Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy (CTP)
University of Washington

Aiming High: Leadership for District-wide Instructional Improvement

A Partnership between the Center for Educational Leadership and Norwalk-La Mirada Unified School District

Interim Research Report and Case Summary
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The Center for Educational Leadership (CEL) at the University of Washington entered into a contractual arrangement with the Norwalk-La Mirada Unified School District (NLMUSD) in August, 2004 for the purpose of providing technical support for the district's instructional improvement initiative in the content area of literacy.[1] This report summarizes interim findings from an ongoing qualitative study of the partnership between CEL and Norwalk-La Mirada.[2] While the report focuses on a description of the instructional reform efforts led by the district, the external support provided by CEL is implicated throughout the report in the work of CEL staff and consultants.

The Norwalk-La Mirada literacy initiative is characterized here as a deliberately planned and phased-in reform effort that began with (1) a "learning" year (2004-2005) in which district leaders, building principals, and a group of twelve district literacy coaches engaged in a number of intensive professional development activities that was followed by (2) a "roll-out" year (2005-2006) that featured increased attention to building-level change efforts. We describe the first two years of the reform and provide student outcome data and data on other intermediate outcomes (e.g., professional learning outcomes) related to the literacy initiative. Finally, we raise some issues and areas of tension for the district to consider as they move forward with their change efforts.

Norwalk-La Mirada Unified School District

Norwalk-La Mirada Unified School District sits just to the south and east of Los Angeles, California, about 20 miles east of the LAX airport. While the district was at one time a suburban community to Los Angeles, it is now considered an inner ring suburb with many of the characteristics of its surrounding urban neighbors. The district serves two communities—Norwalk and La Mirada. Traditionally, these two sections of the district have represented two very different communities. Norwalk has consistently been a largely Latino and relatively poor community while La Mirada was at one time a primarily middle class, white suburb. Currently, those demographics are changing; the unified school district serves a student population that is

[1] See Appendix A for the CEL District Partnership Prospectus which details the theory of action that guides CEL's district partnership work.
[2] We are currently studying the CEL partnership work in three school districts; this report is an interim case summary of the data collected in Norwalk-La Mirada.

73% Hispanic/Latino and only 15% Caucasian. Small percentages of African American students (4%), Asian students (4%), and Filipino students (3%) make up the rest of the student population. The district currently serves over 24,000 students in 18 elementary schools, 7 middle schools, and 3 comprehensive high schools. The district is organized by high school feeder patterns into three "families." Each of three Area Superintendents (who report directly to the Superintendent) have supervisory and instructional leadership responsibility for one family of schools.

The district's contract with CEL has included a CEL Project Director, Wilma Kozai, who has oversight responsibilities regarding CEL's work in the district and plays a critical role in coordinating the professional development activities to the needs of district and school leaders. In addition, the contract for 2004-2005 included a total of 125 days divided between CEL consultants who presented at study group sessions and coached literacy coaches and building principals. The contract for 2004-2005 included the following:

- Katherine Casey (15 total days; study group sessions and work with literacy coaches)
- Principal Coaching (total 99 days across 5 CEL consultants)
- CEL Project Director
- Administrative Retreat (2 days)

During 2005-2006, the district increased its contract with CEL. First, the district purchased a summer contract that included work by 3 CEL consultants during summer school (this work consisted of staff development and literacy coaching activities for a total of 33 work days). Second, the contract for the academic year was increased to include a total of 165 days of CEL consultant activity. Again, the work consisted of leading group sessions and conducting principal and literacy coaching activities.

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 one school district (Highline School District in Washington State) and in the spring of 2005, we extended our research activities into Norwalk-La Mirada. In fall, 2005, we added a third school district (Marysville in

Washington State). The data summarized in this report were collected in the Norwalk-La Mirada Unified School District during five site visits conducted between May, 2005 and July, 2006. In a design similar to that used in the comparison school districts, we focused our data collection efforts during the first year in Norwalk on district personnel who were leading the reform efforts, including central office leaders, district literacy coaches, and a few building principals. We conducted observations at CEL/district partnership activities such as leadership academies, coaching activities, principals' study group sessions, and building-level LIT team and roll-out activities. In addition, we made initial visits to two schools in the district (Los Alisos Middle School and Glazier Elementary), however data collected at the school sites have been limited to LIT team and Roll-out days and interviews with principals (we have not, for example, conducted extensive classroom-based observations or teacher interviews during the first year).

Data Collection Procedures

Over the course of the first four site visits, we conducted a total of 18 semi-structured individual interviews and 2 focus group interviews. Most interviews were about an hour in length. We asked informants to describe the kinds of activities that they were engaged in related to the Norwalk/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:

- 7 interviews with central office leaders (2 each with Area Superintendents; 1 with the Superintendent)
- 5 interviews with building principals
- 2 focus group interviews (with one-half of the literacy coaches in each interview)
- 6 individual interviews with literacy coaches

In addition, we conducted multiple and repeated observations of events related to the Norwalk/CEL partnership work including for example: district and building level planning meetings, district leadership academies, coaches' academies, principals' cadres, walk-throughs in buildings, summer school, LIT team sessions and Roll-out professional development activities. Multiple artifacts, such as accountability plans and documents from planning and administrative meetings, as well as professional development and coaching activities, were collected throughout the data collection period.

Data Analysis

Beginning in January 2006, the research team read the entire data set and began to identify key categories and themes within the data (each member of the team read and open-coded a portion of the data). We then identified four main categories and subthemes 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.

A Deliberate, Phased-In Literacy Initiative

Norwalk-La Mirada Unified School District had a seven year association with Panasonic Foundation prior to entering into a partnership with CEL. Steve Fink, the Executive Director of CEL, was the Panasonic liaison in Norwalk-La Mirada. As early as 2003, central office leaders and members of the Panasonic-supported Leadership Associate Program (LAP) were developing plans to address low student achievement outcomes. One central office leader reported "*when we looked at our test scores, we only had four out of ten kids* [at or above proficiency levels on California State measures]." A team of central office and building leaders attended a CEL summer institute in 2003 and, subsequently, district leaders began investigating instructional improvement efforts that were taking place in other districts (a team of district leaders took a visit to New York in May of 2004, for example).

During 2003-2004, the district leadership team streamlined the organization of the central office in order to focus key leadership roles (especially the three Area Superintendents) on instructional improvement. The Superintendent lead initial activities related to an instructional improvement initiative in the area of literacy[3] and with the support of the teachers union (TANLA), the School Board set an official district goal on November 3, 2003 that 90% of all

[3] Early activities in 2003-2004 included visits to NY schools, within district goal-setting and discussions with the School Board and TANLA, discussions with Steve Fink, etc.

students in the district would be performing at grade level in reading/language arts on the California Standards Test by 2007. Norwalk La-Mirada officially began its partnership with CEL in August of 2004. One central office leader noted *"we really needed experts to come in and tell us what were our next steps."* In part due to the long-standing relationship with Steve Fink, the district saw CEL as a *"critical friend"* and several leaders noted that CEL provided the external expertise they needed to launch (in 2004-2005) the first centralized reform effort the School Board had sponsored in many years.

The Norwalk-La Mirada instructional improvement initiative was characterized by our informants from the central office as a coherent, carefully planned and phased-in approach to change. Area Superintendents reported directly to the Superintendent and the *"silos,"* or separate departments for functions such as professional development, curriculum, and school supervision were made the responsibility of the Area Superintendents. Each of these leaders had supervisory and instructional leadership responsibility for about 10-11 schools within a high school feeder pattern ("families") as well as principal evaluation, curriculum and professional development.[4] The Area Superintendents were given budgetary discretion for these functions in order to centralize and focus resource allocation on a coordinated literacy initiative.

The message, emanating from the Superintendent's office was *"we're going to make instruction the most important thing and everybody else* [other central office personnel] *is going to figure out how they can help instruction."* Informants were clear, by the spring of 2005, that this was a unified effort especially at the upper levels of the organization. One district coach commented, *"It's clear that this is a district-wide system and that we're all responsible, we're all accountable for* [it]. *I've never seen a district approach it from the School Board—this is their goal. This is the goal of the union organization; this is the goal of the administration; and the site staff."* Several times during interviews with central office leaders, we heard the term *"message discipline"* indicating that sending a coherent message from all leaders was a conscious practice. The official message has been put into writing and posted in central office meeting rooms:

[4] In addition, each Area Superintendent has responsibility for other student service or instructional departments within the central office such as categorical programs, special education, ELL services, Head Start/preschool programs, etc.

Norwalk-La Mirada Unified School District
Education Policy and Philosophy
"Everything we say or do should enhance our ability to increase student achievement"

THE WORK…

Effective (Assessment Driven) Instruction
Standards-Based Instruction
Student Engagement
Powerful Questioning
Meaning Making
Text Analysis
Balanced Literacy

As one Area Superintendent put it,

> *We're all on the same page. As we roll it out next year to the staff, we're going to be even more on the same page because the message will be planned ahead of time together as a group, delivered together. Everybody's going to hear the same thing. And there will be—styles will be different and we know schools are not going to do it one way—but the message is going to be the same.*

One of the most distinct features of the NLMUSD partnership with CEL has been the phased-in approach taken by the district. Nearly everyone we spoke with talked about careful planning accomplished with the participation of major players such as the School Board and TANLA. The literacy initiative began with a year of "learning" for central office leaders, building principals and a cadre of district literacy coaches.

The "Learning" Year:
"It was all about the principals' growth and the Area Superintendents' growth this year."

