

# Supporting the achievement of English language learners

} Promising  
practices from  
odds-beating  
elementary schools

# About Know Your Schools~for NYKids

Since its inception in 2004, one goal of NYKids has been to help educators learn from other educators whose students consistently perform well. To date the project has identified promising practices at all levels, elementary, middle, and high school, with special attention to schools serving socioeconomically, culturally, and linguistically diverse youth. Results of all studies are available in reports, case studies, frameworks, articles, books, and presentations. To download a copy of this report or other NYKids resources, or to learn more about the project and earlier studies, go to [www.albany.edu/nykids](http://www.albany.edu/nykids).

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# Supporting the achievement of English language learners

Promising practices from odds-beating elementary schools

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Supporting the achievement of English language learners:

# The Odds-Beating Elementary Schools

## Blue Creek ES

North Colonie Central School District



Blue Creek is one of six elementary schools that make up the large suburban school district of North Colonie, one of two districts serving one of the most populous suburbs of the Capital Region of New York State. Colonie's long history dates back to its roots as a Dutch colony, once largely agricultural but always rich with cross-roads to more urban and industrialized cities and towns. Now its remaining farms and hamlets nestle within and between highways and shopping malls in an increasingly diverse community. Blue Creek with its diverse student needs has managed to weave together several qualities that educators relate to their relatively better ELL performance outcomes. These include: all staff support a culture wherein they and children celebrate diversity and emotional and social wellness; leaders purposefully build teacher efficacy and commitment by providing clear and consistent messages about vision and mission and measured autonomy for teachers to use professional judgement; and educators create an inclusive and accessible environment for ELLs to succeed academically and socially.

## Catskill ES

Catskill Central School District



Located two hours north of New York City along the Hudson River, the town of Catskill is the seat of Greene County and serves as a major point of entry to the northern Catskill Mountains. The town's population, which clusters in a small village and several hamlets, spreads over a rural countryside. Catskill Central School District serves 1,547 students in three schools. Catskill Elementary School serves nearly half of the district's students, with 62% of them living in poverty. The majority of ELLs in the district come from Latin or South America, with smaller populations from India, Ukraine, and China. The Catskill Central School District has been identified by the state as a "focus district" for not meeting progress targets in English and mathematics for some populations. As a result, Catskill Elementary is a focus school as well, which requires the school to develop an improvement plan. However, despite its status as a school in need of improvement, educators there have experienced comparatively good results with ELLs. They attribute the achievement of ELLs to their practices around integrating students into the mainstream, individualizing instruction, and connecting with families.

## Fostertown ETC Magnet School

Newburgh Enlarged City School District



Fostertown Excellence through Creativity (ETC) Magnet School is one of nine elementary schools in the Newburgh Enlarged City School District. Students come from all areas of the city and town of Newburgh, making for a very diverse student population. Families in the district submit their school preferences, then a lottery determines where students are placed. The district serves almost 11,000 students, 639 of whom attend Fostertown. The district has nearly double the state average of ELLs and a higher than average percentage of economically disadvantaged students. About 90% of the English language learners in the district come from Central America and speak Spanish. Fostertown is well known within the district for its dual language program and for the high achievement of its students. Educators attribute the success of ELLs to the strong dual language program, ELL-focused leadership at all levels, and a commitment to equity for all students.



To provide a fuller description of the higher-performing schools in our analysis, we have published an 8-12 page case report for each. These cases are available at [www.albany.edu/nykids](http://www.albany.edu/nykids), and highlights from them appear throughout this report. We include here a brief description of each school and invite you to explore the fuller case reports. Details about our sample selection and study methods can be found on page 24.

### **Guilderland ES**

Guilderland Central School District



Guilderland Elementary, along with three other elementary schools in the district, serves a primarily residential suburb near the New York state capital. With a motto to “empower all students to succeed in the 21st Century,” the district has maintained an excellent reputation in the region and state for its quality programs and practices. Serving 548 students, Guilderland Elementary School (GES) has seen its ELL population increase by 300% in the last decade. Although white students whose home language is English still comprise the majority, GES houses a disproportionate number of the district’s ELL population compared to other elementary schools in the district. GES is characterized by a well-supported literacy program with skilled and multiple educators working with ELL students, a focus on family outreach and use of community partnerships and connections, and embedded and extensive professional learning opportunities for leaders and teachers.

### **Schuylerville ES**

Schuylerville Central School District



Schuylerville Elementary is one of three schools in the Schuylerville Central School District. It serves grades K-5, and in 2016 was designated by the U.S. Department of Education as New York’s only “Green Ribbon School” for its outdoor education program and its environmental sustainability efforts. Students leaving Schuylerville Elementary move on to the middle school (grades 6-8) and then the high school. All three schools are situated on the same campus. Schuylerville, the site of the Revolutionary War Battle of Saratoga, is a rural and historic community. It is home to several horse, apple, and dairy farms, and many in the community commute to the nearby cities of Saratoga or Albany for work. With the abundance of farms, migrant workers have been attracted to Schuylerville for employment. Schuylerville Elementary School serves 718 students; ELLs make up 2% of that population, and economically disadvantaged students make up 31%. The relatively higher achievement of the ELLs at Schuylerville Elementary is supported by the dedication and leadership of the ENL (English as a New Language) teacher; the way educators adapt to meet the needs of individual students; and the way that strong connections are fostered between home, school, and community agencies.

### **Van Rensselaer ES**

Rensselaer City School District



The Rensselaer City School District consists of two schools housed on the same campus. The district serves 1,027 students, with 71% of students classified as economically disadvantaged. The city of Rensselaer is located directly across the Hudson River from the state capital of Albany. Since 2007, the city of Rensselaer has welcomed refugees from Myanmar, formerly known as Burma. In the Rensselaer City School District, most English language learners are Burmese, and most are refugees from the minority language groups of Chin or Karen who were settled here by the Albany office of the U.S. Committee of Refugees and Immigrants. Prior to this refugee resettlement, there were few ELLs in the district. Van Rensselaer Elementary is characterized by its universally high standards and rigor for students, focus on literacy instruction for all students, and culture of collaboration.

# Demographics of the Odds-Beating Schools

School Name	Total Enrollment	Urbanicity	% ELL	% Hispanic/Latino	% Asian/Pacific Islander	% Multi-Racial	% African-American	% White	% Econ Disadvantaged <sup>1</sup>	PPE <sup>2</sup>
Catskill	760	Rural	3	9	1	9	9	72	62	\$24,032
Schuylerville	718	Rural	2	3	1	0	1	96	31	\$17,884
Fostertown	637	Urban	11	45	3	4	20	28	61	\$21,878
Van Rensselaer	622	Urban	8	7	14	6	9	63	73	\$19,870
Guilderland	548	Suburban	11	4	21	4	5	67	18	\$17,995
Blue Creek	482	Suburban	6	4	20	6	3	68	24	\$18,457
New York State	N/A	N/A	8	25	9	2	18	45	54	\$21,812

<sup>1</sup> One measure of poverty, and the one used here, is economic disadvantage (see definition at <https://data.nysed.gov/glossary.php?report=reportcards>).

<sup>2</sup> 2013-14 districtwide total expenditures per pupil.

