year of studio/residency work (one of them was present at each of the 50+ studio/residency sessions during 2005-2006), the Highline elementary directors extended the embedded coaching model into other aspects of the district’s professional development work during the summer (2006) and into their plans for the upcoming year—ensuring that: (1) external expertise continued to connect to actual work practices; (2) job-embedded coaching continued to be viewed as the standard for professional development work in the district; and (3) professional learning processes continued as public events. They created new structures and policies, such as:

- An embedded coaching model for elementary summer school, modeled on the high school summer school professional development model and the studio/residency model. Two CEL consultants were hired to work with pairs of summer school teachers in classroom contexts and at pre- and post-debrief sessions that included elementary literacy coaches (see below).

- A new policy for future whole-group leadership seminars with elementary principals (around instructional leadership). District-wide sessions would be conducted by the same consultant who did the job-embedded coaching in the elementary schools at studio/residency sessions (for 2006-2007). This policy was intended to connect whole-group leadership instruction with work taking place in schools and classrooms.

Although the bulk of job-embedded coaching at the high school resides in the interactions with teachers, CEL consultant McDermott also works with principals and central office leaders to plan district- and school-wide professional development for high school staffs. She characterizes her working relationship with leaders in the following interview excerpt:

I'm always ready to check in with leaders and let them know, "Here's what we worked on, here's what we did." I try to keep my responsibility in communicating with them. I think some feel they just really trust me. And, they're like, "Keep doing what you're doing. Keep doing what you're doing." And that's great. But I feel like I want them to really know, here's what we're doing, here's what's happening They don't need to know more than the teachers, but they need to understand. I do feel that all the principals really do have a vision for the most part. They get what it is, so I feel like it's more touching base with them. If I had to have a category of working with principals, it's touching base and planning.... I do really try to make sure that I get their ear at least once a visit and let them know what's happening. And they try to find me, too.

High school principals differ in the roles they play during their teachers' job-embedded coaching cycles. Some do classroom observations with the group of teachers, some substitute teach for teachers who go to observe their colleagues' learning experiences, and others advocate McDermott's work from a distance with broad expectations that all teachers will implement the workshop model in their classrooms. Two principals comment on their role in this regard:

I spent a significant amount of time, but not a hundred percent of the time, with [McDermott] and teachers that she's working with when she's been onsite, so that's helped me to develop a better understanding of what literacy work with our students needs to look like so that I can support teachers and also identify whether or not what they're doing is what we want them to be doing.

We've tried to put little things in place like, you know, I have shared with the teachers, "Anytime you want a sub to go into Monique's or Rosa's room, just let me know, we can do that, we go in there together, we can talk about it." People aren't taking me up on it. I now know next year it will be, "On this day, let's you and I go into those classrooms to observe." So it definitely has to be more intentional and more scheduled.

Naturally, each principal comes to his or her work with different experiences and talents. How the leader envisions and communicates the literacy improvement initiative determines how McDermott frames her own coaching work, as she explains below referring to three specific principals:

[Principal A] is a real democrat, a real negotiator with her staff and with people. She's really into autonomy and she has a different leadership style. You know, [Principal B] definitely has a more authoritative style of instruction and [Principal C] has a more student-centered approach around social work sorts of issues So each of those leader's lenses definitely has an impact on the way the work goes. [Principal B] is very clear, like you guys are doing a workshop and that means you guys have meeting areas [for the mini-lesson], and you're going to have them. For [Principal A], she hasn't said that to her staff and ... I have to coach differently.

McDermott keeps central office leaders abreast of high school job-embedded coaching with regular updates as well. According to her, these leaders appear “*much more interested in my take this year on the things that are happening. [They ask,] 'How is that person supporting the work? Do we need to support them in any way?'*”

The district invests thousands of dollars each month on job-embedded professional development opportunities. That investment is viewed as paying off and central office leaders report seeing positive and relatively rapid changes in teaching and learning at the high school level. Highline's director of secondary schools explains,

You know, we're at that really nice place of having done enough that we can see some outcomes and adjust based on that. I'll speak mostly for secondary. The most powerful work has been [McDermott] working directly with teachers And so [McDermott's] been able to move practice, you know, in really identifiable ways. So we've gradually shifted our strategy at secondary from, you know, she [McDermott] had worked only at Tyee, but now we're also starting to see some of that success with her work at Evergreen.

Impacts of the CEL/Highline Partnership

Our description of Highline's work with CEL over the past one and a half years suggests many outcomes that are important steps in the process of achieving district-wide instructional reform. However, as district sources have noted, the critical outcome of the improvement effort is change in student learning outcomes. In the sections that follow, we provide data regarding

student learning outcomes in Highline over the past three years. In addition, we highlight important intermediate outcomes related to changes in professional practice.