The partnership with CEL began in August 2004 with a set of structures intended to support the learning of the Area Superintendents, building principals, and a newly-hired group of twelve district literacy coaches.[5] The primary vehicles for this learning in Norwalk were (1) monthly day-long leadership sessions referred to as the "Good to Great Academy"; (2) monthly day-long sessions for literacy coaches; and (3) monthly meetings referred to as *"cadres"* held at

[5] See the CEL prospectus in Appendix A for the CEL theory of action. The learning support structures described here are part of the CEL support strategy for increasing the capacity among its district partners for instructional leadership and instructional practice. Study group sessions for leaders and instructional coaching are two primary structures used by CEL in all of their partner districts.

building sites with principals. Katherine Casey (a CEL consultant) led the Good to Great Academy sessions and the work with the literacy coaches. Katherine tailored her monthly seminars to the needs of the school district (administrators and literacy coaches) through her collaboration with Wilma Kozai, the CEL Project Director, who also led principal cadres and worked on-site as a leadership coach. Given Wilma's grasp of the schools' needs, she and Katherine co-planned the academy days each month to strategically support the next steps of the initiative's progression. Five additional CEL consultants (called 'guest coaches' in Norwalk) were contracted to work with smaller cadres of principals (3-5 principals and the literacy coaches assigned to their buildings). The following table summarizes these learning environments, the key participants, and activities:

Table 1
Supporting learning for district and building leaders and literacy coaches

Learning Environment	Participants	Content	Frequency	Typical Activities
"Good to Great Academy"	District leaders (e.g., Superintendent, Area Superintendents, other central office leaders) All principals District literacy coaches CEL consultant CEL Project Director	Balanced Literacy components (e.g., read aloud, shared reading) Powerful instruction Instructional leadership	One day per month	Large group presentation by CEL consultant Small group discussions Demonstration lessons with NLMUSD students
Coaches' Academy	Area Superintendents District coaches CEL consultant CEL Project Director	Balanced Literacy Powerful instruction Instructional coaching	One day per month	Whole group work with CEL consultant; Lesson planning and demonstration lessons with students followed by debriefs of observations
Principals' Cadres	Area Superintendents District coaches Principals (grouped by elementary, secondary levels) CEL consultant	Balanced Literacy Powerful instruction Instructional coaching	One day per month	Building walk-throughs; Discussions with CEL consultants; Lesson planning and demonstration lessons with students followed by debriefs of observations

The Good to Great Academy

District leaders made it clear to building principals that the academy (and cadre) days were *"sacred"* and that attendance was required at these events. One Area Superintendent described the initial roll-out:

> *We said, 'This is our best thinking as of today, August, 2004. We're bringing you the best resources we can, that we're able to find in the country. And this is the kind of support we're going to give you. This is your year to learn.'*

The academy sessions were attended by the Superintendent, the Area Superintendents, a few other central office leaders (such as the Assistant Superintendent for Business Services and the Assistant Superintendent for Human Resources), all building principals (K-12), TANLA representatives, the literacy coaches and toward the end of the year, some teachers who were identified as demonstration teachers (see page 12).

The monthly academy sessions featured a key CEL consultant, Katherine Casey, who came to be revered by personnel in the school district. One principal reported that she was *"everybody's guru. We've all sat at her feet from one level or another."* Katherine's challenge was to connect the 'content' of CEL's theory of action (e.g., instructional leadership, powerful instruction, balanced reading instruction—see Appendix A) with the district's current curricula. Prior to the beginning of the literacy initiative, for example, the district had whole-heartedly encouraged its elementary teaching force to follow the recently adopted and state-approved Houghton Mifflin reading series including a district-directed pacing guide. With the advent of the CEL partnership work and the district literacy initiative, the focus was on using curricular materials (such as the Houghton Mifflin series) in the service of engaging students through powerful questioning and meaning-making activities, using assessments to drive standards-based instruction, and through the analysis of relevant and engaging texts. Specific components of Balanced Literacy (such as read aloud and shared reading) were introduced and demonstrated at these sessions and participants (Area Superintendents, principals, and coaches) were encouraged to "try these practices on" in district classrooms.[6] The sessions were referred to by some

[6] See Appendix B for a description of the component parts of Balanced Literacy. "Powerful instruction" and "Balanced Literacy" as they are used by CEL staff and consultants have roots in the Early Literacy project at Ohio State University (Fountas & Pinnell, 1995), approaches to reading emanating from New Zealand (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 1996) and Teachers College, Columbia University (Calkins, 2001), and in Cambourne's *Conditions of Learning* (Cambourne, 1995) (as cited in Stein & D'Amico, 2002). See also Appendix A for CEL's theory of action.

informants as *"input sessions"* in which participants were provided with specific information and models of powerful instruction. The point, from CEL's perspective, was to build instructional *leadership* capacity among district leaders by strengthening their content knowledge and pedagogical skills (see Appendix A).

Principals' Cadres

The content of the academy days, reading instruction as well as strategies for instructional leadership, was reinforced and deepened at the site-based cadre sessions conducted with principals by the CEL guest coaches. One of the Area Superintendents described a typical cadre session during this first year of Norwalk's partnership with CEL:

> *About once a month they would come—I think we had about 8 visits during the year. We observed our literacy coaches do lessons. We planned with the literacy coaches and watched them do the lessons and then came back and debriefed. And our guest coaches modeled that for us and then we did it as a group. Then some of us took on some of the work and did some of the read alouds and did the same thing. So we kind of critiqued each others' lessons. And it gave us a chance to do it as well as give us a chance to debrief it. We recognized what was good, what was strong, what needed work, and how to voice that fairly without being a dream killer in the process.*

Our informants reported that the cadre work varied by family. However, typically the guest coaches worked with the Area Superintendents, the district literacy coaches, and some principals to assess the learning needs within each cadre and relied on the literacy coaches to locate classrooms for demonstration lessons. One of the key activities during the first year included walks through classrooms. The literacy coaches described this process (in a focus group interview conducted in May, 2005):

> *We started with going into classrooms. I mean for several months. That was new for schools: looking at classroom environment, looking at instruction, and then analyzing it. Each session, we had assigned reading and we would read and discuss it as a group and then try to relate those readings to what we were seeing in the classroom. We've recently taken it to the level of doing some—one of the coaches, or principals, would do a demonstration lesson in one of our areas: read aloud, shared reading. Then we would debrief it together and critique it and then talk about implementation at the school site.*

Another coach noted that the walks did not continue past February (2005) because *"the general consensus was that we were seeing the same type of thing. None of this work was occurring at this point and so was it worth our time to do something else instead of walking through?"* The CEL guest coaches were reportedly helpful in moving the activities to important next steps (such as demonstration lessons).

Coaches' Academy

The district literacy coaches have been the linchpin of Norwalk-La Mirada's literacy initiative. Rather than hiring site-based literacy coaches, the district brought on a group of twelve district coaches in the fall of 2004. The hiring process for these coaches was stringent—the applicants were not only interviewed, but also had to teach a demonstration lesson for the hiring team. Several of the coaches were hired from within the district and these included veteran teachers, teacher leaders (for example, one coach was previously a member of the Panasonic LAP team as well as member of the TANLA executive board and another was a TOSA who had central office experience).[7] Four of the twelve coaches were hired from outside the district. The coaches have been paid a teachers' salary plus a stipend for this position.

One day per month, following the Good to Great Academy, Katherine worked with the twelve district literacy coaches. The content of these sessions was reportedly similar to that of the academy days, but was intended to focus more deeply on curricular content, pedagogy, and instructional coaching.[8] The pattern of planning lessons, demonstrating lessons, and debriefing the lessons continued at these sessions. One of the coaches told us in the spring of 2005:

> *I think one of the most powerful* things *for me is learning by example…this is the first chance that I had to get deep into my instruction by example, by seeing somebody do it with students. And…the next step was, okay, let's plan it together, let me model, now let's discuss it. And then gradually turning this process over to us and having us create that lesson was incredibly powerful. And, to see it with our students!*

The coaches described their learning during the first year of the reform as *"fantastic"* and *"incredible."* Katherine modeled lessons for them and one coach said that *"this was different than what we'd done before."* The coaches reported that as they were learning from Katherine (and other CEL guest coaches) they typically mimicked these lessons in other demonstrations that they did in classrooms around the district. One coach summed up what several coaches reported about their level of knowledge at the beginning of their work with Katherine. The quote also shows the kinds of things that coaches were learning about how to instruct teachers.

> *You feel very young* [in the work]. *You realize there's this whole knowledge base here that you're not aware of. At the beginning it was all about, 'what did she say here?',*

[7] TOSA means Teacher on Special Assignment. Typically, these teachers were assigned to central office functions such as curriculum development or professional development, or both.

[8] Note that we have limited data on the coaches' sessions with Katherine Casey during 2004-2005 because we did not begin the study until May of 2005 and our field trip that spring did not include observations of the Academy days.

> *'what did she say there?' And then going back and trying to try on that kind of language with it. And, so I think that was the first step for my understanding. And, then, what was the whole purpose. We had to go through that. What are we teaching when we do this? And we had that big discussion. Are we teaching writing with this? What is that demonstration going to look like when we go into a classroom? Is it going to look just like what she did? Are we going to extend it? Is it forty-five minutes? Is it an hour and a half? I mean, we literally didn't know what the parameters for it were and how it fit into the literacy box…into our literacy box. Then we realized she had a timer up there set for 20 minutes for a reason, to try to make this something that you schedule for today to demonstrate to teachers.*

Although our data are limited from 2004-2005, our interview data suggest that most of the teaching during the Coaches' Academy days was primarily *content-based* (focused on Balanced Literacy content, pedagogy and lesson planning, for example). Our data suggest that there was limited emphasis on *coaching* (in a side-by-side way) as the coaches worked with classroom teachers during that first year. The focus on content first was guided by one of CEL's fundamental beliefs underlying their theory of action, that '*you can't lead what you don't know.*'

The twelve coaches were divided among the feeder pattern families (there were four coaches per family, supervised by one Area Superintendent) and they were housed together in a classroom office at one school within each family. The coaches identified the dialogue that developed through this arrangement as essential to their learning process.

> *What's been incredibly powerful and fortunate is having the experience of being housed together on a school site and, every once in a while, getting to meet with our colleagues and ask, 'What are you doing over there?'* [in another family]. *Being housed together, we're constantly dialoguing and there are always questions that come up. I've found out how important those questions are…they are absolutely essential to a learning community. If you don't have questions, if you don't have that dialogue, if you're not working on it constantly…it's always going to be about questions.*

When they weren't at academy days or cadre sessions, the coaches spent much of their time doing *"marathon"* demonstration lessons. In one family, the coaches reported that they sometimes did up to eight lessons a day in eight different classrooms. The coaches always did these lessons in pairs so that they could critique each other's work and learn through the process—thus, the demonstration lessons were primarily about the coaches' learning, even though they were also exposing at least some teachers to the work of the literacy initiative. Some of this work took place in "demonstration" classrooms and some of it was with teachers who had volunteered to participate. For the most part, these classrooms were places for the

coaches to demonstrate and practice their own skills—the teachers themselves were not expected to conduct demonstration lessons.[9] Near the end of the academic year (2005), some of this work changed to three day coaching cycles with volunteer or demonstration teachers.

> *We started setting up, with those volunteer teachers, going in for three days in a row in order to get to know the kids a little bit. And then we really saw a difference in the teachers' responses over those three days. They really saw a difference in the kids and their responses. We felt like that was really powerful. That kind of helped us get a feel for the schools and the staff in general.*

Although the coaches were primarily *learning* during the first year, they were also building rapport with their buildings and a limited number of teachers who were open to their work or who had applied to be demonstration teachers (designated through a process that included principal nomination and district approval). They also assisted a few other volunteer teachers with changing their classroom environments (for example, setting up classroom libraries and leveling books).

Summary

We were told by several informants, in more or less these words, that *"the key is to go slow"* in rolling out the literacy initiative and the instructional improvement process in Norwalk. District leaders felt it was important to give all the leaders of the reform a year to learn. In all cases (Area Superintendents, principals, and coaches), learning to stay on message and using every vehicle they had—including newsletters, academy days, cadre work, and demonstration lessons—to get the word out about upcoming expectations was considered critical. Major investments were made in the knowledge and skills of the literacy coaches. One could argue that there was more investment—and expectation—for all these participants to learn about instruction than about instructional leadership during this first year of the initiative.