# Background and Overview of Findings

**A**cross the United States, the percentage of school-aged children who are learning English as a new language (English language learners, or ELLs) is on the rise (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). These ELLs are diverse in their prior school experiences as well as socioeconomic, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds. New York State is one of the top 15 states with the highest density of ELLs in its schools (Ruiz Soto, Hooker & Batalova, 2015); in the 2014-15 school year more than 230,000 students comprising 8 percent of the total school population were identified as ELLs. This number has increased 20% over the past ten years (New York State Education Department, n.d.) and reflects a nationwide trend (U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

To close consistent achievement gaps between ELLs and their peers whose home language is English, a number of federal and state policies have been enacted. This study was conducted in the 2015-16 school year, the first year of new regulations for ELL education in New York State. These amended regulations, known as CR-Part 154, stipulate that ELL students must be provided with equal access to all school programs and services offered to non-ELL students (New York State Education Department, 2014). It also requires that schools increase their efforts to integrate ELLs in mainstream classrooms by using co-teaching models whereby a mainstream teacher and as a English new language (ENL) teacher work side-by-side with ELLs. By examining “odds-beating” schools (i.e., those with relatively better ELL performance outcomes taking into account school demographics), this study identifies promising practices for the achievement of ELLs.

## Prior Research

Researchers have identified that as a sub-group, the factors contributing to ELLs’ performance in school are complex and varied.

These factors include not only those related to the capacities of schools and districts to provide appropriate instruction to ELLs in their classrooms, but also to the coordination of services ELLs and their families need to thrive socially and emotionally in their school communities (August & Shanahan, 2010; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2010).

Prior research points to some particular approaches to meeting ELLs’ needs that hold promise in supporting their academic success. De Jong, Harper and Coady (2013), for example, identified three particular aspects of teaching that are associated with better ELL student outcomes: a) understanding ELLs from a bilingual and bicultural perspective; b) understanding how language and culture shape school experiences and inform pedagogy for bilingual learners; and c) the ability to mediate a range of contextual factors in schools and classrooms. This ability to “mediate,” or what some researchers refer to as “broker” (Ishimaru et al., 2016), between people and across contexts such as between school staff and ELLs’ families and the ENL and mainstream classroom is one that has been recognized as important not only for ENL teachers but for district and school leaders, child

advocates, and other staff such as nurses and social workers. Indeed, a growing body of research points to the importance of all staff—not just the ENL teacher—understanding how to be culturally responsive (i.e., value the cultural and linguistic knowledge all children bring with them to school) (Moll, 2015; Santamaria, 2009) when engaging with ELLs.

A collection of commissioned papers on these issues as well as others (van Lier & Walqui, 2012) offer convergences in the research literature regarding what is recommended to support ELLs' academic success. Most salient among these are recommendations for researchers and educators to:

1. Move away from defining language primarily as form or even as function and toward a redefinition of language as a complex adaptive system of communicative actions to realize key purposes.
2. Recognize that language learning occurs more effectively through indirect intervention where learners can acquire

language experientially rather than through a structural syllabus of language forms. This assertion is based on research showing that a) subject-area classrooms are ideal places for ELL learning when teachers carefully scaffold language and content learning and where students work and talk together; b) ELLs learn language as they engage in meaningful content-rich activities (projects, presentations, investigations) that encourage language growth through perception, interaction, planning, research, discussion, argument, and co-construction of academic products; and c) ELLs grow in their communication skills and in disciplinary knowledge when “flawed” language in subject-area classrooms is allowed, as this is an expected part of development.

3. Broaden the conception of literacy and learning and see them as not only being about the development of particular kinds of print-based skills but as “participation in a range of valued meaning-making practices” both in and out of school (p. ii).

## Findings

This study, drawing on social-ecological theory, which highlights the relationships among and between contexts, contributes insight into how odds-beating school educators from district offices to the classroom coordinate processes and practices to achieve better than predicted ELL outcomes. The four elements common and salient to ELL achievement in the schools studied include:

1. A welcoming school climate in a culture that emphasizes high expectations and equitable access to rigorous curricula.
2. Inclusive, individualized, and culturally responsive practices offered by skilled and dedicated ENL and other educators and support staff.
3. Team configurations and communications to serve ELLs and their families.
4. A holistic approach to leadership and capacity building for ELLs' success.



**Odds-  
Beating  
Elementary  
Schools**

Each of these elements is described in more detail in the pages that follow. For study methods, see p. 24.



# 1.

## A Welcoming School Climate in a Culture That Emphasizes High Expectations and Equitable Access to Rigorous Curricula

I think the goal for them [the ELLs] is to feel safe, to see themselves as students, to be able to problem solve, and feel that there's always someone there to help them do their academics or take care of their emotional needs. – Blue Creek teacher

A foundation for supporting ELLs' academic success increasingly acknowledged among policymakers, researchers, and practitioners alike has been the “ecological” nature of what is needed to support them (TESOL International Association's research agenda statement, 2014, p.8). These ecological aspects of districts and schools include those that mediate the divergences between what some ELLs bring with them in cultural values and beliefs, language experiences, content learning experiences, and, as importantly, understandings of how to engage as a learner in a school.

Cultural-responsiveness, which is discussed in more detail with regard to instruction (Element 2), captures the idea that teaching learners from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds should “empower students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (Ladson-Billings, 1994, p. 382). This requires educators to expertly provide opportunities for ELLs to engage in productive struggle to meet high expectations for learning in classrooms with their peers while also providing the emotional, social, and academic supports to avoid frustration and invite their full participation in classroom and school activities.

In this study, several characteristics of the districts' and schools' ecologies were identified as culturally responsive and salient to ELLs' relatively better performance including: a district- and schoolwide culture that embraces difference, high academic expectations for all, and equitable access to rigorous curricula; positive behavior and character education programs that contribute to a welcoming and safe climate; and a widespread commitment to inviting and including ELLs and their families in the school community.

### District and School Culture Embracing Difference, High Expectations, and Equity

A district and school culture can be defined in many ways and here we focus on the characteristics of the culture that make clear what is valued. In Blue Creek, for example, a schoolwide value for embracing difference, high expectations, and equity is part of the fabric of their special needs magnet school identity. Like Blue Creek, Fostertown, with one of the district's first dual-language programs, shares a school identity that embraces difference and equity of opportunity. In other schools that are not magnets or homes to dual language programs (e.g., Catskill), educators point to the shifting landscape of their communities in prompting a necessary culture shift. In these places, the challenges they face have been met with a sense of deep commitment to serving their communities well and with a splash of creativity in adapting to demographic changes (see also Element 4) that might otherwise negatively impact the district and school culture.

Every student needs access to everything. Every student should have breakfast and lunch. Every student should be able to participate in whatever club or activity or learning opportunity you have. – Fostertown district leader



Hallway poster at Blue Creek Elementary inviting students to post responses to “Where did your shoes take you?”