Student Outcome Data during the CEL/Highline Partnership

Student WASL scores have trended up in Highline in reading and writing over the past three years. While we cannot make causal claims that the CEL-supported literacy initiative is responsible for these test score gains, the *trend* in Highline in reading and writing is definitely in the right direction (it's important to note that the district began its work in literacy with instructional improvement in reading as its focus and *just introduced* specific strategies for the improvement of instruction in writing during the 2006-07 academic year). See Table 1 for a summary of the district's student outcome data for reading and writing for grades 4, 7, and 10 over the past three years. Table 1 displays these scores in the aggregate; following tables discuss test scores for particular groups of students.⁷

Table 2.
Highline School District, WASL Scores, 2003-2006.⁸
[Percentage of students at or above standard]

4 th Grade WASL Scores		
School Year	Reading	Writing
2003-2004	63.7	49.6
2004-2005	69.4	47.9
2005-2006	72.9	51.2
7 th Grade WASL Scores		
2003-2004	49.3	47.0
2004-2005	61.2	51.5
2005-2006	50.3	52.0
10 th Grade WASL Scores		
2003-2004	59.6	59.0
2004-2005	66.8	57.2
2005-2006	72.6	65.9

When achievement data are disaggregated for particular groups of students, several important trends emerge. For example, the following table compares WASL score results in

⁷ Note that the dip in 7th-grade scores for 2005-2006 was a state-wide phenomena widely viewed as an anomaly of the test construction.

⁸ Source for Tables 2 and 3: Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction. (undated). Washington State Report Card [website]. Retrieved 3/6/07 from <http://reportcard.ospi.k12.wa.us/>.

reading and writing for non-low-income students and low-income students, highlighting the challenges that the district faces in their attempts to raise ALL students to standard. Of particular note in these data is the reduction in the achievement gap between income groups occurring at the tenth-grade level in reading and writing, which may be related to the investment in embedded coaching at the ninth-grade level over a period of several years.

Table 3.
Highline School District, WASL Scores, 2004-2006.
Disaggregated by Income Level
[Percentage of students at or above standard]

Grade 4	Reading			Writing		
Year	Non Low Income	Low Income	Diff in % pts	Non Low Income	Low Income	Diff in % pts
2005-06	87.2%	64.5%	22.7	67.1%	42.0%	25.1
2004-05	84.9%	60.0%	24.9	61.8%	39.5%	22.3
Grade 7	Reading			Writing		
Year	Non Low Income	Low Income	Diff in % pts	Non Low Income	Low Income	Diff in % pts
2005-06	69.0%	36.9%	32.1	65.5%	42.3%	23.2
2004-05	78.0%	48.6%	29.4	67.0%	40.0%	27.0
Grade 10	Reading			Writing		
Year	Non Low Income	Low Income	Diff in % pts	Non Low Income	Low Income	Diff in % pts
2005-06	78.5%	64.1%	14.4	71.7%	57.6%	14.1
2004-05	75.4%	54.7%	20.7	66.0%	44.7%	21.3

Highline itself reports a significant reduction in the gap in reading achievement scores between English Language Learners and Native English Speakers at the fourth-grade level (see Figure 1). Arguably, this is one of the big challenge areas for the district given the large numbers of students who speak native languages other than English. Similarly, the district reports a reduction in the achievement gap between Latino students and White students for reading scores (see Figure 2). These are encouraging data, given the district's intensive investment in instructional improvement in the reading subject area over the past three to four years.

Figure 1.

Fourth-Grade Reading Achievement Data:
 English Language Learners and Native English Speakers.⁹