Year Two: The "Roll-out" Year

Year two of Norwalk-La Mirada's literacy initiative moved from the 'year of learning' to a focus on leading staff development. Continuing with the deliberate phased-in plans for

[9] Apparently the demonstration teacher role during 2004-2005 was loosely defined. *Demonstration* meant a willingness to let the coaches conduct demonstration lessons, not that the classroom teacher would necessarily demonstrate anything. Some of these "demonstration" classrooms worked out and some did not. The coaches reported that they also sought out volunteer teachers who were willing to let them conduct lessons with their students.

advancing the initiative, new structures and policies were put in place to begin 'rolling out' the literacy work to classroom teachers. To facilitate this transition to the next stage, some significant changes were made in designing the professional learning that would shape the work of district leaders, particularly for principals and literacy coaches.

The real launch for year two was summer school 2005 (1), when the literacy coaches were strongly encouraged to teach in order to put their learning into practice. The other professional development venues for the year included (2) continuation of the monthly Good to Great Academy sessions, (3) continuation of literacy coaches' training, (4) a third academy day for principals, assistant principals and literacy coaches to assist with professional development planning, (5) monthly principal cadre meetings at school sites, and at the school level: (6) LIT Team Days, and (7) one Roll-out each month for school-wide professional development. Table 2 summarizes the content of these key learning experiences for those leading the reform. The difference in the size of Table 1 (year 1) and Table 2 (year 2) illustrates that the intensity was significantly increased. Moreover, the changes underscore the district's attention to principal leadership and the central role that literacy coaches were expected to play in the roll-out. A major step in preparing them for that role was teaching summer school in 2005.

Table 2
Learning Opportunities for district and building leaders

Learning Environment	Participants	Content	Frequency	Typical Activities
Summer School	District literacy coaches CEL consultant CEL Project Director	Trying on components of Balanced Literacy Powerful instruction Assessment	19 days	Classroom teaching with support from CEL consultant

"Good to Great Academy"	District leaders All principals & APs District coaches Demonstration teachers CEL consultant CEL Project Director	Balanced Literacy components (read aloud, shared reading, Independent Reading, Guided Reading) Powerful instruction (student engagement, questioning, classroom environment, assesment-driven) Teaching to standards	One day per month	Large group presentation by CEL consultant Small group discussions Demonstration lessons with NLMUSD students Data analysis Lesson planning
Coaches' Academy	Area Superintendents District coaches CEL consultant	Balanced Literacy Powerful instruction Instructional coaching	One day per month	Whole group work with CEL consultant Planning, demonstrating, and debriefing lessons
Day 3 of Academy	Principals District coaches Area Superintendents CEL consultant CEL guest coaches	Answering principals' questions about literacy and powerful instruction, Professional development planning	One day per month	Q&A with CEL consultant Roll-out planning (by level) with guest coach
Principal Cadre Meetings	Principals Assistant principals CEL guest coaches Asst. Superintendents (sometimes)	Sharpening classroom observations of powerful instruction, Giving feedback to teachers, Establishing a leadership voice	One day per month	Professional reading, Classroom observations, Practice debriefing with teachers with support from CEL guest coach

LIT Team Days	Principal LIT team (6-12 teachers) District coach Assistant Superintendents (sometimes)	Balanced Literacy components (read aloud & shared reading), Powerful instruction, Classroom environment, Charting	One day per month	Demonstration lessons, debriefing, lesson planning, professional reading, watch videos
Roll-out Days	Principal Whole school staff District coach	Balanced Literacy components, Classroom environment, Powerful instruction	2 hrs. once a month	Varies by school—follows topics from the academy days

Summer School

Summer school gave the coaches an intensive learning opportunity to experience all the challenges their teachers would encounter during 19 days of working with the district's most challenging students. They set up the classroom environment, organized the library, and created daily lesson plans. Several coaches claimed they had "*never worked so hard in their life,"* but they also said that the experience and the coaching support they received from the CEL consultants made it invaluable in preparing them for the year ahead. The coaches found it hard to describe how important summer school was for developing their credibility as coaches:

> *It was so powerful! I could go on all day about that. In a nutshell, I guess, I learned that it is tough work being a classroom teacher. That it's totally different when we're coaches and when we're going in during one-shot lessons. And even if we're working with a teacher, saying okay, here's what it looks like on day one and here is what it looks like on day two, and then we leave. It is not the same as being in the classroom and making the decisions on what do I do on day three and day four. And the second week, when my kids still don't have this. And what do I do when my guided reading group takes too long, and I can't finish all of them in a day or in two days. Then where do I go? So, even though it was only nineteen days, which is actually nothing compared to what normal teachers go through, it was a huge eye-opener. I think it helped me relate to classroom teachers this year, because I do have teachers this year that I'm working with that are taking on all the components and they would ask me questions and I could say, okay, well in summer school I know this is kind of what I did.*

Further, they experienced for themselves the value of having a coach to support them when they took risks and tried something new. These experiences helped them develop empathy for the demanding work they would be asking teachers to do:

> *I think the most helpful thing was when I would get stuck, then I would ask Lynn[10] [CEL consultant]. Those are the types of questions I ask her. What do I do now? Where do I go now? Or, how does this work? Or, can we do this? I think it allowed me to see that, even though we've been hearing it over and over again, that there aren't any rules for this.*

Most importantly, the summer school experience gave coaches confidence that they could do the work. One coach shared how she knew her work was making a difference:

> *I knew that my students were learning because they were constantly talking about what they were doing in their head. […]They were able to tell you what the big ideas in text were, they were able to tell you what the theme was and use evidence to support their thinking, of how they got there. They were able to analyze the characters. But the biggest thing was that in the beginning, my kids all thought that reading is just something that you do. That you just read the words on the page, that's it. And they would give literal answers or not even literal answers to questions. And at the end, they had moved to where they could think about it inferentially, they weren't as quick to answer as well, but they actually understood that when you read you should be thinking. And I have that evidence through running records as well through anecdotal notes of listening to their conversations. And through conferring with them and seeing what they were doing.*

The Good to Great Academy

As the administrators and literacy coaches' training during the academy progressed into year two, it focused by design on content that was one year ahead of where the district expected teachers to be. The plan for the second year was for the academy to concentrate on the approaches of independent reading and guided reading and to go deeper into the conditions of powerful instruction, especially getting to know students' needs and lesson planning to address the standards that students need to know. While giving the district leaders a one year head start on the learning paid off in terms of building expertise, the staggered training presented some challenges to pacing.

[10] CEL consultants, Lynn Reggett and Brenda Wallace provided critical support by coaching the literacy coaches during summer school.

One challenge was that participation in the academy days grew to include demonstration teachers who had not been there in year one. In year two, demonstration teachers were now expected to begin trying on read aloud and shared reading with support from their literacy coach. Although their inclusion in the Good to Great academies helped generate interest in taking on the work, (one literacy coach described the enthusiasm as almost a '*revival meeting'* at the academy days), it also required revisiting some of the previous year's work to give the demo teachers a stronger grounding.

Furthermore, as participants got excited about new ideas, Katherine Casey had to remind the school leaders that it was too soon to start introducing the new ideas back at their schools. The following explanation captured the dissemination dilemma.

> *I'm introducing new information that they think is really compelling, so they try to like shove it up in there, and I'm forever saying, 'People, wait a minute. I'm presenting independent reading to you because you've had…' and I bring out the binder. 'Look at all the things that we've done up until here, and where are your teachers? Are they on the third tab because there's 11 in between here and there? You forget to get people up to speed.*

The need to slow down frustrated some of the literacy coaches, who were anxious to expand their repertoire. Yet, all the coaches agreed that they continued to learn from Katherine's extensive experience and expertise, and they also learned from watching *how* she did it. One coach explained, "*Katherine does model it really well when she is with us. And we've just taken her model, like these agendas, and tried to make it our own.*"

Another coach also observed how effectively Katherine addressed doubts raised by any skeptics:

> *She's very smart about the way that she addresses resistance. She lays it right on the table. 'I would expect you to lay what you know about SSR or sustained silent reading alongside what I'm going to teach you today about independent reading with conferring. Lay those two alongside and ask yourself which one makes the most difference in learning for students?' Well, how could you knock that? She'll say things like, 'you can be defensive today, you can look through the lens of, I can't because, I can't because, I can't because. Or you can look through the lens of how can I do this? What would be my challenges, what would be my obstacles, and what can I do to bring those down?'*

The opportunity to focus more on coaching strategies and the coaches' role in this reform came during day two of training with Katherine Casey.

Coaches' Academy

Continuing to invest in building expertise among the literacy coaches, the second day of the professional development was exclusively for coaches because they were the key change agents in the district's plan to build capacity across the district. Through the ongoing work with the team of 12 coaches, the CEL consultant developed a close ongoing relationship with the literacy coaches. Regular email exchanges continued in between her visits so the coaches were able to pose questions and ask for advice in handling difficult situations. The volume and range of issues posed provided the consultant with evidence that the literacy work was spreading to more classrooms.

For the most part, the focus of the training remained on deepening content knowledge, rather than on coaching strategies per se. On one occasion, the coaching day moved out to a school site where one district coach and one of her demonstration teachers volunteered to be observed as the coach coached the teacher during a lesson they had planned together. The teacher conscientiously designed a lesson to focus on a specific standard and had selected an engaging piece of text to use in teaching the objective. Although the teacher's questions were carefully planned to focus on the standard, the lesson failed to achieve the goal. Rather than tackling the coaching challenges, Katherine used the observation as a teaching opportunity to demonstrate the difference that asking good questions can make in helping students make meaning from text. She even used this example to explain to administrators the next day, how text choice and questioning strategies used during shared reading could produce high levels of student engagement *and* teach the standards. By reenacting the lesson twice, once using the teacher's questions that were tightly focused on the standard, and once asking her own questions that scaffolded the students efforts to make meaning from the text, the administrators saw for themselves how strategies had to be tied to the purpose and '*that standards weren't designed to be taught in isolation.*' They had to be used to provide a focus and for assessing students' understanding throughout the entire lesson.

Day 3 of the Academy

District leaders described the shift in year two as moving from the year one emphasis on the coaches to a focus on principal leadership. To allow for principals to work on instructional leadership, the district expanded their time with CEL consultants by adding a third day to the district training to give principals additional time to work with Katherine. This time was used to allow principals to ask questions and further their own understanding of the literacy work and powerful instruction (such as the example above). The afternoon of the third day was devoted to dividing up into level cohorts, with support from one Area Superintendent and one guest coach, to assist in planning the monthly 'Roll-out' day for their whole school. Every Wednesday has been an early release day across the district. The second and fourth Wednesdays were by contract 'team planning time' that teachers control. One Wednesday a month was reserved for the principal to 'roll out' the literacy work to their staff. (Roll-out Days are further described below.)