I think that there is a certain charm to this district. I've always found the colleagues that I work with to be very positive, very supportive, and I am the child of immigrants myself, so I have a very strong passion for ENL and how important it is to get these children kind of a leg up to having the life that their parents brought them here to have, and I think that Catskill is a very comfortable place to do it. – Catskill ENL teacher

### **Positive Behavior and Character Education Programs**

In all of the schools studied, teachers and school leaders interviewed identified schoolwide positive behavior and character education programs as contributing to a welcoming and safe environment where ELLs can thrive academically as well as socially and emotionally. Blue Creek ES, highlighted as a case in point for this characteristic, has had the benefit of a long-standing tradition as a “Peaceable School” (a model for conflict resolution and positive behavior) that encourages adults and children alike to embody acceptance of others’ differences and to hold high expectations for each other’s active and kind participation in the classroom and school.

This school is an eclectic group. It is heavily into character building, and we have a lot of programs and grants that help children to see the ramifications of their actions and to check before they make choices that may not be good for them, and it really shows in the community that the kids are special in that respect. We have a great international group, so we are lucky to have that world view of what goes on in other countries. – Blue Creek teacher

### **Widespread Commitment to ELLs and Their Families**

Making sure that ELLs and their families feel welcomed and safe takes widespread commitment not only on the part of the ENL teachers whose primary charge is ELL students, but also among administrators and other staff in the school building. In Schuylerville, for example, educators described their close-knit environment as one that contributes to a sense of connection between the adults employed in the school, the ELLs, and their families.

I think we’re very good about keeping that connection between home and school and bringing those parents in and helping them to understand what their children need. That even extends past the classroom into the sports world here. We’ve gotten children involved in our school sports programs by bringing in the parents and doing the emails and signing them up, which is a really big thing when kids can connect with other kids. – Schuylerville teacher

In larger urban schools like Fostertown, the home cultures of students are celebrated in school events and represented in the classroom through culturally responsive instructional materials (see Element 2).



It’s a shared vision, to provide equity, and equity does not mean equal. It’s to provide every family exactly what it needs, whatever that may be.

– Fostertown district leader

## WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE IN

# Blue Creek Elementary School

## Keeping Expectations and Rigor High in a Welcoming and Safe Environment

*Kids are encouraged to share, and teachers aren't trying to get kids to fit in a mold—the uniqueness of every kid is cherished.* – principal

*[Blue Creek ES] is very kid centered. I'm always worried about how the kid is feeling before the academics. If they're not into it the academics aren't going to happen. So it's making sure everybody's in a good place.* – teacher

Keeping academic goals high for ELLs while implementing New York's Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) raised challenges for teachers at Blue Creek, yet teachers pointed to a few approaches toward surmounting those challenges to make the curriculum as accessible to ELLs as possible. These approaches included: district leaders' taking a hands-on approach to getting insight on what was needed in the classroom while keeping child wellness at the center of the district mission; using an experimental and eclectic approach to curriculum revision; and working toward coherence and clarity of the curriculum.

### Consistency of Vision and Mission

*All students are provided the opportunity and necessary support to engage in relevant, challenging work, which contributes to their academic and social growth and development. All staff, teachers, and administrators are part of a larger learning community working together to build collective capacity in order to provide a high-quality, relevant, equitable education for all.* – district mission statement

The clarity and consistency of district and school leaders' vision and mission guides practice at Blue Creek. Teachers' and support staff employees' understandings of the vision and mission were consistent in their attention to selfless dedication to high academic standards and the well-being of each and every child:

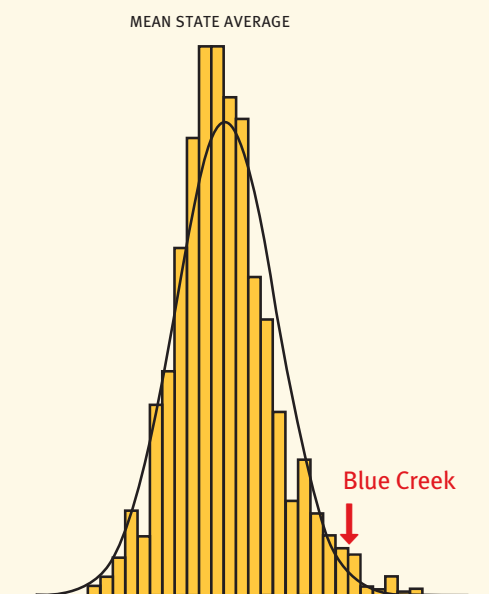
*We're all supportive. No one's out to just make themselves look good. It's never been like that. She [the principal] wants every child to be what they can be—the best they can be. She wants this to be a safe learning environment where they're comfortable and able to learn.*

Since the norm in the district and the school is serving children from various backgrounds and with very different needs, Blue Creek educators described a culture of compassion in which ELLs are generally not seen as a drag on the pace of learning, but as an asset in line with the district mission.

### From a Student's Perspective

When asked about his experiences at Blue Creek Elementary (shared below), ELL student Zhang Li (a pseudonym), a Chinese

The figure shows Blue Creek Elementary ELLs' above-average performance on the ELA and mathematics state assessments in 2013 and 2014 as compared to other schools in NY (1.78 standard deviations above the mean).



4th grader who speaks Mandarin and English, pointed to a safe and inviting environment in which he was provided support on entry into the school.

*I want to share about what I feel before and entering the school year. So before it's I have summer holiday. First I was so nervous because my English was not very well, and I was like, "What if they don't understand me?" and I like the little guy who's who don't understand English now. I was so excited at the, the like I think like one week before the school year start and when I walk into school on the first day, I was like, "Ooohh, this is our school."*

Zhang Li also reported that his parents were welcomed and acknowledged in their role helping him learn. For example, he said his teachers often asked him to bring materials home to inform his parents of events like Open House. They also encourage his reading at home in both his native Chinese and English.





# 2.

## Inclusive, Individualized, and Culturally Responsive Instructional Approaches Offered by Skilled and Dedicated ENL and Other Teachers and Support Staff

A reason for this success [with ELLs] is this whole school effort, and I really feel like we have amazing teachers here who are just providing quality instruction that make it so the ELLs will be successful. They are already providing so many modifications not just for ELLs but for all the students. Some would say, “Oh, this would be good to do,” but they [classroom teachers] are already doing those modifications. For instance you see using visuals, breaking down language, using scaffolding. – Guilderland ENL teacher

Practices that were reported and observed across the schools in this study were common in three specific ways that have been found to be important to ELL success in other research as described in the introduction (e.g., van Lier & Walqui, 2012). They begin with an emphasis on inclusionary practices (i.e., those that integrate ELLs as fully as possible into mainstream classroom activities). Teachers’ roles in coordinating efforts for maximizing ELLs’ integration in mainstream classrooms are complemented by stand-alone ENL or Response to Intervention (RTI) classroom instruction as needed. This approach facilitates a degree of institutionalization of inclusionary practices while maintaining the right amount of specialized instruction as appropriate to students’ language development and other academic needs.

Individualization is another focus in the schools studied. This takes shape as teachers use a variety of strategies and resources to differentiate their lessons and modify resources to maximize ELLs’ learning. Teachers reported focusing on individual student growth with attendant scaffolding and resource adaptations to help make the content accessible to ELLs.

