Balancing Direction and Support—Third Year Scale Up of a System-wide Instructional Reform Initiative

Interim Report #2
The Partnership between the Center for Educational Leadership and Norwalk-LaMirada Unified School District

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The Center for Educational Leadership (CEL) at the University of Washington began a contractual relationship with the Norwalk-LaMirada Unified School District in August 2004. This report summarizes data collected in the district over the past year (fall of 2006 through fall of 2007) as part of the CEL Research Project.[1] Last year we reported that the instructional improvement initiative in Norwalk-LaMirada (called the Literacy Initiative) was a carefully 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 intensive professional development activities. It was followed by (2) a "roll-out" year (2005-2006) that featured increased attention to building-level change efforts (Gallucci & Swanson, 2006).[2] In this report, we analyze the scale-up phases of the initiative. We characterize the challenges of reform implementation as lying at the intersection between centralized direction and accountability measures, on the one hand, and support for continued professional learning on the other. Our analysis suggests that maintaining a balance between the two and reducing variability at the school and classroom levels of the system are central tasks for maintaining the reform momentum.

Norwalk-LaMirada Unified School District has, in partnership with CEL, created a deep system of support for professional learning. We describe these supports in some detail in this report. We also describe the challenges inherent in ensuring accountability around the resource intensive supports. The district has addressed this dilemma in two ways—through the development of procedures for ensuring professional accountability and by investing in a new set of tools for evidence-based instruction.

The report begins with background information including: (1) a description of the research study; (2) an update on district policies related to the reform; and (3) a description of the district's recent central office reorganization. Next, the report describes the accountability systems that have been developed over the past year (and more) in Norwalk-LaMirada (for both adults and students). We then describe the district's support system for professional learning.

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[1] Norwalk-LaMirada is a mid-sized school district that serves approximately 24,000 students. It is located in Los Angeles County and sits just to the south and east of the city of Los Angeles. The student population served by the district is about 73% Hispanic/Latino and only 15% Caucasian.

[2] Gallucci, C., & Swanson, J. (2006). *Aiming High: Leadership for District-wide Instructional Improvement Center for Educational Leadership and Norwalk-La Mirada Unified School District* [Full report]. Available at www.k-12leadership.org.

We examine the progress that the district has made in implementing the Literacy Initiative (we report on student test score data in this section). Finally, we conclude with a discussion regarding some challenges (as evidenced in our data) of staying the course and bringing this ambitious reform to scale.

The CEL Research Project

In the fall of 2004, The Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy (CTP) 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. The study began 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 the fall of 2005, we added a third school district (Marysville in Washington State). An earlier interim report summarized data collected in the Norwalk-La Mirada Unified School District during five site visits conducted between May, 2005 and July, 2006 (Gallucci & Swanson, 2006). The data reported in this document were collected in six site visits to the district between November, 2006 and April, 2007 (we included in this analysis part of the data collected during a site visit in the fall of 2007—notably interviews conducted with five central office personnel and interviews with principals and coaches at three school sites).[3]

As we noted in last year's report, we began our research in Norwalk-LaMirada with a focus on central office leadership (including the literacy coaches) and the CEL-supported professional development activities in the district such as the "Good to Great" leadership academies, the Coaches' Academies, principal cadre sessions, and the district-developed LIT team and Roll-out days. Near the end of our first year of data collection, we selected two schools—one elementary school and one middle school—where we focused our school-level research efforts. The decision to select two schools was made because of limited research resources; the schools were chosen based on district and CEL recommendations of schools that were "on-board" with the Literacy Initiative activities. We felt that such schools would be

[3] We also interviewed teachers during that site visit and recorded field notes at several school-based events. We have not analyzed all of the data collected at that site visit but relied on central office and school administrator interviews to provide an up-to-date synopsis of district policies and procedures.

fruitful research sites for understanding how the Literacy Initiative was "rolled-out" at the school level.

Mid-year during 2006-2007, the CEL partnership study in Norwalk joined another study being conducted at the University of Washington called School Leadership Roles for Learning Improvement: How Schools Reconfigure, Assess, and Support Learning-focused Leadership.[4] As part of the study design, new schools were selected at the elementary and the high school level: we are now conducting research activities at three schools in Norwalk that include our original middle school site, an elementary school and a high school. In addition, we continue to focus on central office instructional leadership, the district's overall policies and procedures, and the CEL partnership activities around the district's Literacy Initiative.

Data Collection Procedures

Over the course of six site visits during 2006-2007, we conducted a total of 30 semi-structured individual interviews (these include 5 interviews conducted in this fall with central office leaders and 9 interviews conducted at school sites). 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:

- 9 interviews with central office leaders (2 each with area superintendents (one was a joint interview); 2 with the Superintendent; and 3 with personnel in the Assessment and Evaluation Department)
- 12 interviews with building principals including interviews with 6 of the 7 middle school principals and 4 elementary principals
- 2 interviews each with 2 different district literacy coaches (total 4 interviews)
- 9 interviews with classroom teachers (3 at one elementary school and 6 at one middle school—the middle school teacher interviews were conducted in the context of a new study and are not the primary focus of this report)

In addition, we conducted 38 observations of events related to the Norwalk/CEL partnership work including: district leadership academies and coaches' academies (N=4),

[4] The school study, in which Norwalk-LaMirada is a district site, is one of three studies of Learning-focused Leadership that are commissioned by the Wallace Foundation and that are being conducted by a team of researchers at the University of Washington. The other two studies focus on central office leadership and on the targeted use of resources to support instructional improvement agendas. For more information about CTP and related studies, visit www.ctpweb.org.

principals' cadres (N=8), school-based LIT team sessions and Roll-out professional development activities (N=4), coaching/classroom observations (N=16), and CEL consultant coaching of district coaches (N=6). Multiple artifacts, such as accountability plans and district policy documents, and handouts from professional development and coaching activities, were collected.

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) (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). We then identified 14 broad codes and subsequently coded all interviews using the HyperResearch qualitative data analysis program. Field notes and relevant documents were hand coded by research team members.

Following these open and focused coding procedures, 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 cross-case analyses that summarize findings across the three CEL partner school districts. To minimize bias and maximize data quality, we regularly check our assertions with local scholars and informants from CEL and the school district before proceeding to final writing stages.

Central Office and School Board Policy around the Literacy Initiative

"Staying the Course:" Consistency in Board Policy from 2003 through 2007

On November 3, 2003, an official board policy was set in NLMUSD with a goal that 9 of 10 students in the district would perform at grade level in reading based on the California Standards Test (CST) by 2007. In partnership with the Center for Educational Leadership at the University of Washington, the district launched (in the fall of 2004) the first centralized reform effort the NLMUSD School Board had sponsored in several years. The instructional reform has been called the "Literacy Initiative" and the focus on improvement in literacy instruction has stayed consistent over the past three (plus) years.[5]

As the spring of 2007 approached, it was clear that while students in the district had made gains in terms of the state testing system (see section on "student outcomes" below), the gains

[5] The Initiative has been redefined to more generalizable instructional practices such as student engagement, standards-based instruction, assessment-informed instruction, etc. and these have been promoted strongly at the secondary level. At the elementary level, the focus has remained Balanced Literacy practices.

were not enough to meet the Board goal of 9 out of 10 students at "grade level." One central office leader described the gains in this way:

> *And so if you really look at it, grade level would probably be at the higher end of basic* [on the California State Test]*—we've got to be at proficient and above.…we started out on the CST and it was like two and one-half out of 10. So we had a long way to go. This past year even the majority of* [of students in] *the district (based on the benchmark test) were at six out of ten.*

In May, 2007, district leaders met with key stakeholders (including teacher's association leaders) and made a proposal to the board to (1) continue the Literacy Initiative and (2) to set a revised timeline for meeting the 9 out of 10 goal. A revised board policy, adopted on May 31, 2007 and referred to across the district as "Priority One!" reads as follows:

> **"Priority One! 9 out of 10 Students Reading at Grade Level", with the following measurements: 7 out of 10 by 2008, 8 out of 10 by 2009 and 9 out of 10 by 2010, as measured by English Language Arts benchmark 4.**

Two things are notable about the new policy. First, the policy maintains the district focus on the Literacy Initiative with extended timelines for meeting the overall goal of 90% of students reading at "grade level" and, second, the policy uses a new measurement tool—a benchmark testing system available to districts in California.

The Superintendent told us that *"The Board of Education has maintained the priority of the Initiative. It has not wavered at all."* She further noted (in reference to her own potential retirement plans) that the Board had said, *"We will not hire a superintendent who does not want to continue this Initiative and the vision that we have—we will have 9 out of 10 reading at grade level, not by 2007 like we had hoped, but we will just lengthen the timeline and continue on our journey."* The School Board in Norwalk-LaMirada has been cohesive over the years of the Literacy Initiative. One new member joined the Board two years ago and one member was running for City Council last year, but otherwise the Board has remained stable.

The benchmark tests that the Board goal is now calibrated against are given to district students four times per year in English Language Arts (grades 2-11) and are intended as indicators of student progress on the California State Standards and ultimately on the CST that is administered each spring. The benchmark tests were developed by Action Learning Systems (based in Sacramento) and are described as correlated with the California State Test (see below in the section on student assessment for further discussion). According to one central office

leader, the benchmark tests have *"between a .78 and .82 correlation with how students perform on these and how they perform on the CSTs."* Central office informants suggested that there is still some discussion about whether the new Board policy should be based on performance on Benchmark Three or Benchmark Four (which is given after students have taken the CST). One central office leader noted that although the benchmark tests are tied to the standards and are correlated with the CST, *"there are only 2-3 questions per item, whereas when kids sit down to take the* [CST] *test, they have huge numbers."*

Even given their concerns that the Board goal is calibrated with assessments that will be predictive of student performance on the CST [and ultimately, with the California High School Exit Exam (CASHEE)], the central office leaders that we spoke with were of one mind about the need for a consistent Board priority and the need for district leadership to practice *"message discipline."* The following comment is representative of what we heard about the policy from the central office leaders that we interviewed:

> *The whole urgency piece with teachers and continuing a strong staff development* [program] *and just continuing message discipline that this is not going away, this is good teaching.. So just staying on message discipline and keeping all our resources in that direction and I think that no matter what we do that we don't let anyone in the organization veer from that. So for me, that's for the kids.*

Partnership with the Center for Educational Leadership (CEL)

The contract with CEL is re-negotiated each year and includes the services of a Project Director and several CEL consultants who work in various district professional development venues. In our first report (Gallucci & Swanson, 2006), we described the first two years of the contract. The 2006-2007 contract was reduced slightly from 165 days of CEL consultant time in 05-06 to 161 days (for professional development activities). The contract continued into the 2007-2008 school year and increased to a total of 189 days for the academic year only. Much of the additional time was contracted for Shannon Maul—a consultant who supports the Literacy Initiative at the middle and high school levels (for example, she is now conducting two "academy" days per month for high school language arts teachers, coaches, and principals). Katherine Casey has been a constant in Norwalk from the beginning of their contract with CEL; Wilma Kozai has been the Project Director for the district partnership; and in 07-08, Steve Fink (the CEL Executive Director) is coaching some of the central office leaders (the Superintendent and area superintendents) two days per month over 4 months.

Organizing for Reform: Central Office Changes 2007

Norwalk-LaMirada Unified School District partnered with the Panasonic Foundation over the past 10 years (the official Panasonic partnership ended in 2006-2007). The central office was reorganized in 2003-2004 with support provided through the Panasonic-funded *Leadership Associate Program (LAP)*—a leadership team of key district stakeholders who worked to streamline the organization of the central office in order to focus key leadership roles on instructional improvement (Gallucci & Swanson, 2006, p. 5). That reorganization was done intentionally as the district began its instructional reform in partnership with the Center for Educational Leadership *"to support where we were going"* (Superintendent, 10/2007). Beginning in the fall of 2007, the district once again reorganized its key central office functions. The Superintendent described this process and its historical roots:

> *The history was the traditional model of operational leaders at the elementary, middle, and secondary level. And, someone was in charge of curriculum, someone in charge of staff development—it was very compartmentalized, and just in the structure it made it siloed, very siloed. So people were doing wonderful work, but it wasn't connected….and it took many years to discover what we were doing. So once we were a partner with the Panasonic Foundation—they were like our critical friend and they would push us and ask us questions about our practices…*

The reorganization in 2003 included organizing schools into PreK-12 families—three of them—each headed by an Area Superintendent (AS). At the same time the district drastically cut back on the department structure at central office, reducing (for example) the curriculum and staff development departments to minimal administrative staff (that is, a secretary and another staff member). This fall, the district eliminated one of the Area Superintendent positions (one person retired in December, 2007), and reassigned one Area Superintendent to oversee all elementary schools and one all secondary schools. One of the area superintendents described the change as follows:

> *Well, based on declining enrollment and severe budget issues, we've had to re-think the support by family, where we were organized into three families….and that was a wonderful luxury to get the Initiative off the ground and running—it really worked in that manner. But, in reality, you have to think about keeping cuts away from the classroom and away from schools. So we elected to go back to an Area Superintendent for elementary schools and then an Area Superintendent for secondary schools. The* [third] *Area Superintendent will retire in December, and her job is to determine how best to support the departments and oversee those responsibilities to either one of the two of us*

(or another structure), but not hiring a new person at least for a year. That is the direction that the Board has given the Superintendent and she supports it.

Under this new arrangement, the retiring Area Superintendent is charged with coordinating the "support" departments in relation to the district's instructional improvement initiatives and building cohesiveness across them. There are four departments that are the focus of her work: Federal and State (Categorical) Programs; Special Education; Welfare, Health and Attendance; and Assessment and Evaluation. The Directors for these departments are all relatively new to the positions (many departments existed with minimal support staff in prior years)—three of the four have been on the job for one year and one is new this fall.

The two remaining area superintendents now support elementary and secondary schools, prioritizing issues of leadership for the Literacy Initiative and other related instructional improvement efforts. One AS now supervises 18 elementary schools, twelve of which are new schools for him (he had 9 elementary schools in his "family" for the past several years). Similarly, the other AS is now responsible for secondary schools that are new to him. The area superintendents were formerly responsible for a department within central office as well as their family of schools—currently, although they continue to supervise some central office functions (such as PreK-12 Arts programs and/or the Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment (BTSA) program), major departmental responsibilities have been lifted while the support needs of the departments are reassessed. Each AS has focused on visitations to their schools during the fall of 2007. For example, one had completed a two hour meeting with each principal and a walk through at each elementary school by mid-October.

Even with the reorganization and a significant set of budget cuts, the central office continued to provide resources to support the Initiative and its roll-out at the school level. The district released a number of teachers to attend LIT team sessions and district leadership academies. Further, a permanent substitute was available to every coach during Year Three, which created greater flexibility for coaches to work with individual teachers as the district increased its expectations for implementation.

Scaling Up the Literacy Initiative: Year Three

In this section, we describe the school district's reform strategies, including the ways in which they have provided "direction" for the reform through accountability mechanisms and the

ways that they have developed—through their CEL partnership—a range of professional learning options for educators in the system.

Professional Accountability for Initiative Outcomes

Year Three (2006-2007). In the spring of 2005, the Norwalk-LaMirada Leadership Associate Program (LAP) developed a set of accountability guidelines built around the Literacy Initiative that was aimed at central office leaders, principals, coaches and teachers. Although the document has existed for the past two school years, developing "teeth" for the guidelines has been a longer and more complicated process. The Superintendent, for example, described some of her frustrations regarding holding adults in the system accountable for the Literacy Initiative outcomes (January, 2007):

> *I would say everyone has what they are accountable for…it's all in writing. What I don't think we've done well enough is follow-up on it… And, how are we going to share that accountability piece? So I think it's out there and it's in the principals' evaluations; I've built it into the area superintendents' evaluations; it's built into mine. It's now in the teachers' evaluations, but there are other things regarding accountability that I don't think we bring to the conscious level.*

The Superintendent went on to explain that although (for example) teachers were accountable that year to "try on" Balanced Literacy instructional components, such as Shared Reading or Read Aloud, the meaning of "try it on" was not always understood.

