

Common Core Elementary and Middle School Odds-beating School Study: Methods and Procedures

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Contents

Overview of the Common Core Odds-Beating Study.....	3
Phase 1: Analysis of Policy Contexts, Existing Literature, and Instruments for Accountability.....	4
Literature Review and Theoretical Framework	4
Research Questions	5
Phase 2: Studies of Elementary and Middle Schools.....	6
Methods.....	6
Sample.....	6
Procedures	10
Consent for Site Visits	10
Training of Field Researchers.....	11
Key Informants.....	11
Site Visit Schedule.....	11
Instrumentation.....	14
Procedures for Data Collection and Analysis.....	16
Survey.....	21
Procedures	21
Analysis of Response Rates for Climate and Instructional Surveys	21
References	23
Appendices.....	25

Overview of the Common Core Odds-Beating Study

The Common Core Odds-Beating Studies were developed in collaboration between a team of researchers at the University at Albany and the New York State Education Department. The study began in the recognition that there was a need for research investigating the processes and practices in schools with relatively better outcomes on the Common Core-aligned assessments first implemented in the state in the 2011-2012 school year. At the time of this study, there had been no systematic examinations of the ways a variety of schools have approached and responded to the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) and the Annual Professional Performance Review (APPR) systems, both part of the Race to the Top reform agenda.

Because so much had changed in terms of what and how educators were expected to do as a result of both the CCLS and APPR, a central focus of these studies was to identify theories of action in schools that were odds beating in terms of achieving higher-than-expected achievement outcomes on CCLS-aligned ELA and Mathematics assessments. In this way the study sought to investigate the impact of the variety of changes that have taken place, including the profession's understanding of effective instruction and the leadership qualities that support that instruction. Another central focus of these studies was to identify and describe the combinations of variables that are associated with better student outcomes on the CCLS-aligned assessments: This is the primary purpose of the case and cross-case analyses.

In addition to the theory of action, case, and cross-case analyses, results from the study are being and will be reported in a variety of ways and in different venues. This report is designed as a resource that describes the sample (also see Schiller et al 2014) and details the methods and procedures that were used for data collection and analysis that informed the theory of action, case, and cross-case reports. The sections that follow describe the methods used in each of the following stages:

- Phase 1: Analysis of Policy Contexts, Existing Literature, and Instruments for Accountability
- Phase 2: Studies of Elementary and Middle Schools
 - Case Studies of Elementary Schools
 - Case Studies of Middle Schools
 - Surveys of Elementary and Middle Schools
- Phase 3: Theories of Action
 - Cross-Case Analyses

Phase 1: Analysis of Policy Contexts, Existing Literature, and Instruments for Accountability

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Literature Reviews

Two rounds of literature reviews were conducted in conjunction with developing research questions in collaboration with NYSED. The first iterations of a literature review were conducted in order to identify theoretically-sound, research-based lines of inquiry for the case studies. Once we had agreement with NYSED on the lines of inquiry that would frame the study, this same literature review informed the research design including the instruments, data collection procedures, and methods of

The second literature review was completed in spring and early summer of 2014. This literature review was conducted in the following manner and for the following reasons:

- (1) The conventional school improvement research did not move beyond the effective schools research that characterized the latter part of the 20th Century and emphasizes better planning and management. This literature was insufficient since the RTTT agenda that our studies were intended to investigate required locating *new designs* for schools and districts with the three key drivers: The Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS), the Annual Professional Performance Review (APPR), and data-driven instruction (DDI) and overall improvement planning. The three drivers mentioned above are mechanisms for organizational and professional change, especially penetrating changes into what and how teachers teach and what and how students learn. These changes start with what teachers and students do in classrooms, but they also extend to organizational routines in schools and districts and to new data and information management systems as well. The effective schools literature has little to say about changes of this magnitude and therefore we searched beyond this literature.
- (2) Since one of the directives from NYSED was to cross-walk the theory of action (TOA) with the DTSDE 2.0. This evaluation tool takes a systems view of schools, encompassing district office relations and other important priorities not included in the effective schools research. This broader systems view, together with a social-ecological perspective on schools, districts, families, and communities, corresponded to the team's research and development perspectives. We needed to look again for literature that provided this research and development perspective.
- (3) Finally, we took into account literature reviews of best-practices, guides, and the latest research collected in service of deliverables One and Two as part of the MOU. Deliverable One was to revise and reshape the Look and Listen Fors to match the DTSDE 2.0. This work examined what the DTSDE 2.0 framework might "look like" or

“sound like” in practice. Additionally, Deliverable Two was a 123-page resource guide which connects schools and education systems to the latest literature and best-practices in response to DTSDE-framed needs and priorities.

In addition to this literature analysis, during the summer of 2014, we returned to the newly published literature in search of guidance. In particular, the research by Knapp et al. (2014), McDonald et al. (2014), Day and Gu (2014), and Bard et al. (2014) have enabled us to examine and analyze data in new ways, also setting the stage for improved research with the middle schools. The policy brief on performance adaptation identifies these references and provides details (see Lawson et al, 2014).

Developing the Template for the Theory of Action (TOA)

We used the findings from the literature review to develop a research-based TOA analytical template consisting of the two aforementioned categories: (1) core characteristics and (2) consequential practices. We intentionally organized these categories as best we could to correspond to comparable priorities in the DTSDE 2.0 because we wanted the categories and the findings to be easily accessible for DTSDE purposes and also to have immediate “face value” for NYSED.

The template we derived from our literature review and facilitated initial analysis of the information compiled concerning the nine participating elementary schools. Like a pair of spectacles that provide special views of the world, this template directed attention to some types of information, but not others. The result was a set of nine case studies that were structured and written to feature findings across the study’s lines of inquiry.

The second round of analysis enabled a kind of check and balance system. We reviewed each case anew, but without the categories we derived from the literature. Our main question was: What else is in these cases that others have not identified, described, and explained? The method here is called “grounded theory” (Strauss & Corbin, 2008). The main idea is to derive new categories from new findings.

We ended up with a new template. In the process, we discarded some of the literature review categories for which we had no evidence in our sample schools. At the same time, we used the grounded approach to amend existing categories and add new ones.

Research Questions

This study was employed to investigate the following research questions:

- (1) To what extent and how are the schools’ curricula and instructional practices aligned with the CCLS?

- (2) To what extent and how do the schools utilize their educator evaluation system processes (observation, feedback, measures of student learning) to improve instruction?
- (3) What school and district capacities support implementation of the new curriculum and teacher evaluation system?
- (4) What are the workforce configurations, organizational designs, and improvement models in place in the schools and districts?
- (5) To what extent and how do the schools' theories of action align to the DTSDE?

Phase 2: Studies of Elementary and Middle Schools

Methods

This study employed case study methodology with multiple methods in order to investigate implementation of Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) and Annual Professional Performance Review (APPR) in a purposive sample of nine elementary schools. Interest resided in each school as a special case as well as in two kinds of inter-school comparisons (i.e. theories of action and cross-case). This section outlines the process of selecting participating schools and the methods used to collect and analyze information from them.

Sample

The funder for this study was particularly interested in elementary and middle schools whose students had on average exceeded expected performance on Common Core aligned state assessments in 2013. This process is detailed in a separate sampling methodology report (Schiller et al 2014) with an overview presented here. Twelve such schools were selected (six elementary and six middle), and they were dubbed "odds-beating schools." The study design also called for equal representation of rural, suburban and urban schools based on the assumption that effective practices may differ by school location and community context. Comparisons thus could be made among these odds beaters. A second kind of comparison also was prioritized. Six elementary schools (three elementary and three middle) representing rural, suburban, and urban settings and performing as expected on the 2013 assessments were considered "typically performing schools."

For the purposes of this study, expected performance was estimated using regression analysis. Average schools were predicted in a subject (either mathematics or English language arts) at a given grade level using the proportion of students at that grade level who were classified as economically disadvantaged and the proportion that were classified as English language learners. These two demographic characteristics accounted for between two-thirds to three-quarters of the variation in average scores across schools. The expected-actual

performance gaps were compared for three grade levels – third, fourth and fifth for elementary schools and sixth, seventh and eighth for middle schools – in the process of classifying schools.

Approximately 14% of close to 1,300 elementary schools and just under 17% of around 610 middle schools state-wide met at least one of the two criteria for being dubbed as “odds beating.” All such schools exceeded expectations by a significant margin in multiple subjects and grade levels. One of the criteria took into account how far schools exceeded expectations by determining whether the cumulative difference between expected and actual performance was at least one standard deviation larger than the mean difference for all schools state-wide. The other criterion took into account whether the expected-actual gap was statistically significant (i.e., unlikely to be due to random variation) for at least three of the six comparisons.

Approximately 18% of elementary schools and 15% of middle schools state-wide met both of the criteria for the classification “typically performing.” The criteria were that the expected-actual gap in performance was less than a quarter of a standard deviation away from the mean difference, and none of the gaps were statistically significant (i.e., could be due to chance). In essence, the average performance of students in these schools was indistinguishable from what would be expected in the given grade levels and subjects for schools serving similar populations.

In purposively sampling from the potential pools of odds-beating and typically performing schools, the first step was to eliminate schools targeted by the state as persistently among the lowest performing in the state on the prior 2011 and 2012 of assessments. Then, keeping in mind the design requirement of two odds-beating and one typically performing school from each community type, a pool of 21 potential participants was selected balancing the types of populations served (e.g., ethnic/racial diversity and rates of economically disadvantaged students or English language learners), fiscal resources (e.g., per-pupil expenditures, combined wealth ratio, % of expenditures on instruction), and region of the state. In consultation with the funders, the list of potential participants was prioritized for recruitment.

Ultimately, 18 schools accepted the invitation including all but three of the first choice schools (one typically performing elementary school and two odds-beating middle schools) (see Table 1 and 2 regarding how schools qualified for the study). All of the odds-beating elementary schools had actual-expected performance gaps at least one standard-deviation larger than the state average, with five exceeding 1.5 standard deviations. In contrast, all of the odds-beating middle schools met the criteria for having statistically significant performance gaps in at least three of the comparisons, with all but two having average performance gaps greater than one standard deviation larger than the state overall. All but one of the odds-beating schools also had statistically significant actual-expected gaps in three out of six comparisons, with three

doing so on all but one of the comparisons. Thus, the odds-beating schools participating in this study out-performed schools serving similar demographic populations on multiple subjects and grade levels compared to schools across the state.

Table 1.

Elementary School Sample Performance on 2013 New York State CCLS Assessments

Odds-Beating Schools	Number of Significant <i>t</i> -tests	Average Z Residual Range
Spring Creek	3	1.50-1.99
Eagle Bluff	3	1.00-1.49
Bay City	5	1.50-1.99
Starling Springs	5	2.00<
Yellow Valley	2	1.50-1.99
Goliad	5	1.00-1.49
Average	3.8	1.50-1.99
Typically Performing Schools		
Wolf Creek	0	-0.20-0.00
Paige City	0	0.00-0.20
Sun Hollow	0	0.00-0.20
Average	0	-0.20-0.00

Table 2.

Middle School Sample Performance on 2013 New York State CCLS Assessments

Odds-Beating Schools	Number of Significant <i>t</i> -tests	Average Z Residual Range
Hutch Hill	3	< 1.00
Julesberg	6	1.00-1.50
Larabee	6	2.00<
Roaring Gap	4	1.50-1.99
Ruby	3	2.00<
Sage City	3	<1.00
Average	4.2	1.00-1.50
Typically Performing Schools		
Locus Glen	0	-0.20-0.00
Silver City	0	0.00-0.20

Tarelton	0	0.00-0.20
Average	0	-0.20-0.00

The sample of 18 schools (see Tables 3 and 4 for demographic profiles¹) tended to be more economically disadvantaged, less white, and have lower per-pupil spending than elementary and middle schools across the state. This choice was purposeful as one interest in this study was to identify practice in more challenged contexts. The design of this study enables several kinds of comparisons. Comparisons among the odds beaters were of special interest, but so were comparisons between the odds beaters and the typically performing schools. In addition, comparison by locale (i.e. rural, suburban, and urban) are also possible. In purposively selecting the final sample, preference within location-type was given to As with all manner of case study research, interest resided in thick descriptions of each school as a special case and, via comparative analysis, the articulation of salient theory.