Principal Cadre Meetings

To further develop principal leadership, the district continued cadre meetings one day a month for principals to meet with their CEL guest coaches. These cadre meetings were held in schools and usually involved classroom visits, observing a demonstration lesson, and debriefing as a group. The literacy coaches no longer attend the cadres as they did during year one. As possible, some of the Area Superintendents participated in a portion of the day. At one middle school cadre, for example, the day began (like all Norwalk-La Mirada meetings) with celebrating successes. Principals described ways in which more teachers were 'trying on' the work. At one school, a paraprofessional was learning to do interactive read aloud. The middle school principals also shared what they had been doing for their Roll-out Days. Across the middle schools the focus varied from a concentration on language arts to incorporating literacy strategies in the content areas.

Cadre meetings typically devoted some time to discussion of professional literature. During this cadre, the host principal shared copies of two professional articles that described ways other districts use coaches to build instructional capacity. The CEL coach reinforced the importance of leaders modeling the lesson planning process by describing how she had

supported one member of the LIT team to plan the lesson they were about to see. Before going into the class, principals were reminded to "*think about how we can help this teacher grow.*" The rest of the morning was devoted to a classroom observation and debriefing of a shared reading lesson.

After the lesson, the principals discussed what the teacher had done well and identified two or three specific ideas for the teacher to think about. Then the host principal debriefed with his teacher with all of the other principals as an audience. This provided the opportunity for all of the principals to engage in a discussion of how to have effective debrief conversations with teachers that are constructive but non-evaluative.

Support for principals extended beyond the cadre days with one-on-one coaching from CEL's guest coaches at school sites.[11] For example, the CEL Project Director, who also coached middle school principals, was influential in guiding principal's development as described by one of her protégés:

> *Wilma is my sounding board. One of Wilma's strengths is that she has very good questions, that make you think. You need to be open to feedback, because if you don't then you'll never know what is there for you as a next step. So, I went to Wilma, and I said, 'Would you be willing to coach me? Observe me having conservations. Come to my staff development and see how I present my rationale, my leadership. Please help me become a better leader and ask me questions.' [….] Yesterday was a typical example. I had thought about this master schedule, classroom composition. She said, 'Tell me what your thinking was behind this decision?' and I did and she said 'Good.' And I said, 'Oh wow, I just heard myself, that's exactly… I had it inside but never articulated it both in writing and in speaking.' So, she helped me put that out there and then see the picture, because I am going to have to do that for my teachers.*

The final two learning opportunities (LIT teams and Roll-out Days) were added in year two specifically to begin to disseminate the first year's learning to classroom teachers at each school site. These two additions also added significant responsibilities to the literacy coaches. To clarify the expectations for the coaches' new role, the Area Superintendents established a list at mid-year (05/06) of priorities for coaches' work during the roll-out year. Although there was not complete agreement among the coaches we interviewed (spring 2006) as to the exact order of the tasks, there was consensus that their role had shifted to becoming *staff developers* more than *coaches* to support individual teachers. There was also an explicit expectation that the coaches'

[11] This support was given when requested, but not all principals took advantage of additional coaching to strengthen their instructional leadership.

first priority was to provide support to principals and that working with the demonstration teachers (the work of instructional coaching) was a second priority. The district's accountability documents for 2006-2007 send a clear message about the literacy coaches' priorities. They are expected to:

- Assist principals and area superintendents with staff development;
- Provide materials that principals can use with staff;
- Assist principals in looking at classroom environments;
- Help principals and area superintendents improve their own pedagogy; and
- Establish effective relationships with principals.

Beyond this work with principals, coaches are also expected to:

- Develop relationships with teachers;
- Develop and support demonstration classrooms;
- Coach teachers in improving their practice; and
- Share their expertise with literacy coaches across families.

One of the coaches summarized how their role had changed and what that meant for her work on a day to day basis:

> *This year we're staff developers, so I'd lead Roll-outs at two schools, I have a middle school and an elementary school where I work. And that is once a month at those schools. And so in order to do that it involves planning time with the principals and planning the staff development, planning time on my own to put materials together, or find professional texts. Because neither of the principals that I work with have the professional texts nor read the professional texts; they are relying on me then to find it. So, a huge portion of my job this year was just devouring professional text. And then, let's see, as staff developer working with the principals, we also lead the LIT teams.*

LIT Team Days

To support the extension of the work to the schools, the district provides six substitutes for each school on one day per month, to release members of their literacy leadership team, or LIT Team. Individual schools have devised their own formulas for how those subs are used and how they structure their day of learning together. The principal and literacy coach plan the day based on the needs of their school. Some schools have teamed up with a partner school and the two LIT teams meet together, alternating visits to each other schools. Some principals use the subs to release six teachers for the morning and six teachers during the afternoon in order to involve more teachers in the work.

Typically the days include classroom visits and observations of demonstration lessons, sometimes by the principal, sometimes by the coach, or sometimes by demonstration teachers or other volunteers. During an elementary LIT team day one of the teachers shared how scary it was to have others observe her teaching, but after having done it and benefited from the feedback of all the observers, she said she was glad she did it and, she added, *" I'm ready to do it again.*"

During one LIT team day with Glazier and Lampton Elementary schools together, the principals were on the hot seat for demonstrating lessons. One principal prefaced her lesson by saying she didn't know the students, but she had observed the class twice to get a sense of what they had done. The lesson was a shared reading of non-fiction text about the Galapagos Islands intended to teach text features. She began by building on a chart the students and their teacher had already been using. The chart in the new text was more complex; it included rows and pictures. She engaged the children in identifying what was the same and what was different between this chart and those they had seen before. The questions guided the students' attention so that they were able to make several important observations about the ways in which animals in the Galapagos were endangered.

The debrief discussion that followed helped the entire group identify teacher moves that contributed to students learning. It also demonstrated the power of collaborative planning and collegial analysis. One teacher commented, "W*hen you hear how other people read the text, it helps me consider what supports kids need to make meaning.*" They also agreed that it was important to see how this worked with their own children in their own classrooms.

The power of this collaborative work among the LIT team members was also helping to reach wider segments of the school. In some schools the work was spreading by word of mouth. Sometimes two teachers would ask to meet with the coach together. One demonstration teacher wanted to bring her whole grade level team. One of the coaches described another example of how it was expanding at one of her schools:

> *At the elementary level, they'll do a LIT day where in the first two hours of a LIT day they're going to demonstrate two lessons—one for different grade lessons. And so they'll use subs so that they'll release teachers to come and observe this lesson and then debrief it. And so you have two grade-level teams to come and observe that. Then…and that's on top of the LIT team group, and so those two grade levels will then say, 'Wow! That was great. When can you come in here to my room?' And so you get that snowball effect. And I know it's a good problem, but it does turn out to be you know a logistical nightmare…*

Some individual schools had figured out ways to support the work beyond the one-day district supported LIT team. Another literacy coach explained how she is extending the work with teachers:

> *One of the things that I did, because I realized that if we only meet with the LIT team once a month, we're giving them homework assignments to do. Like try this on. Where is their support? So what we said is, with each of the principals, they got subs on additional days, so each month, like for instance in November, I had the middle school LIT team and the elementary LIT team, on a Monday and a Tuesday, then I had an elementary LIT support day and then a middle school LIT support day. And what that was, was on one day, the principals gave us one sub or two subs, depending on what they had, and I offered in hour chunks, time for any LIT team teachers that wanted to sign up, for me to either come in and I would plan with them, or they could try on a lesson and I would coach them, or I would model a lesson in their classroom with their students, with some of the pieces, like how do I make my kids turn and talk, or how do I get my kids to sit this way, or how do I…show me that.*

The other way that coaches and principals were exposing all the teachers in their schools to the literacy initiative was through the once a month Roll-out Days.

Roll-out Days

Students were released early one afternoon per week in Norwalk-La Mirada. On one of those days each month, building-level staff development related to the literacy initiative was directed by the district. The sessions, called Roll-out Days, were led by building principals with the assistance of a literacy coach (in some cases, the coaches reported that they planned and led this staff development work). The content of the sessions mirrored the content of the Good to Great Academy days and the LIT team work in buildings. We observed two Roll-out Days at Glazier Elementary in the Norwalk family—one held in February and one in May of 2006. Each session lasted about two hours (from 1:20pm to 3:20pm) and they were attended by most building teachers. Both sessions followed a similar format that included: watching a video, small group discussions, and small group 'take-away' activities.

The focus of the staff development in February was on shared reading. Following an opening statement by the principal, the teachers observed a demonstration lesson conducted by Katherine Casey (the lesson was videotaped at one of the Good to Great Academy days). After watching the lesson, teachers were asked by the literacy coach to *"talk to each other about the*

teacher moves" they had observed during the lesson. During the share-out that followed, teachers commented on several aspects of what they had seen, providing some evidence of the level at which they understood the pedagogy of shared reading.

- *She asked the students to 'picture this in your mind.' She used visualization.*
- *She showed evidence of in-depth planning.*
- *She was teaching lower ELD kids and she held them accountable. That was very powerful.*
- *She did text and text features in one lesson…that's not a good model for us to use.*
- *My big 'aha' was that she was not just teaching them to understand this text; she was giving tools to use on all texts.*

The Roll-out Days were an opportunity for the principal and the literacy coach to provide the staff with tools to facilitate their learning. At the session in February, the literacy coach used the following chart on shared reading and read aloud to talk about lesson planning:

Planning for shared reading and read aloud Lessons

1. Know your students and the needs of students based on data and teacher observation.
2. Select a grade-level appropriate text aligned with expectations and the standards.
3. Read and discuss the meaning of the text.
4. What standards will be your focus?
5. Name the reading skills and meaning making strategies you used.
6. Predict where kids might struggle.
7. Highlight the strategies (teacher moves) you will use in the lesson.
8. Plan meaning making opportunities:
    - What do you expect to hear?
    - What do you want to hear?
    - Chunk text
    - Open-ended questions
    - What will you do if students don't get it?
9. Create a strong opening and closing.
10. Reflect/debrief. [Important to use a text more than once, as there is too much to cover.]

In addition to the chart created by the literacy coach, other teachers from the building shared charts they had co-created with students in their classrooms—on subjects such as nonfiction text, text features, authors' use of specific details—suggesting that charting of this type was part of the pedagogy of shared reading. The principal gave the teachers a nonfiction text selection and his lesson plan for a demonstration he had done earlier in the week at the LIT team session. The literacy coach then provided the teachers with grade-appropriate nonfiction text selections and asked them to work in grade level teams to create a two-day shared reading lesson plan.

In May, the Roll-out Day was an opportunity for the principal to foreshadow the expectations for the 2006-2007 year. Teachers were shown a district-developed video on classroom environment and later in the afternoon, they visited classrooms of LIT team members to observe aspects of classroom environment such as libraries, whole group meeting areas, spaces for small group instruction, print-rich décor, and easily accessible student materials. The principal told the teachers that he would expect to see evidence of read aloud and shared reading lessons in all classrooms the following year. He drew on his LIT team teachers to provide "testimony" regarding their experience with these strategies over the 2005-2006 year. The comments below are representative of the kinds of statements the teachers made.