> *I think that's our fault because we didn't make that clear to begin with…whether it's everyday, once, once a week, or once a month. It's not just once. So that's still a conversation we're having. That is, I don't think it is clear and consistent. Because you don't want one principal saying, ' we will do this everyday' and another principal saying, 'Well, once a week is okay.' So until we have a consistent message, we've still got a dis-connect there.*

Likewise, two of the area superintendents recounted (in the fall of 2006) the difficulty of communicating to all principals about a new assessment of teachers' skill with the Balanced Literacy components (called "the Read Aloud/Shared Reading continuum"). Their frustration was with the way that their messages were interpreted across principals. *"We communicated it in several venues, several times, and the first staff development that I was at with one of my principals, the principal started giving a completely different message."* It was also not perfectly clear last year whether the use of the Balanced Literacy components was actually part of the

teachers' assessment process on the part of principals, and (if it was) in what ways. Two of the area superintendents (called #1 and #2) discussed the problem in November, 2006:

#1: *They have to do it* [Read Aloud and Shared Reading].
#2: *It's not evaluative in terms of quality.*
#1: *They have to try it.*
#2: *But only if they do or they don't.*
Interviewer: *Do they have to do it once?*
#2: *Well, that's what the whole plan is about.*
Interviewer: *The accountability plan?*
#2: *The whole continuum: where you are, where you want to be, and these are the steps. Now my interpretation…if I had a teacher, who we'd agreed would do certain things and then didn't do it, then I'd say you didn't do it just because you did it once….*
#1: *But, I'm sure that's out there* [the idea of doing it once],
#2: *I'm sure.*

The area superintendents acknowledged that during Year Three they struggled to be consistent in their own actions. For example, one AS told us that *"I've had so many of these conversations with different principals at different times, but not consistently…not where I can talk to one and keep my notes and come back two weeks later and say, 'We talked about this, now* [how are you doing?]."

Year Four (2007-2008). When we visited the district during the fall of 2007—Year Four of the Literacy Initiative—there a clear change in the language of the central office leaders. One AS put it this way:

> *I feel the pressure's on, the bar's been lifted on me. I have to do more because the work is harder for principals now and how do I know if all of the teachers at that school are doing the work unless I'm there. They all have to do the work this year. So I think that's why I'm feeling the bar raised and I need to be there.*

The Superintendent commented that *"we're getting more focused and deliberate and accountable for what we want to have happen in our schools."* This language was manifested in several behavioral changes on the part of the top central office leaders:

- The Superintendent began meeting with individual principals in the spring of 2007 and continued that practice into the fall of 2007. The focus of her conversations was first on *"looking at their standard scores and their APIs and why they were where they were."* This year, she intended to *"tie it into some of the things* [a consultant] *did with professional*

learning communities…and, let me understand how you are infusing the initiative into your school culture as a whole."

- There was clarity among the Superintendent and the area superintendents that principals were to be *"in 3-5 classrooms per day"* observing instruction and assessing the professional development needs of their teachers.
- The two area superintendents were exercising leadership "voice" to maintain a more consistent message to schools. Part of this was clear in the way that they described their new role as prioritizing consistent visits to schools that included: (1) a review of expectations with principals; (2) walks through classrooms during which the AS would model how to keep track of observations; and (3) reflecting with the principal on next steps. One AS said of the process: *"As consistent as we are in talking to each other…they will hear the same message and they'll hear the same voice and get the same level of monitoring, support, and encouragement."*
- To the extent that they maintain the schedule of school visits that began the 2007-2008 school year, the area superintendents were also increasing their leadership "presence" in the schools. They began the year with a fast-pace of visits: one was visiting two elementary schools per day and the other planned to visit each secondary school four times by December. The AS who supervised elementary schools was purposeful about including the literacy coach for that school in his visits, even modeling Balanced Literacy processes himself.

  > *We did independent reading with conferring* [at the district leadership academies] *and what I feel is my responsibility is to model for the principals that they should be going back and trying on conferring during independent reading. So, tomorrow…we're going to go into a 3rd grade room and* [the principal] *and I are going to confer with kids and let* [the coach] *coach us in the kinds of questions we would ask. So, I'm going to do that tomorrow and then do it on Thursday* [at another school].

- The area superintendents reported that they write follow-up messages to school staffs and principals after each school visit (again, the exercise of leadership "voice"). These 1-2 page briefs typically outlined what was done during the visit and summarized what each area superintendent saw on his walkthrough. A segment of one such message follows:

  > "As we walked through classrooms, we were able to see efforts in place to establish classroom libraries. In many classrooms, students are able to access 'just right books,' as well as books of interest. There was a variety of ways that teachers have organized the

books. I was impressed with the efforts to level the Spanish books, as well as the amount of time many are spending (including Saturdays) to get their library "student friendly."

- Another important means of exercising leadership "voice" is "The Good to Great" Update—a weekly newsletter that goes out to schools from the area superintendents. [Note that this letter is not new this year.] The letter communicates important aspects of the Literacy Initiative to all principals. Principals are encouraged to take articles from the "Good to Great" newsletter and use them in their own weekly staff memos. The district newsletter also includes articles written by building principals and/or district literacy coaches.

Holding Principals Accountable. In 2006-2007, the central office leaders had difficulty making regular school visits to hold principals accountable for implementing the Literacy Initiative. 'Implementation' in this case meant holding teachers responsible for "trying on" strategies such as Read Aloud and Shared Reading and for supporting teachers in "creating a classroom environment to support balanced literacy."[6] While area superintendents expected that principals were in classrooms monitoring implementation of these strategies, they readily admitted that it was difficult given their own various responsibilities to make school visits a consistent part of their leadership routine. Two of the area superintendents made the following comments last November (2006): *"I would be very honest. I don't think I'm doing a very good job." "Overtime, not enough." "We're very saddled. You saw me pulled off for half an hour on a union issue; a variety of phones calls and different things."* The formal evaluation form for principals (document dated 8/30/06), however, listed many objectives related to the Literacy Initiative, including these examples from the "Instructional Leadership" section:

- Participate in all aspects of the 2006-2007 Literacy Academy; provide staff development for staff on the work of the Initiative (Read Alouds, Shared Reading, Independent Reading, Guided Reading). Participate on all LIT team meetings.
- Meet with each staff member to determine their next steps in using Read Aloud and Shared Reading to improve student comprehension and engagement [NOTE: this is apparently in reference to the use of the Read Aloud/Shared Reading continuum as an assessment of teachers' next steps—see below.].

Under the "Overall Leadership," section principals were expected to:

- Practice the instructional skills presented at the Leadership Academy.

[6] Both strategies (Read Aloud and Shared Reading)—see Appendix A for a description of the components of Balanced Literacy—were introduced through the "Good-to-Great Academy" by CEL consultants. See "Providing Support" sections for further explanation. The components of the classroom environment include, for example: a whole group meeting area, classroom libraries, use of charting.

- Assist K-2 staff with Running Record assessments….
- Review the accountability plan for yourself on a regular basis.
- Plan (with coach and demo teachers) all LIT team meetings.

Other sections of the principals' evaluation form included organizational communication (weekly bulletin, message discipline); collaborative leadership (Council, Union, PLC staff development); fiscal resources management; public relations management; and parent/community leadership.

The expectations for principals for 2007-2008 are described in at least two places: the principals' evaluation form (under next steps) and a document detailing the joint agreement with the teachers union for that year. In both cases, the specifics regarding the principals' role in implementing the Literacy Initiative components include (1) continuing to provide educational leadership that supports 'the work;' (2) using the Read Aloud/Shared Reading continuum to assess teacher progress and growth; (3) visiting and observing in a minimum of 3 (up to 5) classrooms everyday to inform and plan for professional development needs; and (4) providing regular feedback to staff regarding the classroom visits.

The area superintendents (and the Superintendent through her meetings with individual principals) planned to monitor the principals with regular school visits during 2007-2008. One AS said, regarding the principal evaluation cycle completed during the summer of 2007:

> *Our next step for our principals, because they have a lot on their plates—there is the technology piece (we want them using the palm pilot, we want them to use the Data Director, we want them to look at the benchmarks, plus do all this work)—is now that you're an instructional leader, you need to be out in your classrooms, at least three classrooms everyday. And, how are you going to take your notes when you go and visit, how are you going to give teachers feedback, how is this going to impact the way you do staff development for your school? And so that's an expectation, that every principal will be keeping track in some way of the dates of the classroom visits, that in some way they're taking notes on what they are seeing….so that's an accountability piece that we think was our next step that we needed to take.*

As the Superintendent put it in October of 2007, *"I think there's more deliberateness about what we do. And it was before, but it's deeper deliberateness. The principals' accountability is deeper. My work with the principals is deeper."*

District Literacy Coaches. Beginning during 2006-2007, the district increased the number of literacy coaches to 15 and placed one coach full-time at each of the three comprehensive high schools. The other 12 coaches were divided among the elementary and

middle schools (four coaches per "family" of schools). Each coach served approximately two schools. During the 3rd year of the initiative, the coaches moved from working closely with principals to "roll-out" the reform (through professional development sessions for whole staff—called Roll-outs—and LIT team whole day sessions) to a focus on supporting classroom teachers, especially the demonstration classrooms in each building.[7] Two of the area superintendents described this change in November, 2006:

> *We met with each principal and coach at the beginning of the year. One of the reasons we did that was to talk about the relationship that we saw them having for this coming year and whose role was what. And, I think, we all communicated the same thing. This was to be a gradual release year for coaches to the classroom, from primarily working with the principal to the coach getting out more into the demo, the LIT team classrooms, and if they had time, into the regular classrooms with teachers.*

In Year Three, the principal and the LIT team members were to plan the Roll-out staff development sessions and then ask for input from the coaches. The idea was that coaches might be asked to do a piece of the Roll-out session, but the principal and the LIT team were to do most of it. An AS noted, *"And, that is what was communicated, but, again, I don't know if that's what is happening because I'm hearing from the literacy coaches that principals are still demanding too much time."* At the high schools, it was just the opposite. In those settings, the coaches generally did not get enough time with the principals (according to the area superintendents).

During the 06-07 year, the literacy coaches (something we noted in our last report regarding Year Two as well) were not generally evaluated following formal procedures. Their position resides in an intermediary position between the central office and schools and their role is neither teacher nor principal. There is apparently no specialized evaluation process in place for the literacy coaches. However, because they are technically "teachers on special assignment," if they were evaluated, the process would follow the procedures that are in place for teachers. The coaches are supervised by the area superintendents. One AS described the problem:

> *But, we've done a lousy job of evaluating them because they go on professional options—they've been turning them in. We don't observe them teaching. They do something on a professional options plan where they decide, like they're going to work on classroom libraries or something they can do that's more appropriate to what they're doing. And*

[7] See our report written in October, 2006 for a description of the staff development structures the district put in place during the second year of the reform (Gallucci & Swanson, 2006 available at www.k-12leadership.org).

> *then, they all have the Stull Bill…So we have to adjust what they do to meet those objectives.*[8]

The area superintendents also reported that they did not meet regularly with the coaches (once a month was the aim), although the coaches did meet monthly with Katherine Casey for their own professional development (see below regarding support structures for coaches). As one AS reported, a change for 07-08 was including the literacy coaches in his school walkthroughs and discussions with principals. *"We were not regular in meeting with them once a month, so we're really bringing the reins back in and realizing we have to. Now that's just perfect because like* [a coach] *tomorrow will be coaching* [the principal] *and I so I can watch her and have a sense of her skills in that area."*

Teacher Accountability. We described above the confusion over the term "trying on" in terms of expectations for all teachers in the district during the 2006-2007 school year. Issues related to teacher accountability around implementation of the Literacy Initiative are complicated in Norwalk-LaMirada by several factors, including: (1) teachers' contract negotiations and other agreements with the union and (2) the various roles that teachers can play in the Initiative (e.g., demo teachers, LIT team members). In this section, we describe (based on limited data collected at the classroom level) the "official" teacher accountability story—that is, what are official expectations for teachers regarding the reform implementation and how teachers are assessed regarding their progress toward those goals.

Clearly, leaders in Norwalk understand that teachers are the keys to the success of the Literacy Initiative. The Superintendent put it succinctly last winter (1/07): *"You can bring up test scores, but they'll go back down. If you increase the learning and the capacity of teachers to teach, then it will be sustainable."* One of the area superintendents noted this fall (07) that *"it's all around teachers. Teachers make the difference."* Even, he said, similar to good principals, it would be the teachers who make the difference within schools. The strategy for building capacity among teachers and bringing it to scale across the district has been influenced by the CEL's theory that developing capacity among "goers" will build internal capacity to support others in the system.

[8] The Stull Bill is a California State law that was passed in 1971. It requires districts to evaluate teachers based on objectives set in each of six broad areas of practice based on the California State Standards for the Teaching Profession.

In Norwalk, in the 2nd year of the reform, demonstration teachers were designated as the first classrooms to receive intensive professional development around the Literacy Initiative, with the understanding that these classrooms would become sites for the learning of other teachers. Demonstration teachers attended the monthly Leadership Academies (see Gallucci & Swanson, 2006), were coached by the literacy coaches, and were members of the building LIT (Literacy Initiative) teams. In return, the demonstration teachers were expected to build a deep skill base around the literacy practices and be willing to demonstrate those skills for other professionals. In most schools through last year, at least one if not two teachers from each grade level were also members of a LIT team. This group of teachers met for one full day per month and formed the next "layer" of expertise in the school. Although some principals began raising the ante for LIT members during the spring of 2006—asking them to step up as leaders of their grade level teams and to bring what they were learning back to those settings—this practice was variable and often LIT members were not clear about their role beyond the professional development sessions they attended (Gallucci & Swanson, 2006).

From the point of view of the central office leaders, the demonstration teachers and the LIT members were ahead of the rest of the teachers in the buildings. This is where the "trying on" language comes in. All teachers were expected to "try on" Read Aloud and Shared Reading last year (whereas LIT members were often working on Independent Reading and Guided Reading). An Interactive Read Aloud Continuum was developed and principals were asked to meet with all teachers to help them assess themselves and set a goal for the year related to the practice of the Read Aloud. As noted above, the "continuum" was implemented variably across the district. At the same time, all teachers were expected to provide a rich classroom environment that included a gathering place for group discussions, classroom libraries and the use of co-constructed charts (as a scaffold to support students' independent work).

This year, all elementary teachers and ELA secondary teachers *"will actually be held accountable for the classroom environment, the Read Aloud and the Shared Reading piece. That's a top priority over everything"* (AS, 10/07). Several documents list the agreements made with TANLA (teachers' association). The following language is in the agreements:

- K-5 grade language arts teachers are expected to incorporate purposeful and well planned approaches of Read Aloud and Shared Reading into their daily instruction (part of the evaluation).

- 6-9th grade language arts teachers are expected to incorporate purposeful and well planned approaches of Read Aloud and Shared Reading into their units of study (part of the evaluation).
- K-9th grade language arts teachers are expected to continue to provide a learning environment that supports the work, is print rich, provides a meeting area, co-constructed charts, classroom library (part of the evaluation).
- K-11th grade teachers will use data to inform instruction (part of the evaluation).
- K-9th grade language arts teachers will be expected to practice small group instruction, Guided Reading (K-5 only), and Independent Reading with conferring/assessment (non-evaluative).
- 10th grade language arts teachers are expected to practice using Read Aloud and Shared Reading in their units of study (non-evaluative).

Currently, teachers' evaluation is on a 3 year cycle (for veteran teachers) and the evaluation itself is based on the Stull Bill and the California State Standards for the Teaching Profession. The process of fitting the various instruments (Interactive Read Aloud Continuum, official evaluation forms, word of mouth about TANLA/district agreements) together to form a cohesive implementation process is "in progress."

Accountability Systems for Monitoring Student Progress

Norwalk-LaMirada added two new forms of student assessment and a system for monitoring data called Data Director that was available to all classroom teachers during Year Three of the Initiative. In this section, we describe how these new systems work and what they are intended to do (specific outcome data is presented in a later section of the report). Our primary sources of data for this section are the Director and a staff member from the district's Assessment and Evaluation department.

Benchmark Assessments. As mentioned earlier, the district added a new "benchmark" testing system during the 2006-2007. The benchmark tests are administered to students in English Language Arts four times a year and in mathematics three times a year across the district. The tests are scored by Action Learning Systems and the data are uploaded to Data Director within 8 days, where they are then available to teachers for analysis. The tests "*are supposed to be 45 minutes, but fairly across the board, it takes more than 45 minutes, which a big commitment for a teacher.*" One AS credited a district principal with "*finding*" the benchmark testing system for the district.