Table 3.

Characteristics of Participating Elementary Schools

	% Economically Disadvantaged Students	% White Students	Total Enrollment	Per-pupil Spending
Odds Beating				
Yellow Valley	>43%	<73%	380-500	<\$18.3K
Spring Creek	18-43%	>89%	>500	\$18.3-21.4K
Bay City	>43%	<73%	>500	<\$18.3K
Eagle Bluff	>43%	>89%	380-500	<\$18.3K
Starling Springs	18-43%	<73%	<380	\$18.3-21.4K
Goliad	>43%	<73%	>500	>\$21.4K
Typically Performing				
Wolf Creek	18-43%	>89%	>500	<\$18.3K
Paige City	>43%	73-89%	380-500	<\$18.3K
Sun Hollow	18-43%	73-89%	<380	<\$18.3K
All Participants				
Median	44%	76%	476	\$17K
Mean	53%	68%	501	\$18K
Std. Dev.	21%	28%	130	\$2.5K
All Elementary Schools				
Median	30%	83%	438	\$20K

¹ The schools in this study have been promised anonymity and therefore individual school demographic data that could possibly reveal the identity of the school cannot be shared. At least three, and usually more than five, schools in the state have the same characteristics described in this table.

Mean	33%	75%	458	\$20K
Std. Dev.	22%	24%	160	\$4.1K

Note: Groupings reflect roughly the top, middle and bottom thirds of the distribution for a given characteristic across the state.

Table 4

Characteristics of Participating Middle Schools

Odds Beating	% Economically Disadvantaged Students	% White Students	Total Enrollment	Per-pupil Spending
Hutch Hill	17-40%	>90%	>770	<\$18K
Julesberg	17-40%	<75%	>770	\$18-22K
Larabee	<17%	75-90%	770-450	<\$18K
Roaring Gap	17-40%	<75%	770-450	\$18-22K
Ruby	>40%	>90%	<450	<\$18K
Sage City	>40%	<75%	770-450	>\$22K
Typically Performing				
Locus Glen	17-40%	>90%	770-450	<\$18K
Silver City	>40%	<75%	770-450	\$18-22K
Tarelton	>40%	>90%	<450	>\$22K
All Participants				
Median	38%	84%	581	\$20K
Mean	37%	74%	603	\$19K
Std. Dev.	16%	24%	312	\$3.4K
All Middle Schools				
Median	27%	85%	620	\$20K
Mean	30%	79%	650	\$20K
Std. Dev.	.20%	20%	317	\$4.2K

Note: Groupings reflect roughly the top, middle and bottom thirds of the distribution for a given characteristic across the state.

Procedures**Consent for Site Visits**

Once schools were selected, UAlbany staff made the initial approach to the school principal and district superintendent to obtain consent for the school to participate in the research. At that time, the district was promised a modest stipend for their contributions of time to the study and provided sample schedules. After each superintendent and principal agreed to participate, the principal was asked to appoint an on-site coordinator to help in scheduling visits and

collecting documentary evidence. Once coordinators had been appointed, they worked with UAlbany staff to complete the site schedule and a field team was assigned to the site visit.

Training of Field Researchers

To insure consistent data gathering across multiple sites, UAlbany staff provided a 3-hour orientation for all field team leaders and coleaders. In this orientation, field team researchers were presented with an overview of the study and guidance on the content and use of instruments to guide interviews, focus groups, classroom observations, summary interpretations of school visits, and collection of documentary evidence. Newer field researchers were partnered with experienced UAlbany staff to shadow on at least one visit before collecting data themselves.

During the orientation, all of the instrumentation was distributed in electronic formats as well as in a field manual. Researchers were strongly encouraged to review the manual's detailed descriptions of data collection procedures for all aspects of the school visits, and use the manual as reference material during and after the site visits.

After the training sessions, each field team was assigned a supervisor that was either the PI or one of the CO-Is on the study. This person oversaw the writing of the case study.

Key Informants

Participants included the district superintendent or assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction, the principal of each school, other school or district administrators responsible for curriculum and instruction, professional development, special education, English Second Language programs, and assessment. In addition, support service staff such as the school psychologist, social worker, nurse and at least one teacher of each grade level was included in interviews or focus groups.

Site Visit Schedule

The site visit schedule was developed for one lead researcher and one co-lead and at least one assistant who took notes on a laptop or notepad, recorded interviews, and focus groups, and transcribed all audiotapes. See Table 5 for middle school sample schedule; both the elementary and middle school schedules were very similar.

Table 5.

Sample Schedule for Middle School Study

<i>Time Block (or Period)</i>	<i>Lead Researcher</i>	<i>Co-lead</i>
<i>8:30am - 9:30am</i>	<i>Superintendent Interview</i>	<i>Director of Special Education</i>

	<i>Interview</i>	
<i>9:30am - 10:15am</i>	<i>Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Interview</i>	<i>Director of ESL/ELL Interview</i>
<i>10:15am - 11am</i>	<i>Director of Assessment Interview</i>	<i>Director of Professional Development Interview</i>
<i>11am - 11:45pm</i>	<i>Extended Learning Coordinator Interview</i>	<i>Student Services Coordinator Interview</i>
<i>11:45pm - 12:45pm</i>	<i>LUNCH/Travel</i>	
<i>12:45pm - 1:45 pm</i>	<i>Principal Interview</i>	<i>6th grade classroom Observation/Debriefing</i>
<i>1:45pm - 2:15pm</i>	<i>Building Leadership Team Focus Group</i>	<i>7th grade classroom Observation/Debriefing</i>
<i>2:15pm – 2:45pm</i>	<i>School Tour</i>	

Sample Schedule Day 2

<i>Time Block</i>	<i>Lead Researcher</i>	<i>Co-lead</i>
<i>8:30 am-9:30am</i>	<i>School Tour, if not Day 1</i>	<i>School Tour, if not Day 1</i>
<i>9:30am – 10:15am</i>	<i>Assistant Principal Interview</i>	<i>Mainstream Teacher Focus Group</i>
<i>10:15am – 11am</i>	<i>6th grade classroom Observation/Debriefing</i>	<i>Support Staff Focus Group</i>
<i>11am – 11:45am</i>	<i>7th grade classroom Observation/Debriefing</i>	<i>ELA Coach Interview</i>
<i>11:45am – 12:15pm</i>	<i>8th grade classroom Observation/Debriefing</i>	<i>Math coach Interview</i>

12:15pm – 1pm	LUNCH	LUNCH
1 pm – 1:45pm	Sped Teacher Focus Group or Interview	8 th grade classroom Observation/Debriefing
1:45pm – 2:30pm	ELL Teacher Focus Group or Interview	
2:30pm – 3:15pm	Wrap-up with Principal	Wrap-up with Principal

Target Interview List:

District level

- Superintendent
- Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction
- Director of Assessment
- Director of Professional Development
- Director or Coordinator of Special Education
- Director or Coordinator of ELL Bilingual Programs
- Director of Student Services
- District Director of Extended Learning

School level

- School Principal
- Assistant Principal/Master teacher or instructional coach
- Special education teacher
- ESL teacher

Target Focus group list:

- Building Leadership Team focus group

- 6th – 8th grade [or 3rd - 5th gr., if elementary school] Mainstream Content Teachers focus group
 - Support staff (School Psychologist, Social Worker, Nurse) focus group
 - (2) Instructional Coach (ELA and math)(or focus group, if requested, by content area, if possible)
-

9—17 interviews total

3 – 6 classroom observations total

Instrumentation

Note samples of instruments are in the Appendix.

Interviews and Focus Groups. A series of semi-structured interviews and focus group protocols were developed to gather comparable data across sites on a variety of aspects of district and school leadership, curriculum, instruction, student social/emotional health, family engagement strategies and community partnerships, barriers to students' attendance, school and classroom engagement, learning readiness, and out-of-school time (OST) learning, workforce development, stability, and remodeling, organizational redesign, and data to evidence decision-making and implementation. Each section of each interview protocol consisted of a general question to begin the conversation, and a series of more specific questions that could be used if needed for follow up (Creswell, 2013; Morgan & Krueger, 1997). The interview protocol for the principal and the teacher focus group protocol are provided as examples of the ## used in the field.

Surveys. Two online surveys – a climate survey and an instructional survey – were developed with the dual purposes of (a) collecting information from a broader set of informants from each school and (b) providing a conduit for staff at each school to provide information anonymously. Development and structure of these surveys followed established processes (Fowler, 2013; Blair, 2013; Rea & Parker, 2014). Both surveys were also designed to allow benchmarking to national and international studies of school culture and instructional practices. These large-scale studies include TIMSS, PISA, NELS and ECLS-K.

The climate survey to be distributed to all personnel was designed to measure not only adults' perceptions of the principal, relationships with other adults, student behavior and school climate but also their beliefs about student learning and engagement. In addition to the large scale studies, questions were drawn from well-known sources including Collective Efficacy, CSCL (parent, personnel, and student) and SSOCS. A penultimate draft of the survey was reviewed by the funders. The final survey consisted of 25 questions with four possible

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responses – Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree – designed to be completed in less than 10 minutes (see Appendix).

The instructional survey was designed to capture the alignment of instruction to CCLS and triangulate to mainstream teacher focus group questions and classroom observations (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). The instructional survey (see Appendix) was designed to gather in depth instructional practice information, drawing on items appropriate for elementary grade teachers from the large scale studies and supplemented with a few specifically to ask about CCLS-aligned practices. As with the climate survey, the penultimate version was reviewed by the funders. The survey consists of 31 closed-ended questions for all teachers about their relationships with the principal and each other, and their normal instructional practices. Then, the survey asks respondents who teach ELA to complete 53 additional closed ended questions and math teachers to complete 42 additional closed ended questions. Using an electronic “skip” technique, teachers only see questions that are appropriate to their teaching situation. Finally, teachers are provided with an optional open-ended question, giving them an opportunity to share their thoughts on the school, teaching, or any element of education that they want to share. The survey is designed to be completed in between 25-30 minutes depending on the subjects a particular respondent teaches.

Classroom Observation Protocol.

The classroom observation protocol prompted observers to notice the CCLS-shifts in particular, but also to attend to the interactions of students and students and students and teacher generally and in as much detail as possible. Observers recorded a variety of features of the classroom, including the type of activity (e.g., lecture, class discussion, individual work, transition); type of work (copying from the board, notetaking, calculating, small group discussion, individual work); focus of activity (e.g., fractions, identifying author’s point of view); kinds of texts used (textbook, non-fiction, literature, primary sources, study materials); content of instruction (subject area knowledge, strategy instruction, specific content); focus (“big ideas”, facts and details, connections to other knowledge, connections to life, problem solving). A set of questions guided observers through the physical features of the classroom, the nature of the lesson, the types of activities the students were engaged in, characteristics of instruction (e.g. explicit teaching of structures or strategies).

Post Observation De-brief Questions. These questions, which were asked informally of teachers after classroom observations, focused on the purposes of the lesson, the role of the CCLS, planned versus actual activities, levels of student engagement, things that in hindsight might have been done differently, and what will come next for this class.

Procedures for Data Collection and Analysis

Data Collection

Every school was visited by a research team consisting of at least three members. Prior to the visit, district and school leaders received introductory details about the purposes of the study, the requirements for participation, and the potential benefits accompanying participation. Also prior to the site visit, team members completed preliminary reviews of relevant documents sent in advance or available on the school and district office websites. Second, the school climate survey was distributed to all school staff electronically through Survey Monkey.

Once on-site, team members observed classes and completed both focus group and key informant interviews using semi-structured interview protocols. Classes were observed after receiving teachers' permissions and were scheduled by the principal. See Tables 6 and 7 for summaries of focus group and interview participants. In the elementary school study a total of 69 interviews and 45 focus groups were conducted. In the middle school study a total of 66 interviews and 44 focus groups were conducted.

Observations were structured by formal protocols developed in previous research (see Appendix). A total of 49 observations of ELA and math classrooms were conducted in the elementary study and 50 in the middle school study.