A third characteristic these schools share, which relates to Element 1 regarding the culture and climate of the district and school, is teachers’ sensitivity to the benefits of highlighting and drawing upon ELLs’ cultural and linguistic backgrounds to enhance ELLs’ own learning as well as enrich the classroom experience for all. ENL teachers lead the way in enacting culturally responsive practices, but these practices also extend out to the school through other teachers and more broadly across the school in events that celebrate diversity.

### Inclusionary Practices

They [ELLs] will work in smaller groups, so we can really, really hone in on the skills that they’re getting and be on the same topic, but really at their level. – Van Rensselaer teacher

Educators in the schools in this study share a common priority to integrate ELLs as much as possible in mainstream classrooms while providing the necessary supports by ENL and other specialists as needed. One of the ways they do this is through the strategic use of small-group instruction. In Van Rensselaer, for example, ENL, RTI and/or AIS (Academic Intervention Services) instruction is offered within the mainstream classrooms.

They’re different kids from different cultures. So that as soon as you get your class you try to figure out where everybody’s backgrounds are so that you can highlight those so that they just become an inclusive, accepting environment. And I just love their faces when I read something in Italian or with Spanish in it. They just brighten up, and then they’ll come to me to tell me if I’m saying it correctly or incorrectly, and they’re very proud of that.

– Fostertown teacher



On some occasions she [the ENL teacher] will pull a small group, but we'll also include other students that are not ENL students with that group, just basically students who need a little bit of extra help. So the ENL students are not treated as different from the rest of the group, just maybe they need a little extra help. But there are other kids who need extra help, too. So they're involved with that, as well. So it makes everybody feel a little bit more comfortable that they're not singled out for their language. – Van Rensselaer teacher

An important aspect of this approach is that students are moved flexibly in and out of groups in the mainstream classroom based not solely on language background, but rather based on performance. An AIS teacher explained, “It could be a child was absent for three days and would just join a group.” For example, in classroom observations, ELLs were seen working in grade-level groups and also AIS groups and participating with their mainstream classmates in both situations.

### Individualizing through Differentiation and Resource Adaptations

It's a very individualized kind of approach. – Catskill support staff member

One of the ways teachers individualize instruction to the benefit of ELLs is by providing technologies and adapted resources to make content more accessible. In Blue Creek, for instance, teachers hailed the effectiveness of Google Classroom accessories such as Google Translate in putting ELLs in the driver's seat as they make sense of new material. They are given Chromebooks or iPads during classes to access such resources, and all children are encouraged to help their ELL peers in using the technology, deciphering the tasks, and making sense of the content.

ELLs also benefit from instructional programs supplemented by resources specifically adapted for them; in addition, they have access to resources available for their disabled peers, such as videos depicting content, that enhance their understandings of texts above their reading level. At Schuylerville, for instance, teachers describe choosing different texts, using native language texts, incorporating ample visuals, and using lots of concrete examples to make content more comprehensible for ELLs. As one Van Rensselaer teacher explained of her ENL colleague:

*She brings in a lot of resources. She spends a lot of time researching different programs and then she actually coordinates with the teachers although she doesn't really have to. She'll try to see what everybody's doing and try to work on vocabulary, writing, whatever it is that we [classroom teachers] are doing. She wants to try to make sure she's building their skills in all the areas.*

Another teacher at Van Rensselaer corroborated this sentiment, saying, “And I feel like if the teachers don't know what to do with a particular child, especially the beginners that come in, she has a lot of great resources that she can give the teachers. . . . So she is always researching and always has been. I think she's a huge part of [our success].”

### Culturally Responsive Approaches with ENL Teachers Leading the Charge

Your ENL teacher needs to be a super star. – Catskill teacher

The conscious effort to take ELLs' cultural and linguistic backgrounds into account to enhance their experience in school is headed up by ENL teachers who play a primary role as “cultural brokers” (see Ishimaru et al., 2016). In this role they advocate for ELLs and their families and help district and school leaders as well as other teachers and staff understand their needs. As the ENL teacher at Blue Creek explained,



*They [ELLs] will not learn English unless they feel safe and comfortable. So forget the curriculum until they feel safe, and this building is amazing because of the attitude of the teachers. They don't pretend to know it all. They come and ask me questions and I give them some suggestions.*

Fostertown provides an example of classroom teachers valuing the various home cultures of students. They reported creating classroom libraries with multicultural themes and diverse main characters to make those important connections.

#### WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE IN

## Guilderland Elementary School

### Working Together to Integrate ELLs

*This is a building that works together.* – teacher

High-quality literacy education was highlighted by Guilderland ES staff as a major focus of their instructional program. With the resources of ongoing literacy-focused professional development, Reading and Writing Workshop, and Reading Recovery specialists, students are provided with a cutting-edge literacy education. Another salient feature of the instructional program is the move towards inclusion, with ENL services increasingly being provided in an integrated “push-in” rather than stand-alone “pull-out” model.

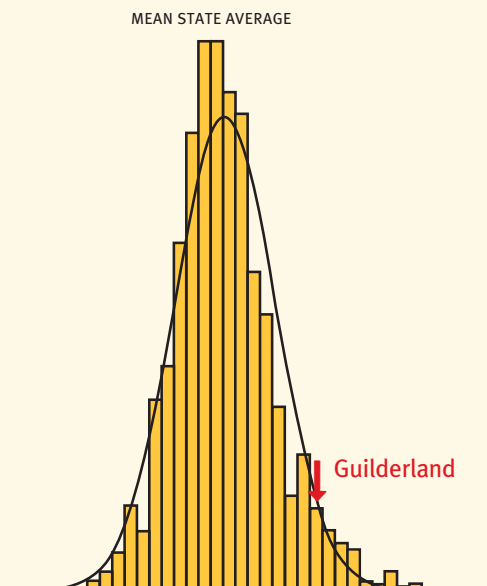
#### Moving toward More Integration in the Mainstream

ENL and mainstream classroom teachers converged on the idea that whether ELLs are in stand-alone ENL classrooms or are integrated in the mainstream, the important thing is to make sure that “the presence of language [is] all around them.” To encourage this, over time teachers at Guilderland Elementary have worked towards developing a genuine form of co-teaching between ENL and mainstream teachers. These changes have included more collaboration in terms of lesson planning, with a focus on vocabulary that may be challenging for ELLs. The goal, according to one teacher, is to “learn new ways to provide that same service [to ELLs] in the classroom” without making them feel “separated.”

With this transition to more integration still a “work in progress,” in the words of a district leader, both administrators and teachers expressed confidence in their progress and results of their efforts. As one teacher expressed it, “I have this extra person who also is sharing that weight and responsibility for [ELLs] and can give me tips, and we talk about it.” Another mainstream teacher referred to ENL teachers as “experts” with ELLs, adding

that “they really know their students holistically and what their family life is like.” With continuing planning and collaboration, teachers expressed feeling that the integrated model will continue to develop and be successful. One teacher noted that students already “see us as co-teachers.”

The figure shows Guilderland Elementary ELLs’ above-average performance on the ELA and mathematics state assessments in 2013 and 2014 as compared to other schools in NY (1.3 standard deviations above the mean).