Direct Reading Assessment (DRA). The DRA, also referred to as the *Developmental Reading Assessment,* was "rolled-out" in Norwalk-LaMirada for all K-2 students during the fall

of 2006. Students were assessed one-on-one and earned four sub-scores ranging from 1-4 in the areas of: Retelling, Fluency, Accuracy, and Phrasing (a total score of 12 is needed to pass to the next higher reading level). The assessment was administered in Norwalk-LaMirada schools by teachers three times during 2006-2007. Teachers were provided with a substitute so that they could administer the assessment to individual students. During the first round of DRA assessments in the fall, the literacy coaches were deployed to each school (all of the coaches to one site) to support teachers in the process and to help them develop accurate scoring practices (Director, Assessment and Evaluation, 11/06). Prior to the start of school, the area superintendents and the coaches *"each took a grade level and spent a day training the teachers."* The coaches continue to support teachers at each of their schools as they administer the DRA assessment during 2007-2008.

Data Director. Data Director is a web-based warehouse and assessment management system. Data Director was developed by Achieve! Data Solutions, LLC—a company founded in 2002 by Action Learning Systems (the California-based professional development company and producer of the benchmark testing system) and WebMedia Solutions, an educational technology developer. Achieve! is best known for Data Director and markets the tool in 40 school districts across California and Michigan. [Interestingly, Achieve! was recently acquired by Harcourt Education company.] Norwalk-LaMirada began using the Data Director system during 2006-2007 and by the accounts of our central office informants, they are very happy with the system.

According to the Director of Assessment and Evaluation, schools can access a *"multi-assessment report, which is called a pre-built report* [using Data Director]. *They just click on a certain link to see all their students and how they previously performed, for the last four years, on all the different state assessments at one glance."* Teachers can access the system from their homes so they can reach information about individual students easily. Teachers can save "pre-built" reports and then tailor them to meet their own instructional needs (assuming they understand the system).

In the fall of 2007, the district deployed two personnel to "roll-out" Data Director to schools. A retired former principal and a former teacher/counselor working in the Assessment and Evaluation department conducted in-service sessions in schools about the system. As well, if teachers or principals call (something district officials hope they do) they receive the attention of these specialists to learn more about how to use the system. According to one central office

staff member, "*The principals are really invested in this—they really enjoy it. It gives them a lot of information—I won't say every principal, but almost all principals have called me to ask how to do something and then I show them and it's like, 'wow! I knew there was a way, but I just couldn't remember how to do it.'* He went on to explain,

> *So the principals are trying to keep the teachers on top of this. When they get their benchmark scores, the principals are trying to get the teachers to do what we basically did right here between you and I* [learn how to read the achievement data]. *There are other reports where it's more by student. You get to see whether they got* [an item] *right or wrong and what the correct answer was.*

Although the district was just beginning the building-based professional development for the system, some enterprising teachers downloaded data for their incoming students before the school year began. One of our teacher informants had set up an individual record keeping system to monitor student growth throughout the year. Student folders included the benchmark scores, the CST scores, and space to record conferring notes, student work and reading log data.

One of the features of the system that is thought to be especially helpful is the integration of the district's student information system (SASI) with the assessment data in the Data Director system. In this case, *"what our teachers see, even if they don't have data for this year yet, they get to see their students and last year's data."*

Providing Support for Professional Learning

Year Three (2006-2007) of the Literacy Initiative in NLMUSD saw a continuation of the structures that were put in place for professional learning during Years One and Two of the Initiative. In addition, during Year Three and going into Year Four, efforts were made to expand these structures to include more classroom teachers, in some cases, all teachers in a building. In the sections following, we briefly describe these professional learning structures and then provide more detailed "case" examples of two of them: (1) the cadre structure intended to support principal learning and (2) the support structures for the district literacy coaches. We conclude this section on "providing support" by mentioning in brief a number of other instructionally-related professional development initiatives supported by the district.[9]

[9] We do not have extensive data on these other professional learning opportunities as they are not part of the CEL/district partnership and therefore have not been the focus of our research activities.

The basic structures that began in the first year of the Initiative (2004-2005) and that were developed in conjunction with the Center for Educational Leadership (CEL) at the University of Washington continue in Norwalk-LaMirada. These include the following:

- Monthly, one day Leadership Academies called the "Good to Great Academy." Katherine Casey (CEL consultant) continued to lead and teach at the sessions. In Year Three, the sessions were divided for elementary schools and middle schools. Elementary schools continued to bring principals and demonstration teachers to the sessions. Middle school teams included principals and teachers who were members of the LIT teams, which were almost exclusively made up of language arts teachers. In both cases, literacy coaches attended the sessions with their schools. During Year Three the content of the sessions (in general) continued to include components of Balanced Literacy (moving into Independent Reading and Guided Reading), powerful instructional strategies, and teaching to standards (with continued reference to related instructional leadership). Shannon Maul began working with high school coaches and literacy team members. During Year Four of the Initiative, academy days were similarly scheduled, but at the secondary level, all English language arts teachers began attending the sessions.
- Coaches' Academy Days, which were one-day per month, also continued in Year Three and into Year Four of the initiative. The sessions were typically attended by all district literacy coaches; area superintendents joined when possible, trying to attend at least part of each session. In addition, during Year Three, each literacy coach was supported by Katherine Casey for a half day professional coaching session focused on coaching strategies and content selected by the coach (see below for an example).
- Principals' cadres continued during Year Three. At the elementary level, each "family" of principals (approximately 6 per team) met one day per month with CEL consultant Jan Kaneko. At the middle level, Project Director Wilma Kozai worked with the principals and at the high school level support for cadre work was provided by CEL consultant Jack Fleck. These sessions were also attended by the area superintendents. The content focused on instructional leadership strategies (see below for a detailed example).
- Summer school sessions continued to be sites for professional learning in 2006. They included CEL coaching in four areas focused on (1) high school teaching (15 coaching days provided by Shannon Maul); (2) K-8 teaching (8 days of coaching by Katherine Casey); (3)

K-1 programs (4 days of coaching by Sylvia McGrade); and (4) ELL programs (2 days of coaching by Mary Waldron).

- LIT Team days continued at middle and elementary schools. They occurred on one day per month in 06-07; the central office provided six substitute teachers per building. Schools varied in terms of LIT members—some schools had 12 and some continued with about 6 teachers (when principals included more teachers in the LIT days, school resources were used to release teachers). The content of the LIT days typically followed the instructional content of the leadership academy days and last year focused on balanced literacy components such as Independent Reading and Guided Reading. At some elementary schools, "mini-LITs" for grade level teams popped up as did additional LIT teams (see below under Progress Report for Elementary Schools for more discussion).
- Roll-out Days continued as staff development for whole school staff members into Year Three. These sessions typically focused on instructional practices (e.g., Balanced Literacy components) although the specifics were driven by the learning needs of classroom teachers as revealed by principal, literacy coach, and demonstration teacher observations. At the middle schools, the literacy coaches made an effort to focus on instructional strategies that applied to all content areas, such as creating co-constructed charts, questioning, and using text features. The sessions were typically two hours in length and occurred one time per month during the Wednesday early release.

Table 1
Support Structures: Year Three

Learning Environment	Participants	Frequency	Content
"Good to Great" Academy	District leaders Principals Literacy coaches Demonstration teachers Teachers' association leadership CEL consultant CEL project director	One day per month Separate days for elementary, middle, and high school levels	Balance literacy Powerful instruction Teaching to standards Instructional leadership
Coaches Academy	Literacy coaches area superintendents (sometimes) CEL consultant	One day per month	Balance literacy Powerful instruction Instructional coaching

Principal Cadres	area superintendents Principals CEL consultant	6 times per year for each "family" of schools.	Instructional leadership [e.g, classroom observations, giving feedback to teachers, establishing leadership voice]
Summer School	Literacy coaches Classroom teachers CEL consultants [Intermittent participation by CEL Project Director]	4 weeks	Use of components of Balance Literacy in classroom teaching (focus on specific levels such as high school teaching, K-1 teaching, or ELL teaching).
LIT Team	Principal 6-12 teachers District literacy coach	One day per month	Balanced literacy Powerful instruction Classroom environment
Expanded LIT Teams	District literacy coach Classroom teachers Principal (sometimes)	Year Three: Variable by school Year Four: Expanding in most schools to include more teachers	Balanced Literacy Powerful instruction Classroom environment
Roll-out Days	Principal District literacy coach Classroom teachers	Two hours per month	Balanced literacy Powerful instruction Classroom environment

Related Professional Development Activities

There are several other "initiatives" that are ongoing in the Norwalk-LaMirada school district—although none of these activities is front and center (or supported in board policy) as is the Literacy Initiative. In fact, central office leaders comment consistently that these professional development efforts "support" the Literacy Initiative. Often, outside consultants who lead these activities are asked to attend the Leadership Academies in order to develop some understanding about the Literacy Initiative. One central office leader commented, *"So our math has also come up with 'what is the work of math?' because 'what's our work in literacy or any content area?' We've identified that as assessments, standards, questioning, student engagement, and meaning-making. And, that applies to math or any content area we would address."* Likewise, the Superintendent feels that the important work of having difficult

conversations with (for example) teachers around Initiative implementation requires learning on the part of principals. She said, *"They don't* [necessarily] *know how to translate that into having the difficult conversations coming up now as…teachers are trying this on. You want to have conversations that are legitimate without destroying you or them."* She sees the work with Cindy Harrison (see following) as supporting this type of learning. The following professional development activities are underway in the district:

- The district has contracted for over a decade with Cindy Harrison who provides professional development related to Professional Learning Communities (PLC) and site-based leadership (e.g., shared decision making). She generally works with principals and has had school-based contracts with several middle schools and at least one elementary school.

- The district has a contract with California State University at Fullerton, specifically with Marty Bonsangue, for professional development in secondary mathematics. Most of the effort in math in the district is around algebra. Two recent grants were written to expand this work and bring it into summer school.

- Starting last year but expanding this year, the district has contracted with Susan Dutro to introduce Systematic ELD instruction. Several elementary schools have sent teams of educators to two workshops. The state has mandated that ELD instruction occur for 30-45 minutes per day outside the literacy block and the district is in part responding to this state initiative. At the same time, schools are aware that they must bump up the performance of the EL population (large in Norwalk schools) on the state tests this year in order to continue to make progress on API/AYP.

- There were brief mentions in our data of two other efforts: an arts initiative and RTI (a targeted intervention effort as a pre-referral for students who might be identified for special education services).

Looking Deeper: Case Reports on Two Forms of "Support"

The depth of the support for professional learning in Norwalk-LaMirada is unique. Not only is the support deep, it is likewise well-coordinated. The pieces fit together and, to the degree that leaders stay clear about the goals and purposes of the reform, the focus of professional development sessions across the district is consistent. The Superintendent, her area superintendents, and the Board have kept their focus on the Literacy Initiative and the district has maintained its relationship with CEL to deliver most of the professional learning opportunities over the past three-four years. In this section of the report, we provide in-depth description and analysis of part of this support system—the principals' cadre meetings and two types of support

for the learning of the literacy coaches. Because principals and coaches function as key conduits for reform ideas, their professional growth is of utmost importance.

Principal Cadre Meetings: Learning to Lead for Instructional Improvement

We attended eight principal cadre sessions during 2006-2007. The following summary describes in some detail one elementary cadre session that took place in March, 2007 and notes similarities and differences between it and two other cadre sessions that occurred over three days that month. The middle school cadres follow a similar format although there appeared to be more variation in their content depending on the host principal's priorities.

Elementary Principals

Elementary principal cadre sessions are intended as opportunity for principals within one feeder pattern "family" of schools to work on their instructional leadership skills. A CEL leadership consultant typically plans the session with the host principal (based on input from the group at the previous session)—session locations rotate through the elementary schools in each family. Sessions have occurred 6 times per year and have been scheduled on three days in a row (across the three families of schools). The cadre sessions provide guided practice for the principals at school sites regarding instructional leadership. Typical activities include classroom observations, teacher conferences (planning for them, conducting them with a live teacher, and debriefing them with group of principals), reading professional literature related to literacy instruction and/or leadership (e.g., reading *School Leadership that Works*, Marzano & Waters[10]), and planning school professional development sessions related to the Literacy Initiative.

The CEL consultant who works with the elementary principal cadres reported that her role is *"to support the work the principals are engaged in here in Norwalk."* She brings a set of beliefs to the cadre work. *"My belief is that principals need to get in the classrooms on a regular basis in order to analyze the instruction, to see what's going on in their classrooms, and assess teachers' learning needs."* She also believes that professional development is *"the key"* and that part of being able to analyze classroom instruction is to understand the implications of that analysis for planning professional development in the building.

[10] The district has generally supplied coaches and principals with professional literature as requested. This book was passed out at the cadre meetings we observed but was not the topic of discussion that month. (It was discussed in one cadre session we observed in January.)

At one cadre session that we attended in March of 2007, the participants included the host principal, 5 other elementary principals, the area superintendent for that family of schools, and the CEL consultant. Following is the agenda for the session:

Agenda:

7:45am	Meet, room 43, order lunches
8:00-8:30	Classroom observation, 5th grade
8:35-9:00	Observe 2nd grade, ELL classroom, demonstration teacher
9:00-9:25	Plan debrief
9:20-9:40	Debrief with 5th grade T
9:40-10:00	Feedback on debrief
10:00-10:15	Break
10:15-12:00	Leadership professional development lead by CEL consultant

The group convened at 8:00am and immediately left to observe lessons in two classrooms. First, they saw a 5th grade Read Aloud lesson and then a 2nd grade Shared Reading of a poetry text. The adults present observed, scripted parts of lesson, and tried to "listen in" as students talked to one another during "turn and talks" (partner talk). What follows is a vignette from the 5th grade Read Aloud lesson taken from our field notes—a lesson that the principal debriefed later that morning with the teacher.

> Students (S) were grouped on the floor in the gathering area of the classroom; the teacher (T) was sitting on a low chair with a book in her lap. There were charts for each of several characters in the book on the board behind the teacher. T was doing an "opening" for the lesson when we walked in:
>
> *We've used a lot of good strategies (prior knowledge and personal experience; we monitored, clarified, and modeled think aloud). As you listen to me read, use these strategies.*
>
> *Remember, Jonas* [they were reading The Giver by Lois Lowry] *has two memories (war and Christmas)—2 opposite emotions. Turn and talk to your partner: What do you think Jonas is going through now that he has experienced these good memories and bad memories?*
>
> The T listened in to one or two groups while students were talking. [Note: these children seem very used to talking in pairs. No management issues.]
> T called them back and said *"I heard a lot of sharing."* She called on a pair…S explains that Jonas might have been starting to *"feel like a normal person."*
>
> T asks *"What do we know about the community?* [She kept talking.] W*e know they are 'like robots.'"* Then, she began reading. In a moment, she paused and explained a concept to the students. Then she says, *"We've been learning about literacy devices and the author's use of similes and metaphors."* In the story, she was referring to the fire

burning and candles and the terms used by the author: light and brightness. She asks the students: *"What are you thinking?"*
One student (same as before) answered "*Makes you feel joyful and warm…."*
T asked, *"anyone else?"* The T then began explaining something about getting to the 'white' part of the onion [deeper meaning?] and went on to explain something about the story. T continued reading and then asked another 'turn and talk' question. After kids talked, she asked one student to give his thoughts, then explained some ideas to students and continued reading.
Lesson continued [we were there for approx 20 minutes]

The principals went to another classroom and observed a short Shared Reading lesson with 2nd graders; then returned to an empty classroom used as a meeting space. Immediately, the CEL consultant began a conversation about the principal's debrief of the first teacher's lesson. What follows is a sample of that conversation [J=CEL consultant; HP=Host Principal; P=other principal; AS=Assist Sup]:

J: *We want to focus on the strengths of the lesson and what might be a leverage point to* [help] *the teacher be more effective in her instruction. We're going to focus on* [T #1] *and probably won't have time for* [T#2].
So what were the strengths of the teacher's lesson?
P: *Pointed to strategies that good readers use and immediately let them know to use them.*
P: *Used the strategies in the actual lesson.*
AS: *Used think aloud and modeled that.*
[Conversation continues in similar vein]
HP: *She thought about the standards (characters); she was charting* [she had a chart for each character].
P: *She didn't give the kids a lot of time to share.*
J: *Yes, she was doing a lot of the work.*
[Other principals talk about this point.]
HP: *Her strength was the selection of a good, strong text.* [He goes back to praise here.]
J: *Yes, we need to compliment teachers on that* [use of age-appropriate text].
[Goes on…]
J: *Want to think about something that will give you the most "bang for the buck" in terms of teacher growth…which of these things do you think will do that?*
P: *I think release to students*
P: *That helps her assess their learning…*
J: *What do we want the teacher to leave with today?*
HP: *…if she could open it up to questions right at the point of kid's energy…and ask "what are you thinking?"*
J: *So if that's the case, what is it you want her to do?*
HP: *Balance between open-ended and more specific questions so it keeps the group more engaged. Her chunking was okay, but we want her to be more in-depth…*

J: *So students will do more of the work. So what will you ask her?*
[This continues for some time and the CEL consultant and the host principal (with some input from other principals) got increasingly specific about what the host principal will actually say to this teacher when she comes in for the debrief.]