> *I've been in other environments where teachers were told what to do. It was very didactic. This is an opportunity where the district is trusting us…trusting us to create environments and to make decisions. We need to take this opportunity!*
>
> *I've never seen such sophistication of talk about reading among first graders* [a 37 year veteran]. *They know how to pick a just right book; they know book levels; they can track characters.*
>
> *I've noticed the vocabulary from shared reading showing up in other areas. I heard 'I agree with' show up in math.*

The strategy of making the school-based staff development (LIT team days and Roll-out Days) a priority makes sense for reaching larger numbers, but in terms of supporting significant changes in practice, the one-on-one work of the coaches with individual teachers may have had the greatest impact.

Coaching Demonstration Teachers

Finding the time to work with individual teachers was complicated by the fact that not all demonstration teachers were entirely receptive to being coached. Given the other priorities, coaches struggled to carve out sufficient time to work with them. The coaches tried to schedule consecutive days with their teachers so that they could work on developing skills over time, starting with identifying goals and needs of the students, lesson planning, sometimes demonstrating lessons, sometimes co-teaching, and sometimes observing, followed by a reflective debrief to plan for next steps. The number of individual teachers coaches were working with ranged from two to eight, and it was often a slow, time consuming process.

However, the coaches learned that investing the time to earn teachers' trust was essential before they would be open to being coached:

> *The biggest thing is building relationships with everyone. Because you can't do the tough work until you've got the trust. And it takes about a half a year, and that's about what it took before I saw any of the demonstration teachers really wanting to put themselves out there. Before, it was like, come on in, its okay. They'll let you in there, but I don't think they were really willing to be coached.*

Even though the one-to-one coaching was designated as a lower priority, most coaches found it to be an extremely important part of their learning. One coach described why these experiences are so valuable:

> *Well, to see what they're learning from students and really guiding their instruction, and also taking what they're doing with their reading and going further with…getting deeper with their writing because I wasn't really able to do that too much through summer school last year. We only had 19 days last year. But it's been so exciting for me to see the growth in the students that my demo teachers have, you know from kindergarten and second grade and where they started the year on our assessments to where they are now and the level of conversation and the level of thinking that I'm seeing. It's just so exciting.*

The coaches who worked with high schools, however, found progress there to be slower and more problematic. The high school demo teachers did not attend the academy sessions. Brenda Wallace, who had worked with secondary coaches during summer school, was brought in to work with 9th grade language arts teachers, but only at one high school; the other high schools chose to focus on literacy support in social studies classrooms. CEL brought in Laura VanDerPloeg at mid-year to support this work. However, inconsistent communication and competing schedules often left these efforts with limited support from district and school administrators. Moreover, competing demands often made it impossible for the literacy coaches to participate in the high professional development sessions. Consequently, district leaders were rethinking what the literacy work would look like at the high school in year three. The high school coaches agreed that "*high school is a whole different beast*" and that district personnel were still trying to figure out how to support the work there.

Summary

A consistent common theme that we heard from all of the participants in the various professional development forums was how important it was to see strong models, try it on and experience it for themselves, and to have the support from a more expert 'other' to help them improve. The summary of the powerful learning experiences that one of the coaches provided was echoed by many:

> *Listening to Katherine and watching her do lessons would be one of them. And then I guess, the actual trying it on but not just in isolation, not just me doing it, but the collaboration piece. In the beginning, we were together and partnered together when we went out. We planned together and we tried it on together.*

Similarly, the coaches observed that the same kinds of experiences were turning points for their teachers:

> *I've found that it's just…it's almost like layering on understanding. When the teachers see, 'Wow! My kids were engaged.' And then others start to see, 'Wow! Look at the standards. I really need to try and do this or that, or I need to make adjustments because I'm really not addressing the standards if I don't do this.'*

> *If I demo-lesson with their kids, it's, 'Wow! I've never seen him do that, or she's never done that.' And kind of this new awareness of their class, and then they'll go to try it on, and they'll come up with questions…you know just there's always questions, or how to do this or that. … once you've seen it in action and once you've been part of a planning team and there's excitement from the majority of the team members, and then the lesson is carried out and you see how the kids have loved it, and sometimes you know I'll say to the kids, 'Well, what did you think? How was this? What did you like about it?' And right there they're telling their teachers, 'You know we like being listened to. We like having our voice heard.' And it's hard to deny it when it comes right out of the kids' mouths.*

Several literacy coaches lamented that in the second year they lost what had been so valuable to them during the first year—their time together for the coaches to collaborate, observe each other, and share ideas:

> *We wanted to have coaches meetings where we would do sort of a case study, so we'd bring to the table, here's what I've been working on and doing and everyone can offer collegial input and support. Nobody has time. So it's because they have us spread so thin, that we're just running from place to place.*

Although the coaches were still seeking more one-on-one feedback, at the end of the year before summer school in year two, the coaches finally got some important time for collegial

conversations with consultant support, which renewed their conviction that opportunities to collaborate were essential:

> *The magic was that there were a group of coaches, and it wasn't all of us, but there was a consistent group of coaches that were together all those days. And we don't ever get to do the work together anymore. We're in such isolated pieces. So I guess what I would like would be more time for collaborating. And like Lynn [CEL consultant] says, you have to. You absolutely have to and it's a shame that we're doing it at the very end of the year. But the power in it was, we got to see what everybody has learned this year and is now doing.*

The district's investment in literacy coaches has built collective expertise among the team that is now a valuable resource that all the coaches need to be able to access for their ongoing growth as professionals. Overall, the consensus was that this had been another incredible year of learning. And the most rewarding part for the coaches was to see evidence that students were learning more too.

Outcomes of the Norwalk-La Mirada/CEL Partnership Work

Our description of the first two years of NLMUSD's work with CEL suggests many outcomes that are important steps in the process of achieving district-wide instructional reform. However, as district sources noted, the critical outcome of the improvement effort is changes in student learning outcomes. In the sections that follow, we provide data regarding student learning outcomes in Norwalk-La Mirada over the past three years. In addition, we highlight important intermediate outcomes related to changes in professional practice.

Preliminary Results: Student Outcome Data

With very few exceptions, student test scores are trending up in Norwalk-La Mirada in English/Language Arts over the past two years. We can not make causal claims that the CEL supported literacy initiative is responsible for these test score gains, however, the *trend* in English/Language Arts is definitely in the right direction. See Table 3 for a summary of the district's student outcome data for the past three reported years.[12] It is important to note that across all grade levels, test scores continue to show less than 50% of students at or above state

[12] Data source for all data reported by CEL research team: Data Quest, California Department of Education. http://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/ (retrieved 10/11/06)

proficiency levels and that the achievement gap between subgroups (by race or ethnicity, for example) persists.[13]

Table 3
Norwalk-La Mirada Unified School District (CA)
California Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR)
California Standards Test (CST) Scores – All Students

Data reports percentages of students who scored at proficient or advanced levels.

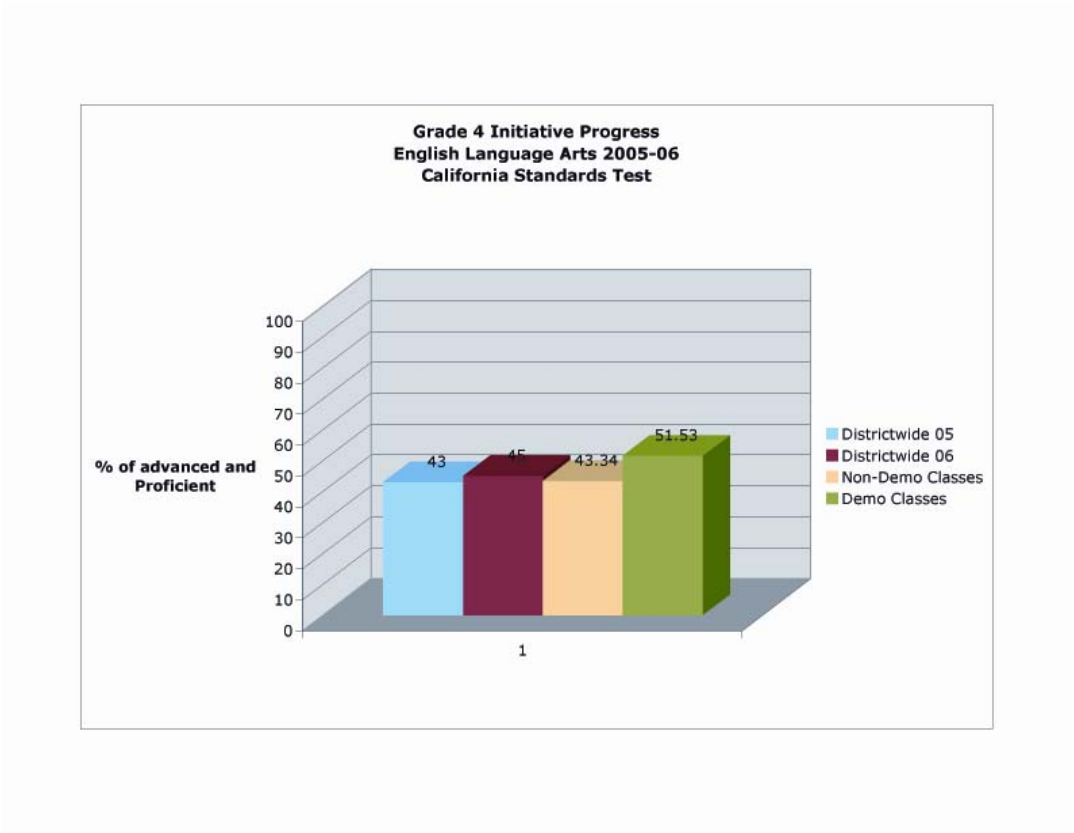
2005-06 School Year										
Subject	**2nd Grade**	**3rd Grade**	**4th Grade**	**5th Grade**	**6th Grade**	**7th Grade**	**8th Grade**	**9th Grade**	**10th Grade**	**11th Grade**
English-Language Arts	45%	35%	45%	39%	32%	35%	33%	37%	27%	26%
Mathematics	58%	56%	49%	43%	31%	31%				
2004-05 School Year										
Subject	**2nd Grade**	**3rd Grade**	**4th Grade**	**5th Grade**	**6th Grade**	**7th Grade**	**8th Grade**	**9th Grade**	**10th Grade**	**11th Grade**
English-Language Arts	39%	26%	43%	37%	27%	37%	31%	35%	25%	24%
Mathematics	57%	51%	45%	39%	28%	28%				
2003-04 School Year										
Subject	**2nd Grade**	**3rd Grade**	**4th Grade**	**5th Grade**	**6th Grade**	**7th Grade**	**8th Grade**	**9th Grade**	**10th Grade**	**11th Grade**
English-Language Arts	31%	26%	33%	34%	26%	29%	24%	31%	25%	22%
Mathematics	47%	43%	39%	34%	25%	23%				