*I see that myself and the ENL teacher are like equals in the life of this one student. We're equally important and I feel that under that legislation [Part 154] I cannot just brush this student off on this ENL teacher. I really feel like we have a team responsibility here. — teacher*

### **From Classroom Teachers' Perspectives**

The Guilderland classroom teachers who participated in interviews and focus groups shared some of the ways they are engaging in inclusive, individualized, and culturally responsive practices.

#### **What optimizing inclusion looks like:**

*Our ENL teacher works very closely with the classroom teacher, and I've had what's called beginning ENL students. They have very limited English and they're completely immersed into my classroom. But the ENL teacher works super closely with me and she really does their reading and writing instruction, and that's kind of outside the classroom, but otherwise we really try to immerse them within the classroom, and I think that it works amazingly well. It's amazing how the full immersion takes off, and I think it helps too that we do a lot of partnering and grouping. And so those students are grouped within my classroom working with non-ENL students, and so they're really picking up language, and even behaviors, social skills from the students in the class. I think that that's huge.*

#### **What individualizing looks like:**

*What [the ENL teacher] will do is sometimes meet with them [the ELLs] before I start instruction, and she'll go over some of that content area vocabulary and that of course helps them when they get started.*

*Even materials like for science and social studies, the ENL teacher will help me adapt them at the beginning of the year. And I'm finding, at this point in the year, I don't really have to adapt them that much—even for students who only had 20 words when they first came in September.*

#### **What practicing cultural responsiveness looks like:**

*Yesterday we had a big Chinese New Year celebration and one of the student's moms came in. They made lanterns. The ENL student was really in the spotlight with her mom. They did a slide show and sharing, and the kids were asking her questions about her culture. So this interaction I think is really important. I don't always know what they know and don't know, so it's my philosophy that I always say to them, "I have so much to learn from you and you have much to learn from me." I try to model that so that the students see me doing that, then the students want to know.*



# 3.

## Team Configurations and Communications to Serve ELLs and Their Families

We don't have that issue of ENL being a separate entity. . . . It's incorporated. We communicate. – Van Rensselaer teacher

Collaboration and communication have been found to be fundamental to the development of trust and the smooth functioning of a school (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). For schools with increasing populations of ELLs, research suggests that the need for teachers to collaborate around instructional and assessment strategies and for the whole school community to communicate messages of welcome and inclusion for ELLs and their families is salient to ELL achievement outcomes (Elias & Haynes, 2008; Liew, Chen & Hughes, 2009; Wilcox, Lawson, & Angelis, 2015).

In this study, several practices related to collaboration and communication were identified, including the use of multiple district- and schoolwide parent outreach strategies, consistent collaborations between ENL specialists and mainstream teachers regarding instructional and assessment adaptations, and purposeful fostering of community partnerships.

### District- and Schoolwide Parent Outreach

In the schools studied, educators showed evidence of using multiple strategies to bridge the gap between home and school. In Fostertown, this effort includes teachers making home visits and the school paying for parents' taxis to attend meetings. In Van Rensselaer, where many parents speak the minority languages of Chin, Karen, or Burmese, staff ensures that documents are translated and interpreters are present at parent meetings. In all of the schools participating in this study, teachers find ways to communicate with parents despite the challenges this effort entails due to time constraints or difficulty making contact through email or phone. In addition to such direct outreach efforts, and reflecting the importance of creating a welcoming climate for ELLs and their families (Element 1), in some of the schools studied, periodic international celebrations are held to welcome immigrant parents and celebrate their native cultures.

[The principal] was looking at who is coming to open-house night, who's coming to conferences, who's not, and realizing which subpopulations and which families weren't able to get to those. So she worked with the transportation director to get a school bus to go to some of these populated apartment complexes and bring the people, because they didn't necessarily have a way to get a ride to school for these things. – Blue Creek district leader



I think one of the biggest assets that our ENL teachers bring to the table is their commitment. They get to know these families inside and out and they develop a trust with them.

– Guilderland support staff



I think that they know that I'm interested in their language and their culture. I try to get them bilingual books. . . . I'll send those home so the moms can work with the kids and I try to let the moms know, "Please don't speak English with your kids at home. You have to be sure they don't lose their native language." I think it makes the parents feel a bit that they can work with their kids on concepts and read to their kids in Spanish and that they're still helping. – Schuylerville ENL teacher

### Consistent Collaborations between ENL Specialists and Mainstream Teachers

In the schools in this study, high levels of communication and collaboration between ENL specialists, mainstream classroom teachers, special education specialists, and literacy and math specialists was identified as salient to their ELL outcomes. These communications and collaborations focus on qualities of instructional materials and assessments as well as on ELL progress monitoring. With the ENL teacher in the middle of these collaborations, teachers report working from the same curriculum map and co-planning through the lens of what instructional and assessment adaptations they might need to make for ELLs.

If you're a classroom teacher, you generally plan for two types of learners, regular ed and special ed. ELL is now a new entity. OK, now that's the third, and without having a whole lot of a background or expertise in instructing ELLs, that's where our ENL teacher came in and really aided the classroom teacher. – Schuylerville superintendent

### Fostering Community Partnerships and Connections

English language learners, some of whom may be children of migrants or refugees and often economically disadvantaged, require coordinated services both within and beyond the school (Clewell, Campbell, & Perlman, 2007; Epstein & Sanders, 2006; Haynes, 2002). In the schools in this study, educators develop partnerships and connections to community service providers to fully support the needs of all students, including their ELLs. For example, they connect with the community by organizing food and clothing drives for students in need. In Fostertown and Van Rensselaer, connections and referrals are made to local Boys and Girls clubs and community centers where children and families can begin to develop ties to their neighbors and also take advantage of after-school tutoring, sports, art, music, and recreational activities. In Schuylerville and Van Rensselaer, school personnel work with state and national migrant worker and refugee agencies to ensure that families are supported in their transition to the United States. Further, social-emotional, mental health, medical, dental, and vision care is coordinated by support staff through their connections and partnerships to county agencies and health providers.

So we try to have that collegial network with every service, so that we really work to provide services for the whole child, depending on what their needs are. And we find that the needs are similar between the ELLs and the poverty kids and the special education kids. All their needs are similar in that they have the support they need to be able to learn in school. So we basically take care of anything we can. – Fostertown district leader

But it should be our job, not only as a school district, but as a community, of being able to extend ourselves so that other people feel welcome and it's not Rensselaer City School or it's not the school district doing this and the Boys Club doing this, but we work together as a unit to be able to provide opportunities for our kids to be successful, but also for families to be more of a community enriched thing. – Van Rensselaer superintendent



[The ENL teacher] knows my program for the most part. She understands my expectations. – Catskill teacher



## WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE IN

# Van Rensselaer Elementary School

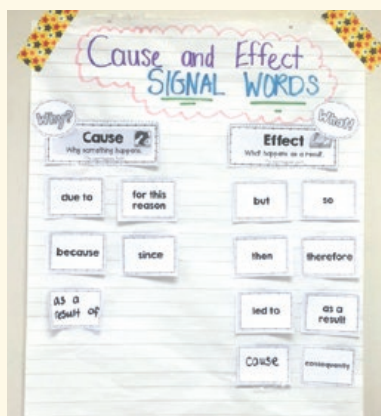
## Collaborating for Optimal Integration

*We're setting the bar high.* – ENL teacher

Throughout the school and the district, educators described Van Rensselaer as having a collaborative culture. Teachers work together to plan lessons as well as develop curriculum for horizontal and vertical alignment. Grades 3, 4, and 5 are taught collaboratively, with one teacher focusing on math and science and the other focusing on ELA and social studies with a shared group of students. ENL teachers work with classroom teachers to ensure that instruction is aligned and that ELLs are working on the same standards and curriculum as their peers. Three teachers in the district are assigned to work with ELLs: the main elementary ENL teacher is assigned to grades K-4; another ENL teacher splits her time among schools, working with students in grades 4-12; and a third teacher works with ELLs in grades preK-K and also provides reading intervention services for grades 2-4. Working together, they provide rigorous, standards-based instruction to ELLs.