4th Grade Reading Achievement Growth Among English Language Learners

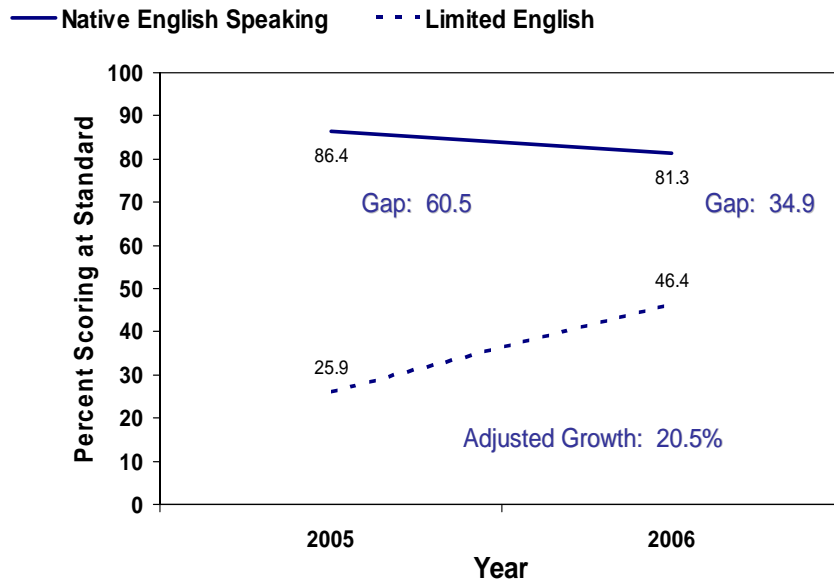
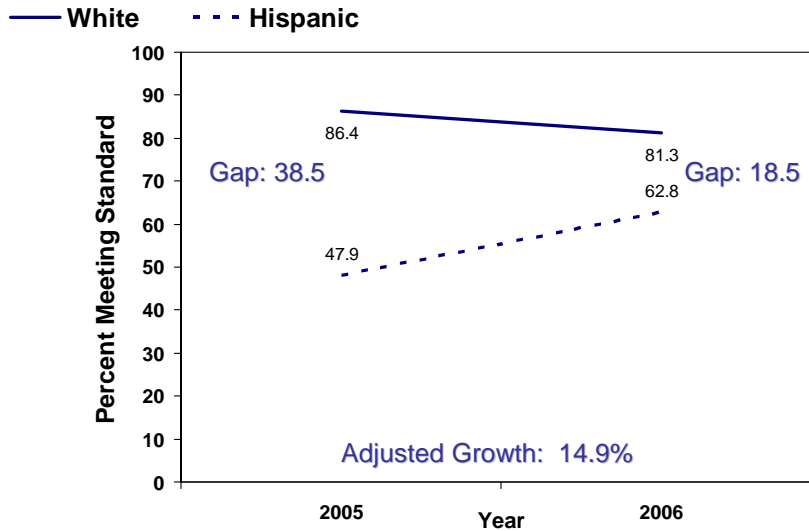


Figure 2.
 Fourth-Grade Reading Achievement Data:
 White and Hispanic Students.

⁹ These comparison charts (Figures 1 and 2) were developed by Highline School District and reported by Panasonic Foundation (Highline, WA: A System of Learners from Superintendent to Kindergarteners. *Strategies for School System Leaders on District Level Change*, 12, December, 2006). As noted in the Panasonic report, a similar narrowing of the achievement gap between these groups of students has not yet been detected at the upper grades.

4th Grade Reading Achievement Growth Among Hispanic Students



Impact of the Partnership on Professional Practice

Across informants, in both interviews and informal conversations during our observations of CEL-related activities, we heard a variety of positive statements from adults in the district about what they were learning related to instructional leadership and powerful instruction (see previous report for initial findings related to professional learning—Gallucci, Boatright, Lysne, and Swinnerton, 2005). Because we focused our research efforts on literacy coaches and teachers during the 2005-2006 school year and into the fall of 2006, we highlight here examples of the things that these professionals reported they were learning. We divide these examples by school levels.

Learning among elementary teachers and literacy coaches

The example of Caryn provided above demonstrates that for those elementary teachers who were participating in the district's embedded coaching activities, there was evidence of change in instructional practice. Several other teachers cited learning from Reggett in the studio/residency work. Here a teacher describes what she learned, over time, in the context of watching Reggett work with a small group of her kindergarteners.

I've been able to focus on that small group, but it always affects the others. Watching her [Reggett] do interactive writing the way that she does it (it's a little different than the way I do it), I realized when they write sentences I wasn't having them repeat them over and over like she did. She had them do it over and over so that they would be able to read them, but I wasn't doing that. And I started to. They read it much better now because they know it. They remember. I have taken a lot of those kinds of things.

Another teacher talked about watching Reggett's demonstrating the Read Aloud with her students and notes what she learned.

The first couple of lessons that she taught and just watching ... here she is doing these stories and just asking, "What do you think?" and that's it. And letting the kids talk and staying out of it and giving them the time they need to think. It's recognizing the points where you need to intervene and either get them back on the right track or prompt them or push them a little further.

Teachers described, in general terms, a number of aspects of reading instruction that they were learning—these mirrored the components of reading instruction demonstrated and discussed at district-wide leadership seminars, coaches' seminars, and in the studio/residency sessions. They included accountable talk, invitational questioning, conferring with individual students, and the use of student data to guide instructional decisions.