District officials in Norwalk also compiled student outcome data at three grade levels comparing data from demonstration and non-demonstration classrooms. The district-generated figures report test score data over two years (2005 and 2006) on the California Standards Test (CST) (see Figures 1-3 below). These data are promising in regards to the goals of the literacy initiative. They indicate that in classrooms where job-embedded coaching around powerful

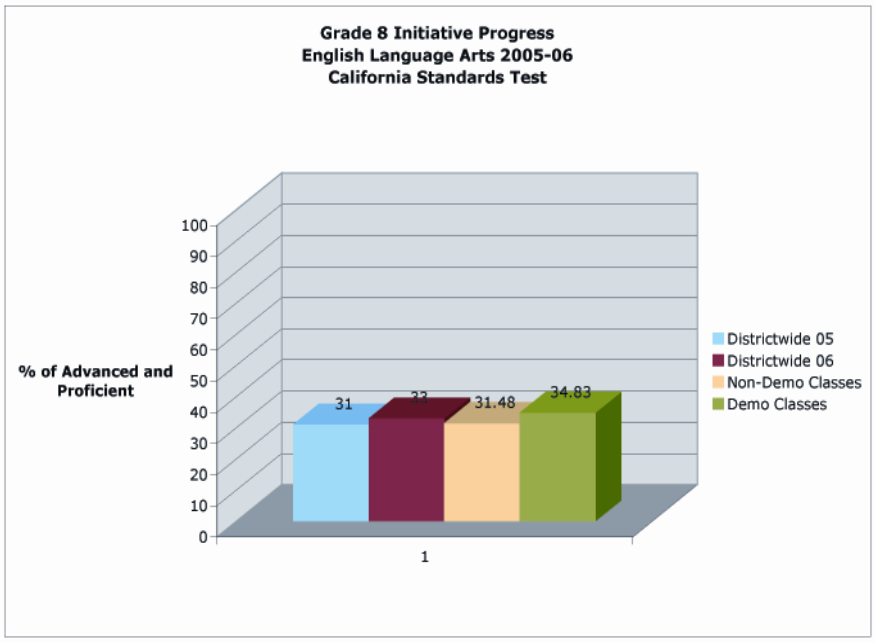
[13] The vast majority of students in Norwalk-La Mirada are Hispanic/Latino students. However, disaggregated test score data in Grade 4 (for example) for 2006 show 40% of Hispanic students at or above proficiency while 78% of Asian students and 61% of White students are at or above proficiency. Similar discrepancies can be found across the past three years for other grade levels.

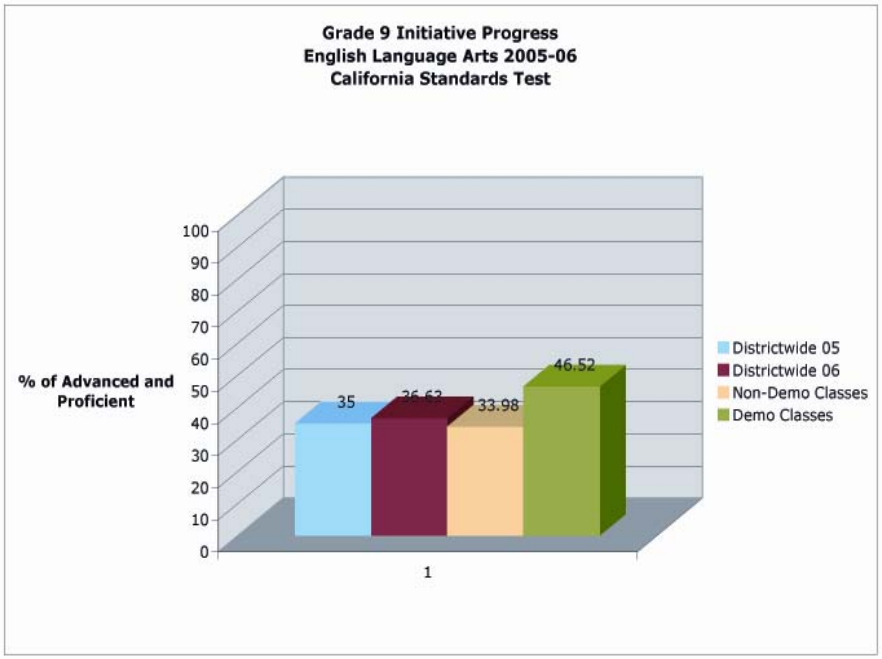
instructional strategies in Balanced Literacy was provided, student outcomes in English/Language Arts are trending higher than those in non-supported classrooms. [14]

Figures 1-3
Norwalk CST Data
Non-Demonstration and Demonstration Classrooms
4th, 8th, 9th Grades



[14] It is difficult to completely attribute these gains to the literacy initiative because we have no prior data comparing students in these classrooms. The data are promising, however, and it will be important to continue to monitor the test scores from demonstration and non-demonstration classrooms.


Grade 8 Initiative Progress
English Language Arts 2005-06
California Standards Test
% of Advanced and Proficient
100
90
80
70
60
50
40
30
20
10
0
31
31.48
34.83
1
Districtwide 05
Districtwide 06
Non-Demo Classes
Demo Classes


Grade 9 Initiative Progress
English Language Arts 2005-06
California Standards Test
% of Advanced and Proficient
100
90
80
70
60
50
40
30
20
10
0
35
33.98
46.52
1
Districtwide 05
Districtwide 06
Non-Demo Classes
Demo Classes

We also report student outcome data for the two schools where we have made initial visits: Los Alisos Middle School and Glazier Elementary School.[15] These are schools that are reported (by Area Superintendents, CEL Project Director, CEL guest coaches, and district literacy coaches) to have strong principals (strong instructional leaders) who are focused on the literacy initiative. Again, these data are trending up (although they are low overall)—these will be schools that we expect to study closely during the 2006-2007 year by watching LIT team work, literacy coaching activities, and classroom practice.

Table 4
Los Alisos Middle School
Norwalk-La Mirada Unified School District (CA)
California Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR)
California Standards Test (CST) – All Students

Data reports percentages of students who scored at proficient or advanced levels.

2005-06 CST Results			
Subject	**6th Grade**	**7th Grade**	**8th Grade**
English – Language Arts	26%	36%	29%
Mathematics	28%	36%	
2004-05 CST Results			
Subject	**6th Grade**	**7th Grade**	**8th Grade**
English – Language Arts	23%	33%	28%
Mathematics	26%	24%	
2003-04 CST Results			
Subject	**6th Grade**	**7th Grade**	**8th Grade**
English – Language Arts	18%	19%	16%
Mathematics	15%	14%	

[15] These are research sites. Because both of these schools are in one "family"—the Norwalk family, we plan (resources permitting) to select 1-2 schools in other families this year.

Table 5
Glazier Elementary School
Norwalk-La Mirada Unified School District (CA)
California Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR)
California Standards Test (CST) Scores – All Students

Data reports percentages of students who scored at proficient or advanced levels.

2005-06 School Year				
Subject	**2nd Grade**	**3rd Grade**	**4th Grade**	**5th Grade**
English-Language Arts	47%	28%	33%	30%
Mathematics	72%	60%	43%	31%
2004-05 School Year				
Subject	**2nd Grade**	**3rd Grade**	**4th Grade**	**5th Grade**
English-Language Arts	28%	14%	26%	29%
Mathematics	52%	40%	30%	27%
2003-04 School Year				
Subject	**2nd Grade**	**3rd Grade**	**4th Grade**	**5th Grade**
English-Language Arts	19%	10%	27%	25%
Mathematics	30%	35%	34%	25%

Intermediate Results: Reports on Professional Learning Outcomes

Across informants, in both interviews and informal conversations during our observations of the literacy initiative 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. The CEL Project Director for Norwalk noted the impact she has seen of the work thus far:

> *For the elementary and middle school principals, I would say the professional development has shown a pay off for the learning—because principals feel much more comfortable leading the work in instruction alongside a coach. The coaches' ability to do lessons has certainly paid off. So that piece has definitely paid off.*

Likewise, Katherine Casey reported that the word is spreading in Norwalk because of the work of the coaches. She was impressed by the degree to which the coaches were "*grappling*" with new ideas and concepts.

> *…the emails they send saying, 'Oh, someone just asked me this question: what do I do?' Or, 'I thought I just did this great session, and people want to know about how AR* [Accelerated Reading] *works within Balanced Literacy?' So I get some of their questions that make me say, 'Okay. These people are grappling with some of the* [difficult] *stuff.*

The literacy coaches themselves reported that they were learning. Some said that they learned the most from their own teaching experience during summer school, when they *taught* (not coached) during the summer of 2005 and had to put into practice the things they had been learning with Katherine Casey during the academic year. One coach said of that experience:

> *Without a doubt, my time last summer was the most beneficial, because it included the assessment of the students I was working with. It included actually putting into place what I was learning on a daily basis, doing the planning, seeing how tough the work was and how much time it took. That made me understand how important this work is, but also how hard this work is.*

The coaches also talked about the benefits of on-the-spot coaching from Katherine Casey, other CEL consultants, or the CEL Project Director. One coach described the way that the Project Director facilitated her learning.

> *I said, 'You know, I'm having this problem with shared reading. Can you come and watch the way I'm questioning them because I don't think I'm really getting them to the understanding that I want to.' She sat through my whole, entire lesson and watched me and then gave me suggestions afterward…one of the things I wasn't doing was writing on my overhead as much* [during shared reading]. *Then she helped me with a couple of chunking areas, saying, 'You might want to try this.'*

Some coaches described the actual content of their learning over the two years of the literacy initiative. The following comments are representative of the kinds of things we heard (see previous sections on years one and two of the initiative for more evidence of learning among the district literacy coaches).

> *I had a good foundation in Balanced Literacy and this work has just gone deeper in that for me. I don't think I ever thought about text the way I think about it now. I think I was going through the motions. I really use student data now to inform my instruction. It was taught to me that I never, ever really worked on making meaning the way that I have this year with kids.*

> *I think that one of the things I've learned is that helping kids make meaning of text—getting them to think about text, releasing it more to the kids, giving those questions that ignite thinking so that kids are learning more and comprehending text more. I've become much more of a meta-cognitive reader and thinker. I'm thinking about text more than I ever have. I've learned how to think about text…I think I took that for granted before. Also unpacking the standards…what do they really mean and what do I need to know as*

> *a teacher or what do I need to be able to do as a teacher to unpack that standard and make it accessible to kids.*

One coach said that it was expectations for student learning that were changing.