### Collaborating on Curriculum to Help ELLs Meet the Standards

Teachers at Van Rensselaer all follow a curriculum that has been carefully aligned to the state standards. For example, when ENL teachers teach beginning ELLs in stand-alone classes, they find



“Cause and Effect Signal Words” poster hanging in ENL teacher’s classroom.

out what the classroom teacher is doing and then mirror that, but with scaffolds appropriate to their language levels. One ENL teacher attributed the success of their students to the fact that the ENL teachers hold students to very high standards. They work on the same standards as the classroom teachers and expect students to rise to their high expectation. This practice requires ENL teachers to collaborate closely with classroom teachers so that they know which standard(s) and supporting skills are the focus of a lesson. An ENL teacher said, “I mean we’re really aligning with the Common Core. We’re really trying to be very diligent about giving those kids the lessons that they’re going to be needing and lead them on to get them where they need to be.”

### Working Together to Bridge the Gaps

Van Rensselaer teachers reported that ENL teachers work to obtain resources for students and then help classroom teachers to integrate new materials into their lessons. This requires a commitment to collaboration and a coordinated effort to ensure that teachers are aware of ELLs’ needs and the resources available to meet those needs. This collaboration extends beyond the classroom as well. Classroom teachers reported that ENL teachers often help them to communicate with parents and also help them bridge any cultural gaps. A teacher who attributed some of the success of ELLs to her ENL co-teaching colleague said,

*She always knows what I’m doing. I don’t know how. She follows the curriculum map, and if ELL kids are in our classroom and we’re in the thick of something, she lets them stay. . . . She’s always willing to pitch in. She doesn’t say like, “Oh, that’s my lunch,” or “That’s my prep.” She’s always willing, and with parents too. If I can’t understand them and I’m willing to call, but sometimes I really can’t understand them and I don’t want to insult anybody, she’ll get the interpreter in and she’ll call the parent for me.*

### From ENL Teachers’ Perspectives

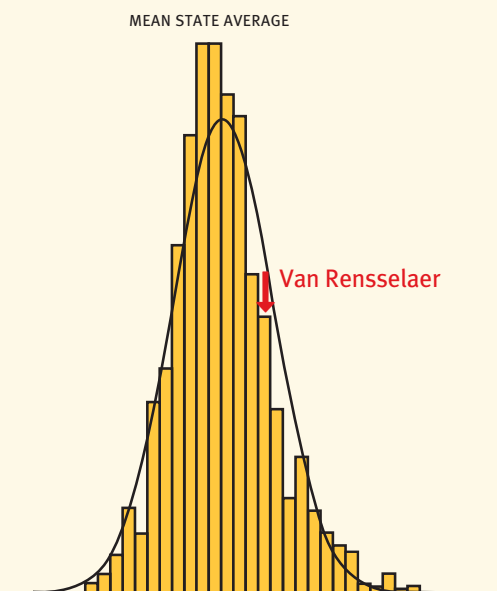
*My teaching philosophy is helping any student make gains, helping them in whatever their area of need is. It’s supporting them in all aspects of learning, not just what’s going on in my classroom. It’s supporting them in their regular classroom. It’s supporting them in things that they’re doing outside of school. It’s showing interest in my students and incorporating that into my classroom.*

The three ENL teachers at Van Rensselaer Elementary School are strong believers in collaboration. They collaborate with each other as a small department, with mainstream classroom teachers in their building, and with other local ENL teachers through a regional professional learning community. Through consistent communication they are able to support the curriculum in both integrated and stand-alone ENL instruction.

One ENL teacher described how she collaborates and communicates with classroom teachers to support ELLs and ensure that they are receiving integrated, rigorous instruction:

*I follow their [mainstream teachers’] curriculum—what the teachers have developed based on the Common Core curriculum. So*

The figure below shows Van Rensselaer ELLs' above-average performance on the ELA and mathematics state assessments in 2013 and 2014 as compared to other schools in NY (.74 standard deviations above the mean).



*we're using that to do our lessons. We're communicating with the teachers, following their curriculum, looking at the standards which they've obviously incorporated within their curriculum.*

This same ENL teacher reported that while teachers do not have scheduled time for coplanning, they do whatever they can to be on the same page. She said they talk before school, after school, and in passing throughout the day and use email as well:

*You know, if I pop into a class and they [the classroom teachers] say, "She had trouble with this lesson today." I'll say, "Ok, I'll take that piece." And I'll put that into my lesson for the day because it's little things like that that are a necessity.*

With regard to communication with parents an ENL teacher highlighted the importance of her role brokering connections between them and the school as well as the broader school community.

*We beg them [ELLs' family members] to come in and we really want them to feel a part of our community of Rensselaer. We're trying to build that connection. Like I said, [it's] knowing their background, bringing that into our lessons, having them share things about their experiences, just always touching base with their families as well—getting to know the kids really before the learning piece plays in, which it does.*



# 4.

## A Holistic Approach to Leadership and Capacity Building for ELLs' Success

It's not about me, it's about we. – Fostertown district leader

Leadership approaches that include shared decision making and capitalizing on the expertise of the professionals in the school building were demonstrated in the odds-beating schools featured in this study. Leadership teams made up of teachers from all areas and grade levels, parents, and administrators work together to develop goals tied to the district mission, bridging what some scholars (e.g., Hamann & Reeves, 2013) call the “professional schism” (p.81) that often contributes to ELL achievement gaps. Several practices and processes related to leadership and capacity building were found to be salient to ELLs' relatively better performance, including: staffing fit to a diverse school, affordances for teacher decision making, and widely distributed pedagogical knowledge about teaching English language learners facilitated through professional development opportunities.

### Staffing Fit to a Diverse School

In the schools participating in this study, district and school leaders have been charged with staffing their schools with faculty who are well-qualified educators as well as people who are compassionate to the needs of diverse learners. Hiring teachers with multiple certifications and a desire to continue learning allows for some scheduling flexibility and increases the overall capacity of the faculty. In Van Rensselaer Elementary, for example, multiple teachers have dual certifications, including ENL along with bilingual education, literacy, or special education. In Guilderland Elementary School, one school leader said he looks for “lifelong learners . . . always trying to better themselves.” And in Fostertown, building leaders reported hiring teachers with personal attributes that will support successful and compassionate teaching.