We spoke with literacy coaches from six schools in the district. Several of the coaches discussed the difference between the district-wide seminars and the embedded coaching model. The impact of working "right here with the kids, trying it on in real time" was clear in their comments.

How to describe it—you're in the classroom. You're not watching a videotape of somebody teaching. You're right here in the moment saying, "Why did you do that?" ... We're in the classroom, like the last time sitting down, each of us, with a real student talking to them about their reading and then immediately going back together and sitting and saying, here's what I saw, and what did you notice?

Coaches commented that the district seminars had given them "an initial structure" and many coaches talked about coming back to buildings to mimic what they had learned at the district sessions. But several coaches thought that the studio work had taken them deeper. Working with other schools had broadened their thinking, moving even veteran teachers to rethink their practice.

It's exciting that—like any profession, be it a doctor or somebody in technology—it's getting better. And I think that is a new mindset for a lot of teachers. They

always think of it in terms of, “Here comes another program.” But I think the whole approach to this is not a program. It’s how can we refine our craft? How can we get better and add to our knowledge base and be willing to take some risks?

That coach went on to explain that even with reluctant teachers, *“Those doors are beginning to open because of the accountability piece.”* Data, such as running records and other benchmark testing, had led some teachers to reassess their teaching practice. *“When you put those data down in front of teachers, they can’t say, ‘Those are different kids [not mine].’”*

In general, the literacy coaches we spoke with talked about learning the aspects of reading that the teachers mentioned (e.g., accountable talk, invitational questioning). But they also talked about learning to coach *“side by side”* during their studio/residency work. They reported increased understanding of how to work with teachers, how to observe instruction and how to *“work public.”*

High school teachers are learning to ask new questions.

One of the most visible outcomes of the CEL-driven instructional improvement work was that Highline educators were beginning to ask different questions. Central office leaders, for example, moved from worrying about the nature of coaching relationships to their direct role in supporting high quality teaching and learning. As McDermott explained,

They’re more sharp about their role, like they’re trying to figure out ... rather than, “They [teachers] seem to like you,” which was really important to them, this year it’s more like, “How are they doing? Do they need support? Are they able to...?” I think they’re asking more specific questions about what they need to do to support the people in their goals and do they need to guide them around the choices they’re making.

Likewise, high school literacy teachers were asking deeper questions about practice (this resonates with what we heard from elementary teachers about the difference that embedded coaching was making for them). Rather than concerning themselves with the basic structures of Readers’/Writers’ Workshop, high school teachers who had had at least a year of embedded coaching under their belts were able to use the workshop structure to *“fine tune”* their language arts instruction. Comparing her professional growth between the 2004-05 and 2005-06 school years, one teacher explained,

Last year was just sort of mucking it through and trying to figure out the basics and [asking myself], “What could really be different about the way kids learn and the way you teach?” So this year has really been much more methodical because we [the language arts staff] knew a lot of the basics and so I think it was sort of owning Workshop and making this, especially the second half of this year, has been how to use what we knew before we’d ever met [McDermott] and put all of those in place into a stronger practice because at the beginning of this year and last year we kind of left behind everything we ever knew about language arts before.... And that feels to me like really going back to some of the stuff I used to do, but using everything I know now to push forward. And kids were just on fire today.

Structural issues can be major concerns for *new* teachers because they are foundational for maintaining order in the classroom, and some teachers report that most professional learning opportunities and teacher preparation programs do not address these issues as clearly they would like. One teacher in our study recalls how, in the beginning of 2005-06, she sought out a colleague to learn how to make physical transitions smoother between mini-lessons and independent work in her classroom. Here is an instance of a teacher identifying and seeking knowledge about how to make the basic workshop structures (she was observing in the CEL-related sessions) work in her rather new teaching practice.

Teacher: *Because part of workshop structures, with a lot of teachers, including myself, it never occurred to me to really teach transitions, because most secondary classrooms don’t have a lot of physical transitions. So no one ever told me—well, people told me to teach transitions—but no one ever showed me how to teach transitions. And once I learned, actually, from a Workshop teacher [in the same district] who had come from an elementary background, I was like, “Oh, now it makes sense.”*