Finally, the instructional survey was administered electronically to all teachers at the school. Both surveys were collected anonymously to promote unbiased feedback. The surveys were sent by the SUNY Albany team survey coordinator to the school liaison, who in turn distributed an introductory letter, explanation of anonymity, and a link to the survey via email. These are discussed further below.

Table 6.

Summary of Elementary School Study Participants

Participants	Yellow Valley	Bay City	Eagle Bluff	Wolf Creek	Spring Creek	Goliad	Paige City	Starling Springs	Sun Hollow	TOTAL
District administrators										
Superintendent	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	9
Assistant Superintendent	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	1	0	6
Directors of Assessment	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	4
Others	2	3	0	1	1	5	4	3	0	19
TOTAL District Administrators	5	6	2	2	2	8	7	5	1	38

School Administrators										
Principals	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	9
Assistant Principals	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	3
Others	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	4
TOTAL School Administrators	2	5	1	1	1	2	1	1	2	16
Support Staff										
School psychologist	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	6
Others	2	3	2	0	2	2	1	1	1	14
TOTAL Support Staff	3	4	3	1	3	2	2	1	1	20
Teachers										
Grade 3	3	2	4	2	2	2	3	3	2	23
Grade 4	3	2	4	2	3	2	4	2	2	24
Grade 5	3	3	4	2	2	2	4	3	2	25
Others	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	7
TOTAL Teachers	11	9	12	6	7	6	11	9	8	79
Teacher Aides	0	1	0	0	0	0	6	0	0	7
Specialists										
AIS	2	0	2	2	4	4	4	0	3	21
Special Education	4	1	3	1	2	2	3	1	1	18
ESL	1	0	0	0	0	1	2	0	0	4
Others	3	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	6
TOTAL Specialists	10	2	6	3	6	7	9	2	4	49
	31	26	24	13	19	25	30	18	16	202

Table 7.

Summary of Middle School Study Participants

Participants	Ruby	Tarelton	Hutch Hill	Locus Glen	Silver City	Larabee	Julesberg	Roaring Gap	Sage City	TOTAL
District administrators										
Superintendent	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	8
Assistant Superintendent	0	0	1	0	1	2	1	2	0	7
Directors of Assessment	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	2

Others	0	0	0	2	4	0	4	5	3	18
TOTAL District Administrators	1	1	2	3	6	2	8	8	4	35
School Administrators										
Principals	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	9
Assistant Principals	0	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	1	11
Others	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	2
TOTAL School Administrators	1	3	3	2	4	2	3	2	2	22
Support Staff										
School psychologist	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	5
Others	1	0	3	3	4	2	1	4	3	21
TOTAL Support Staff	2	1	4	3	5	3	1	4	3	26
Teachers										
Grade 6	2	2	5	3		0	5	0		17
Grade 7	3	2	3	0		2	5	0		15
Grade 8	3	3	7	1		2	5	0		21
Others	0	0	4	6		2		5		17
TOTAL Teachers	8	7	15	10	6	6	15	5	16	70
Specialists										
AIS	1	2	0	0	0	3	3	2	0	11
Special Education	1	2	7	8	3	2	4	4	0	31
ESL	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	2	6
Others	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
TOTAL Specialists	2	4	9	8	4	6	8	7	2	50
Grand Total	14	16	33	26	25	19	35	26	27	203

Data Analysis

Data analysis commenced while teams were on site as is standard in qualitative research. Structured by this study's lines of inquiry, teams engaged in debriefing activities at the end of each day. These debriefing activities were structured by a series of questions to be used in writing an interpretive memo. This interpretive memo was structured to organize the team's reflections on the data and, after the first day, help to identify special needs and opportunities for detailed probes into the school's structure and operations.

The survey data were analyzed to examine overall trends in school climate and instructional practices within and between schools. Groups were aggregated to so that no statistic reflected fewer than 5 participants. Responses to questions concerning similar topics were combined to create more reliable indicators of the underlying factor being measured.

Both the survey and all other data were analyzed by at least one site team member to construct a summary report. The purpose of the summary report was to capture the major themes related to each of the lines of inquiry in a timely manner (within six weeks of the visit), gather feedback from participants on the accuracy of the report, and utilize the report as an outline for the more in-depth case study that would follow. Each summary report was shared between the lead and co-lead of the site visit team as a way to confirm findings (researcher triangulation). Next, the summary report was forwarded to the school principal and district leader (either Superintendent or Assistant Superintendent) to check for accuracy. Any inaccuracies were fixed and were integrated into the final summary report. In sum, the credibility of findings for each case was validated through source triangulation, researcher triangulation, and member checking.

Phases of Case Analysis

Each case's data set was then loaded into a qualitative analysis software program (NVivo 10, QSR International)) and coded according to an a priori scheme based on the lines of inquiry informing the study: (a) District Office-School Relations, Alignment, & Coherence; b) School Building Leadership; c) Common Core Curriculum and Instruction; d) Teachers' Instruction and Practice; e) Student Social/Emotional Developmental Health; f) Family Engagement Strategies and Community Partnerships; g) Barriers to students' attendance, school and classroom engagement, learning readiness, and out-of-school time (OST) learning; h) Workforce Development, Stability, and Remodeling; i) Organizational Redesign; j) Data to Evidence to Intervention Decision-making and Implementation Mechanisms with Evaluation-driven Continuous Quality Improvement Mechanisms.

All coders and site team leaders had participated in at least one elementary school site visit to provide context for coding and writing of case studies. As mentioned earlier, the a priori coding scheme was based on the pre-established lines of inquiry rooted in the literature. Two rounds of test coding by two team leaders were completed: the first to establish codes and code categories and the second to use them to code a subset of data (three source files: one interview, one focus group, and one observation which accounted for ~10% of the total for one case). Intercoder reliability of the final coding scheme between these two coders was determined to be 90% or greater. A team of five coders were then trained by the team leaders. Each analyst then crafted a descriptive case study organized by lines of inquiry (described above).

Each case study included a description of the school selection criteria, demographics, context, and the climate survey results. Each case study was then prepared for different audiences with ethical concerns to maintain participant anonymity a central goal. In total three versions of each case were produced: an “internal”* version including participant position title and demographic detail to facilitate research team intra- and cross-case analysis; a “member-check” version in which position titles and any other information that might reveal identities were removed; and an “external” version with no identifiable information prepared for the funder and for other publications. See figure for description of all phases of analysis.

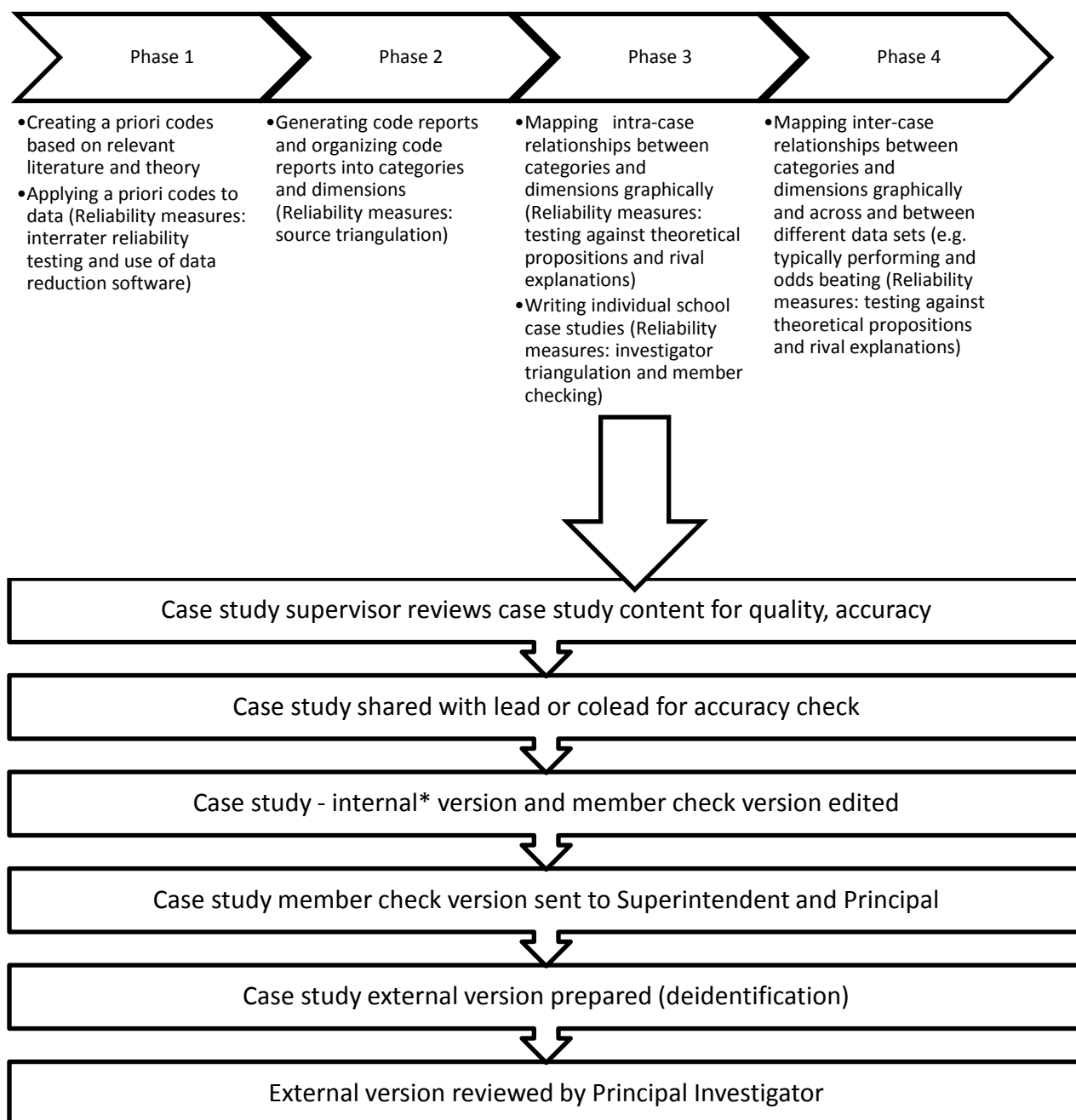


Figure 1. Phases of Analyses

Phases of Cross-Case Analysis

Cross-case analysis was conducted using both deductive and inductive procedures. These procedures were used because deductive and inductive processes were seen as dialectical, not mutually-exclusive, and supportive of rigorous analysis that could both build from theory and generate new theoretical insights (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2013; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

First the research team extracted code reports by a priori categories (i.e. lines of inquiry): this *deductive* strategy, also called “enumerative” or “conceptual” (Kaplan, 1964; Popper, 1968), was used to assist the analysts in orienting constructs and propositions against the data. Each analyst created code reports by line of inquiry utilizing the matrix query function in NVivo 10 so as to compare the data from typically performing and odds-beating schools.

Finally, the entire team shared findings across all lines of inquiry and mapped inter-case relationships between themes and across and between different data sets (e.g. typically performing and odds beating; rural, suburban, urban). Reliability measures used at this stage were testing against theoretical propositions and rival explanations (Yin, 2014).

Survey

Procedures

Analysis of Response Rates for Climate and Instructional Surveys

The team requested that a climate survey be distributed to all adults in the 18 visited elementary or middle schools. Across the nine schools elementary schools, response rates for the climate survey varied from 9%-93%, with a cumulative total of 256 responses for a summative overall response rate of 46% (Table 8). The response rates for the middle schools were somewhat lower, ranging from 0% to 52%, with a cumulative total of 232 responses for an overall rate of 33% (Table 9). The instructional survey was distributed to teachers in the 18 visited elementary or middle schools. Across the nine elementary schools, response rates varied from 0%- 88%, with a cumulative total of 117 responses for a summative overall response rate of 33%. The middle school response rates were slightly lower, ranging from 12% to 42%, with a cumulative total of 139 for an overall rate of 26%. Both sets of response rates overall are deemed acceptable, especially when interpreted with caution (i.e., taking into account margins

of error due to small sample sizes) and used in conjunction with other evidence from the interviews and observations..

Table 8.