Following this planning session, the teacher came in and the host principal introduced her and jokes were made to put her at ease. The host principal began the debrief with the teacher by asking her to *"restate her objective."* The teacher said that the [Houghton Mifflin--HM[11]] benchmark assessments had shown that her kids were struggling with (California State) Standard 3.1 (character analysis and how characters work together in fiction to carry out a plot). She started her work on this standard by using HM to scaffold their learning (with stories from the anthology) and had just introduced the book, *The Giver* (a challenging text for them). The host principal asked her what she thought were the strengths of the lesson (she said 'charting' and talked about her literacy coach and the work she had done with her). The host principal said, "I*n terms of this lesson?"* and the teacher replied, *"The kids have grown in terms of understanding what a character is…*"etc. This went on and then host principal asked her, *"I was thinking…what can we learn from this lesson? What I was wondering was what could you tell—how much were you able to get from the kids?"* The teacher immediately identified what the principals in the group had thought was a problem. She said, *"My next challenge is when doing Read Alouds, I feel like I'm giving them all the answers…trying to find ways to pull answers from them without giving it to them."* [At this point, host principal seemed to steer her into a conversation about kids who were struggling or might not "get it" and strategies for working with them and pulling them into the conversation.]

After the teacher left, host principal said, *"I'm exhausted!"* The following conversation summarizes his struggle in conducting the debrief.

HP: *You* [CEL consultant] *were pushing me to not be too prescriptive, but she was answering broadly. I tried to go back to the lesson…tried to ask open-ended questions, but she passed over the important question (have kids summarize the story plot). Then I became more prescriptive…*
J: *What do you think she left thinking?*
HP: *I tried to have her think about having the kids summarize…*
J: *You wanted her to leave thinking she needs to do less of the work. Do you think she left thinking that?*
HP: *I could have restated that…*

[11] Houghton-Mifflin is one of two state-adopted texts—the district adopted it at least 5 years ago, prior to the CEL supported Literacy Initiative.

J: She identified the problem at the beginning when she said, "Kids need to do more of the talking."
P: You might have asked, "how would you do that?"
[Debrief of debrief continues….]

Near the end of the session, the CEL consultant stated two general objectives of the teacher conference (to learn more about the teacher's thinking and to move the practice of the teacher). She said it takes a lot of practice. Another principal said, *"It takes a lot of honesty…we can't grow if we don't practice."* The CEL consultant assured everyone present that *"you don't realize how far you've come in three years…you are seeing so much more…"* The host principal said, *"I learned to think about getting as clear as I can on the teaching point and move when the teacher brings it up to focus on that."*

After a break (this was two hours into the session), the CEL consultant handed out a template put together by the NLMUSD area superintendents on "leadership voice" that was a template for leading with "voice" at professional development meetings. The area superintendent for this family of schools had asked each principal to turn in a script they had used for opening a professional development session at their school. [The CEL consultant told us later that this was in response to the literacy coaches' feedback that some principals were not participating enough in professional development sessions.] There was some discussion and sharing about how principals were trying to implement "voice" at professional development sessions. The group talked about developing a "rationale" for whatever is being taught to staff. One of the principals gave an example:

> [At professional development sessions] *I started by saying 'we're working very hard…we're an improvement school and we need to strategize and plan for the STAR test.' I wanted to raise the level of concern and develop a sense of urgency around what we would do to help our kids improve.* [She went on to say some things about analyzing DRA data, planning something related to the upcoming test—things she said to her staff to give a rationale for the activities they were about to do in a professional development session.]

Following the conversation about how to use leadership "voice," the CEL consultant led a section of the meeting about how to "teach" teachers to read and analyze text in staff development sessions [here the point was that principals (as instructional leaders) were to *lead* professional development sessions based on their analysis of teachers' learning needs. The CEL consultant modeled the use of "voice" (providing a rationale, etc.) as well as teaching them how

to do this with teachers]. The consultant provided a short text selection ("Salvador Late or Early" from *Women Hollering Creek* by Sandra Cisneros). Principals read the text and then discussed the meaning of the text in response to CEL consultant's question: *"What did you think?"* [The text provoked a thoughtful, deep conversation about issues of poverty, children not being *seen* by teachers, children having big responsibilities at home…several principals said they identified with the character having grown up themselves in large, poor families.] The CEL consultant charted the reading strategies that the principals reported they had used when reading the text. They included: visualizing, making connections, questioning, and inferring. She made the point that they have taught teachers to think about standards or strategies, but meaning-making can get lost in conversations about texts. She said that as a principal she provided her teachers with many opportunities to analyze texts of different kinds (some difficult so they could understand more about what struggling readers do). *"You need to do this with your staff. You can read the White Pages* [reference to CA State Standards documents] *but until they understand* [through doing] *then those pages will not make sense to them."* She then summarized the conversation about what this means for planning professional development with teachers around steps in analyzing text and noted that the process is the same as for students.

1. Read the text to find meaning (big ideas).
2. Write notes
3. Talk about meaning
4. Then, do the strategy work.

The consultant then ended the session with this comment:

> *We need to know as adults what we do as readers. Teachers won't get the assessment piece if they don't get that. I did this over and over again with my teachers with many texts. I brought this one because I know your community. If you want teachers to think about kids, you might use this* [kind of text]*; if you want research, bring that in…sometimes use what Katherine Casey uses* [this is a reference to the district leadership academies].

Over three days that March (2007), we also attended the elementary principal cadre sessions with the other two families of schools. At each session, 5-6 principals were present as were the area superintendents for each family and the same CEL consultant. One of the other sessions was very similar in content and activities (as described above). A notable difference was that the host principal was new—she had just been assigned her first principalship three

weeks prior to the cadre meeting. Perhaps because she was a former literacy coach, she asked the consultant to "coach" her during the debrief with the teacher and the consultant actually stepped in and conducted the debrief (essentially providing the other principals with a "demonstration lesson")—as it became clear that this "new" principal needed a higher level of assistance in learning how to debrief a teacher on her lesson.

The third cadre meeting was different in a few ways. First, there were no visits to classrooms at that meeting. The agenda had been set by the host principal (with some input from the CEL consultant) and activities included: how to analyze text (same text as other sessions was used); planning staff development sessions; and a jigsaw reading of a professional text on Guided Reading. Second, time was used differently at this cadre meeting—for example, one hour was spent with each principal describing "celebration" stories from their school. Overall, the activities at this specific session tended toward breadth (reading an entire book jigsaw style) rather than focusing on an in-depth example of classroom practice. This was not always the case for this "family" cadre meeting. One of the principals in that group told us:

> *We meet at a school site and we pretty much set the agenda. So, for example, in November, we met at* [school name] *and we went into classrooms and it was for us to sharpen our skills for identifying what teachers are doing well, and what their next steps would be. What will we do with individual teachers and then what information can we gather for the whole school to move. We are sharpening our tools to be better at giving feedback to teachers and coaching them on their next steps. So, having a model for making that time with teachers. If we have ten minutes to give them feedback and to move them further, how best to use that ten minutes. And, we're looking at our staff development Wednesdays* [Roll-outs]*—how we're creating them. Are they around good staff development theory?*

Overall, in our conversations with five elementary principals, we were surprised that principals did not bring up the cadre work as a source of support for their own learning until prompted by our questions [perhaps the principals are so busy that this oasis of time for themselves is quickly put aside in the fray of everyday activity?]. Once mentioned, however, all the elementary principals we talked to were positive about the cadre work and about the skills of the CEL consultant. The same principal as above said, *"Our coach is very knowledgeable. She was a principal who went through the same type of instructional practices."* These comments from two other elementary principals are representative of the language the principals used to describe the cadre work.

The reason it's good is because it's only administrators and we're able to talk openly and discuss the issues that affect a lot of us. And, a principal doesn't have a lot of people to share with. And, because of everything that is going on, we don't have time to meet together. It's not like teachers who get their grade level team planning and meet after school. We're on separate campuses as principals and so we really don't get to meet together to talk about what's going on or just share ideas of what's working, what's not working, what our frustrations are.

The biggest thing about getting people together is that they can learn…that's the biggest piece. It's not about 'who I am and where I'm at.' It's about coming together. And, in our profession, it's these four walls and the time I make to get out into the classrooms, which should be the biggest priority. But, it's the time we make together…it's being in a small group.

Middle School Cadres

As in Year Two, during 2006-2007, the middle school cadres rotated to a different school site each time. The first two years of the cadres were mainly focused on building content knowledge about literacy practices. A few sessions in Year Two focused on the leadership work that CEL believes is necessary to simultaneously demand and support instructional improvement. Such instructional leadership included learning how (for example) to utilize available resources to target professional development to teachers' needs and to provide feedback that would help improve teachers' classroom practices. Classroom visits had typically been included as part of the cadre meetings, but in Year Three that practice became less common. The host principal was responsible for developing the agenda. Wilma Kozai, the CEL Project Director and middle school 'guest coach' was usually consulted in planning the sessions, but the expectation was that the principal would lead the activities.

Most principals (we interviewed 6 of 7 middle school principals) found the cadres to be a valuable opportunity to meet with their colleagues and share ideas, but over half of those interviewed expressed frustration at the lack of focus. The two cadres we observed underscored a need to revisit the purpose of the sessions. In the first session, half the time was spent sharing what each of the principals was currently working on with their staff. The activities described varied considerably. One school was learning to use Data Director to look at individual students' test performance over 3 years. At another school, the focus was test prep for the upcoming CST (California Standards Test). Another principal explained that they were just continuing the work; they had tried to embed test prep into their instruction all year. They had been teaching students to use academic language in their conversations about text, they read a variety of genres

and worked on gradually building reading stamina. Still another principal shared their efforts to develop common assessments.

As principals described what they were working on, they also pointed to the barriers they encountered in achieving results, some of which were the result of limited resources. Others were viewed as the limitations in what teachers had been taught to do and in the additional support they need to master new practices. Their list included:

- *teachers'* [had not learned] *how to use assessments to inform their instruction;*
- *we don't have common curriculum so how can we have common assessments;*
- [While] *some teachers are getting pretty good at Read Alouds and Shared Reading… some are'waiters'…*

Others noted that teachers need additional help in learning to plan standards-based lessons.

For this session the principals had agreed to discuss teacher evaluations. They were to bring to the cadre examples of write-ups they had done documenting their observations and identifying areas for improvement. The intent was to help each other strengthen and make evaluation processes more consistent; however, several had not brought completed forms to share so the conversation turned to asking the two area superintendents who were present what the next steps for the Literacy Initiative would be: *What were the expectations for teachers next year? Would the literacy practices be part of the evaluation? Will* [the teachers' association] *support that? Is the expectation that all teachers have tried to do a Read Aloud or that they are using them on a regular basis?* The area superintendents shared that they were working with the union to clarify the expectations for next year. They promised to keep the principals informed as they resolved these questions. The meeting ended with no agreement about evaluation practices or next steps for the middle school cadres. It was the last meeting of the year and state testing was about to begin.

The other cadre meeting we observed (a different family of schools) was quite different. The host principal had informed teachers that visiting principals would be in classrooms during the morning. One enthusiastic demonstration teacher who had been working regularly with the literacy coach was nervous, but eager to have feedback so the principals hurried off to observe first period. In all, the cadre visited six language arts classrooms. The purpose of the first teacher's lesson was to learn to analyze poems. It was designed to help prepare students for the upcoming CST (California Standards Test), but it was also an engaging examination of what to

look for and think about to make meaning as one reads poetry. The teacher read several different kinds of poems, one by Langston Hughes, one by Carl Sandburg, to compare the tone and use of figurative language. He worked hard to engage the students by stopping to ask questions for the students to turn and discuss with their partners. He re-read the poems or certain lines to help the students look deeper at understanding the poet's intended meaning.

The other classrooms varied considerably. Due to the time of year, many were doing test prep activities. In one demonstration teacher's class the students were engaged in silent reading of their independently selected books; we did not observe instruction related to Independent Reading (such as the teacher conferring with individual students about their reading). When the cadre came back to the meeting room and after a quick discussion of what they observed, rather than working on how to provide feedback to each teacher the conversation turned to how the principals, as instructional leaders, could engage their staff. *"How do you get everyone to the place where* [the eager demo teacher] *is?"* the CEL coach asked.

> Principal #1: *It has to come from us. We have to get into classrooms more often.*
> CEL coach: *How many demo teachers still don't want coaches in their rooms? You have to hold the demo teachers accountable. Why are they still demo teachers?* [If they do not want to work with coaches?]
> AS: *Except for the* [largest middle school] *every language arts teacher has been going to the leadership academy. We have to expect them to change. What can we do to help you reach that tipping point?"*

The AS shared observations at one of the elementary schools where every teacher is implementing balanced literacy practices: *"There everybody teams, it's the culture of the school."*

> CEL coach: *You can't just give them more time to get onboard. Either you or your coach need to keep them focused.*
> Principal #2: *I need to learn how to teach my staff to collaborate. They need more training.* [The PLC consultant] *is the missing piece. The teachers may be willing to share what they did in a lesson, but they don't get together to <u>plan</u> a lesson. You don't learn to collaborate until you do it. Maybe if I direct them step by step to plan lessons…*

The assistant superintendent cautioned that the district was at a critical juncture. The history of the district was that it had not stayed with any reform very long, he noted. He commented that if leaders were not persistent in voicing their expectations for teachers, they would wait for this reform to go away also. The conversation then turned to exploring strategies that might address the issue. The principals brainstormed more effective ways to use their coach and their

permanent substitute to support team planning. They discussed how LIT days and early release Wednesdays could be used to encourage collaboration. The CEL consultant asked if there was a way she could assist in engaging reluctant teachers. The solution everyone favored was to have a full-time coach at each school, but in a time of diminishing resources, that was clearly not feasible. There was, however, agreement about the need to clarify the role of the demonstration teachers as leaders of this work.

In both of these cases, the cadre meetings ended without clear outcomes or a plan for what leadership work the principals would take on between sessions. Our interview data confirmed that while most agreed that the cadres were helpful, there was also as one principal described, *"great potential that I haven't seen materialize."* The principals found the cadres most beneficial when they observed classrooms and practiced giving feedback to teachers, but too often, half of the principals noted, they turned into "*whining"* sessions which didn't help them solve any of the challenges.