Interviewer: *Tell me specifically what skills she taught you.*

Teacher: *Well, just basically being explicit: “This is exactly what I want, what it should look like.” It’s a level of specificity that I would have never considered even necessary. Like obviously if you are sitting two inches from me, I want you to be looking at me, I mean, I didn’t bring you up here so that you could turn around and look out the window. But she [indicated to students] how should your knees be positioned, where should your hands be, where should your notebook be ... all sorts of things. This is when should you talk, when should you leave, when should you not leave. Just being really specific and direct, up front, with, “This is what I expect of you here.” And then having some students model it. Or, more importantly, she taught me transitions, [how to move to] work time and*

not releasing everybody all at once So, "Don't pick your chair up above your waist." Just like things that. "Don't drag your chair..." but actually have kids model for other students. This is how you should move directly to your work space. "Don't talk to anybody, it needs to be silent when you transition, don't ask me questions during transitions, because I'm making sure that everybody's transitioning," just, being really specific with kids. This is the way it's going to be. And it eliminates a lot of the problems that I have had in the past with, when kids want to come back up, when they come back up they don't come back quickly enough. So I guess, I've done a lot of that with my coaching [of newer teachers] around structures—clearly teaching transitions, and being very specific about how and when they should be transitioning.

High school teachers have new expectations for students.

Some high school principals are asking—and urging their staff to ask—questions about what their students can accomplish in a school year. A sense of urgency arises in their conversations and it is apparent that adults' expectations of students are changing. For example, CEL consultant McDermott comments:

I just actually spoke with [name], who's a principal, not a teacher... she was talking about a visit around the classrooms and basically said, "I really believe kids can do anything now".... She articulated things that teachers really feel, like, "Oh, I can ask so much more of them." Today, I had a planning session with [her high school], and a lot of their refrain all day was, when I said, "What do you want to change about the curriculum next year from this year?" And they said, "I really want to get to what we did in May in October." Like, "I know we can. I know that. We can ask the students to do things that we were waiting to do in May to get them to do that in October." And so my sense is that they've moved their conversations from, "I don't know if my kids can do that or if my kids can handle that," to "I don't know how to get my kids to do that. But I believe they can," and I'm not sure It's almost more of the onus on the teacher, rather than the doubt of the kid, and so it's easier to do [professional development] with that kind of attitude because they're really asking, "What should I do to get my kids there?"

While we cannot attribute changes in teachers' and principals' expectations to one source, the classroom-embedded coaching in Highline's high schools is prompting educators to see what's possible for their students:

Interviewer: *What do you think is important for me to know about the instructional improvement work that you and the other teachers are doing here that I haven't asked you about already?*

Teacher: *I think it's just really important to know that [the professional development] is different. It's so ... I don't know how to explain it, like, my expectations of kids are so much higher now because I've been given the tools and I've been shown what kids are capable of doing. So my expectations are so much higher than they ever were before or could have been before, because I never really had a vision of what my kids are capable of, and I didn't really have any models to look at to see where they were achieving those things.*

Further, the embedded coaching has led teachers to question their attitudes toward students. After a coaching cycle, for instance, one new teacher openly voiced frustration over her perceived “*negative views of students.*” According to McDermott, this high school teacher is beginning to visualize her students as learners instead of behavioral problems—a trend that is common for many teachers she works with.

What's great about [the new teacher] is she is so honest and she just immediately went to, “I think I encourage them to be negative, I think I encourage that dynamic.” She's very open about it, which is just fabulous Because she is really trying to reset that, and so I think she is questioning a little bit about, “Why do I have these negative views of students when I so clearly want to be a teacher?” And I wonder often if that is also paired up with teachers' fear of their own inability to make kids do the work. So they blame It's because, well, “I don't know how to get you to do it.” Once people feel that they can get kids to do work, I think they don't feel ... [t]hey don't have that perspective of blame as much anymore, and I'd say that's true of the teachers I have worked with for several years. They look at the students much more as learners and not as behavior problems any longer.

One principal led a professional development exercise for all of the building's language arts teachers that built on McDermott's work. She and McDermott taught teachers how to use an IRI (Informal Reading Inventory), a complex measurement tool for assessing reading comprehension, oral fluency, inference, and a range of other skills on a grade level scale. As part of the professional learning experience, the principal and teachers brought in a few students to be their “*guinea pigs.*” To the teachers' surprise, their initial estimations of student ability were off the mark. The principal describes the experience:

... We just had a parent-teacher conference on this student, and he is an athlete, and is a scholar, and wants to go to college, and has that focus and that vision for himself, and very clearly states that to everybody. But he's been struggling academically. And what came out of the [parent conference], and what he acknowledged himself, is that he does struggle with his reading. That it's

superficial and, when having conversations about what he's reading, he will build on other ideas but has difficulty identifying his own and tracking a thread of thinking throughout a text. So we [as a staff] thought this would be a perfect candidate to test. And it was interesting because [his language arts teacher] said, "He's not a discipline problem. He's not a problem. He's a leader on campus. Oh, he's going to test pretty well. It might just be one or two things. So start out at grade level and go back." And basically, through the process of the testing, she realized that here's someone who's in the eleventh grade who was assessed at between the second- and third-grade reading levels. And it was horrifying to go through this experience. You could just feel the pain that the teachers observing this assessment were feeling for him and he was amazing. It was always presented [to the student] as, "You're helping teach us. We're learning something from you." So he was just so excited about being a part of this. So then juxtapose that to another student who this [same] teacher works with that we pulled in, who I think everyone would acknowledge has the reputation for being a slacker, being a discipline problem, bouncing off the walls, never participating, and really hasn't produced any thinking work. Or even a product that we would be able to use to really have an accurate determination of what he can do as a learner and what he's able to think about. And so, again, a perfect reason to give this assessment. Well, ends up that the assumption was always [that he is] going to be a third- or fourth-grade reader. Ends up that he tested above grade level as a reader. And so we had a really rich conversation afterwards. Here's a teacher who said, "I have expectations for all kids, but I have to check my perceptions Here's a student I thought would be completely capable and struggled. Another one who I didn't think was capable, and didn't struggle. And so how does that inform my practice, and how do I check myself?" And then more so, it underscored the importance of, "How are we accurately assessing what students know and are able to do? And how do we develop lessons that support students?" Both of those students, being in the same class, "How do we support both of them as learners?"

This example is a stark one. It highlights, however, something that many coaches and teachers talked to us about—that the use of classroom-based data (such as the reading inventory described above) was pushing them to rethink their expectations regarding students and to re-assess their own interpretations of students' abilities. Often teachers encountered such forms of assessment in their job-embedded coaching activities with the CEL consultants.

Moving the Work Forward: The Challenge of Bringing the Work to Scale

There were a number of strong themes that ran through our data related to the Highline/CEL district partnership and Highline's system-wide instructional improvement initiatives. Here, we summarize these themes. In sum, as we noted in the beginning of the

report, these are typical challenges for any district engaged with instructional reform—and might be expected to continue to nag districts the deeper they get into such work. We raise a few suggestions as “*food for thought*” as leaders in Highline continue to think about and rethink their instructional improvement efforts.

- **How central is the vision for system-wide instructional improvement within the district’s priorities—and how does that vision get communicated to system actors?**

Our data are clear that Highline School District (at the highest levels of the central office) views the CEL partnership as one piece of their overall improvement puzzle. District informants note that the CEL work is about professional development and that they have other system concerns (such as developing a district-wide accountability system, rethinking the “*system*,” and attending to various aspects of high school redesign, to name a few). CEL originally entered the district at top levels of the system (at the behest of the then-chief academic officer, with the blessing and support of the superintendent), but, over time, the nature of CEL’s partnership with the district has been defined (by the district) as addressing one, albeit important, part of the district’s theory of action.

Much of CEL’s work within the district over the past two years has centered on the development of innovative and productive forms of job-embedded coaching as well as planning for and moving the work into new content areas such as mathematics and writing instruction. As this report demonstrates, the district has gained some traction with the embedded coaching pathway to improving instruction. However, the confusion about the centrality of the instructional improvement work with CEL to the district’s overall vision was a strong theme (especially among external consultants). It is worth considering this as an issue of coherence and communication—that is, is instructional improvement and capacity-building considered the core work of the school district? How do people throughout the system understand these instructionally focused priorities in terms of other district projects? In what ways might other initiatives and priorities compete with the messages about powerful instruction that are set at district-wide leadership sessions, making it difficult for system actors to stay focused?

- **Urgency for improved outcomes across all students and bringing the work to scale.**

District *and* building leaders worry about how to bring the instructional improvement work to scale across schools, and, within schools, across classrooms. District leaders are trying a variety of strategies—chief among them embedding the instructional improvement work in schools and classrooms. Assistant Superintendent Jackson talked about the importance of the *follow-up work*—the work that the district leaders do to follow up with principals after the district-wide leadership seminars or after job-embedded professional development sessions—both to assess principals learning needs and to help them learn how to lead the professional development work in their schools. Principals are likewise strategizing and using a variety of means to spread the word among their staffs: some are setting “*an expectation for improvement*” by expecting all teachers to work with coaches, and most are using precious staff meeting time for professional development work (either in literacy or mathematics). In exceptional schools, the principals work very closely with their literacy coaches, planning carefully for next capacity-building steps. It is clear from our data, however, that some schools do a better job than others in terms of deciphering across competing priorities and initiatives and in terms of setting high expectations for instructional change. The district, due to AYP pressure, has not had the luxury of waiting to launch a mathematics improvement initiative and just this year began work with writing. As with districts across the state of Washington, the need to improve mathematics instruction has moved front and center. Setting improvement priorities across several subject areas adds to the challenge of bringing significant change to scale (and, again, this is a *national* issue—not just a Highline/CEL issue).