We can always build skill, but we can't build nurturing. We can't build that love for teaching. We can't build that caring for the students. I take that route. – Fostertown principal

### Affordances for Teacher Decision Making

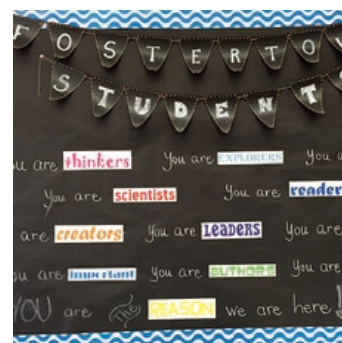
In schools with odds-beating achievement of ELLs, a mutual trust between administrators and teachers is prevalent as discussed earlier, and this trust is built upon a history of shared decision making through which teachers' judgement is valued by administrators. Building and district leaders expressed the belief that teachers are professionals with valuable expertise and therefore need leeway to make decisions that are in the best interests of the students they teach.

What I love about her [the principal] is she's not a micromanager. She respects us. We respect her. She knows we're all doing our job, that we love what we do, and there's no one slacking. – Blue Creek teacher

### Widely Distributed Pedagogical Knowledge about Teaching English Language Learners

Building capacity to teach ELLs depends on providing quality professional development opportunities to all faculty members. In the odds-beating schools featured here, district

Every day you learn something new from a colleague. – Guilderland teacher



Hallway bulletin board at Fostertown ETC Elementary School



leaders expressed supporting ENL teachers in their efforts to improve their practice through professional development focused on ELLs. In turn, the ENL teachers reported working with their colleagues to turn-key best practices and act as point-people for questions regarding policy implementation and regulatory compliance as well. For example, at Van Rensselaer Elementary, ENL teachers attend conferences or workshops and bring new practices or policy information back to the building. In Fostertown, teachers observe one another teaching to develop new strategies. Administrators also videotape successful co-teaching collaborations to share with district teachers, so that they have context-specific examples of how it can be done. In Guilderland, teachers took a field trip to a school with a large population of ELLs to observe their well-established co-teaching practice.

Overall, district and school leaders demonstrated a flexible approach to professional development. Some schools, like Fostertown, focus professional development specifically on multilingual learner strategies, while in other schools professional development has not focused specifically on ELLs, but ENL teachers offer embedded PD through their collaborative efforts in the school.



You need to get everyone involved for the benefit of the child.

– Schuylerville principal

#### WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE IN

# Fostertown ETC (Excellence through Creativity) Magnet School

## Leadership to Support a Shared Vision

*Now everyone is a teacher of ELLs. So that has been the crucial shift.* – principal

In the Newburgh Enlarged City School District, leadership structures and capacity-building strategies to support ELLs include 1) ensuring that schools are staffed with teachers in tune with ELLs' needs and show potential for leadership roles, 2) the district leadership structure includes quality and qualified supervision specifically for ELL programming, and 3) leadership is distributed through such routines as instructional conversations.

### School Staffing to Meet ELLs' Needs

Both district and school leaders described efforts to hire faculty members who are skilled teachers but also compassionate to the needs of ELLs and students living in poverty. The district has a detailed hiring procedure that begins with candidates being prescreened by the human resources department. The principal at Fostertown spoke about what she looks for when hiring new teachers, including qualities for teacher leadership:

*I have many teachers who can be leaders, teacher leaders that can take anybody under their wing. But you can't teach something that's innate and that's what I look for: that opportunity, somebody who'd embrace the program, be a good instructor but still have that compassion and the want to help the ELLs, because that's what the program is about.*

### District-Level ELL-Focused Leadership

The Newburgh Enlarged City School District recognized the need for a district-level leader to take charge of curriculum and instruction for ELLs so that programs from school to school could maintain some consistency and so that ELLs would not fall between the cracks. A district leader explained that prior to having the position of Supervisor of Language Acquisition, "We had a 'light touch' with the supervision of the ENL program." She went on to explain that ENL instructional programming had been part of each

principal's responsibility, so programs differed from school to school. The new supervisor has brought more uniformity to the programs across the district and also helps principals with little experience with ELLs to develop their skills.

Another district leader explained that this position is very important “because there’s somebody for accountability with what the programs are. She supervises programs in the buildings. She monitors them. She’s responsible for the PD [professional development]. . . . She makes sure that those kids are getting the kind of care that they need to have so that they are able to learn, and she’s very well respected. She does a very good job.” Leaders at the school and district levels agreed that this position is an important part of ELL student success at Fostertown. As one said, “Now we ensure that we include [discussion of] our ELLs in all our conversations.”

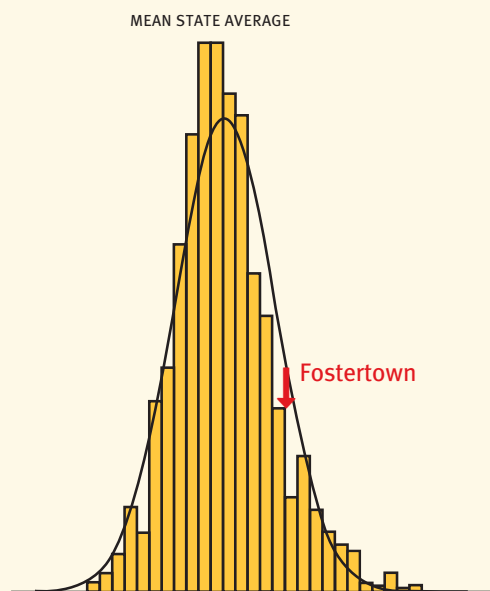
The Supervisor of Language Acquisition put together a team of district educators to form the District Language Acquisition Team (DLAT). The team developed an ELL Framework aligned to the five pillars of the district strategic plan. According to a district leader, DLAT created the “connective tissue” between district priorities, state standards, and bilingual progressions. In addition to creating the ELL Framework, the team meets periodically to monitor progress toward district goals.

### Routines for Capacity Building

The principal and assistant principal at Fostertown have developed a program of “School Based Instructional Conversations” to build capacity within the faculty. This practice arose from the principal’s school plan, which was aligned to district priorities. In this plan, she chose collaborative learning as the schoolwide focus and expanded the focus to be inclusive of both students and adults. She described her rationale, saying, “Students will mirror what they observe happening among the adults in the school.” Both students and educators engage in collaborative learning practices.

One practice that was described is peer visitations, in which grade-level teaching teams observe one another’s lessons and then meet to discuss them. One district leader called the principal “a pioneer” for starting this practice in her building, as it has spread to other buildings as well. Fostertown administrators reported that this practice has been especially useful in providing teachers embedded professional development in teaching ELLs. When classroom teachers observe ENL teachers or dual language classes, they learn new strategies to engage and instruct ELLs. According to the assistant principal, this practice has been “eye-opening” for teachers, and they have requested to do vertical (across grade) peer observation as well.

The figure shows Fostertown Elementary ELLs’ above-average performance on the ELA and mathematics state assessments in 2013 and 2014 as compared to other schools in NY (.93 standard deviations above the mean).