All of the principals interviewed agreed that the cadres would be more productive if they had a clearer purpose. Some questioned whether the cadres were supposed to be about the Literacy Initiative as one principal explained:

> *Wilma Kozai's there and she knows the instruction of literacy but what we straddle is our desire as principals to talk management stuff. I brought to the table looking at observations for evaluation which is a practical thing. I tried to build the Literacy Initiative into the agenda as well. So we straddle: Is this literacy? Is it a principal support group? (laughs) Is it our sharing of best practices? So, I'd say most of the time they're useful, but it's not always good.*

When the middle school cadres began the focus was clearly on literacy instruction. In fact, in the first year, the literacy coaches attended these sessions as well. By the end of Year Three, as this quote illustrates, the purpose was less defined. This principal went on to acknowledge the confusion:

> *I guess I have a hard time defining whose meeting it is because the principal comes with the agenda and then we just go through the agenda. It's a free-for-all, back and forth conversation. It's not clearly the AS and it's not clearly Wilma's and it's not clearly the principals' either. That may be why we get off task sometimes.*

Further, the hesitancy of the group to engage in 'tough conversations' was perceived by some to indicate a lack of trust. One principal said that "*as colleagues we get along, but we*

don't really communicate." Another noted the '*discomfort'* in the group when it came to giving feedback:

> *With our cadre, we stick with maybe what's a little safe and easier, that is dealing with content. I personally would like us to go in and observe teachers together and give feedback….We did that twice and it was beneficial, but I still felt that it kind of stayed on a safe, superficial level because no one wanted to put themselves out there in front of the teacher and other principals. I think we sometimes need to kind of jump in and dig a little deeper ourselves.*

This uncertainty on the part of middle school principals was also displayed when it came to utilizing Wilma as a coach. As the Project Director, Wilma has a limited number of days available to provide one-on-one assistance to principals. For those who hade signed up to have her coach them, they wanted more of her time. Although several of the principals indicated that they needed to learn to be a more effective leader, some had never asked for support. Those who had not asked Wilma for help indicated that they hesitated because they were not sure how to use her. This suggests that like the cadres, there is a need to clarify the role district leaders want Wilma to play in supporting instructional leadership in the Literacy Initiative.

One principal explained how she has worked with Wilma:

> *She's says, "Well, you might want to think about this," or, "When you talk to this teacher…" Or she'll throw questions at me: If you were to talk to this teacher in a conference, what were some of the things that you pointed out that were good and what were some of the things that you would want them to, areas for them to improve upon and what would you tell them to help them do that? She's much more of a coach than* [my supervisor].

All of the principals were appreciative of the resource support (money, subs, professional books) and encouragement they received from district leaders, but when it came to identifying the sources that contributed to their learning how to lead the literacy work, they viewed the CEL consultants (Katherine Casey and Wilma Kozai) and the PLC consultant as their "coaches."

In summary, middle school principals agree that their cadres are not as productive as they want them to be, yet, it is a resource they want to keep. It may be necessary to take the time to reach some agreements on a clear purpose for the cadres, the role of the CEL consultant, and how to negotiate developing agendas that serve both the district's objectives and the principals' professional learning needs in order to make this valuable learning opportunity more productive.

Coaching the Coaches

Coaches Academy Days. Once a month, the district literacy coaches meet for a day with Katherine Casey—the CEL consultant who has worked in Norwalk-LaMirada since Year One of the Literacy Initiative. Typically, all 15 of the district literacy coaches attend the meetings and the area superintendents attend at least part of each session. The sessions are generally aimed at issues of coaching and how to help principals and demonstration teachers (as well as other teachers) implement the reading strategies that are presented at the monthly Good to Great Leadership Academy sessions. The following description of a Coaches Academy, developed from our field notes, is representative regarding the content and process of these professional learning sessions.[12]

This Academy session occurred after Katherine had worked with a few of the literacy coaches doing one-to-one half day coaching sessions embedded in the context of their work in schools. She mentioned at the start of the meeting that she had learned from that coaching and had used her new understandings to develop the Coaches Academy session. Following a few announcements and general conversation, Katherine initiated a discussion about three types of professional development that the coaches either facilitate or conduct: whole group sessions, small group sessions, and individual coaching. The focus for this session was to be on individual coaching with teachers. Katherine began by writing on chart paper the following scenario, which referred to the process of coaching more than one teacher at a time: "Teacher A (demo teacher)—lesson in this room; Teacher B (LIT member) and Teacher C (LIT member) –released to watch." The following interaction then took place (KC=Katherine Casey; C=Coach; AS=Assistant Superintendent):

KC: *Don't coach all year in Teacher A's room only.*
A lot of coaching is seeing (modeling), not telling—seeing someone else get more out of your kids because teachers think they are doing the best they can do with the kids. If you are doing a lesson, someone else must be watching because when you leave, the teacher needs someone to debrief with and make sense with.
Through the course of the year you should be working with others besides just the demonstration teachers.
C: *Wait, that's a paradigm shift* [they are told to work with demo teachers].
KC: *We've got to practice gradual release* [with the demo teachers].
AS/Cs: We would need to talk to the principals about that.

[12] Across 2 years of data collection in Norwalk (2005-2007) we observed 4-5 of the Coaches Academy sessions.

KC: Otherwise, your demo teachers can develop a reliance on the coach. You may need to take a break from the demo teacher to work with others. Now with the extra substitute teachers, you can get this going. It could be too much to stay in one teacher's room. So…react to that. What are you thinking as I talk about gradual releasing? Does it make sense? Is it possible?

Cs: It's a scheduling nightmare. It's a culture shift.

The conversation continued about the importance of setting expectations with the teachers who are coached, being a *"cheerleader"* for *"let's do it"* even if the teacher is not quite ready; asking for example: *"What makes sense for you to try on?"* or *"When does it make sense for me to come back and see how the kids are doing?"* Katherine then went on to discuss with the coaches the importance of keeping the principal in the loop—to establish coach credibility and value (with the principal), not to be evaluative of teachers. She encouraged the coaches to copy principals in on all of their emails to teachers. Later in the session, Katherine came back to the issue of how to schedule multiple teachers for coaching. She wrote on a chart:

<u>Possible Day</u>

1) Classroom A (B&C observe)
   45-50 minutes (quick pre-talk, lesson)
2) Classroom D (E&F observe)
3) Grade Level Meeting (different teachers)
4) Debrief with teachers (and planning next steps)
   45-50 minutes (Teachers A, B, C)
5) Debrief with teachers (D, E, F)

A coach commented at this point. *"I got intimidated because they showed no enthusiasm* [e.g., some teachers came in and did other work during a classroom observation]. *I should have set* [better] *expectations."* Katherine made several suggestions to the coaches: assign teachers specific students to script, talk to teachers about where to sit as they observe a lesson (next to students), and ask teachers to observe particular aspects of the lesson. As the session continued, the coaches spent time getting clear on their terms—for example, when "observing" for student engagement, what does "engagement" actually mean?

Throughout the day Katherine continued to answer questions and offer bits of advice from her experience. She was clearly pushing the coaches in this session to do two things that had not been typical for most of them up to that point: (1) moving away from just coaching the demonstration teachers and (2) making sure that they were working with more than one teacher

at a time (see "Progress Report" section for a related discussion of spreading the work across teachers in the schools).

One-to-One Coaching. During Year Three of the Initiative, Katherine Casey had some extra consulting days for Norwalk-LaMirada (left from a previous contract) and the decision was made to use them for one-to-one coaching sessions with the literacy coaches. Each coach received one half day session with Katherine. Each of the coaching sessions was unique and designed to meet the needs of the individual literacy coach. The coache set the agenda and decided who would attend the session. We observed four of these and describe one of them in some detail here.

The session began at 7:45AM at an elementary school. The literacy coach, the school principal and Katherine Casey met in a conference room. The coach talked with Katherine about what they would be observing/doing that morning: first, the coach would be demonstrating a guided reading lesson in a 2nd grade classroom with a small group of advanced readers and next, they would be observing a lesson in the demonstration teacher's kindergarten classroom and debriefing the lesson with the teacher. The literacy coach began by describing the demonstration teacher to Katherine [KC=Katherine; C=Coach; P=Principal]. The teacher had asked the coach to work with her on management issues and to look at her pacing during lessons. The discussion continued with a set-up for what they would be observing that morning in the classroom and then turned to a discussion of the coach's demonstration lesson in the other classroom. At one point, Katherine asked the coach what she wanted in terms of "coaching" that morning.

KC: *What kind of support do you need for the Guided Reading lesson?*

C: *The text is about Spiders. The text itself is not that difficult. We'll orient in the introduction to the table of contents. In another lesson with this book with 4th graders, the kids didn't know what the table of contents was. I had to tell them.*

KC: *This helps me to know what's here and where it is. There is a CST question about what page #s in a table of contents mean. Don't be afraid to teach in Guided Reading even though they are supposed to know. So ask, 'what's it about? What about spiders?'*

C: *I hope to read the 1st and 2nd sections. I have questions. This 3rd section is lengthy. I'm not sure whether to give it to them or not.*

KC: [Looking at the book.] *It depends on the level of meaning you want to go for.* [She is encouraging the coach to go into the content because there is lot there.]

C: *I haven't really gone deep enough .*

KC: *So tell them you want to read the pictures. Listen in—if they are not really using the pictures—then re-read the pictures (informational text uses pictures <u>and</u> running text).*

C: So, you can go slower? With the 4th graders, I pointed to running text and pictures. For closure here, I plan to talk about informational text.
KC: If talk about the table of contents.
C: Whew! I'm getting nervous.
KC: I'm happy to coach you.
C: Okay, okay.
KC: The purpose is to demonstrate for the teacher about how to teach informational text.
P: She's been out on extended leave during the Literacy Initiative. I've got 3 new staff in the last 10 days!
KC: [Tells coach what she likes about the lesson.]

In the classroom, the coach began the lesson with the small group of four students grouped at a kidney-shaped table in front of her. Katherine observed the lesson until she saw a place to "coach into" what was taking place [here "S" refers to student].

C: Read page 5. Does the picture match with what he read?
S: There are 2 main body parts. [He points to them.]
C: Look at the picture about the parts of ….
KC: Have the kids name out what they see.
C: Can you name the parts you see?
KC Can everyone put their finger on …..? What do you think they are for?
S: Abdomen.
KC So, where does that part point to? Where does the line go? I wonder what part is down here? Maybe a big part? Find another word that lands on a big part of the body? Put your finger on it...follow the line. Know how we figured that out? We followed the line. Did you know that in nonfiction, you can follow a line like that? Mark, what are <u>you</u> seeing? What is interesting to you?
S: Fangs.
KC: So readers, when you read (the running text), what are the 2 main parts? Now, have them look at the next page…

The lesson was followed by a short debrief (in the classroom) between the teacher, principal, coach, and Katherine. Katherine talked about releasing more of the work to the students the next day and moving the meaning-making work to a higher level.

KC: The challenge of informational text is meaning making. So: 'Now students, what can we say about how spiders look?' Making summary statements is a higher level main idea piece.
P: So tomorrow, would you just do 3 pages?
KC: No, keep going. Strive to get through 2 more sections. It depends on the scaffolding required. Get them to do more of the work. Put your finger on it. What helps you figure that out?
KC: [To teacher] *What were you thinking regarding the lesson?*
T: I feel like a sponge regarding how to teach high readers.

Back in the conference room, Katherine and the coach debriefed the whole lesson. Katherine pointed out to the coach that it is often easier to watch a lesson and see what might work (as in, having the students put their finger on the words and lines in the picture) than it is to "see" that while teaching. She emphasized several big ideas about Guided Reading and teaching informational text.

> *KC: Big ideas: kids do more of the work (teacher can fold her hands) and for the reading part—meaning making.*
> *C: Kids summarizing what they learned. I'm always focused on lesson closing, not summarizing.*
> *KC: The order might be: Focus on meaning-making; reading work; summarizing meaning; naming the reading work.*

The rest of the coaching session was the observation in the demonstration teacher's classroom. The coach then debriefed the teacher about the lesson and Katherine "pushed into" the debrief, coaching the coach (right in the context of the coaching work) about how to work with that teacher. Following the teacher debrief session, Katherine and the coach discussed how to continue coaching this teacher (and about how the coach did in the teacher debrief). Katherine, for example, encouraged the literacy coach to not model for the teacher in future lessons, but to coach side-by-side with her, encouraging the teacher to try things out on her own.

We observed three other "coaching the coach" sessions. One was at a high school where the coach invited all the high school coaches to attend. There was no principal present at that session. The other two sessions were at elementary schools (one included the school principal and the other included two veteran coaches who had been mentors for the beginning coach who was the focus of the session). Although each session was unique, they followed a similar format of (1) pre-conferencing; (2) observations or demonstrations in classrooms; and (3) debriefing sessions.

One of the coaches we observed told us later how she felt about the support that she was receiving from the two coaching structures we describe here. Regarding the Coaches Academy days, she noted that they are *"a lot of work"* but *"I think they are essential."* She went on to say:

> *They are, I think, the gut of our work in a sense. When we can ask Katherine questions and we can ask each other questions. We don't always get to come together as a group like that and have discussions about certain things that are going on in our demo*

> *classrooms or LIT teams or even with administrators. We don't do it all the time; it happens once a month. So, that in itself is wonderful.*

This coach was a new coach during the 2006-2007 year. She relied heavily on two veteran coaches for support and spoke about the challenges of *"catching up."* Of the veteran coaches, she said, *"I especially go back to them because I usually work with them when we are planning LIT days or, in general, they might be familiar with teachers I am working with now. And, I'm very confident and comfortable that they can help me."* Of the one-to-one session with Katherine, this coach commented:[13]

> *When I emailed her* [Katherine], *I said I wanted to work in the debrief with* [the demonstration teacher] *on the content area versus pedagogy and I wanted next steps for her students. And that is exactly what she gave us. And I thought, it's going back to thinking, 'why didn't she tell me what I should do here', but that's not the point. I was anticipating more of 'here's a book you could read,' or 'why don't you try this or that?' But…it felt more comfortable but at the same time uncomfortable to know that you can make it your own. Just try it out! …So, in terms of how you read certain texts and then plan from there, there's a definite next step that we need to take* [on our own, (the teacher) and I together] *and that's what I took away.*

Progress Report: Outcomes of the Literacy Initiative Year Three

This part of the report is divided into four sections that bring data to bear on the following questions: (1) how are schools interpreting the accountability pressure coming from the district central office? And, (2) how are principals strategically leading the "roll-out" of the Initiative within their sites?

District leaders agree that the elementary schools are further along in implementing the Literacy Initiative than the secondary schools (although variation is still present across elementary schools). This may be due to the direct application of the literacy practices to almost all elementary classroom teachers—they are all teachers of reading. At the secondary level, the translation of the literacy practices to different content areas has been challenging—and, as well, secondary teachers of English have not traditionally viewed themselves as teachers of reading. Moreover, there is some evidence that some elementary principals have taken a more hands-on approach to leading the reform than many of the secondary principals. District leaders are aware

[13] Our interview data from coaches is limited in this data set because the study shifted mid-way through 2006/2007 to a school based study. We did not interview coaches beyond the coaches who worked at (one) elementary, middle and high school.

of the added challenges at the secondary level and are currently addressing these in their plans for differentiated support and for increased monitoring of progress in secondary schools.

Elementary School Level

Our report about "progress" at the elementary school level is limited in two ways: first, we have interview data with only four of the 18 elementary principals and second, many of our examples are drawn from one elementary school.[14] Therefore, it is with considerable caution that we report here on how implementation of the Literacy Initiative is proceeding across, as well as, within the elementary schools.

Accountability Pressure. Principals talked about accountability in terms of (1) knowing their staff (and being in classrooms in order to do that) and the pressure *"get everyone on board"* and (2) looking at and helping teachers interpret student outcome data, especially now that they have several means to do this work.

In terms of knowing their staff, two principals said that they are in classrooms everyday. One said, *"We walk through the school* [he and his AS] *and he will ask me, 'What are you working on?' I'd say student engagement. So, he would say, 'Okay, let's go see some classrooms."* This principal also said, *"our classrooms are open…there is no place to hide."* He expects these conversations about classroom practice to continue with teachers over the next few years, because *"Are we there yet? No."*

Another principal said:

> *I'm in the classrooms more, doing instruction. Like, I'll go in and do a Read Aloud or I'll sit in and I'll talk with the kids more about what they were actually learning. When they're doing a Read Aloud, I'll sit down and really listen to the kids' thinking and their talking. I think I get more involved with instruction. I've always monitored instruction, but it's at a deeper level.*

A third principal suggested that she is *"spending more time in some classrooms than others"* and *"we're supposed to be in classrooms the first two hours of the day, but that's still a struggle for me."* She said that many different things come up that pull her away from classroom

[14] In part, this is due to our own research design which, starting in Year Two of the reform, sampled one elementary school and one middle school in each of three school districts. It is also due to the fact that the study in Norwalk-LaMirada joined the Wallace study of school-level leadership in March of 2007, which led to a change in research sites at the elementary level. Norwalk will participate as a Wallace site through December of 2008.

observations. One principal noted that she is not the "teacher" but is the building administrator and that being in classrooms each day may not actually be her role.[15]

Although limited, our data suggested that principals and others were recognizing the importance of the new forms of student assessment data. At one school, for example:

> *We're also looking to see with our new DRA, if we can more finely pinpoint the areas of need. And with our benchmark data, we're looking at students who are scoring right at basic who, with just a few more questions correct, we can bump them up.*

That principal explained that they had *"created a prototype for analyzing the data."*

> *We took a 1st grade class. The teacher had completed the DRAs and already made her notes as to where instruction needed to begin. We started to do some analyzing of it and we found that teachers wanted to give the kids the benefit of the doubt. And, after looking at it, we decided (as school policy) that if the information is there, that is how we identify the kids…some teachers were saying, 'you know, that's a really strong kid, let's bump him up.' But what happened is that the kids did not come in with the ability to talk about their learning. So, we said, they really don't know it, they can't make those connections because we've never asked them to. And, so let's teach it and then they'll know it. So, it's to inform our instruction, not to turn in a number regarding what level they're on, but to inform instruction.*

A classroom teacher at another school talked about the "aha's" that she had related to the DRA testing.