Summary of Survey Response Rates from Elementary Schools

Elementary School	Climate Survey Response Rate	Instructional Survey Response Rate
Yellow Valley	93%	66%
Bay City	47%	50%
Eagle Bluff	58%	88%
Wolf Creek	68%	34%
Spring Creek	73%	61%
Goliad	17%	15%
Paige City	45%	17%
Starling Springs	9%	17%
Sun Hollow	58%	0.00%
Total	46%	33%

Table 9.

Summary of Survey Response Rates from Middle Schools

Middle School	Climate Survey Response Rate	Instructional Survey Response Rate
Hutch Hill	43%	37%
Julesberg	36%	22%
Larabee	23%	12%
Roaring Gap	49%	42%
Ruby	52%	19%
Sage City	15%	21%
Locus Glen	0%	25%
Silver City	42%	21%
Tarelton	50%	21%
Total	33%	26%

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Appendices

Summary of elementary school instruments²

1. School Principal and/or Assistant Principal Interview
2. School Instructional Coach/Master Teacher (ELA or Math) Interview
3. School Support Staff Focus Group (School Psychologist, Social Worker, Nurse, School Counselor)
4. School ESL Teacher Interview (or Focus Group upon request)
5. School Special Education Teacher Interview (or Focus Group upon request)
6. School Mainstream Teacher Focus Group
7. School Building Leadership Team Focus Group
8. Classroom Observation Protocol ELA
9. Classroom Observation Protocol Math
10. District Superintendent Interview
11. District Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction Interview
12. District Director or Coordinator of Special Education Interview
13. District Director of Extended Learning Interview
14. District Director of Student Services Interview
15. District Director of Assessment/Assistant Superintendent for Assessment Interview
16. District Director of Professional Development Interview
17. District Director of ELL Bilingual Interview

² Survey instruments are in a separate document as they are formatted for online delivery; and middle school instruments are very similar with only minor changes to language as appropriate to the level.

*School Principal and/or Assistant Superintendent Interview**(Note: Questions in **bold** are priorities.)***Introductory Script**

Introduction:

Hello, I am _____ from the University at Albany's School of Education, and we are conducting a study of your improvement strategies.

Thank you for taking time to help us with our study. With your permission, I am going to ask you a series of questions and listen to your answers. All answers are confidential, and your identity will not be revealed*. This interview should take about __ minutes.

Before we can begin, I need to go over a few things:

1. We would like to tape record the interview to make sure that we have accurately captured the information you are providing. If you prefer that we do not tape record, that is all right, too.
2. If you do grant us permission to tape, you may ask at any time that we stop the recorder. And if you are reluctant to continue the interview at any time, let me know, and we will stop.
3. Before we can start, I must have your consent in writing (provide form if interviewee has not brought one with him/her and be sure all relevant areas completed).

Interviewer: _____

School Interviewee(s) Name/Title: _____

1. **Please restate your name and position and how long have you been working in this school.**
What attracted you to this school?
2. **What is the vision for this school?**
3. **Does the school have a mission statement? [If so,] How does it relate to the vision?**
4. **What are the goals of the school?**
How are goals created?
Who is involved in the creation of goals?
How are goals evaluated and who is involved in evaluating them?
Are school goals related to district goals?
5. **What is your philosophy of leadership?**
What messages do you try to convey about how people should act and interact?
How do you communicate these messages?

6. **How do you define success?**
What things do you need to do to achieve success?
What are the challenges to achieving success in this school?
7. To what do you attribute students' performance on the CCLS- aligned assessment at <name of school>?
Does the level of success differ by student subgroup (e.g. African-American, Hispanic/Latino, English learner)? And if so, what do you attribute this to?
Do you use any special strategies or tools to provide leadership for CCLS-related, implementation and professional development? Describe.
8. **MIDDLE SCHOOL ONLY:** Does your school have a special philosophy regarding middle school education? *Do you do anything special to increase or improve college and career readiness? If so, how?*
9. **How are teachers selected for your school, and how do you decide their grade levels and subject area assignments?**
What qualities do you look for in a teacher in this school?
Do you make any special efforts to retain good teachers?
10. **What kinds of professional development have you received and from whom?**
Are your own needs for professional development being met?
[If mentoring is mentioned] - Please describe it.
11. **What would you consider to be high-quality <elementary or middle level> classroom instruction?**
What rubrics or guides do you use to assess whether instruction is high quality? Please describe how these are used.
Are there any instructional strategies that are mandated or strongly encouraged?
If so, what are they? Who was involved in deciding on these instructional strategies?
How were these decided upon?
12. **Have you changed your approach toward curriculum and instruction as you implemented the CCLS? If so, how?**
What outcomes do you want from these changes?
How will you evaluate or assess the impacts of these changes?
13. **How is instructional support provided to teachers in this school?**
Can you provide examples of the types of support?
How often does this support happen?
14. **How are programs selected in this district? Who is involved?**
What are the criteria for selection?
Are the programs mandated or strongly encouraged by the district?
How are programs evaluated?

15. Has the APPR process changed your approach to evaluating teachers and their instruction? If so, how? If not, why not?

How have you proceeded with APPR implementation?

How is teacher performance evaluated? What observation protocols have you used?

How does your assessment of instruction vary depending on teacher specialization (e.g. content area specialist [MIDDLE SCHOOL ONLY], ESL, special education)?

How are resulting data communicated and used?

16. How is student performance monitored? How are the resulting data used?

a. Describe any assessments other than the state level standardized testing.

b. How frequently are students assessed?

c. How are assessments developed or chosen in this school?

d. How are assessment materials evaluated?

e. How are data evaluated and used?

f. Have you noted any impacts of data use and instruction? Please describe

17. Supplemental academic support services programs or plans (e.g. AIS, ESL):

a. What supplemental academic support services plans are in place for struggling students? Please describe.

b. What supplemental academic support services are in place for gifted students? Please describe.

c. How do you determine when supplemental academic support services are necessary?

d. How are decisions about academic support services made? At the district or school level?

e. How do you evaluate the effectiveness of supplemental academic support services?

18. How do you develop relationships with parents and guardians?

Who is responsible for establishing and maintaining relationships?

What outcomes do you seek from these relationships?

How would you describe the overall quality of the relationships between the school and parents/ guardians at this school?

19. Does your school have any formal partnerships with community agencies and local businesses?

What outcomes do you seek from these partnerships?

How do you evaluate the effectiveness of these partnerships?

20. Please describe any formal organizational structures or programs that help students transition from one school to another (e.g., Pre-K to kindergarten, 5th grade to middle school; OR into middle school, into high school).

21. Are there any other special features of your school that you would like to share?

Thank you.

END

School Instructional Coach (ELA or Math)

(Note: Questions in **bold** are priorities and to be added to any other district protocol(s) in the case that this position title does not exist or is combined with the responsibilities of another position.)

Introductory Script

Introduction:

Hello, I am _____ from the University at Albany's School of Education, and we are conducting a study of your improvement strategies.

Thank you for taking time to help us with our study. With your permission, I am going to ask you a series of questions and listen to your answers. All answers are confidential, and your identity will not be revealed*. This interview should take about ___ minutes.

Before we can begin, I need to go over a few things:

1. We would like to tape record the interview to make sure that we have accurately captured the information you are providing. If you prefer that we do not tape record, that is all right, too.
2. If you do grant us permission to tape, you may ask at any time that we stop the recorder. And if you are reluctant to continue the interview at any time, let me know, and we will stop.
3. Before we can start, I must have your consent in writing (provide form if interviewee has not brought one with him/her and be sure all relevant areas completed).

*Except in the case of principals who have consented to be identified.

Interviewer: _____

School Interviewee(s) Name/Title: _____

1. Please state your position and how long you have worked in this school.
What attracted you to this district?
2. **How would you describe the culture of this school?**
What messages do you strive to convey about how people should act here?
How and to whom do you communicate these messages?
What qualities do you think a teacher should have to be successful with the students you serve in this school?
3. **How do you provide instructional support to teachers in this school?**
How is it decided which teachers get instructional support? Who makes the decision?
Can you provide examples of the types of support?
How often does this support happen?
4. How do you define success in your work?

*What are the things you need to do to achieve success?
What are the challenges to achieving success in this school?*

5. How well supported are you in achieving success in your work?
*Do you have district support?
Describe your opportunities for your own professional development.
Do you have opportunities for collaboration?*
6. **To what do you attribute this school's level of success on CCLS-aligned assessments?**
Does the level of success differ by student subgroup (e.g. African-American, Hispanic/Latino, English learner and if so, to what do you attribute this?
7. **What would you consider to be high-quality <elementary or middle level> classroom instruction?**
*Where did these ideas come from?
How are these instructional strategies aligned with CCLS?
What do you think contributes to high-quality instruction?*
8. **Are there any instructional strategies that are mandated or strongly encouraged, if so, what are they?**
*Are there any tools or rubrics used to guide you in the use of these strategies?
Who was involved in deciding which strategies would be used?
How were these decided upon?
Describe any training or support that you received to implement these strategies in the classroom.
Who provided the PD and to what extent has that PD been useful or effective?*
9. **Do the teachers in this school have enough and appropriate resources to meet every student's needs?**
*For example- Do you have enough support from parents and the community?
Do you have the needed Technology? Supplies? Time?
Is there enough support for teachers to meet all students' needs- including African-American, Hispanic/Latino, ELs and Special education students?*
10. **Have you changed your approach toward curriculum and instruction as the CCLS have been implemented?**
*If so, how were you supported to make those changes?
What outcomes do you seek from these changes?
How will you evaluate or assess the impacts of these changes?
Has the CCLS implementation changed your roles and responsibilities?
How do you determine that the content is rigorous enough? What do you do to increase rigor?*
11. **Has the APPR process changed the school's approach to curriculum and instruction? If so, how?**
12. **How do you monitor teachers' performance, if at all?**
*What tools or rubrics do you use?
What kinds of information do you receive about the teachers you work with?*

Who shares this information with you? When?

How do you share teacher performance and other information and with whom?

Are you a trained evaluator for APPR? If so, who trained you?

Have you received any professional development to better support the teachers?

13. How do you and teachers collaborate?

What is the focus of your collaboration?

How is collaboration supported and sustained?

Do you evaluate the effectiveness of these collaborations? Please describe.

Do you collaborate with other coaches? Please describe.

14. Are there any other things that I should know about your school's approach to instruction that you would like to share?

Thank you.

END

Support Staff Focus Group (School Psychologist, Social Worker, Nurse, School Counselor)

(Note: Questions in **bold** are priorities)

Introductory script for focus groups:

Hello, I am _____ from the University at Albany's School of Education, and we are conducting a study of improvement strategies in schools around the state. Thank you for taking time to help us with our study. With your permission, I am going to ask a series of questions and listen to your answers and discussion. No one will be identified by name, and no one but the people in this room will know what you said. This discussion should take about an hour and will cover several broad topics including the Common Core Learning Standards and the new APPR system.

Before we can begin, I need to make sure that everyone has signed a form consenting to take part, including -- if no one has any objection -- consent for us to tape record the session so that we can accurately capture the information you are providing. [Provide the form and be sure they sign in both places: they are a) willing to take part and b) willing to be taped. You and/or assistant will need to check all forms to be sure that no one objects to taping -- and to be sure everyone has agreed to participate.]

Interviewer: _____

School Interviewee(s) Names/Titles: _____

1. Please state your positions and the number of years you have worked here.
What attracted you to this school?
2. **How would you describe the culture of this school?**
To what extent do you think the needs of students with whom you work are prioritized here? Explain.
3. **Please describe the population of students you work with in this school.**
What languages, educational backgrounds (e.g. interrupted), years in the U.S. does this population have?
4. **Describe the goals for students with whom you work in this school.**
*How are goals created?
Who is involved in the creation of goals?
How are goals evaluated and who is involved in evaluating them?
Are school goals related to district goals?*

5. **MIDDLE SCHOOL ONLY:** Does your school have a special philosophy regarding middle school education?

Do you do anything special to increase or improve college and career readiness? If so, how?

What challenges have you found in this work?

How do you evaluate the effectiveness of these programs/practices?

6. How do you define success?

What are the things you need to do to achieve success in your work at this school?

What are the challenges to achieving success in this school?

How well do you feel the district and school support you in achieving success with your students?

7. How do you monitor students' progress?

What assessments are used to monitor students' progress?

How frequently do you assess students' progress?