> *I think for the kids, we've underestimated them, and I think that's what I'm learning. Our expectations were so low that we weren't expecting a lot out of them and they can do a lot more. If you just scaffold it the right way and give it to them, they are ready. You just need to ask them.*

Taking it to Scale: Variation across Schools and Teachers

As might be expected at this stage in a major reform effort, our informants suggested that there was great variation across the district in terms of instructional change. Some reported variation across families in terms of how the literacy initiative was "rolling out." Others suggested that there was variation across levels—with high school lagging behind elementary and middle schools. Within these levels, there was reportedly wide variation in the degree to which schools were implementing—or trying on—instructional practices such as read aloud and shared reading. In some schools, such as Glazier Elementary, most teachers were described as being on-board with the change effort and actively engaged in learning new instructional practices.

> *With Glazier, I think the majority of teachers (not all) are trying read aloud and shared reading. They're asking to be observed by their principal on read aloud and shared reading. They're very anxious to move to the next piece, but for them I think they need to say, "Wait a minute. I'm doing this, but how can I make this better?' 'How can I use this to know my students better, to guide my instruction, to make my planning a little deeper?' And part of that is having someone watch them and observe them, and that's a struggle.*

In other elementary schools, teachers were reportedly more hesitant. Within those schools, there were some strong teacher-leaders who *"were deep into the work and believe in the work"* and some who were reportedly *"naysayers."* One coach, however, reported that she was seeing a cultural shift in some of the schools where she worked.

> *I'm seeing teachers are thinking about their practice a lot more and they're becoming more open about talking about their practice. I'm seeing the whole idea about having professional dialogues regarding how we push our kids and help our kids learn.*

In some cases, the literacy coaches told us that non-demonstration teachers were requesting help with setting up appropriate classroom environments, for example. In other cases, some demonstration teachers reportedly worked on weekends or evenings on their instructional practice (with their coaches). The coaches told us a particularly poignant story about the teachers who came to summer school in 2005—without pay.

> *What was also really exciting is that we made it* [summer school] *open to demo teachers. I had two or three that were with me four or five days. And, to be able to have their input and bounce ideas off of them as well. They used their own time…you know, they didn't get paid for it, but they came in.*

Not all reports were as rosy. In some cases, we heard that building principals were not spending time in classrooms (as required by the district) and, in others, planning for professional development activities was either difficult (between coaches and principals) or non-existent. In those cases, the coaches said that they planned the building professional development events without the input of the building leader.

Looking Forward: Tensions and Concerns

There are many promising signs regarding the Norwalk-La Mirada literacy initiative and its partnership work with the Center for Educational Leadership at the University of Washington. Student test scores are trending in the right direction and there are compelling reports about professional learning. These kinds of reports are helpful in maintaining the momentum for change; however, the challenge of overcoming variability across schools and personnel and bringing the reform to scale is still daunting. District leadership in Norwalk recognizes this and acknowledges the need to hold all players accountable for particular outcomes over the upcoming years.

Accountability and Evaluation

In the spring of 2005, working with the LAP team members, the district developed an accountability plan intended to lay out the expectations for all relevant personnel (teachers, coaches, principals, central office, school board members, and TANLA) related to the literacy initiative. For each group, expectations were balanced with "supports" that would be provided by other participating parties. For example, during 2005-2006 teachers were expected to (1)

engage in read aloud and shared readings; (2) participate in required staff development; and (3) work in collaboration with a partnership or team. To provide support for those activities, the literacy coaches were expected to model and demonstrate lessons; help develop 'demo' classrooms; and provide teacher coaching. Principals were also expected to coach teachers and provide meaningful feedback.

The accountability plan was revised in the spring of 2006 with feedback from central office and building leaders and literacy coaches. The plan was extended to include expectations for other central office departments such as human resources, the business office, child welfare and attendance, and special education (in relation to the literacy initiative). Again, the plan delineated the responsibilities for each group of leaders, the coaches, and teachers as well as school board members and the teachers' union. For the 2006-2007 year, the teachers in the district will be held accountable for the following (as described in district documents):

- *Every K-5 Teacher and 6th-9th grade Language Arts Teacher will be expected to improve student comprehension through read alouds and shared readings.*
- *Classroom environment: By October 1, 2006, every Elementary Teacher, Middle School Language Arts Teacher and 9th grade High School Teacher will be held accountable as per written criteria. For those teachers who will be on an evaluation cycle for 2006/07, this will be part of their evaluation. For those teachers not on an evaluation cycle for 2006/07, they will still be held accountable. Through routine monitoring, principals can exercise their authority to move a teacher on to the evaluation cycle if necessary.*
- *Participate in all required staff development.*
- *Collaborate with grade level/content area colleagues on instructional practice, curriculum, and student data.*
- *Accountability:*
  - *All grades 2-5 teachers and all grades 6-9 Language Arts teachers will administer district benchmarks assessment four times a year. Teachers will use the data from these assessments to inform their daily instruction.*
  - *Every grade 1 and 2 teacher is required to do a formal running record three times a year. Kindergarten teachers are required to do a formal running record two times a year.*

For the same time period (06-07), the principals were expected to plan professional development; know their teachers as learners; assist teachers with student assessment; plan, observe, and debrief lessons with the literacy coaches; and coach teachers.

The accountability plan for 2006-2007 represented an increase in expectations for district personnel—especially for classroom teachers. In prior years, "evaluation" related to the literacy initiative was somewhat ambiguous. Although district leaders reported that they and the principals were being evaluated in terms of the initiative, the specifics regarding teacher evaluation were somewhat unclear. The following quotes capture the ambiguity.

> *My understanding is that it would be fair to evaluate them* [teachers] *on what the expectations were, which were not how good the read-aloud was, but that you did the read-aloud. I'm hearing now some discussion that not everybody's clear on that.*

> *If you read the accountability sheet that was developed through Panasonic, it sounds like if you're a classroom teacher you're going to be doing it* [read aloud or shared reading] *on a regular basis, but when I was there in August, one* [leader] *said, 'Well, you want to make sure that the teacher tries it at least once. And you can't ask to see it.'*

> *And the other thing is it's not evaluative. He* [the principal] *cannot evaluate a teacher on read aloud or shared reading. That's part of the accountability plan for the union is that they will try it, but it better not be reflected in their evaluation.*

The revised accountability plan addresses this situation and provides increased clarity regarding teacher evaluation (see bulleted points listed above). While we have yet to see how 2006-2007 will unfold, our data from the previous school year suggest uneven implementation related to accountability and evaluation. It will be important for district leaders to continue to monitor their accountability plans and evaluation practices, perhaps developing some means of oversight.

District Culture

In a word, the culture is "nice." By all reports, Norwalk-La Mirada school district is a place where people are supportive of each other and relationships count. We have observed the common district practice of giving "testimony" to positive accomplishments at a Good to Great Academy session as well as at building-level sessions. But, while there was ample evidence in our data of a robust culture of praise and support on the one hand, there was an equally robust theme related to a lack of trust.

Many of our informants used language similar to the following to bring this issue up in interviews.

> *I think we're getting better at it, but it's really hard to make people feel uncomfortable…like you should be at this point. I mean we're trying. I will say that.*
>
> *I just feel like there's this culture of you can't really say what you want to say.*
>
> *We haven't been very forthright in this District in the past. You're not allowed to say certain things or be fairly open with what you think or how you think it. It's been a hard thing to break through.*

A few of our interviewees related this cultural problem to the accountability and evaluation issues raised above. The notion seemed to be that in this type of culture, it was difficult to hold people accountable for change in either leadership or instructional practices. We have recent evidence that district leaders are aware of these issues.[16] Our data indicate that at least some informants think that the district is "working" on this problem. Certainly, the fact that the issue was raised across many interviews and informal conversations suggests that change forces are occurring in the district. Letting conflict emerge might be an important step toward resolving the inconsistencies.

The Role of the District Literacy Coaches in Centralizing Reform

A key concern regarding the district literacy coaches was their limited numbers and the lack of resources to increase them. An Area Superintendent told us as early as spring of 2005 that among the district's challenges, "F*inances would be number one. We wanted to have a literacy coach in every school. We need that and we can't. These* [coaches] *are stretched so thin."* All of the coaches we interviewed spoke about the limits on their time. The district added 3 additional coaches for 2006-2007 and assigned one literacy coach full-time to each of the three high schools in an attempt to address this situation.

Beyond the resource issues, however, we wondered if the coaches might be caught in an awkward position between the central office (to whom they are accountable) and the principals they are mandated to support. In some cases, this was a source of the variability we noted between buildings and across families. When the coaches observed practices at the building level that were questionable as far as the goals of the literacy initiative, it was not clear to us how those issues might be resolved. We raise this issue as a caution. The district has invested

[16] In a recent meeting with leadership teams from other CEL partner districts, the Norwalk team raised just this issue as their problem of practice.

heavily in the district coach role; as we noted earlier in this report, the coaches are the linchpin to the district's reform initiative. In addition to the feedback they need to hone their skills, the coaches also need support to ensure that their jobs are doable.

The implications of this concern may point to the relationship between central office and schools. We noted at the beginning of this report, that the literacy initiative represents a first (in a long time) in terms of a board approved, centralized reform. In a district where decision-making has been historically site-based, it is difficult to begin requiring uniformity. Although central office leaders have developed a number of strategies to focus energies in one direction (e.g., message discipline, district-wide calendars of compulsory professional development, accountability plans), we think that it is as critical to invest in principal instructional leadership capacity as it is to invest in the coaches.

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Appendix A
CEL Partnership Prospectus

Leadership as learning: Closing the achievement gap by improving instruction through content-focused leadership

The Center for Educational Leadership (CEL) exists to eliminate the achievement gap that divides students along the lines of race, class, and language. CEL believes that the achievement gap will be eliminated only when the quality of instruction improves, and that instruction will only improve at scale when leaders better understand what powerful instruction looks like in order to lead and guide professional development, target and align resources, engage in on-going problem solving and long-range capacity building. It is one of CEL's mantras that "you can't lead what you don't know."

This prospectus outlines a professional development partnership between a school district and the Center for Educational Leadership at the University of Washington. Partnerships are based on the belief that powerful instructional leadership is the nexus for improving student achievement. Though each partnership is tailored to the particular context of the district(s) involved, the overall theory of action guiding the work has three basic footings:

The first footing is about ***helping the system to get smarter about powerful instruction*** and the leadership necessary to guide that instruction. The second footing involves working directly with content coaches and teacher leaders at school sites with the aim of ***connecting new learning to classroom practice***. The third footing is about ***ensuring the necessary policies, practices and structures are in place to support powerful instruction*** by working directly with district level leaders to examine their own district contexts. Whether in literacy or math, sustained, in-depth examination in one content area grounds leadership practice squarely within the work of instructional improvement; this ensures that the three footings of CEL's theory of action are closely aligned.

The focus on leadership for instructional improvement has two distinct, but mutually reinforcing dimensions: (1) defining the instructional practices, structures, and routines that are conducive to powerful student learning and to the adult professional development that supports it; (2) honing the leadership practices and routines which support, nurture, and push the development of such practices across the district.