> *It does take a lot of time, but I do see some benefits, definitely benefits especially now. In September, when we first did it, it was like, 'Oh my gosh, why are we doing this because 1st graders can't read.' You know, they got to about level three and then some kids were already at level eight! That was interesting because they were half again as good readers* [as she had thought]*….now, I thought some were higher than they are, yet I can see the problems and why they scored lower in a certain area, like in retell, for example. If they don't use the character's name in a retell, they score lower and I wasn't really thinking about that before.*

At another school, the principal noted the importance of having a resource such as Data Director.

> *We've always looked at data but now we have Data Director and so all teachers have access to it. They can go on and look at their students' scores from the CST to the Benchmarks. That has been really powerful for teachers to be able to use that right at their fingertips and to see where students are scoring and be able to compare data. And, then, they compare that data to the classroom work. They sit down in grade level teams and that's how they plan. They plan as a team, what units they are going to be presenting or having students study. With the Reading Initiative, they sit down and plan which Read Alouds they're going to be doing, which Shared Reading. They can then*

[15] Anecdotally, during our fall 2007 visit, it was not yet clear that principals were uniformly *hearing* the 3-5 classrooms per day message that was being sent by the central office leaders. Some thought it was 3-5/week.

> *group the children later to give them individual assistance based on the data that they get from all the pieces of information: their classroom work, plus the benchmarks, plus the CST. So, they have that knowledge.*

Note that these data are very preliminary because the testing (and it's availability for teachers) had just started in the district last year.

Roll-out Strategies. An AS told us this fall (2007): *"The academies are the same, the cadres are the same. The difference will be the LIT team work and I can only speak to elementary. Massive, I would call it, a massive expansion of the LIT team. There are certain schools where everybody is on a LIT team."* This expansion began in Year Three of the Initiative and, according to this informant, is spreading quickly this year. Most schools began Year Two with a LIT team consisting of one teacher per grade level (some began with slightly different configurations). By last year, there were reports that some schools had 12 teachers on their LIT team or they had two LIT teams of 5-6 teachers each. These teams met one time per month. The demonstration teachers (usually 2 per school) also attended the monthly leadership academies (for a total of 2 full days of professional development per month). One of the things that quickly became apparent to principals and coaches—especially, as the pressure to demonstrate implementation results increased across the district—was that the rest of their staff were only exposed to the Initiative ideas at a 2 hour "Roll-out" staff meeting one time per month. During Year Three principals began to develop new ways to spread the learning experiences out among teachers in their buildings.

One way that principals did that was to hold "mini-LIT" sessions that were generally run by the literacy coach and (at least in one school) used grade level teams as the vehicle for the sessions. One coach told us, *"Every school is finding creative ways to start releasing the teachers to either watch each other or let them start getting together and trying it on."* She went on to describe what she did with two different grade level teams at mini-LIT sessions.

> *This year I've done two of them. The first one was 3rd grade. What we did was try to unpack the standards and form units of study based on the standards. And, just to get them to think about standards not in isolation but in clusters. And, then we took a look at their test release items and where their teaching needs to be most heavily weighted. Then, we planned a unit of study—I think it was around folk tales—that was directly out of their Houghton Mifflin, which was a resource that they all had. I think it was three stories, as Read Alouds.*

> *That was 3rd grade. At 2nd grade, we did an author study. We worked on some charting and some planning. They were using three books so we planned out two of the three and they were to plan the third one on their own.*

As far as what happened after those sessions, the coach told us:

> *I can tell you that with the 2nd grade team, I'm very confident. I've seen the charts up in their rooms; I know they are trying it on. The 3rd grade team, I know two of them mentioned something to me about trying it on (one was a LIT team member) and one other teacher.*

At another school, the principal paid for release days for her whole staff to work with the literacy coach and herself to *"tear apart the state standards."* They worked in grade level teams and *"the teachers were amazed at how much was in there and they began to understand it better."* She explained that they had touched on standards the year before, but she felt the whole staff needed the time to do this work together.

Principals were also "upping the ante" last year for LIT team members, suggesting that they needed to take on leadership roles themselves as members of grade level teams and at staff meetings (e.g., Roll-out meetings). For example, at one school the principal talked about how she was encouraging LIT members to take the work back to their grade level meetings.

> *How do I improve that buy-in and get that cadre of people to really feel invaluable to go back and do that tutoring on whatever we're trying to do. I talked to* [a teacher] *the other day… 'You're like a cheerleader. You know all this is valuable. Your job is to go back* [and take up the teaching]*...so…you could say, would you like to come into my classroom to see a demonstration? Can I come into your classroom and do a demonstration with your kids?' So, we're having that discourse about this is what the responsibility of the LIT team member is and what their role is.*

Other principals are asking demonstration teachers to lead their LIT days—or at minimum to take a strong role is planning the sessions. One principal said, *"We had the first staff-directed* [professional development] *where our two demonstration teachers developed it. So, we're empowering other people to take that leadership role."* At another elementary school, there are now three LIT teams in place (most teachers are now on LIT teams). The most experienced LIT team is lead by three demonstration teachers.

Yet, at another school, the principal reported that she was careful not to use the term *"leader"* when talking about members of the LIT team.

> *We've been asking them to make everything public. In the past, we had leadership teams and they took on a negative connotation. So, now we're saying they're the teachers who*

> *want to be the pioneers, ahead of the pack. But everything is public and they are to share everything. Feel free to share everything, but you are not in charge of going back and making sure everybody has the same level of understanding. It's to keep everything public and hope that other people will take on the work.*

This approach (and the culture that it signified) was suggestive of the wide variation we saw across the schools we visited in how the aims of the Literacy Initiative were accepted by staff. Principals knew they were expected to bring more teachers into the work of the Initiative, however, our data indicate that teachers' participation was variable. One coach put it this way: *"The pace is fast—or, I guess the expectation is fast—but it's not moving. The pace is faster than it needs to be. I think there are a lot of teachers that are still* [learning about] *'Shared Reading and Read Aloud…"*

Last year, the coaching work was still primarily with the demonstration teachers, although coaches also supported primary grade teachers in the DRA assessment process and principals in planning professional development sessions (e.g., LIT days and Roll-outs). There was wide variation between two schools in terms of what one coach was working on with the demonstration teachers. For example, she described her work at one school. *"At* [school name] *I work with a 2nd grade teacher and a 5th grade teacher. And there…most of the work revolves around Shared Reading and Read-Aloud."* Whereas, at her other school, this coach was working with the demonstration teacher on Guided Reading and with another teacher on Independent Reading. In contrast, at a school in another part of the district, the principal's priority was classroom environment and making sure that teachers had classroom libraries set up.

At the elementary level, we have classroom observation and interview data at one school only. These data suggested (not unexpectedly) that some teachers are much further along in implementing the Balanced Literacy components than others (even among the LIT team members). And as teachers picked up new instructional strategies, they understood them in different ways. Some teachers understood the reform very well—especially from a political standpoint. That is, they could describe in detail what the district was trying to do and how the district was supporting them to make progress. Some teachers could explain the rationale for the various literacy strategies and were noticing changes in their students.

> *First of all, they are talking more about books. I would say in a sophisticated way. Even in a retell, for example, yesterday I did a Read Aloud with an author that we're studying. The kids are trying to learn the lessons that the book is focusing on or making a connection with the book. One of the boys said—this is the phrase that he used—'I think*

> *the author, Helen Lestor, wanted us to learn that you need to look when somebody is speaking so that you can hear the whole thing.' That came from a first grader! Then, they'll make a connection. A little boy said, 'This book is good for me because I don't listen all the time either and so maybe I need to listen better when you give directions.'*

This teacher also explained several new strategies that she was using in her classroom, including her recent adoption of work stations as a strategy during Guided Reading.

Recent surveys conducted by the school district and by TANLA (Teachers' Association of Norwalk/LaMirada) suggest that teachers are generally supportive of the goals of the Literacy Initiative. TANLA surveyed 246 teachers (with a response rate ranging from 49% for elementary teachers to 34% for high school teachers) and the district surveyed 372 teachers (with response rates ranging from 66% to 77% across school levels). While the TANLA survey found that teachers felt pressure to implement the literacy strategies in their classrooms, 81% of teachers surveyed felt that the professional development provided by the district (through their partnership with CEL) was somewhat to highly effective and 86% reported that the instructional strategies were relevant to their classroom practice. While the majority of the teachers surveyed by the district said that they were using the strategies in their practice, previous research suggests that technical aspects of a reform such as the Literacy Initiative (e.g., using charts during instruction; performing Read Aloud or Shared Reading) will typically be implemented prior to gaining a deep understanding of the philosophy behind Balanced Literacy (e.g., why and how to help students make meaning of a variety of texts) (Hubbard, Mehan, & Stein, 2006)—which would help explain implementation variability among teachers. Research dating back to 1982 (Joyce & Showers) cautions that professional development embedded in the context of classroom work (such as coaching) and extended over time is necessary to support professionals to learn and to maintain ambitious, rigorous instructional practices. Given the phased in approach to the reform and the fact that many teachers are only recently exposed (beyond general staff meetings) to the instructional strategies, implementation variability at the classroom level would be expected. [16]

[16] Hubbard, Mehan, & Stein (2006). *Reform as learning: School reform, organizational culture, and community politics in San Diego.* New York: Routledge. Joyce, B., & Showers, B. (October, 1982). The coaching of teaching. *Educational Leadership, 40,* 4-8.

Middle School Level

Our progress report at the middle level is based on interviews with 6 of the 7 middle school principals, one assistant principal and observations of three middle school cadres. In addition, a more in-depth look at one middle school included interviews with four teacher leaders, the school's literacy coach and two demonstration teachers, plus observations in the demonstration classrooms, five days of observing the literacy coach coaching six teachers, as well as observations of two Roll-out days and one LIT team session at the school. With only limited knowledge of the other six middle schools, this report does not attempt to assess or compare the progress at the schools. Rather the information shared by the principals about their schools is used as a backdrop to situate the work we observed in our research site.

The seven middle schools in Norwalk-LaMirada represent the broad diversity that exists across the school district. The schools range in size from 584 to over 1,100 students. Their socioeconomic makeup varies from 17 percent low income to 74 percent, with the percentage of English Language Learners in the schools as low as 5 percent and as high as 21 percent. Five of the middle schools failed to meet AYP (Adequate Yearly Progress) in 2007 and two of the schools are in program improvement. These demographics present a significant challenge to the principals of these schools, most of whom are relatively new to the role (2-3 years experience). Within this context, it is not surprising that the implementation of the Literacy Initiative at the middle level is as varied as the schools are from one another.

Roll-out strategies. In contrast to the elementary schools, all of the middle school principals discussed the challenge of helping content teachers see the relevance of the Literacy Initiative for their respective subject areas. When they began to roll out Read Alouds and Shared Reading to the whole school, content teachers had trouble connecting these approaches to what they taught. One principal claimed that resentment is too strong a word to describe their reaction, but the following exchange was a typical response:

> *"Why are you telling me this? I need to do my job, don't bother me with this kind of stuff." So, we've really taken a step back and say, 'No, it's not about doing a Shared Reading or a Read Aloud in your class everyday as a math teacher. It's about student engagement, making meaning'—those types of things that are across the school site, across grade levels and content areas."*

Resistance among content area teachers has limited the implementation of the Literacy Initiative at all of the middle schools. When principals were asked what percentage of their staff

were 'onboard' with the Literacy Initiative, estimates ranged from as low as three or four language arts teachers to 80 percent of the entire school. Most responded that between 15 and 25 percent of their staff were on-board. Los Alisos Middle School stood out as the exception; there the administrative team and literacy coach have succeeded in convincing a substantial proportion of the staff to invest in the work. It may be instructive to examine how this school's leadership built commitment to the district's six targets for "the work" [e.g., assessment driven instruction, standards-based instruction, student engagement, powerful questioning, meaning-making, and balanced literacy] by creating expectations and support structures that have produced a high level of participation among staff. It's important to note that this is not a Title I school, so all of the resources that they put in place were accomplished within a tight budget, with some generous support from the central office in response to specific requests. There are at least six strategies that Los Alisos has developed to build support for the Literacy Initiative school-wide. They include:

1) Developing teacher leaders (team leaders)
2) Team planning with support
3) Curriculum Mapping
4) School-based professional development for math teachers
5) Extra support for language arts teachers
6) Strategic use of subs to expand 1-on-1 coaching

Developing clear expectations for teachers was a first step in the process. When one visits Los Alisos Middle School and observes the principal, one can quickly see through the principal's actions the beliefs that guide her leadership of the school. As you walk across the playground with her, she compliments students by name on recent projects or performances, stoops to pick up trash, and reminds any transgressor to *"tuck in your shirt!"* These could be viewed as superficial details, but they seem to send a consistent symbolic message of high expectations.

When she first arrived at Los Alisos, teachers and students didn't know what to make of this new principal—it was an abrupt change from the previous administration, but it wasn't long before her strict rules were seen as far from arbitrary. They were all indicators of the strength of her convictions. The message to students was the importance of dressing for success. Another school leader summarized the message the administrative team conveys to students:

> *We tell them it will require hard work* [to be successful,] *but we won't give up on you. We expect each of you to be successful and graduate from high school and be able to go to college if you want. "College is not a hope, it's a plan."* [The school motto]

Her colleagues describe the Los Alisos principal as a strong, tenacious leader with a wealth of ideas. Many of the newer principals look to her as a mentor. One of the qualities that stand out to others is her sense of urgency—that the students in her charge can't wait for things to change; they need the best teachers today and everyday:

. > *I want this school to be top, top, nothing else. Top. Not for me, not for my reputation, for my students. I want to show the world that kids from this demographic*[17] *absolutely think, have a brain, can act, can perform, and that teachers can be transformed.*

Along with her expectations, the principal ensures that sufficient support systems are in place to facilitate the implementation of these expectations.

<u>*Teacher leadership*</u>. The principal's goal for Year Three was to build leadership among the teachers. She sent four teachers to a conference in San Diego because she was grooming them for leadership:

> *I knew that these four teachers would absolutely have the qualities that a leader needs to have. Initially, they have the convictions, the beliefs, the passions, the credibility, and the respect from the staff… And then by* giving *them the freedom to explore and go with their instinct, they will discover the power of teacher to teacher leadership rather than administrator to teacher. Instead of the administrator telling me what to do, my colleague is asking me to collaborate in what she does.*

Each grade level in each department has a team leader. For the first three years the principal set the expectations for them. One of their primary tasks was to develop curriculum maps to coordinate and pace consistent instruction in each subject at every grade level. The principal met with team leaders monthly to reinforce her expectations for team planning, monitor their work, and assess additional supports they might need. After three years, she no longer worried about team planning in terms of, "*Are they going to do the work*?"

> *Team planning now is teachers deciding what they need to do. Even physical education provided me with an agenda of what they are going to do and they are aligning their curriculum with the standards. They have structured their time and, that to me is what I want because now it's not the principals' agenda. Now, it is <u>our</u> agenda.*

[17] Los Alisos serves 57% low-income and 17% ELL students.