- **Professional development for school leaders**

A critical system challenge of variability across schools (and within schools) suggests that additional attention may be required regarding the professional development of building leaders—who have increasing responsibility for carrying out the district’s instructional improvement initiatives. Most building leaders that we talked to welcomed the district leadership seminars as an opportunity to talk with their literacy coaches and to plan for next steps for the improvement initiatives. During the 2005-06 academic year, the district prioritized job-embedded coaching (a decision that has led to many positive results), thereby moving many of the professional development resources to the school buildings. The district

seminars continued, but they were modified in several ways. First, participants at these seminars were usually elementary school personnel only—secondary schools were separated out to concentrate on their own initiatives. Our high school data suggests that, for some secondary principals, this left a vacuum in terms of opportunities to meet with their colleagues around issues related to instructional leadership. Although the secondary leaders mentioned participating in *administrative forums*, these were not viewed (and probably were not intended) as leadership development sessions. Some secondary principals voiced a desire for more opportunities to meet among colleagues to talk about instructional practice. Second, although the Studio/Residency Project was ostensibly an opportunity for principals to learn from one another (pairs of schools came together for those sessions), the real focus of the principals' role at the events was on leading the coaching and teaching foci. While principals no doubt learned in these settings, they were also acting as *leaders* in those sessions, and were therefore responsible for the learning of others. Principals at both elementary and secondary levels might benefit from a structure that brings them together for concentrated, job-embedded, and externally-guided leadership work. This is a potential strategy for reducing variability of implementation of initiatives across schools.

- **Defining roles with high expectations**

Our data further suggest that important *on-the-ground* (practitioner) roles, including the roles of building coaches at the elementary level and the role of studio teachers, that is, demonstration teachers, are not explicitly defined district-wide. The fine-tuning of these roles occurs at the building level—a strategy that could be problematic, given the wide variation in implementation across schools. Although the roles are defined in terms of the studio/residency work in literacy and mathematics (see Appendix A for an example of the role definition that has been done for the Elementary Studio/Residency Project), at practical levels, our data indicate that the roles of coaches and studio teachers is carried out with variation across schools. This leaves some studio teachers, for example, with unclear expectations regarding how to share their learning with others at their grade levels or in their schools. This finding suggests that central office leaders—perhaps in concert with a group of strong practitioners and building leaders—might continue to develop role descriptions that

are clear and that set high expectations, especially for teacher leadership, given the high levels of support that are invested in these personnel.

- **Competing demands and initiatives**

This continues to be a strong theme in our Highline data. The most obvious “*competing*” initiatives are curricular—programs such as Open Court and Reading First—as well as previous school reform models, such as Success For All. Predictably, this theme is strongest among Reading First schools at the primary grades—although, in cases of strong building leadership, it appears that school staffs can overcome the confusion across initiatives. Some informants seem to understand what they referred to as “*the big picture*,” but our data analysis surfaced many more misunderstandings and complications than we expected. Although district instructional leaders clearly have done an admirable job of interpreting the differences between these programs and initiatives—referring in their talk and written materials to the components of powerful instruction, for example—it is clear in our data that professionals on the ground are not always making the connections. Many informants talked about the difficulties they have seen, for example, among classroom teachers in interpreting the differences between the officially adopted basal series for reading and the approach to powerful instruction that they have seen demonstrated by CEL consultants and building literacy coaches.

An interesting side note is that some elementary schools are funding additional external support for instructional improvement. For example, schools have sent teams of coaches and teachers to Teachers College or to Regie Routman workshops to learn more about the “Workshop” model for reading and/or writing instruction. In the cases we have observed, these carefully selected opportunities seem to be igniting and extending the instructional improvement efforts. We attribute this to strong building-level leadership. This leads us to conclude that examples of strong leadership and sensemaking around competing priorities exist within the district and that taking advantage of those “*existence proofs*” might be part of a focused approach to continued leadership development.