How were the assessments developed?

How are the resulting data used?

8. What kinds of information do you receive about your students' prior educational or life experiences before you begin working with them?

Who shares this information with you? And when?

How do you share performance and other information (e.g. social/emotional) with <middle or high> school teachers and staff?

9. How do you and teachers collaborate?

How is collaboration supported and sustained?

By whom?

Do you evaluate the effectiveness of these collaborations? Describe.

10. Are supports in place to assist students' transitions <into kindergarten? into middle school? into high school>?

Examples?

Who is responsible for them?

11. Are there any other things that I should know about support services at your school that you would like to share?

Thank you.

END

*ESL/Bilingual Teacher Interview (or Focus Group upon request)**(Note: Questions in **bold** are priorities.)***Introductory Script (change to Focus group introductory script if needed)**

Introduction:

Hello, I am _____ from the University at Albany's School of Education, and we are conducting a study of your improvement strategies.

Thank you for taking time to help us with our study. With your permission, I am going to ask you a series of questions and listen to your answers. All answers are confidential, and your identity will not be revealed*. This interview should take about __ minutes.

Before we can begin, I need to go over a few things:

1. We would like to tape record the interview to make sure that we have accurately captured the information you are providing. If you prefer that we do not tape record, that is all right, too.
2. If you do grant us permission to tape, you may ask at any time that we stop the recorder. And if you are reluctant to continue the interview at any time, let me know, and we will stop.
3. Before we can start, I must have your consent in writing (provide form if interviewee has not brought one with him/her and be sure all relevant areas completed).

Interviewer: _____

School Interviewee(s) Name/Title: _____

1. Please state your position(s) and the number of years you have worked in this school.
 - a. *What attracted you to this school?*
1. **How would you describe the culture of this school?**
To what extent do you think English learners' (ELs) needs are prioritized here? Explain.
2. **Please describe the English learner population in this school.**
What languages, educational backgrounds (e.g. interrupted), years in the U.S. does this population have?
3. **Describe the goals for the education of English learners in this school.**
How are goals created?
Who is involved in the creation of goals?
How are goals evaluated and who is involved in evaluating them?
Are school goals related to district goals?

4. Please describe the ESL/bilingual program in this school.
How is it structured? Push in? Pull out?
How do you evaluate the effectiveness of your ESL/bilingual program?
5. To what extent do you feel you have enough and appropriate resources to achieve success for your students?
For example- Do you have support from the Board of Education, parents? The community?
How
has this support been fostered?
Do you have enough access to technology, supplies, time to achieve success for your students?
6. Have you received professional development opportunities through the district or school?
Please describe.
Is it differentiated for you and others who work with ELs?
7. What would you consider to be high-quality <elementary or middle level> classroom instruction for ELS?
Where has this vision of instruction for ELs come from?
How are these instructional strategies aligned with CCLS?
8. Are there any instructional strategies that are mandated or strongly encouraged for ELS, if so, what are they?
Are there any tools or rubrics used to guide you in the use of these strategies?
Who was involved in deciding which strategies would be used?
How were these decided upon?
Please describe any training or support that you received to implement these strategies in the classroom.
Who provided the PD and to what extent has that PD been useful or effective?
9. How do you plan for instruction?
What kinds of tools, rubrics, or materials do you use? Who decides on what is used?
How effective are they?
10. Have you changed your approach toward curriculum and instruction for ELs as the CCLS have been implemented?
 - a. If so, how were you supported to make those changes?
 - b. What outcomes do you seek from these changes?
 - c. How will you evaluate or assess the impacts of these changes?
11. Has the APPR process changed your approach to curriculum and instruction for ELs? If so, how?
12. How do you monitor EL students' progress?
Has the APPR process changed your approach to assessing EL students? If so, how?
What kinds of information do you receive about your students' prior educational or life experiences before you begin working with them?
Who shares this information with you? When?

How do you share performance and other information (e.g. social/emotional) with other school teachers and staff?)

What rubrics or guides do you use to assess student performance? Please describe how these are used.

13. How do you and mainstream teachers collaborate?

What is the focus of this collaboration?

How is collaboration supported and sustained? By whom?

Do you evaluate the effectiveness of these collaborations? Please describe.

Do you share your knowledge of ELs with the other teachers and staff?

14. How do you engage your ESL students' parents?

Who is responsible for engaging with them?

15. What kinds of supports are in place to assist the transition for ELs?
(into kindergarten? into middle school? into high school?)

16. Are there any other things that I should know about your school's approach to English learners that you would like to share?

Thank you.

END

*Special Education Teacher Interview (or Focus Group upon request)**(Note: Questions in **bold** are priorities.)***Introductory Script (Insert Focus group Introductory script as needed)**

Introduction:

Hello, I am _____ from the University at Albany's School of Education, and we are conducting a study of your improvement strategies.

Thank you for taking time to help us with our study. With your permission, I am going to ask you a series of questions and listen to your answers. All answers are confidential, and your identity will not be revealed*. This interview should take about __ minutes.

Before we can begin, I need to go over a few things:

1. We would like to tape record the interview to make sure that we have accurately captured the information you are providing. If you prefer that we do not tape record, that is all right, too.
2. If you do grant us permission to tape, you may ask at any time that we stop the recorder. And if you are reluctant to continue the interview at any time, let me know, and we will stop.
3. Before we can start, I must have your consent in writing (provide form if interviewee has not brought one with him/her and be sure all relevant areas completed).

*Except in the case of principals who have consented to be identified.

Interviewer: _____

School Interviewee(s) Name/Title:

1. Please state your position(s) and the number of years you have worked in this school.

What attracted you to this school?

2. How would you describe the culture of this school?
*What messages do you strive to convey about how people should act here?
How and to whom do you communicate these messages?
To what extent do you think special education students' needs are prioritized here?
Please explain.*

3. Please describe the Special Education student population in this school.

What disabilities and extent of disabilities does this population have?

4. Describe the goals for the education of special education students in this school.

***Who determines what the goals are for Special Education Students?
How are goals determined?***

5. Please describe your special education program.
How is it structured? Extent of Classified, 504 plan, etc. students?
How is the effectiveness of your Special Education program assessed?
6. How well supported are you in meeting special education students' needs?
Please describe any district support or network team support you receive in meeting special ed students' needs.
How often do you receive this support?
Please describe opportunities for professional development.
Do you have opportunities for collaboration?
7. To what extent do you feel you have enough and appropriate resources to achieve success for your students?
For example- Do you have support from the Board of Education, parents? The community? How has this support been fostered?
Do you have enough access to technology, supplies, time to achieve success for your students?
8. What would you consider to be high-quality <elementary or middle level> classroom instruction?
Where did these ideas come from?
How are these instructional strategies aligned with CCLS?
What do you think contributes to high-quality instruction?
9. Are there any instructional strategies that are mandated or strongly encouraged, if so, what are they?
Are there any tools or rubrics used to guide you in the use of these strategies?
Who was involved in deciding which strategies would be used?
How were these decided upon?
Describe any training or support that you received to implement these strategies in the classroom.
Who provided the PD and to what extent has that PD been useful or effective?
10. How do you plan for instruction?
What kinds of materials do you use?
Who decides on materials that are purchased and used?
11. Have you changed your approach toward curriculum and instruction for special education students as the CCLS have been implemented?
If so, how were you supported to make those changes?
What outcomes do you seek from these changes?
How will you evaluate or assess the impacts of these changes?
12. Has the APPR process changed your approach to curriculum and instruction for special education students? If so, how?

13. Has the APPR process changed your approach to assessing special education students? If so, how?
14. How do you monitor special education students' progress?
What kinds of information do you receive about your students' prior educational or life experiences before you begin working with them?
Who shares this information with you? When?
How do you share performance and other information (e.g. social/emotional) with <middle or high> school teachers and staff?
What rubrics or guides do you use to assess student performance? Please describe how these are used.
15. How do you and mainstream teachers collaborate?
What is the focus of this collaboration?
How is collaboration supported and sustained? By whom?
What outcomes do you want from these collaborations?
Do you evaluate the effectiveness of these collaborations? Describe.
16. How do you engage special education students' parents?
Who is responsible for engaging them?
17. What kinds of supports are in place to assist the transition for special education students? (into kindergarten? into middle school? into high school?)
18. Are there any other things that I should know about your school's approach to special education students that you would like to share?

Thank you.

END

*Mainstream Content Teacher Focus Group**(Note: Questions in **bold** are priorities.)***Introductory script for focus groups:**

Hello, I am _____ from the University at Albany's School of Education, and we are conducting a study of improvement strategies in schools around the state. Thank you for taking time to help us with our study. With your permission, I am going to ask a series of questions and listen to your answers and discussion. No one will be identified by name, and no one but the people in this room will know what you said. This discussion should take about an hour and will cover several broad topics including the Common Core Learning Standards and the new APPR system.

Before we can begin, I need to make sure that everyone has signed a form consenting to take part, including -- if no one has any objection -- consent for us to tape record the session so that we can accurately capture the information you are providing. [Provide the form and be sure they sign in both places: they are a) willing to take part and b) willing to be taped. You and/or assistant will need to check all forms to be sure that no one objects to taping -- and to be sure everyone has agreed to participate.]

Interviewer: _____

School Interviewee(s) Names/Titles: _____

1. Please state your positions and the number of years you have worked here.
(What attracted you to this school?)
2. **How would you describe the culture of this school?**
3. What are the goals of the school?
How are goals created?
Who is involved in the creation of goals?
How are goals evaluated and who is involved in evaluating them?
Are school goals related to district goals?
4. **MIDDLE SCHOOL ONLY:** Does your school have a special philosophy regarding middle school education?
Do you do anything special to increase or improve college and career readiness? If so, how?
5. How do you define success?
What are the things you need to do to achieve success in this school?
What are the challenges to achieving success in this school?

How well do you feel the district and school support you in achieving success with your students?

6. To what do you attribute this school's level of success on CCLS-aligned assessments?
Does the level of success differ by student subgroup (e.g. African-American, Hispanic/Latino, English learner) and if so, what do you attribute this to?
7. To what extent do you feel you have enough and appropriate resources to achieve success for your students?
For example- Do you have support from the Board of Education, parents, the community? How has this support been fostered?
Do you have enough access to technology, supplies, time to achieve success for your students?
8. What would you consider to be high-quality <elementary or middle level> classroom instruction?
Where did these ideas come from?
How are these instructional strategies aligned with CCLS?
What do you think contributes to high-quality instruction?
9. Are there any instructional strategies that are mandated or strongly encouraged? If so, what are they?
Are there any tools or rubrics used to guide you in the use of these strategies?
Who was involved in deciding which strategies would be used?
How were these decided upon?
Please describe any training or support that you received to implement these strategies in the classroom.
Who provided the PD and to what extent has that PD been useful or effective?
10. How do you plan for instruction?
What kinds of tools, rubrics, or materials do you use?
Who decides on what tools, rubrics, or materials are used?
11. Have approaches toward curriculum and instruction changed with the implementation of the CCLS?
 - a. *If so, who determined what changes would be made?*
 - b. *How were you supported to make those changes?*
 - c. *What outcomes do you seek from these changes?*
 - d. *How will you evaluate or assess the impacts of these changes?*
 - e. *How do you determine that content is rigorous enough? Do you use any rubrics or guides to assess the level of rigor? What do you do to increase rigor?*
12. Has the APPR process changed your approach to curriculum and instruction? If so, how?
What has been your experience with the APPR implementation?
13. Has the APPR process changed your approach to assessing students? If so, how?
14. How do you monitor students' progress?
What rubrics or guides do you use to discuss student performance? Please describe how these are used.

What assessments other than state level standardized tests are used?

How frequently are students assessed?

How are assessments developed and by whom?

How do you evaluate the assessment material?

a. *How are the resulting data used?*

b. *What kinds of information do you receive about your students' prior educational or life experiences before you begin working with them?*

Who shares this information with you? When?

How do you share performance and other information (e.g. social/emotional) with [middle or high] school teachers and staff?

15. *How do you engage students in learning?*

Do you think the students in this school are engaged?

16. *Do you have opportunities for collaboration in this school? Describe*

What is the focus of your collaboration?

How is collaboration supported and sustained? By whom?