This is significantly different than the situation the principals described at the other middle schools. At the middle level, many teachers have K-8 multiple-subject credentials, while others have single subject endorsements. The mix of subject certification makes it difficult for schools to configure teaching assignments in a way that would allow them to incorporate common planning time into their schedules, and thereby enable teachers to meet together during the school day. At the same time, the principals all complained that their teachers did not take advantage of their bi-weekly early release Wednesdays for team planning. A couple of principals have asked the union about using 'teacher Wednesdays' for planning, but when told 'no,' they were reluctant to press the issue.

Rather than ask for permission, the principal at Los Alisos has asked the union to explain how using that time for team planning was <u>not</u> aligned with the union's stance that the time was designated for teachers to support student achievement. *"Tell me why you think I need to change* [using teacher Wednesday for team planning]*? Can you see my thinking to be unproductive to student achievement? If you can show me evidence of that, then I will change it."* Since they have not responded, she continues to encourage teachers to use that time to complete their team work. Moreover, she provides additional resources to optimize how they use that time.

<u>Team planning with support</u>. The Los Alisos principal has found ways to show teachers the value of collaborative planning. She spent building money to bring Cindy Harrison in for extra training in creating strong PLCs. She used substitute teachers to release math teachers for additional professional development, bringing in consultants that tailored the work to their department's curriculum maps. She did the same for language arts teachers. During team planning, whenever possible, administrators participated to provide additional help. These steps have supported teachers to make the most of their limited time together. The only complaint we heard was the need for more time. For example, most of the math teachers also teach science. Similarly, the language arts teachers also teach social studies. As a result, if they alternate every other team meeting for each subject, they only end up with two hours a month. Recognizing the need for more time, the principal has, on occasion, given up one of her administrative Wednesdays for team planning. Moreover, their Roll-out days are often differentiated and tailored to the needs of different content areas, giving the departments additional support for accomplishing their team's work.

Curriculum Maps. One of the tools that supported their planning was a curriculum map. A few years ago, a consultant was brought in to facilitate the development of maps to create consistency across classrooms at each grade level. Now that all of the teams have developed standards-based curriculum maps, teacher leaders reported, *"The maps are a tool for building community."*

> *We are always touching base between classes to check on how the lesson went, since we are teaching the same thing. We give each other suggestions to make the lessons work better. We always try to help each other out.*

Extra support for language arts teachers. Beginning in Year Three, the principal contracted with a former demonstration teacher (now on maternity leave) to help language arts teachers develop lesson plans to incorporate writing into their literacy instruction. The consultant developed units of study and each grade level was released for a full day each month to discuss lesson plans, peruse literature pieces that might be used, and discuss assignments that require students to apply the lesson content. A few times a year, a second writing consultant worked with language arts teachers to continue to expand their expertise.

Professional development for math teachers. Similarly, the principal contracted with two different consultants to provide additional time for math teachers, by grade level, to strengthen their content knowledge. They learned to use new materials, new pedagogical approaches, test preparation techniques, and are learning to develop pre- and post-assessments to monitor student learning.

Use of substitutes to expand one-to-one coaching. Two events stimulated the principal and literacy coach, who work as a team, to think creatively about how to use available resources to include more teachers in "the work." For the literacy coach, it was when one of the new literacy coaches in the district asked to shadow her for a day. The new coach had been attending the leadership academy during the year, but had missed the first two years and felt insecure in her new position as coach. When another new coach heard about it, she asked to do it too. The new coach joined two experienced coaches on walk-throughs at each other's schools (one elementary and two middle schools). Across the classrooms, they found great implementation variability especially beyond the demonstration classrooms. These observations led the coach to recognize that only demonstration teachers had received one-to-one support and to question the

value of the monthly LIT sessions and the two-hour Roll-out staff meetings. She began to think about other approaches for supporting teachers.

About the same time, the principal was looking at classroom level test score data and noticed that on the literary analysis standard, there were a few teachers who were getting bigger gains and she looked to see who those teachers were. They were the demo teachers who had benefited from two years of coaching with the literacy coach. She felt that they had developed strong content knowledge and that coaching had strengthened their pedagogy. Then she thought about how she could get other teachers to that level and she asked herself:

> *Can I hold these teachers accountable for this literacy implementation without giving them enough support? No, I can't. Do I want the union rep asking, "What are you doing for these teachers?" No, I don't. Do I want all of my students to have the same luxury in terms of critical thinking that these teachers are giving to their kids and to spread it everywhere? Yes, I do. So then how am I going to maximize what I have?*

It was that thinking, combined with the literacy coach's experiences, that led to the decision to depart from the district structure of holding LIT team meetings once a month. Instead, they used the existing resources, the six sub days and their portion of the permanent sub to release teachers for one-on-one coaching.

Starting with the LIT team members, who had the most exposure to the Initiative, the literacy coach used one substitute to release two teachers, each for half of the day. The first period, the coach and one teacher planned a lesson together. Then one teacher either taught the lesson with the coach observing and scripting, or they team taught, or the coach demonstrated teaching the lesson, depending on what the teacher wanted or needed. The last period, the teacher and coach debriefed their observations and made plans for next steps. This process closely modeled the process used for conferring with students in the classroom and took the form of a mini-coaching cycle[18] completed in three consecutive periods in a single day.

During the planning the coach had the chance to emphasize what to focus on in the upcoming lesson, such as making sure the lesson plan was standards-based, that it had a purpose, that the teacher had thought through the questions she would ask, where she wanted to stop and have the students talk about the text, where she might stop and think aloud to model what good

[18] Coaching cycles are designed to give ongoing support as teachers develop aspects of their teaching practice. See Casey, K. (2006). *Literacy coaching: The essentials*, Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, Chapter 6, "Models of Intensive Classroom Support" for descriptions of coaching cycles. This is also similar to the process that Katherine Casey was teaching the coaches at the Coaches' Academy we describe in an earlier section of this report.

readers do. After the lesson, the coached reinforced and summarized the new strategies the teacher should take away from their work together as she continued to improve her practice.

We observed four coaching cycles, three with language arts teachers who are members of the LIT team and one with a math/science teacher. Although each of these teachers had varying levels of understanding about the content they were teaching and command of pedagogical strategies, the literacy coach was able to tailor her support to the their specific needs, but also reinforce consistent practices she wanted all teachers to make part of their regular practice. For example, she kept reiterating "*purpose - make sure to have a clear purpose stated and in writing on chart or overhead."* "*What are the standards asking the students to know and be able to do?*" She also reminded teachers that when students were unable to generate their own ideas, they needed to see models. "*Use think alouds to make your thinking transparent and model how you are thinking for the students."* Finally, she constantly reinforced that the goal is to gradually release the work to the students. To make sure that the teacher wasn't the one doing all the work, she would ask, "W*hat are you going to release them to do?"*

One additional experience confirmed the decision on the part of the school leadership team that they needed to support a larger number of teachers. The coaches had been hearing about one elementary school in the district where every teacher was implementing the literacy practices, so they went to check it out. They started at kindergarten and went up the grade levels. They observed consistency and articulation from one grade level to the next. Convinced that the middle school teachers needed to see this, the coach shared what she had seen with the middle school principal and they arranged for a visit. The literacy coach was excited that the visit appeared to have the intended effect:

> *We had an awesome visit to [the elementary school] with 11 of Los Alisos' staff members on Friday. The conversation was rich and centered on rigor and high expectations. The teachers were simply blown away at what the kids were doing in kindergarten and the thinking that students were doing. It was very exciting. One thing everyone was going to do after our discussion was make sure absolutely everyone in their class participates in some way during Shared Readings. We discussed what this might look like in all the content areas.*

All of these efforts to facilitate teacher learning have had two visible outcomes that were evidenced in our data from Los Alisos. First, the grade level teams were cohesive. Veteran teachers were taking the initiative to help new teachers and they used their curriculum maps to guide their lesson planning and monitor what students were learning. Second, the administrative

team's high expectations have translated to high expectations that teachers hold for themselves and for their students:

> *My expectations have increased every year. I've learned that as long as you support them, there is really nothing they [the students] can't do, no matter what their language level is. I know the expectations in my class have changed. I think they've changed school-wide. The conversations I now have with my colleagues are no longer resignation with low scores, instead it's they are still just writing summaries, now its how do we get them to analyze…*

Accountability Pressure. Middle school principals differed from the elementary principals we interviewed in the way they experienced accountability pressures. Other than the pressure they felt to raise test scores and make AYP, most only mentioned after prompting that they were expected to implement the Literacy Initiative. They knew they were accountable for "*meeting with their LIT team and conducting a Roll-out once a month and make sure that all teachers are doing a Read Aloud*."

Middle school principals indicated that they rarely saw their supervisors (during Year Three) at their school sites and were not clear about their own accountability. Several interpreted the lack of presence in the school as an indicator of trust and an implied message that they were doing okay. Half of the administrators saw their supervisors as stretched so thin that they generally were "*responding to crises*." As a result, if they were able to *'keep the peace or make problems go away'* without needing the AS to intervene, '*then we've done a good job*.' Only a few of the principals mentioned that they were expected to be in classrooms every day. Although two principals mentioned that in addition to adding to their own learning, they enjoyed teaching demonstration lessons and observing classes; others struggled to get in to classrooms on a regular basis.

Until this year (Fall 07), the assistant superintendents did not do walk-throughs with the middle school principals. This left principals uncertain as to what was expected of them. The newer principals were looking for a coach to help them with both the management demands and in becoming an instructional leader. The more established principals were looking for a coach to challenge them, improve their leadership skills, and help fulfill their potential.

Student Outcome Data

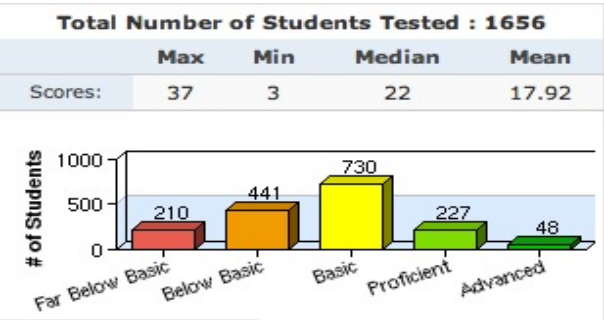
Benchmark data. The externally developed benchmark tests are intended to provide teachers with interim reports on student progress throughout the academic year. They are

aligned with the California State Standards and the California State Tests so theoretically teachers can calibrate their instruction against these data as the year proceeds. They might, for example, assess which standards students have mastered and which need further work based on these data.

The district's Priority One! goals are calibrated against the benchmark assessments (Benchmark Four given in June). The district has compiled reports for the School Board regarding the benchmark assessments. Following are two examples of these reports both at Grade 4. Our purpose is not to report on benchmark test scores, but to show how the district is making sense of the scores and reporting them to their School Board.

Figure 1
District-wide, English Language Arts, Benchmark One, Grade 4, 2006, 2007

BMK 1 / 09-18-2006



BMK 1 / 09-20-2007

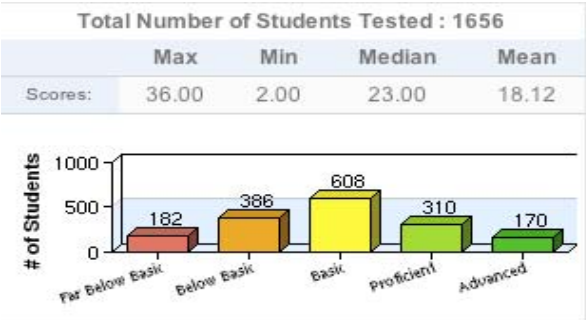
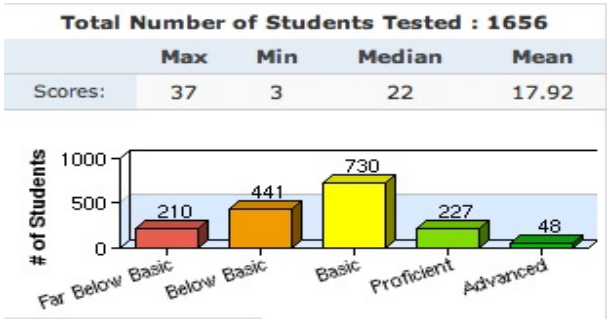


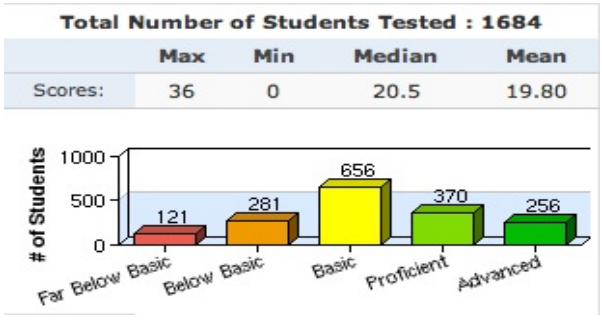
Figure 1 shows Benchmark One scores administered to 4th grade students in the fall of 2006 and then in the fall of 2007 (note that these are different groups of students). The figure shows that the raw number of students who received scores in the proficient and/or advanced range on this test increased from one year to the next (that is, the number went from 275 in 2006 to 480 in 2007). It is important to keep in mind that because these are different groups of students one year of such data is difficult to interpret. However, if such trends were to continue over time, one might conclude that students' performance in the English Language Arts is improving (and that the Literacy Initiative may be a contributor to that improvement).

Figure 2
District-wide English Language Arts, Benchmarks One-Four, Grade 4, 2006-2007

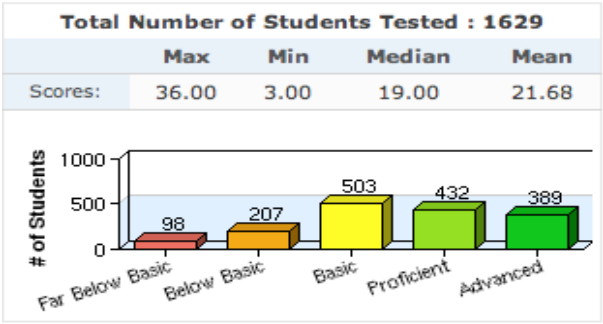
BMK 1 / 09-18-2006



BMK 2 / 11-06-2006



BMK 3 / 02-26-2007



BMK 4 / 05-17-2007

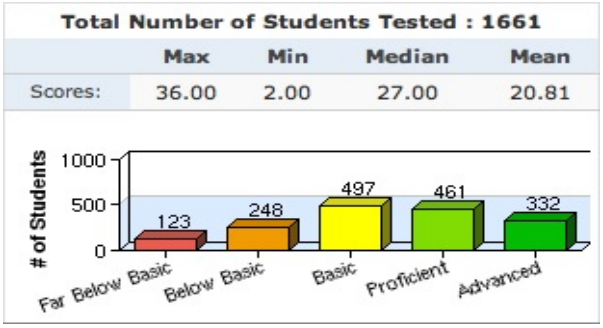
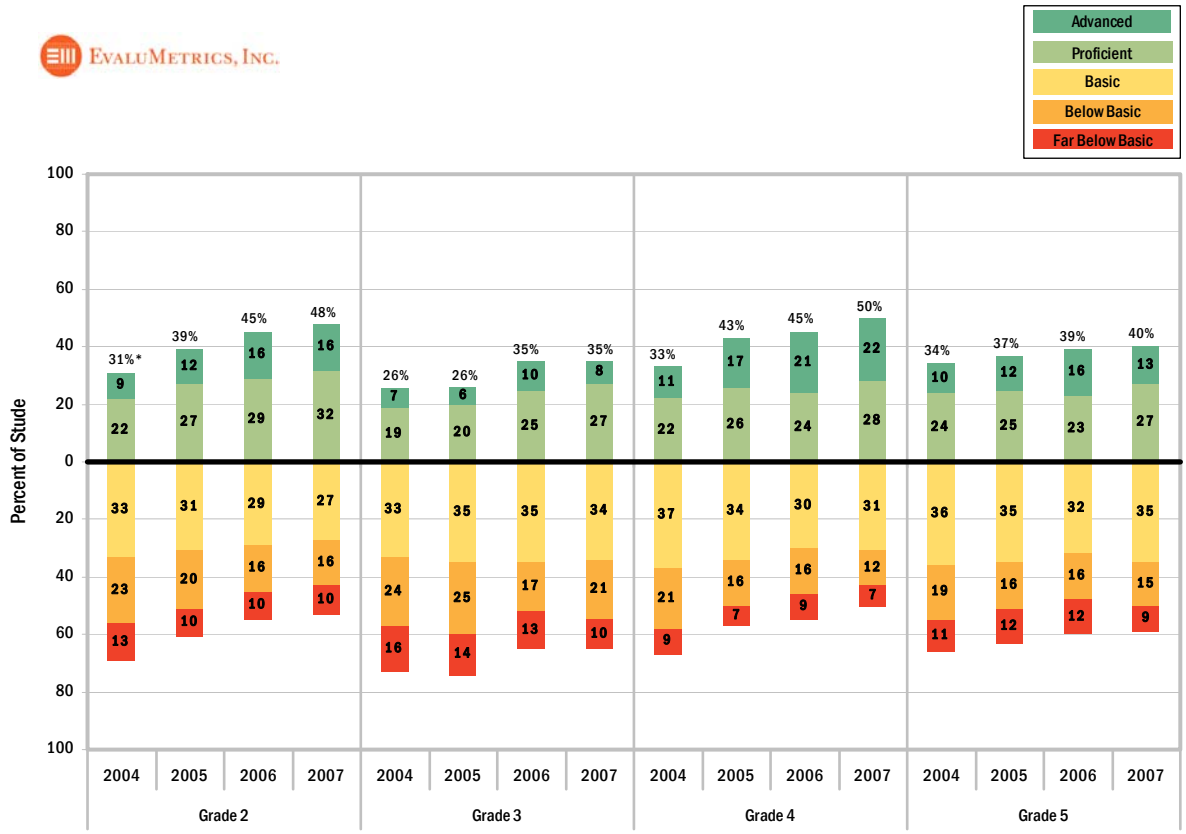


Figure 2 shows 4th grade benchmark test data over the course of the 2006-2007 academic year. In this depiction, the raw numbers of students in the same 4th grade cohort who scored at proficient or above increased from 275 to 793 students (for 48% of the total number who took Benchmark Four). We selected Grade 4 from the array of figures that the district compiled because the number of students on the vertical axis of the graph remained relatively the same across the year whereas for some of the other charts the numbers and the scales used made them difficult to interpret.