### From a Principal’s Perspective

The principal of Fostertown ETC Magnet School is passionate about providing an equitable and accessible education for English language learners. She and the assistant principal are especially aware of the needs of urban students who speak another language at home, since both leaders come from an urban, diverse background themselves. The principal reported that school goals are created by the building leadership team, which is “comprised of all stake holders, and it’s a representative of each grade level, a representative of our special areas, students with disabilities, ELLs, and we have a couple of parents.” Including all stakeholders and distributing leadership is an important aspect of this principal’s leadership philosophy:

*At first as a leader, myself, I was very micromanaging. I had to learn to delegate and make leaders out of my staff, so that was like a big “aha” moment for me. [It’s] very difficult when you’re a micromanager because you have to have your hand on everything and you have to know everything. That’s not leadership. That’s micromanaging. Leadership is being able to pick out the people in front of you that are capable and able to do what you want them to and empower them. For me, leadership is being able to show that individuals can become leaders, and if you empower adults as well as children to become leaders, you can sit back and kind of just look at the fruits of your labor. Whether they’re successful or not, you will never know until you do it.*





# Conclusion

The number of English language learners in U.S. schools is rapidly increasing. Based on national assessment data such as the National Assessment of Educational Progress (U.S. Department of Education, 2013), a troubling achievement gap exists between ELLs and native-speaking students, with ELLs falling further behind for each year they remain in school.

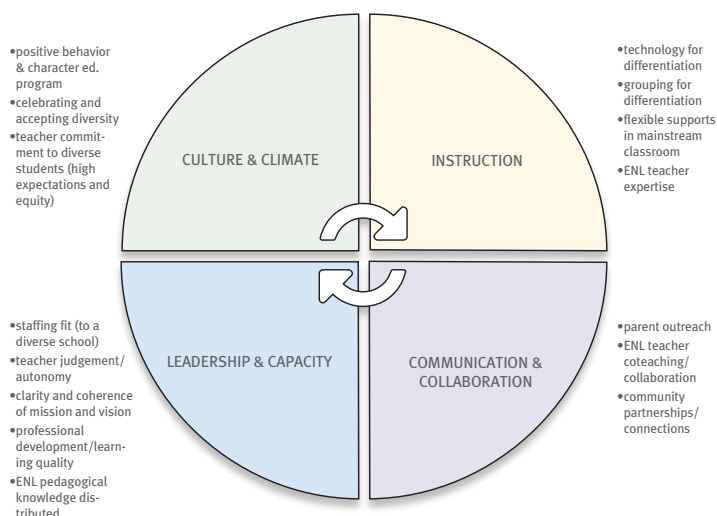
However, in some New York elementary schools, ELLs are beating the odds with better than expected outcomes on state assessments. What contributes to this success? And how do educators in elementary schools with consistently higher performance on ELA and mathematics state assessments serve English language learners? In this study, we examined these questions from a social-ecological perspective, investigating the interdependent systems of classrooms, schools, and districts. The findings demonstrate that what educators do in the school, what they do within and beyond the classroom, and what they do across the district can support better ELL achievement outcomes.

In the school, educators develop a welcoming school climate in a culture that emphasizes high expectations and equitable access to rigorous curricula. In the classroom, inclusive, individualized, and culturally responsive practices are offered by skilled and dedicated ENL teachers and other educators and support staff. Beyond the classroom, educators find ways to partner, team, and communicate with others to serve ELLs and their families. And across the district, a holistic approach to leadership and capacity building ensure that educators' efforts are supported and sustained, contributing to ELLs' success.

## Implications for practice:

- Provide opportunities for districtwide planning regarding how to support ELLs' social and emotional well-being.
- Make explicit the mission to embrace and celebrate diversity in all aspects of work across and within schools.
- Articulate the importance of high expectations for all students and provide supports to monitor how well those expectations are being met.
- Support ongoing adult learning opportunities about instructional adaptations for ELLs (e.g., new technologies, differentiation techniques).

- Provide opportunities for school administrators and teachers to learn about coteaching and inclusion models of instruction and culturally responsive practices.
- Ensure that ENL teachers are fully included in decision making and their expertise is utilized to the benefit of all staff.
- Engage in thoughtful and ongoing discussions about the vision of the district as one that embraces diversity, and present this vision to the community in word and action.
- Forge partnerships with religious and cultural institutions and community agencies that bridge between ELL families and the district and ensure their needs are met.
- Ensure adequate financial and human resources to meet the needs of ELLs and their families.
- Select and promote staff who embrace and celebrate diversity. Ensure that adequate ENL expertise is within each building and that collaboration among ENL specialists across the district can occur.



# Research Methods

In this multiple case study we utilized a replicated “unusual case” design to identify patterns in schools characterized by relatively better elementary ELL outcomes (Yin, 2014, p.57). Quantitative methods, specifically regression analyses, were used to identify the sample.

## Sample Selection

Schools were identified based on performance outcomes as well as a variety of other demographic criteria. Performance outcome measures included the 2012-13 and 2013-14 New York State mathematics and English language arts assessments across grades. Schools classified as “odds beating” are ones in which ELLs exceeded expected average performance in ELA and mathematics at grades three through five or six on the two state assessments. Using SPSS software, an expected average performance level was generated for each subject at each grade level. By comparing expected to actual average performance, schools could then be classified as “odds beating” if the difference between expected and actual performance was on average close to one standard deviation greater than the mean difference for all schools in the state. Of 1,378 schools serving grades three through five or six outside of New York City, 127 were identified as potential “odds-beaters.” The sample was then investigated to identify only those schools in “good academic standing” for ELL performance. The sample was further winnowed into three categories: rural, suburban, and urban schools and those serving more or less economically disadvantaged and/or ethnically diverse student populations, favoring both higher poverty and higher diversity in the final sample. Finally, schools whose per-pupil expenditures, combined wealth ratio, and percentages of expenditures on instruction were above the norm were eliminated from the sample.

## Data Sources and Analytic Procedures

Once schools were chosen and site visits arranged, two researchers trained in using the instruments and in human subjects research visited each school to collect documentary evidence and conduct interviews with the focal students, teachers, principal and other building leaders, and district administrators; they also conducted focus groups with teachers and conducted classroom observations. Interviews and focus groups followed a semi-structured protocol guided by the research questions. The interviews and focus groups were audiotaped and a record was also kept using a laptop computer. The documentary evidence included lesson plans and student work. The observations were guided by an observation protocol that prompted description of activities as well as a debrief with teachers about the intent of their lessons. Before and during site visits researchers kept interpretive memos cataloguing questions raised, notes for follow up, and beginnings of interpretations.

In total, 25 administrators, 41 teachers, 7 support staff, and 17 student focus group or interview transcripts, as well as 28 classroom observation notes were collected and coded inductively using a constant-comparison method utilizing the qualitative software program HyperResearch (Strauss & Corbin, 2008). Using typical cross-case procedures, code reports by theme related to the research questions were produced and a matrix comparing themes was utilized to identify key patterns among the schools (Yin, 2014). The research team then engaged in axial coding in order to chunk major themes and their relationships as they related to the research questions (Strauss & Corbin, 2008). This was facilitated again through the use of HyperResearch and data matrices in Excel (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014).

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 – KW, KG



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