What outcomes do you expect from these collaborations?

How do you evaluate these collaborations?

17. *Are supports in place to assist students' transitions <into Kindergarten? into middle school? into high school>?*

Who is responsible for them?

18. *Are there any other things that I should know about your school that you would like to share?*

Thank you.

END

Building Leadership Team Focus Group*(Note: Questions in **bold** are priorities.)***Introductory script for focus groups:**

Hello, I am _____ from the University at Albany's School of Education, and we are conducting a study of improvement strategies in schools around the state. Thank you for taking time to help us with our study. With your permission, I am going to ask a series of questions and listen to your answers and discussion. No one will be identified by name, and no one but the people in this room will know what you said. This discussion should take about an hour and will cover several broad topics including the Common Core Learning Standards and the new APPR system.

Before we can begin, I need to make sure that everyone has signed a form consenting to take part, including -- if no one has any objection -- consent for us to tape record the session so that we can accurately capture the information you are providing. [Provide the form and be sure they sign in both places: they are a) willing to take part and b) willing to be taped. You and/or assistant will need to check all forms to be sure that no one objects to taping -- and to be sure everyone has agreed to participate.]

Interviewer: _____

School Interviewee(s) Names/Titles: _____

1. **Please state your positions and how many years you have been working at this school.**
What attracted you to this district?
How long have you served on the leadership team?
2. **How did you get involved with the Building Leadership Team?**
What are your roles and responsibilities on this team?
Who else is on this team with you?
How do you communicate the products of your work to others in the school or district?
3. **What is the vision for this school?**
4. Does the school have a mission statement? [If so,]
How does it relate to the vision?
5. **What are the school goals?**
How are goals created?
Who is involved in the creation of goals?
How are goals evaluated and who is involved in evaluating them?
Are school goals related to district goals?

6. **MIDDLE SCHOOL ONLY:** Does your school have a special philosophy regarding middle school education?
Do you do anything special to increase or improve college and career readiness? If so, how?
7. **What roles and responsibilities has this team taken with regard to CCLS implementation?**
8. **What roles and responsibilities has this team had with regard to APPR implementation?**
9. **Has the implementation of the CCLS and/or APPR system changed the roles and responsibilities of the BLT? If so, how?**
How is the leadership team agenda decided upon?
Who makes decisions about the leadership team agenda?
Have you received any professional development on leading your school through these changes?
How do you evaluate effectiveness/outcomes of your work?
[If yes] How do you feel about your new roles and responsibilities?
10. **Has the implementation of CCLS and/or APPR changed your relationships with others in the school or district in any way? If so, how?**
11. **How is student progress in this school monitored?**
How does this BLT use data?
What data is used?
When/how often is student progress data shared?
Who monitors student progress?
12. **What is the role or responsibility of the Building Leadership Team in reaching out to engage parents?**
13. **How does the BLT partner with community agencies?**
What are these partnerships?
Who is responsible for establishing and maintaining partnerships?
How do you evaluate the effectiveness of these partnerships?
14. **Beyond academics, how does the BLT address students' social and emotional development, if at all? Please explain.**
15. **Are there any other things that I should know about your school or the BLT that you would like to share?**

Thank you.

END

Classroom Observation Protocol ELA

Observer:

Date:

School:

Grade/# of students:

Notes: (Inclusion, ESL push in):

Part 1: Field notes on the lesson:

A NOTE TO THE OBSERVER: Please keep in mind that this study has a keen interest in evidence of CCLS-aligned instruction. Do not limit yourself to only noting the emphases of the shifts; however, do keep these in mind as you are taking your notes. The shifts for ELA are:

1. Balancing Informational and Literary Text
2. Building Knowledge in the Disciplines
3. Staircase of Complexity
4. Text-Based Answers
5. Writing from Sources
6. Academic Vocabulary

As clearly and accurately as possible...

Take as much space as needed and provide as much detail as you can. Do not note your perceptions here, but rather what you actually see and hear. Make sure that you use consistent symbols for who is speaking (no names, but T-Teacher, T2: second teacher; S- student; X – a student called on). Also keep times at each major change of activity (t led; student-student interaction, etc.. Please indicate if the beginning and/or end of the lesson is missed.)

Part 2: Summary of practice

The summary a –j below may be done after the lesson if necessary.

- a) Describe the topic and apparent purpose of the lesson*
- b) Describe how the teacher makes connections (prior knowledge requested, KWL, text-to-text; personal experience; visuals)*
- c) Describe the types of activities/tasks (individual, small group, choral reading; student discussion of text; practice using academic vocabulary, conventions, foundational skills (e.g. print concepts, phonological awareness); higher-order; student presentation; discussion groups, group response; turn/pair/share*

- d) *Describe how writing is integrated into this lesson (writing process, writers' workshop, reader/writer response, modeling/authentic displays, purpose of the writing activity, kinds of sources used, evaluation of writing)*
- e) *Describe the materials/resources (e.g. fiction or nonfiction texts, textbooks, worksheets, overheads, smart boards, videos, any other technologies etc.) Describe range of and levels of complexity of materials*
- f) *Describe supports offered (e.g. any ways instruction homework, or questioning was differentiated, modeling, other adults/resources/aids/assistants, centers)*
- g) *Describe feedback and any ways student learning was assessed during this lesson (call on another student, probe, solicit others to assist, conference, multiple choice test or quiz, written response – short answer, essay, other assessment)*
- h) *Describe the climate of the classroom (e.g. emotional support, teacher sensitivity, regard for student perspectives)*
- i) *Describe how the teacher managed behavior*

Part 3: DEBRIEFING

1. What were your goals and objectives for this lesson? (if not stated explicitly during class)
2. How did you plan this lesson?
What kinds of materials were available to you?
Who decided on materials that you could use?
What information about your students did you use to inform this lesson?
Did you plan in alone or in collaboration?
What kind of support are you provided around lesson planning?
3. What CCLS were you attempting to teach in this lesson?
Describe any challenges you encountered teaching this lesson.
What do you attribute those challenges to?
4. How did this lesson fit into prior and future lessons?
Please describe your planning process
5. How did you assess students' learning during this class?
6. Is there anything else about this lesson that you would like to share?

END

Classroom Observation Protocol (Math)

Part 1: Field notes on the lesson:

A NOTE TO THE OBSERVER: Please keep in mind that this study has a keen interest in evidence of CCLS-aligned instruction. Do not limit yourself to only noting the emphases of the shifts; however, do keep these in mind as you are taking your notes. The shifts for mathematics are:

1. Focus
2. Coherence
3. Fluency
4. Deep Understanding
5. Applications
6. Dual Intensity

As clearly and accurately as possible...

Take as much space as needed and provide as much detail as you can. Do not note your perceptions here, but rather what you actually see and hear. Make sure that you use consistent symbols for who is speaking (no names, but T-Teacher, T2: second teacher; S- student; X – a student called on). Also keep times at each major change of activity (t led; student-student interaction, etc.. Please indicate if the beginning and/or end of the lesson is missed.)

Part 2: Summary of practice

The summary a –j below may be done after the lesson if necessary.

- a) Describe the topic and apparent purpose of the lesson*
- b) Describe how the teacher makes connections (prior knowledge requested, KWL, text-to-text; personal experience; visuals)*
- c) Describe the types of activities/tasks (individual, small group, choral reading; student discussion of text; practice using academic vocabulary, conventions, foundational skills (e.g. print concepts, phonological awareness); higher-order; student presentation; discussion groups, group response; turn/pair/share*
- d) Describe how writing is integrated into this lesson (writing process, writers' workshop, reader/writer response, modeling/authentic displays, purpose of the writing activity, kinds of sources used, evaluation of writing)*

- e) *Describe the materials/resources (e.g. fiction or nonfiction texts, textbooks, worksheets, manipulatives, measurement tools (e.g. rulers, scales), overheads, smart boards, videos, any other technologies etc.) Describe range of and levels of complexity of materials*
- f) *Describe supports offered (e.g. any ways instruction homework, or questioning was differentiated, modeling, other adults/resources/aids/assistants, centers)*
- g) *Describe feedback and any ways student learning was assessed during this lesson (call on another student, probe, solicit others to assist, conference, multiple choice test or quiz, written response – short answer, essay, other assessment)*
- h) *Describe the climate of the classroom (e.g. emotional support, teacher sensitivity, regard for student perspectives)*
- i) *Describe how the teacher managed behavior*

Part 3: DEBRIEFING

1. What were your goals and objectives for this lesson? (if not stated explicitly during class)

2. How did you plan this lesson?

What kinds of materials were available to you?

Who decided on materials that you could use?

What information about your students did you use to inform this lesson?

Did you plan in alone or in collaboration?

What kind of support are you provided around lesson planning?

3. What CCLS were you attempting to teach in this lesson?

Describe any challenges you encountered teaching this lesson.

What do you attribute those challenges to?

4. How did this lesson fit into prior and future lessons?

Please describe your planning process

5. How did you assess students' learning during this class?

6. Is there anything else about this lesson that you would like to share?

END

District Superintendent Interview

(Note: Questions in **bold** are priorities.)

Introduction:

Hello, I am _____ from the University at Albany's School of Education, and we are conducting a study of your improvement strategies.

Thank you for taking time to help us with our study. With your permission, I am going to ask you a series of questions and listen to your answers. All answers are confidential, and your identity will not be revealed*. This interview should take about ___ minutes.

Before we can begin, I need to go over a few things:

We would like to tape record the interview to make sure that we have accurately captured the information you are providing. If you prefer that we do not tape record, that is all right, too.

If you do grant us permission to tape, you may ask at any time that we stop the recorder. And if you are reluctant to continue the interview at any time, let me know, and we will stop.

Before we can start, I must have your consent in writing (provide form if interviewee has not brought one with him/her and be sure all relevant areas completed).

Interviewer: _____

District Interviewee(s) Name/Title: _____

1. **How long have you been the superintendent here?**
What attracted you to this district?
2. **What is the vision for this district?**
3. **Does the district have a mission statement?[If so,] How does it relate to the vision?**
4. **What are the goals for the district?**
How are your goals created?
Who is involved in the creation of goals?
How are goals evaluated and who is involved in evaluating them?
Are school goals related to district goals? If so, who is responsible for aligning them?
5. **What is your philosophy of leadership?**
What messages do you strive to convey about how people should act?
How do you communicate these messages?
6. **How do you define success?**

*What are the things you need to do to achieve success?
What is your recipe for success?*

7. In your view, what are the most important and urgent improvement priorities for your district?
*Have these priorities changed over the past two years?
Who decides what the priorities are?
How are priorities evaluated and who is involved in the evaluation?*
8. How are new principals selected? What qualities do you look for?
How do you determine their school assignments?
What do you hold principals accountable for?
Do you make any efforts to retain good principals?
9. How are new teachers selected? What qualities do you look for?
*How are teachers selected for different schools, grade levels, or subject area assignments?
Do you make any efforts to retain good teachers?*
10. How are decisions involving <name of school> made?
*Is the principal included in these decisions?
If there is a conflict or difference of opinion on improvement priorities at the school, how is it resolved?*
11. How are decisions about instructional programs or practices made? For example, does the district adopt the state's curricular modules, particular textbooks or instructional models?
[examples if needed: sheltered language instruction, project-based learning]
 - a. How does the district proceed with implementation of selected programs/approaches?
 - b. Is implementation different for students with special needs, such as ELLs, gifted and talented, special ed?
 - c. How do you evaluate the effectiveness of new programs or practices?
 - d. MIDDLE SCHOOL ONLY: How do you ensure consistent levels of rigor across multiple sections of the same course (Ex. Algebra1)?*Are there district mandates for instructional programs?
Who is involved in making decisions about instructional programs or practices?
How are instructional programs and practices evaluated? How often and by whom?*
12. Was implementing the CCLS a big change for your district and <name of school>?
How? If not, why not?
13. To what do you attribute students' performance on the CCLS- aligned assessment at <name of school>?
14. Has the implementation of the CCLS changed the school's (name) curriculum and instruction?
*What kinds of resources or support have been offered to facilitate these changes?
What outcomes do you want from these changes?*

How will you evaluate or assess these changes?