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Appendix A

Highline Embedded Coaching Models

Highline Studio/Residency Project Guideline: 2006-2007

BEFORE				
Studio/Residency Teacher	Coach	Principal	District Office	Consultant
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meet with the coach to discuss the focus of the work • Participate in the e-mail conversation with the consultant about what has been tried, the focus of the staff and student behaviors/results observed (at least ten days prior to the studio day) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decide and communicate objectives and outcomes for the process • Meet with the teacher to discuss the focus of the work • Initiate and participate in the e-mail conversation between the teacher and the consultant about what the teacher has tried the focus of the staff and student behaviors/results observed (at least ten days prior to the studio day) • Communicate and plan with partner school about: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Focus of the day ○ Subs ○ Schedules • Utilize resources to optimize participation (subs, schedules) • In consultation with the teacher, principal and consultant, prepare an agenda for the day including goals and schedule 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participate in the e-mail conversation between the teacher and the consultant about what the teacher has tried the focus of the staff and student behaviors/results observed (at least ten days prior to the studio day) • Communicate and plan with partner school about: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Focus of the day ○ Subs ○ Schedules • Consult with the teacher, coach and consultant in preparing an agenda for the day including goals and schedule • At the systems level, remove obstacles and scheduling roadblocks to facilitate the learning of the group. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be knowledgeable (receive e-mails) of collaboration between the school staff and the consultant – contribute to the discussion as appropriate. • Ask clarifying questions • Arrange for videographer – unless the buildings indicate a need to cancel. (Pat will verify with each school prior to each consultant visit) • Communicate with buildings which members will be participating from district office 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respond to school e-mails prompting thinking and focus • Initiates deep reflection in the planning process. • Assists in the completion of the agenda • Be transparent in thinking • Prepare articles, and professional development ideas to share with buildings
DURING				
Studio/Residency Teacher	Coach	Principal	District Office	Consultant
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If appropriate participate in job alike conversations about the content of the work and 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If appropriate participate in job alike conversations • Participate throughout the consultation day 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frame the work (opening and closing - facilitate all voices in articulating their learning), (Together or alternate) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participate throughout the consultation day • Model thinking, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrate lessons with the eye on building independence • Provide and support buildings with material suggestions. Be

<p>next steps</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participate throughout the consultation day • Teach along side the consultant/ coach or by themselves. • Articulate thinking and decision making, share knowledge of students as learners. Bring data and samples of student work to the consultant visit • Ask questions and ask for support as needed throughout • Be flexible in creating a class schedule to facilitate the learning of the group. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Model thinking, asking questions • With the knowledge base about the teacher’s strengths and skills, facilitate or prompt the teacher around the work. • Focus on and identify the coaching moves being modeled by the consultant through job alike conversations • Analyze the strengths and needs of the teacher to apply to further coaching work. • Demonstrate lessons by themselves as well as along side the consultant or teacher. • Consider the needs of other teachers participating in the consultant visit. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participate throughout the consultation day • Facilitate the identification of next steps with action plans, timelines and responsibilities. • Facilitate the group dynamics • If appropriate participate in job alike conversations • Work with videographer in identifying components of the consultant day to ease use of video 	<p>asking questions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With the knowledge base about the coach’s/ principal’s strengths and skills, facilitate or prompt the coach/principal around the work. • Focus on and identify the coaching moves being modeled by the consultant to apply to work – articulate the coaching moves observed during the visit. • Observe for and analyze the strengths and needs of the coach and principal to apply to further work. 	<p>flexible with the choice of materials based on the needs of the building</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work collaboratively with the teacher and coach in designing the instruction for the day. • Facilitate and guide new learning about the work before, during and after the lesson. • Introduces pertinent reading or resources to further the learning. • Articulate rationale about the teaching moves and the decisions made with references to other educators in the literacy field. • Know and operate under the gradual release model. • Be transparent in thinking
AFTER				
Studio/Residency Teacher	Coach	Principal	District Office	Consultant
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share ideas with grade level partners and staff. • Open to having interested teachers observe the work they are learning through this process. • Act on the next steps identified during the process – supported by the coach. • Work with the coach to plan for upcoming consultant visits. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Act on the instructional next steps identified during the process with district coach and teacher • Try out and approximate coaching moves identified • Apply learning with Professional Development opportunities (early release, grade level meetings and coaching cycles, video) • Work with the teacher and principal to plan for upcoming consultant visits. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Act on the next steps identified during the process • Ensure that systems are in place to continue the work. (classroom observations, team teaching, residencies) • Apply learning with Professional Development opportunities (early release, grade level meetings, book clubs) • Try out and approximate coaching moves identified 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Act on the next steps identified during the process • Ensure that systems are in place to continue the work. (classroom observations etc.) • Try out and approximate coaching moves/conversations identified • District coach: Apply learning with Professional Development opportunities (early release, grade level 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Act on the next steps identified during the process • Be transparent in thinking • Continue dialogue with teacher, coach, and principal to continue the learning

			<p>meetings and coaching cycles)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Give feedback to principal and coach based on strengths and needs observed.• Catalogue the videos (Sue White)	
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