California State Tests. The district has also complied student test scores on the CST. Below are the CST scores over the past 4 years for Grades 2-5 and for Grades 9-11 (we did not receive scores for Grades 6-8 from the district—but, we generated our own graph that shows middle school test scores). The following figures demonstrate that overall, test scores in English Language Arts are trending up in Norwalk-LaMirada. Although overall scores remain relatively low (close to 50% of students are at or above proficient in elementary; much lower in high

school). It is notable that in among high school students, 9th grade scores—where the literacy work began in 2005-2006—scores are trending higher than at the other grades.[19]

Figure 3
District-wide, English Language Arts, CST scores, Grades 2-5, 2004-2007

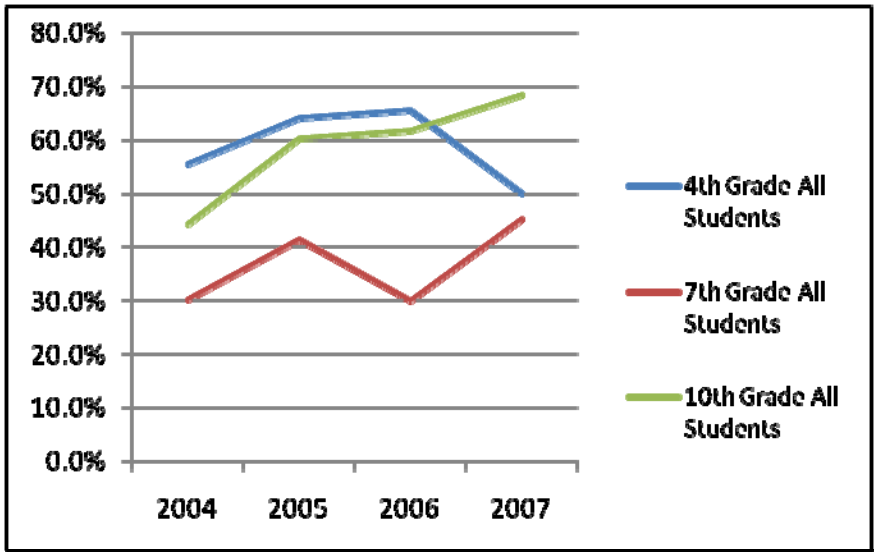


[19] This statement is made with caution. Students encounter many interventions across the district classrooms. However, gains such as these in 9th grade are promising.

Figure 4
District-wide, English Language Arts, CST scores, Grades 9-11, 2004-2007

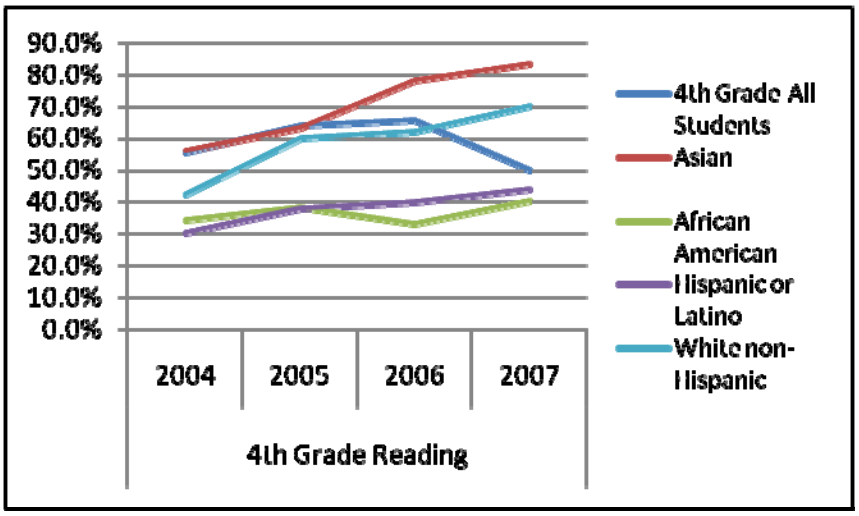
Figures 5 and 6 (following) also show trends in reading on California State Tests. Figure 5 shows scores over the past four years for all Norwalk-LaMirada students in Grades 4, 7 and 10. Here 7th grade test scores are trending considerably lower than those for 4th and 10th grades. Figure 6 disaggregates reading scores for 4th grade students. It demonstrates the difference in scores for students who are of Asian or White descent compared to students who are of Hispanic, Latino or African American descent.

Figure 5
District-wide, Reading CST scores, All Students, 2004-2007
Percent of students at proficient or above



ENGLISH / LANG. ARTS	2004	2005	2006	2007
Grade 2	31%	39%	45%	48%
Grade 3	26%	26%	35%	35%
Grade 4	33%	43%	45%	50%
Grade 5	34%	37%	39%	40%
Grade 6	26%	27%	32%	33%
Grade 7	29%	37%	35%	37%
Grade 8	24%	31%	33%	33%
Grade 9	31%	35%	37%	42%
Grade 10	25%	25%	27%	28%
Grade 11	22%	24%	26%	28%

Figure 6
District-wide, CST Reading scores, 4th Grade by Race/Ethnicity, 2004-2007



	4th Grade Reading			
	2004	2005	2006	2007
All Students	55.6%	64.1%	65.6%	50.0%
Asian	56%	63%	78%	83%
African American	34%	38%	33%	40%
Hispanic or Latino	30%	38%	40%	44%
American Indian				
White non-Hispanic	42%	60%	62%	70%

How Reform Ideas Become Instantiated in Everyday Work: Implementation Challenges

We summarize in this section a number of themes that run through our data on the CEL/Norwalk-LaMirada partnership and the district's system-wide Literacy Initiative. The themes are characterized as *implementation challenges*. Research suggests that such challenges might be expected as districts engage instructional reform efforts that extend over a number of years (e.g., Elmore & Burney, 1997; Hubbard et al 2006). We intend these comments to provide "food for thought" as district leaders and CEL continue to analyze this ambitious reform effort.[20]

[20] Elmore, R. F., & Burney, D. (1997). *School variation and systemic instructional improvement in Community School District #2, New York City.* University of Pittsburgh, High Performance Learning Communities Project, Learning Research and Development Center. Unpublished manuscript. [See footnote #15 for Hubbard, et al reference]

- **Reducing variability through a balance of support and direction.**

Our data demonstrate the considerable depth that the district has achieved—in large part through its partnership with the Center for Educational Leadership—in the level of support for professional learning that is available to educators across the system. Principals, on average, attend a minimum of four professional learning events a month if you count the Leadership Academy, the principals' cadre, their own building LIT team days, and their Roll-out sessions with building staff. Three of these are full day events and all are focused on instructional leadership and/or literacy instruction. This does not count the ongoing learning that can occur by spending more time in classrooms, demonstrating lessons themselves, and conferring with students as well as the various other professional learning events that occur less often (e.g., the Cindy Harrison sessions on professional learning communities). Yet, as one of the CEL consultants noted:

> *Leadership voice has been hit or miss. We took it on from the very beginning and so have some of the others* [other consultants]*…and, that's not consistent across the principals….*
> *And, there are, I would say, about maybe 60-70% that visit classrooms on a regular basis, but you have to get into classrooms and look at instruction. But, I would say that's not consistent* [either].

We found other sources of system variability. There is great variability between schools. For example, there are large differences between the performance of the middle school students and that of the elementary students. And, at the middle school level, there is stark variability between schools in terms of Initiative implementation (this is probably true at all levels, but our data speak most clearly about middle schools in this regard). The implications of the between school variability lead us to speculate that given the already high degree of support that is in place, central office leaders might consider balancing that with the amount of *direction* that is given to schools and school leaders.

There is evidence in our data from this fall (2007) that this is exactly what district leaders are beginning to do (e.g., the Superintendent is meeting with each individual principal for the 2nd time; the area superintendents are visiting schools regularly). But, although the Superintendent and the area superintendents were clear (among themselves) that principals are required to be in 3-5 classrooms per day, we heard variation at the school level in terms of what sense principals are making of this directive. For example, we heard that principals are supposed to be in 3-5

classrooms *per week*. So while what Norwalk central office leaders are doing this fall is in the right direction, these kinds of leadership steps will need continual reassessment and calibration as more is learned about the capacity of school leaders.

There was also within school variability evidenced by our data. For example, at one elementary school, there were differences between classrooms in terms of what teachers had implemented in their teaching practice around the Literacy Initiative—and this variability existed between teachers who were on the school LIT team. The amount of coaching teachers received seemed to correspond with the degree to which teachers had implemented the Balanced Literacy instructional practices. While all LIT teams members participated in a one day professional development session per month (plus the two hour "Roll-out" session), the demonstration teachers also attended the Leadership Academies (another one day session per month) and they were the first in line for classroom-based coaching with the district literacy coaches. [At the middle level, where the entire LIT team is now attending the leadership academy, principals were concerned about how to "fill in the gaps" for the teachers who have missed the previous two years of training. Several mentioned a need for a 'remedial course' to review how to do a Read Aloud and Shared Reading.] Principals would also like building-based coaches. This would be a trade-off for district leaders to consider; on the one hand, they have built a strong force of highly skilled literacy coaches; and, on the other hand, those 15 coaches can only do so much.

There was evidence from our observations of the coaching academies and the half-day coaching sessions with Katherine Casey that coaches were encouraged to coach others besides the demonstration teachers. However, it was clear from our observations at the school level, that this was a difficult task for coaches to take on—it's difficult to "coach" someone who does not welcome your presence. Encouraging signs that may (over time) remedy this situation include the "*massive expansion*" of the LIT team work in elementary schools and the strategy to provide increased coaching at one middle school. Put together with clear direction from central office to principals to teachers—these levels of support may well pay off in terms of reaching scale.

- **The role of central office leadership in system-wide reform.**

The changes we described in this report regarding the role of the area superintendents, such as their increased presence in schools, are related to the above discussion of variability. Just as the central office leaders in Norwalk-LaMirada expect their principals to "know" their

learners—that is, to assess the learning needs of their teachers by being in classrooms everyday and learning to give teachers feedback on their instructional practice—so to must central office leaders know their learners (principals) and be able to assess their needs in order to plan appropriate professional learning experiences for them. Particularly at the middle level, principals were asking for someone to coach them on how to move their staff forward. Recognizing that this is not an easy task, given the workloads that the area superintendents have carried in this district, it seems that these leaders might consider their own *support* options. One option is to consider the workload of the area superintendents; another is sources of new learning and professional support for central office leaders (something akin to the principals' cadres, for example). CEL, we understand, is contracted for 8 days over this year that is specifically targeted at "central office coaching." This is certainly one way for these leaders to find support and guidance as they take on the difficult task of providing increased direction to building principals.

- **Providing ongoing support for the development of the literacy coaches.**

We mentioned earlier the strength of the cadre of literacy coaches in Norwalk-LaMirada. They received a great deal of support for their learning during Year One of the Literacy Initiative. The coaches are clearly very important carriers of the reform ideas out to schools and classrooms. We described in this report two forms of professional support for the coaches: the coaches' academies and a one-time half day coaching session last year with Katherine Casey. In the academy session we described above, Katherine talked about what she had learned about the dilemmas of coaching on-the-ground from the one-to-one sessions—and she tailored that academy around what she had observed as areas in need of support. Although the coaches are being *"creative about how to support"* each other—teaming up for LIT days, conducting walkthroughs at school sites together, and meeting for study sessions—they long for collaborative time and more coaching support from an external expert such as Katherine Casey. This is especially true for new coaches who missed the first few years of Academy training. Given the district's limited resources, this is a true implementation challenge. The coaches appear to carry much of the implementation weight, so this is a challenge that merits continued discussion.

- **How do "reform ideas" travel within the district?**

It is clear that reform ideas have traveled into the district from external sources (e.g.

CEL, San Diego). These ideas have traveled in the form of CEL consultants working on-the-ground in the district. It would be an interesting process to consider how reform ideas travel *within* the district and to then consider the roles that people, ideas, structures, and materials play in that process.[21] For example, in the above examples, we noted that central office leaders are 'upping the ante' in terms of their presence in schools—a means of bringing reform ideas more strongly to the attention of principals. The district has contracted with Data Director, which is a useful program for transferring ideas about assessing student learning and using assessment results to inform instruction. Coaches carry many of the ideas about Balanced Literacy out to classrooms. Going forward, district leaders and their CEL consultants might consider the following kinds of questions: Are "people" working in comparable and consistent ways across the district in terms of spreading ideas and artifacts that relate to the aims of the Literacy Initiative? What further practices could be developed to (1) facilitate the continued creation of shared meaning (e.g., coaching cycles that always include other teachers); (2) the reconstitution of power relationships (e.g. means for cross-organizational level learning, changes in how leaders across levels work together); or (3) the provision of cultural tools (such as materials) to mediate learning? How can dialogue across and throughout the system be facilitated and further developed?[22]

- **The Role of the Teachers' Association in Supporting the Aims of Reform.**

The teachers' association in Norwalk-LaMirada Unified School District is a strong union. Our data are replete with references to its strength. Especially as it relates to principals and their perceived ability to push teachers to take up reform ideas and utilize release time for collaborative planning, references to TANLA are common. Central office leaders are clear that the work to develop agreements with the teachers' association is a big part of the Literacy Initiative although TANLA has generally maintained a stance of approval regarding the instructional reform. Both the district and TANLA conducted surveys of teachers last spring and, in each case, results showed that the Literacy Initiative is supported by teachers in the district. However, agreements on paper are one thing—the perception of principals and others in

[21] Thanks to Lea Hubbard and Mary Kay Stein for this set of ideas about reform travel between districts. Here we speculate about how they are traveling *within* districts such as Norwalk. For a related discussion, about "instructional guidance systems," see Stein & Coburn, 2007 on the CTP website (www.ctpweb.org).

[22] See Boreham, N., & Morgan, C. (2004). A sociocultural analysis of organizational learning. *Oxford Review of Education, 30 (3),* 307-325 for related discussion.

the system is another. Again, this is a place to ensure that the message and support from district leaders is strong and consistent and well-publicized.

Appendix A

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