- 15. How are students with special needs- ELL, special ed, gifted and talented- supported in your district? *What programs/practices/policies are in place for these students?***

Who is involved in developing these programs?

How are the programs evaluated?

How are parents involved?

- 16. What is your process for making adjustments in resource allocations?**

Example

How have resources been allocated to align curriculum and instruction to the Common Core?

- 17. Does your district office develop its own working relationships with parents and guardians?**

Who is responsible for establishing and maintaining them?

What outcomes do you want from these relationships?

Are these efforts successful?

- 18. Does the district office develop its own working relationships with community agencies and local businesses?**

Who is responsible for establishing and maintaining them?

What outcomes do you want from these relationships?

Are these efforts successful?

Because this study is focused on how educators are responding to changes such as the CCLS and APPR, do you have any other comments to share regarding your districts' approach?

Thank you.

END

*District Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction Interview**(Note: Questions in **bold** are priorities.)*

Introduction:

Hello, I am _____ from the University at Albany's School of Education, and we are conducting a study of your improvement strategies.

Thank you for taking time to help us with our study. With your permission, I am going to ask you a series of questions and listen to your answers. All answers are confidential, and your identity will not be revealed. This interview should take about __ minutes.

Before we can begin, I need to go over a few things:

1. We would like to tape record the interview to make sure that we have accurately captured the information you are providing. If you prefer that we do not tape record, that is all right, too.
2. If you do grant us permission to tape, you may ask at any time that we stop the recorder. And if you are reluctant to continue the interview at any time, let me know, and we will stop.
3. Before we can start, I must have your consent in writing (provide form if interviewee has not brought one with him/her and be sure all relevant areas completed).

Interviewer: _____

District Interviewee(s) Name/Title: _____

1. **How long have you been working as the assistant superintendent here?**
What attracted you to this district?
2. **What is the vision for this district?**
3. **Does your district have a mission statement? If so, how does it relate to the vision?**
4. **What are the goals for the district?**
How are goals created?
Who is involved in the creation of goals?
How are goals evaluated and who is involved in evaluating them?
Are school goals related to district goals?
5. **What are the key priorities for this district?**
Have there been changes in priorities during the past two years?
Who decides what the priorities are?
How are priorities evaluated and who is involved in the evaluation?

6. What is your philosophy of leadership?

What messages do you strive to convey about how people should act?

How do you communicate these messages?

7. How do you define success?

What are the things you need to do to achieve success?

What is your recipe for success?

8. How are new principals selected? What qualities do you look for?

How do you determine their school assignments?

What do you hold principals accountable for?

Do you make any efforts to retain good principals?

9. How are new teachers selected? What qualities do you look for?

How are teachers selected for different schools, grade levels, or subject area assignments?

Do you make any efforts to retain good teachers?

10. How are decisions involving <name of school> made?

a. Is the principal included in these decisions?

b. If there is a conflict or difference of opinion on improvement priorities at the school, how is it resolved?

11. How are decisions about instructional programs or practices made? For example, does the district adopt particular textbooks or instructional models? [examples if needed: sheltered language instruction, project-based learning]

a. How does the district proceed with implementation of selected programs/approaches?

b. Is implementation different for students with special needs, such as ELLs, Gifted and Talented, Special Ed?

c. How do you evaluate the effectiveness of new programs or practices?

d. MIDDLE SCHOOL ONLY: How do you ensure consistent levels of rigor across multiple sections of the same course (Ex. Algebra1)?

e. Are there district mandates for instructional programs?

Who is involved in making decisions about instructional programs or practices?

How are instructional programs and practices evaluated? How often and by whom?

12. Was implementing the CCLS a big change for your district and <name of school>?

How? If not, why not?

13. To what do you attribute students' performance on the CCLS- aligned assessment at <name of school>?

14. Has the implementation of the CCLS changed the school's (name) curriculum and instruction?

What kinds of resources or support have been offered to facilitate these changes?

*What outcomes do you want from these changes?
How will you evaluate or assess these changes?*

15. Has the APPR process changed the school's approach to curriculum and instruction? If so, how?
*How have you proceeded with APPR implementation?
Who was involved in developing APPR process?
Were changes made from year one to year two?
What outcomes do you want from these changes?*
16. (If yes to 11 e) What kinds of professional development have you offered to teachers in using the NYSED curriculum modules?
Have any other organizations (e.g. BOCES) supported these efforts? If so, what have they done?
17. Describe the district process for making adjustments in the allocation of resources.
Please provide an example.
18. What interventions and/or out-of-school learning (OSL) opportunities are in place for struggling students or students with special needs?
*How do you determine when student interventions are necessary?
Which of these interventions and/or OSL opportunities occur at the district level vs. the school level?
How are interventions and/or OSL opportunities supported, reviewed, and/or evaluated?
Is there anything else about interventions and/or OSL in this district that you would like to share?*
19. How is collaboration supported in this district?
*Can you provide examples of the kinds of work that teams or PLCs have been doing in the past few years?
Who has been involved?
Are the teams and PLCs across middle/elementary schools (if more than one MS/ES in district)?
Are there opportunities for vertical teamwork? If so, can you provide an example of the kinds of work vertical teams have engaged in recently?
Is there anything else about collaboration in this district that you would like to share?*
20. Are there any other things that I should know about your district or <name of school> that you would like to share?

Thank you.

END

Director or Coordinator of Special Education Interview

(Note: Questions in bold are priorities and to be added to any other district protocol(s) in the case that this position title does not exist or is combined with the responsibilities of another position.)

Introduction:

Hello, I am _____ from the University at Albany's School of Education, and we are conducting a study of your improvement strategies.

Thank you for taking time to help us with our study. With your permission, I am going to ask you a series of questions and listen to your answers. All answers are confidential, and your identity will not be revealed*. This interview should take about __ minutes.

Before we can begin, I need to go over a few things:

1. We would like to tape record the interview to make sure that we have accurately captured the information you are providing. If you prefer that we do not tape record, that is all right, too.
2. If you do grant us permission to tape, you may ask at any time that we stop the recorder. And if you are reluctant to continue the interview at any time, let me know, and we will stop.
3. Before we can start, I must have your consent in writing (provide form if interviewee has not brought one with him/her and be sure all relevant areas completed).

Interviewer: _____

District Interviewee(s) Name/Title: _____

1. **Please state your position and how long you have served in this position.**
 - a. ***What attracted you to this district?***
2. **Describe the district's general approach to the education of special education students.**
3. **Please describe the special education student population in the _____ School.**
4. **What is the district's vision for how to serve special education students?**
5. **Does the district have a mission statement for special education?**
6. **To what do you attribute the level of success the <name of school> has had with implementing CCLS-aligned instruction for special education students?**

7. **What are the district goals for special education students?**
How are goals created?
Who is involved in the creation of goals?
How are goals evaluated and who is involved in evaluating them?
Are school goals related to district goals?
8. Selection and retention of teachers:
How are special education teachers' work assignments determined?
How are new special education teachers selected? What qualities do you look for?
Do you make any special efforts to retain good special education teachers?
9. Are teachers supported enough to meet the needs of their special education students?
How does the district support special education teachers?
Are there professional development opportunities for special education teachers?
What opportunities are there for collaboration?
In what ways are materials adapted for special education students?
10. Do teachers have sufficient resources to meet the needs of their special education students?
For example- do they have enough technology, supplies, time?
11. **Are any instructional practices for special education students mandated or strongly encouraged by your district? If so, what practices for special education teachers, what practices for mainstream classroom teachers?**
What strategies are used for the development of special education students' reading and writing skills as outlined in the CCLS?

What strategies are used for the development of special education students' math skills as outlined in the CCLS?
12. **How would you describe excellent CCLS-aligned instruction for special education students?**
13. **Have approaches toward curriculum and instruction for special education students changed as the district has implemented the CCLS in the _____ School?**
If so, how were special education and mainstream teachers supported to make those changes?
What outcomes do you want from these changes?
How will you evaluate or assess the results of these changes?
14. **Has the APPR process changed the approach to curriculum and instruction for special education students? If so, how?**
15. How is the progress of special education students monitored?
16. **How are special education parents engaged? What role do you play in that?**
17. What kinds of supports are in place to assist special education students' transitions?
(into kindergarten? into middle school? into high school?)

18. Are there any other things that I should know about approaches toward special education in the _____ School that you would like to share?

Thank you.

END

District Director of Extended Learning or Academic Intervention Services Interview

*(Note: Questions in **bold** are priorities and to be added to any other district protocol(s) in the case that this position title does not exist or is combined with the responsibilities of another position.)*

Introduction:

Hello, I am _____ from the University at Albany's School of Education, and we are conducting a study of your improvement strategies.

Thank you for taking time to help us with our study. With your permission, I am going to ask you a series of questions and listen to your answers. All answers are confidential, and your identity will not be revealed*. This interview should take about ___ minutes.

Before we can begin, I need to go over a few things:

1. We would like to tape record the interview to make sure that we have accurately captured the information you are providing. If you prefer that we do not tape record, that is all right, too.
2. If you do grant us permission to tape, you may ask at any time that we stop the recorder. And if you are reluctant to continue the interview at any time, let me know, and we will stop.
3. Before we can start, I must have your consent in writing (provide form if interviewee has not brought one with him/her and be sure all relevant areas completed).

Interviewer: _____

District Interviewee(s) Name/Title: _____

1. Please state your position and how long you have served in this position.
What attracted you to this district?
2. What is the vision for this district?
3. Does the district have a mission statement? [If so,] How does it relate to the vision?

4. **What are the district goals for supplemental or out of school learning time student services?**
How are goals created?
Who is involved in the creation of goals?
How are goals evaluated and who is involved in evaluating them?
Are school goals related to district goals?
5. **With the implementation of CCLS in this district, have there been any changes in the extent or nature of supplemental academic support services including AIS offered?**
If so, what changes have been made?
Who has initiated those changes?
How have they been implemented?
Who is involved in implementation?
How is the effectiveness of these support services evaluated?
6. **How do you define success?**
 - a. To what do you attribute the success in achieving higher than average scores on the CCLS aligned assessments at <name of school> ?
 - b. If levels of success considerably different for subgroups, to what do you attribute this?
7. **How are students identified for supplemental academic support services?**
 - c. **How do you determine when these services are necessary?**
 - d. **How do you determine which services are appropriate?**
 - e. **How is the effectiveness of the services evaluated and by whom?**
8. **Does the school or district reach out to parents of students needing supplemental academic support services?**
If so, which services? How?
What is your role in this outreach?
9. **Does the school or district form partnerships with community agencies to provide supplemental academic support services? If so,**
 - a. **Please describe what these partnerships do.**
 - b. **Who is responsible for initiating and maintaining such partnerships?**
 - c. **How do you evaluate their effectiveness?**
10. **Are there any other things that I should know about supplemental academic support services at the _____ School in in the district that you would like to share?**

Thank you.

END

District Director or Coordinator of Student Services

(Note: Questions in **bold** are priorities.)

Introduction:

Hello, I am _____ from the University at Albany's School of Education, and we are conducting a study of your improvement strategies.

Thank you for taking time to help us with our study. With your permission, I am going to ask you a series of questions and listen to your answers. All answers are confidential, and your identity will not be revealed*. This interview should take about __ minutes.

Before we can begin, I need to go over a few things:

1. We would like to tape record the interview to make sure that we have accurately captured the information you are providing. If you prefer that we do not tape record, that is all right, too.
2. If you do grant us permission to tape, you may ask at any time that we stop the recorder. And if you are reluctant to continue the interview at any time, let me know, and we will stop.
3. Before we can start, I must have your consent in writing (provide form if interviewee has not brought one with him/her and be sure all relevant areas completed).

Interviewer: _____

District Interviewee(s) Name/Title: _____

1. **Please state your position and how long you have served in this position.**
What attracted you to this district?
2. What is the vision for this district?
3. Does the district have a mission statement? How does it relate to the vision?
4. **What are the district goals for student services?**
How are goals created?
Who is involved in the creation of goals?
How are goals evaluated and who is involved in evaluating them?
Are school goals related to district goals?
5. **MIDDLE SCHOOL ONLY:** Does the district have a special philosophy regarding middle school education?