With these two dimensions in mind—"instructional practices" and "instructional leadership"—the Center for Educational Leadership provides the following:

HELPING THE SYSTEM GET SMARTER ABOUT POWERFUL INSTRUCTION

General Study Group Sessions for School and District Leaders

The *General Study Group Sessions* serve as a central component of the professional development partnership. The purpose of these sessions is two-fold: (1) to study high-quality instruction in a specific content area (literacy or mathematics) and (2) to define and refine the communication and instructional leadership strategies conducive to improving student achievement through high-quality instruction.

Participation in *General Study Group Sessions* is an expectation for all K-12 principals, assistant principals, literacy coaches, key teacher leaders, and central office leaders. The configuration of each study group depends on the size and needs of the particular district(s) involved. All *General Study Groups* are initially designed for district-wide participation. Over time, however, the configuration of the *General Study Groups* may change to meet the evolving needs of a district. Some districts, for example, have organized *General Study Groups* around particular grade-level bands (i.e. elementary and secondary).

General Study Groups meet for a series of one day sessions across the school year and are conducted by leaders in the field of literacy/mathematics instruction and instructional leadership. The goal of *General Study Group Sessions* is to support school and district leaders, instructional coaches and/or teacher leaders in their own learning of quality instruction and instructional leadership. Specifically, these sessions are aimed at helping participants:

• Recognize, articulate, and teach the critical attributes of powerful instruction
• Build pedagogical content knowledge
• Hone skills for curricular planning informed by knowledge of standards, curricular resources, pedagogical content, and ongoing assessment of student needs
• Develop shared language for talking about teaching and learning
• Develop specific leadership skills that can assist in the movement towards more powerful and effective instruction
• Cultivate an interdependent professional community for teachers and leaders
• Become more effective at planning, coaching, and collaborating with teachers in developing powerful instruction

The format of each session generally includes presentations of exemplary instructional practices; demonstrations of strategies with adult and student groups; time for individual/team/school planning with support of CEL coaches; sharing of professional development tools, resources, and texts to support the work.

While each *General Study Group Session* is built upon the needs of the district(s) and the work of the previous sessions, the scope of the *General Study Group Sessions*—regardless of content area focus—includes specific knowledge and skills which serve as the foundation for *Leadership and Instructional Coaching*. These include:

<u>Instructional Practice</u>

Learning Environment/Conditions for Learning
How People Learn/Developing Pedagogical Content Knowledge
Teaching in the Zone of Proximal Development
  Supporting Students Towards Increasing Independence
  The Role of Modeling
  Meeting the Needs of English Language Learners
Data Based Inquiry
Assessment Driven Instruction
Using Standards to Inform Curricular Planning and Instruction
The Crucial Role of Talk in Learning

<u>Instructional Leadership</u>

Communication
  Developing a "Teachable Point of View"
  Setting Clear Expectations
  Framing the Work— articulating rationale for priorities, creating a sense of urgency, writing instructional letters, crafting openings and closings for meetings
  Data Based Inquiry
  Using School Based Data to Determine Student and Teacher Needs

Using Data as a Leverage Point
Planning for Professional Development to Support Teachers' Growth
Identifying Teachers' Learning Styles and Needs
Crafting Feedback for Teachers
Developing the systems and structures to nurture and support professional learning
Identifying and Working with Teacher Leaders

Leadership Coaching
To apply the learning from *General Study Group Sessions* to leadership actions at the district or school level, *Leadership Coaching* is a key component of the professional development partnership. All principals and their district office supervisors receive coaching from accomplished instructional leaders. The exact number of *Leadership Coaching* days is negotiated as part of the overall partnership contract, but a minimum of four days per person is recommended. The configuration of the leadership coaching is also negotiated as part of the contract. In some districts, principals receive coaching in dyads or triads. In other districts, coaching is one-on-one. In all cases, leadership coaching is school and district embedded, carried out in the actual context of leaders' work.

Facilitated instructional walkthroughs are one element of leadership coaching. Leaders utilize information from walkthroughs to deepen pedagogical content knowledge, analyze classroom instruction, ascertain the strengths and needs of teachers, support teacher growth, and plan professional development opportunities for individual, small groups, and whole staff learning.

CONNECTING NEW LEARNING TO CLASSROOM PRACTICE

Specialized Study Group Sessions for Coaches and Teacher Leaders
Approximately one day per month (commonly following the General Study Group Session) serves as an opportunity for additional study focused on the work of content coaches and/or teacher leaders. These sessions are intended to deepen their understanding of the content introduced at the General Study Group Sessions and to prepare them to work with colleagues at their own sites.

Specialized Study Group Sessions are designed to address an additional body of knowledge specific to the work of content coaching and professional development planning. Coaches and teacher leaders learn how to organize, develop, and sustain study groups in their respective schools and districts; how to structure coaching work with teachers; how to grow and utilize lab-site classrooms within and across schools; how to work with principals to plan for, stage, and deliver professional development; how to utilize video tapes and other resources for their own and others' learning and professional growth.

Instructional Coaching
Instructional Coaching or *Content Coaching* is an essential vehicle for connecting the learning from Study Group Sessions to classroom practice. The specific number of and configuration of coaching days is negotiated as part of the overall partnership contract; CEL Project Directors work with district leadership to make decisions about how to invest coaching resources to achieve the greatest impact.

CEL coaches spend approximately 1-4 days a month "on the ground" in schools with school and district teacher leaders. These coaching days extend the work of both the *General* and *Specialized Study Group Sessions* by providing teacher leaders with additional opportunities to "try on" new teaching strategies and to work with teachers in their classrooms—all with the support of an outside coach who models in classrooms, debriefs with teachers, co-teaches, co-plans, observes and provides feedback. *Instructional Coaching* may focus on developing pedagogical knowledge in a particular content area (literacy or math) or in the area of coaching and professional development itself.

Creating Existence Proofs

Whether through observing a coach model a lesson in a classroom, visiting schools with demonstrated success, or participating in professional development residencies in the classrooms of exemplary teachers, people need to see images of what is possible in order to develop a sense of urgency and deepen their commitment to the challenge of improving student achievement everyday, in all classrooms. When teachers see their own students—or students like them—engaged in rigorous, standard-bearing work, it elevates the expectations for what is possible.

To this end, CEL works with each partnership to design a plan for cultivating expertise among teachers, and creating existence proofs within each district. Some districts, for example, develop lab-site classrooms as places where teachers and coaches can "try on" new instructional strategies with support.

While districts are growing the necessary expertise within their systems, the Center for Educational Leadership connects them with a network of schools and districts across the country engaged in similar work. CEL orchestrates a variety of opportunities to learn from the experience of others through visitations to and residencies in exemplary schools and classrooms.

ENSURING THE NECESSARY POLICIES, PRACTICES AND STRUCTURES ARE IN PLACE TO SUPPORT POWERFUL INSTRUCTION

Leadership Conferences

The purpose of the *Leadership Conferences* is to provide an on-going venue for the application of the principles and practices learned with the *General Study Group* and *Leadership Coaching*. Regular meetings are scheduled over the school year with key central office leaders and principal representatives. These meetings are planned in consultation with the Project Director(s) from the Center for Educational Leadership. The extent to which the *Leadership Conferences* are facilitated by CEL representatives depends on the nature of the partnership; districts take on increasing responsibility for planning and leading the *Leadership Conferences* over time.

The aim of the *Leadership Conferences* is to (1) further flesh out and develop the school district's professional development plan; (2) coordinate this effort between and among schools; (3) identify the systems level policies, practices and structures that need changing in order to improve instruction. The content of *Leadership Conferences* addresses how the district might develop its own "green house" for cultivating expertise among teachers, how to identify and utilize current teacher leadership that exemplifies high-quality instruction, and ongoing examination of their own instructional leadership skills.

Project Management

Each partnership is unique and the professional development needs of a district continually evolve with new learning. For this reason, each district partnership is managed by at least one Project Director from the Center for Educational Leadership. Initially, this person is instrumental in working with district leaders to develop the partnership contract, and to conceptualize how the various components will manifest and reinforce the three footings outlined above. The Project Director is the main interface between the district and CEL coaches and representatives.

As district leaders develop their understanding of powerful instruction and the district-wide implications for leadership, they become more adept at refining long-term goals and problem solving along the way. Over time, project management involves monitoring, reflecting on, negotiating and reconceptualizing the partnership work in response to identified goals. For example, the Project Director may work with district

leaders to develop other learning opportunities such as specialized residencies in CEL's partnership schools, professional development attached to summer school for students, and intervisitations among partnership districts.

There is significant flexibility regarding how the various components of the partnership play out over time, provided that the basic footings of the theory of action are not compromised. While the Center for Educational Leadership remains open to the number of actual content and coaching days, as well as the specific content to be addressed, the partnership is contingent upon a district commitment to invest in learning opportunities and structures to help the system get smarter about instruction, connect new learning to the classroom, and ensure the necessary policies, practices and structures are in place to support powerful instruction.

Appendix B
Balanced Literacy Approaches

Read Aloud

- Teacher provides a model of how to use reading strategies to construct meaning of text
- Students construct meaning through conversations about the text
- Teacher reads text to students, modeling proficient oral reading
- Expands access to text beyond student's independent reading ability
- Immerses students in a variety of genre, language patterns, vocabulary, and rich literature at a level beyond what students can read independently
- Teacher observes, assesses, and reflects upon student strengths and needs before, during, and after read aloud to inform planning and teaching

Shared Reading

- Teacher demonstrates how to use reading strategies to construct meaning of text
- Students construct meaning through conversations about the text
- Students follow along as the teacher reads the text and may read with the teacher
- Students have opportunities to "try on" or practice using the reading strategies with teacher support
- Text may be at a reading level above what students can read independently
- Text is accessible to all students (i.e. enlarged or individual copies)
- Teacher observes, assesses, and reflects upon student strengths and needs before, during, and after shared reading to inform planning and teaching

Guided Reading

- A small group of students read, think and talk about the meaning of a specific text with guidance from the teacher and other students as needed
- Students talk to each other and the teacher to deepen their own understanding about the meaning of the text
- Students use reading strategies demonstrated in shared reading, read aloud, and Word/Language Study with guidance from the teacher and other students as needed
- Text is at students' instructional level
- Students with similar reading strengths and needs are grouped based on teacher assessment
- Teacher observes, assesses, and reflects upon student strengths and needs before, during, and after Guided Reading to inform planning and teaching

Independent Reading

- Students construct meaning of text that they read independently

- Students use strategies taught in read aloud, shared reading, Guided Reading, and Word/Language Study
- Students may interact with peers and teacher to deepen their own understanding of text
- Students select texts that match their interest and independent reading level
- Teacher confers with individuals to monitor progress of their ability to use strategies as they read on their own
- Teacher observes, assesses, and reflects upon student strengths and needs before, during, and after Independent Reading to inform planning and teaching