6. To what do you attribute the students' performance on CCLS-aligned assessments at <name of school>?
7. **How well supported are student services personnel?**
What district resources are available?
Is there professional development for student services personnel?
Are there opportunities for collaboration?
Are there enough resources? Parents, Community, Technology, Supplies, Time?
8. **Has the implementation of the CCLS changed your roles and responsibilities? If so, how?**
9. **Has the implementation of the APPR changed your roles and responsibilities? If so, how?**
10. **Has the implementation of CCLS and/or APPR changed your relationship with teachers or other support staff?**
Are there opportunities for collaboration?
11. **MIDDLE SCHOOL ONLY:** Does the district or the _____ School do anything special to increase or improve students' college and career readiness? If so, what is your role in that?
12. **Does the school or district monitor changes in family and student populations? If so-**
Have the data collected influenced what programs and practices are in place?
Have the data collected influenced plans and/or goals for the future?
13. **Does someone at the school or district reach out to parents who need student services?**
How do they do this?
14. **Does the school or district form partnerships with community agencies? If so, describe.**
Please provide an example.
Whose responsibility is it to initiate and sustain these?
15. **How is the social and emotional development of students approached in this district?**
Is it a priority?
Please provide an example of how it is or is not a priority.
16. **What kinds of supports are in place to assist students' transitions from one grade level to another and one school to another?**
(into kindergarten? into middle school? into high school?)
17. **Are there any other things that I should know about student support services in the district or the _____ School that you would like to share?**

Thank you.

END

District Director of Assessment/Assistant Superintendent for Assessment Interview

*(Note: Questions in **bold** are priorities and to be added to any other district protocol(s) in the case that this position title does not exist or is combined with the responsibilities of another position.)*

Introduction:

Hello, I am _____ from the University at Albany's School of Education, and we are conducting a study of your improvement strategies.

Thank you for taking time to help us with our study. With your permission, I am going to ask you a series of questions and listen to your answers. All answers are confidential, and your identity will not be revealed*. This interview should take about __ minutes.

Before we can begin, I need to go over a few things:

1. We would like to tape record the interview to make sure that we have accurately captured the information you are providing. If you prefer that we do not tape record, that is all right, too.
2. If you do grant us permission to tape, you may ask at any time that we stop the recorder. And if you are reluctant to continue the interview at any time, let me know, and we will stop.
3. Before we can start, I must have your consent in writing (provide form if interviewee has not brought one with him/her and be sure all relevant areas completed).

Interviewer: _____

District Interviewee(s) Name/Title: _____

1. **Please state your position and how long you have served in this position.**
What attracted you to this district?
2. What is the district's vision?
3. Does the district have a mission statement? If so, how does it relate to the vision?
4. What are the goals for the district?
How are goals created?
Who is involved in the creation of goals?
How are goals evaluated and who is involved in evaluating them?
Are school goals related to district goals?
5. **To what do you attribute the level of students' success on the CCLS-aligned assessments at <name of school>?**
6. **Describe the district's performance monitoring system.**
 - a. **How are school staff evaluations used?**

- b. Other than state assessments, what benchmarks or school assessments are administered?
How frequently are these assessments administered?
In what grades? In what subjects?
Who develops these assessments?
 - c. How is subgroup (e.g. African-American, Hispanic/Latino, English learners) performance tracked and how is subgroup performance data communicated with the principals and teachers?
 - d. How is state assessment data used?
7. How does the district address changes to the state assessment system?
How were processes established for addressing changes?
Who is responsible for monitoring the changes?
How is the effectiveness of changes/adaptations evaluated?
8. Has the APPR process changed the district's approach to teacher evaluation? If so how?
Please provide specific examples.
Who is involved?
What challenges have come up with the APPR process?
How have you proceeded with APPR implementation?
9. Has the APPR process changed the district's approach to principal evaluation? If so how?
Please provide specific examples.
Who is involved?
What challenges have come up with the APPR process?
How have you proceeded with APPR implementation?
What observation protocols have you used?
10. What rubrics are being used for teacher evaluation?
How were these chosen?
What are the pros/cons of this chosen rubric?
How easy to use has this rubric been?
How do you evaluate the effectiveness of the chosen rubric?)
11. Does the district provide training to school administrators, teachers, or teacher leaders in the collection and use of student performance data? If so, describe.
How frequently is training provided?
How are topics selected?
Are activities differentiated by school level (elementary, middle, high school)?
12. (If yes, to 9) What impacts have these training opportunities had on processes and practices to improve student performance?
13. Are there any other things that I should know about school and district assessment practices that you would like to share?

Thank you.

END

District Director of Professional Development Interview

(Note: Questions in **bold** are priorities and to be added to any other district protocol(s) in the case that this position title does not exist or is combined with the responsibilities of another position.)

Introduction:

Hello, I am _____ from the University at Albany's School of Education, and we are conducting a study of your improvement strategies.

Thank you for taking time to help us with our study. With your permission, I am going to ask you a series of questions and listen to your answers. All answers are confidential, and your identity will not be revealed. This interview should take about __ minutes.

Before we can begin, I need to go over a few things:

1. We would like to tape record the interview to make sure that we have accurately captured the information you are providing. If you prefer that we do not tape record, that is all right, too.
2. If you do grant us permission to tape, you may ask at any time that we stop the recorder. And if you are reluctant to continue the interview at any time, let me know, and we will stop.
3. Before we can start, I must have your consent in writing (provide form if interviewee has not brought one with him/her and be sure all relevant areas completed).

Interviewer: _____

District Interviewee(s) Name/Title: _____

1. Please state your position and how long you have served in the position.
What attracted you to this district?
2. What is this district's vision?
3. Does the district have a mission statement? [If so,] How does it relate to the vision?
4. **What are your district's goals for professional development?**
How are your goals created?
Who is involved in the creation of these goals?
How are the goals evaluated and who is involved in evaluating them?
Are school goals related to district goals? If so, who ensures this alignment?
5. **What efforts are made at the district to support <Name of School>'s teachers' abilities to provide effective CCLS-aligned instruction. Please provide examples.**
When did these efforts begin?
Today, how are these efforts initiated and by whom? How are they delivered and sustained?

How are they evaluated and by whom?

How are these efforts related to instruction for diverse students' (African- American, Hispanic/Latino, English learner) needs?

6. Describe any district efforts to develop <school> leaders' abilities to provide CCLS-aligned instructional leadership. Please provide examples.
 - How are these efforts initiated and by whom?*
 - How are they delivered and sustained?*
 - How are they evaluated and by whom?*
 - How are these efforts related to diverse students' (African- American, Hispanic/Latino, English learner, SWD, students performing several grades below level) needs?*
 - What kinds of training did professional developers have? (e.g. NTI – National Training Institute)*

7. Does the district have supports or programs in place for brand new and beginning teachers?
 - [Mentors or coaches, if mentioned]- How are they selected and assigned?*
 - Is there compensation provided for mentoring or coaching?*
 - Describe the time frame for mentoring or coaching- for example: frequency of meetings; length of time mentored.*
 - What are the outcomes expected from mentoring/coaching?*
 - How is mentoring or coaching evaluated?*
 - Please describe other programs.*
 - Who is involved?*
 - Who is responsible?*
 - How are these programs evaluated?*

8. Does the district have supports or programs in place for brand new or beginning school leaders?
 - [Mentors or coaches if mentioned]- How are they selected and assigned?*
 - Is there compensation provided for mentoring or coaching?*
 - Describe the time frame for mentoring or coaching- for example: frequency of meetings; length of time mentored.*
 - What are the outcomes expected from mentoring/coaching?*
 - How is mentoring or coaching evaluated?*
 - Please describe other programs.*
 - Who is involved?*
 - Who is responsible?*
 - How are these programs evaluated?*

9. Has your district offered APPR-specific professional development opportunities during the last two years? If so, who was the target audience or school?
 - Please describe – e.g. who provided the PD? What was their training?*
 - How was the effectiveness of the professional development evaluated?*

10. What kinds of information or data are used to inform professional development offered in this district?

How effective is the use of this data to inform resource allocation, future professional development or other supports to teachers and principals?

11. Are there any other things that I should know about professional development in the district or _____ School that you would like to share?

Thank you.

END

Director or Coordinator of ESL/Bilingual Programs Interview

(Note: Questions in **bold** are priorities and to be added to any other district protocol(s) in the case that this position title does not exist or is combined with the responsibilities of another position.)

(Note: If there is no Director or Coordinator for ESL/Bilingual programs, this protocol should be used with the most veteran ESL teacher who is in charge of scheduling.)

Introduction:

Hello, I am _____ from the University at Albany's School of Education, and we are conducting a study of your improvement strategies.

Thank you for taking time to help us with our study. With your permission, I am going to ask you a series of questions and listen to your answers. All answers are confidential, and your identity will not be revealed*. This interview should take about __ minutes.

Before we can begin, I need to go over a few things:

1. We would like to tape record the interview to make sure that we have accurately captured the information you are providing. If you prefer that we do not tape record, that is all right, too.
2. If you do grant us permission to tape, you may ask at any time that we stop the recorder. And if you are reluctant to continue the interview at any time, let me know, and we will stop.
3. Before we can start, I must have your consent in writing (provide form if interviewee has not brought one with him/her and be sure all relevant areas completed).

*Except in the case of superintendents who have consented to be identified.

Interviewer: _____

District Interviewee(s) Name/Title: _____

1. Please state your position and how long you have served in this position.
What attracted you to this district?
2. **Please describe the elementary English learner population in your district.**
What languages, educational backgrounds (e.g. interrupted), years in the U.S. does this population have?
How, if at all, does this population differ from the larger population at _____ School?
3. **What is your vision for how this district should serve English learners?**

4. Describe the goals for the education of English learners in this district.
Who determines district level goals for EL?
How are these goals determined?
What are the desired outcomes?
How are these goals evaluated?
5. Please describe the ESL/bilingual program at the _____ School.
How is it structured? Push in? Pull out?
How is the ESL/Bilingual program evaluated for effectiveness?
6. Does the district have a mission statement for the ESL/bilingual program? If so, what is it? To what extent is this mission statement enacted?
7. To what do you attribute the level success of <name of school> in implementing effective instruction for English learners?
8. Selection and retention of ESL/bilingual teachers:
 - a. How are ESL/bilingual teachers' work assignments determined?
 - b. How are new ESL/bilingual teachers selected? What qualities do you look for?
 - c. Do you make any special efforts to retain good ESL/bilingual teachers?
9. How are ESL/bilingual teachers in the _____ School supported to meet the needs of ELs?
How does the District support ESL/Bilingual teachers?
What professional development is available for ELS/Bilingual teachers?
Are there opportunities for collaboration for ESL/Bilingual teachers?
10. How are regular classroom teachers in the _____ School supported to meet the needs of ELs?
How does the District support mainstream teachers to meet the needs of EL students?
What professional development is available for mainstream teachers to meet the needs of EL students?
11. Do ESL/bilingual teachers in the _____ School have sufficient resources to meet the needs of ELs?
For example, do they have the support of parents? Community?
Do ESL teachers have the technology, supplies, and time needed to meet the needs of EL students?
12. How would you describe excellent CCLS-aligned instruction for English learners?
 - a. To what extent does your description match practice in _____ School?
 - b. Are any instructional practices for ELs mandated or strongly encouraged by your district?
 - c. What strategies are used for the development of ELs' reading and writing skills as outlined in the CCLS?
 - d. What strategies are used for the development of ELs' math skills as outlined in the CCLS?

13. Have approaches toward curriculum and instruction for ELs changed as you have implemented the CCLS? If so:
How were both general ed teachers and ESL/bilingual teachers supported to make those changes? What outcomes do you want from these changes?
How will you evaluate or assess the impacts of these changes?
14. Has the APPR process changed your approach to curriculum and instruction for ELs? If so, how?
How is ESL teacher performance evaluated?
What observation protocols have you used?
How are resulting data used?
15. How is the progress of ELs monitored?
16. How are EL parents engaged? What role do you play in that?
17. How successful have teachers been at preparing ELs for the CCLS?
18. What kinds of supports are in place to assist EL students' transitions (into Kindergarten? To middle school? to high school?)
19. Are there any other things that I should know about programs and practices for English learners in the _____ School that you would like to share?

Thank you.

END

