BUILDING TEACHER CAPACITY TO SUPPORT ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS IN SCHOOLS RECEIVING SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT GRANTS

The Study of School Turnaround examines the improvement process in a purposive sample of 35 case study schools receiving federal funds through the School Improvement Grants (SIG) program over a three-year period (2010–11 to 2012–13 school years). This brief focuses on 11 of these SIG schools with high proportions of English Language Learner (ELL) students (a median of 45 percent ELLs), describing their efforts to improve teachers' capacity for serving ELLs through staffing strategies and professional development (PD). Key findings that emerged from the ELL case study data collected during the 2011–12 and 2012–13 school years include:

- *Few schools reported leveraging staffing strategies to improve teacher capacity for serving ELLs. Administrators in 3 of the 11 schools reported considering ELL expertise and experience when hiring classroom teachers, while respondents in 2 of the 11 schools reported that teachers' ELL expertise and experience purposefully factored into assignment of teachers to specific classrooms.*

- *Most teacher survey respondents (54 to 100 percent) in all 11 schools reported participating in ELL-related PD during the 2011–12 school year. On average, teachers reported that ELL-related PD accounted for less than 20 percent of their total PD hours.*

- *Teacher survey respondents in schools that reported a greater PD focus on ELL-related topics, such as instructional strategies for advancing English proficiency or instructional strategies to use for ELLs within content classes, also generally appeared more likely to report that PD improved their effectiveness as teachers of ELLs.*

Introduction

English language learners (ELLs) are a diverse and growing population of students whose varied linguistic, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds can present various challenges for the schools that serve them. ELLs come from more than 400 language backgrounds and must master grade-level academic content while simultaneously developing their English proficiency. ELLs also may contend with contextual factors that can have implications for their education. They are more likely than their English-proficient peers to live in poverty[1] and have parents with low levels of formal education.[2] Some ELLs are recent immigrants adjusting to a new system of schooling in the U.S.,[3,4] and some have experienced disruptions in their prior schooling.[5]

Numbering nearly 5 million students during the 2010–11 school year, the nation's ELL population has increased by more than 10 percent during the past decade, although the size and growth of ELL enrollment differ across states and districts.[6] As the number of ELLs in U.S. classrooms has grown, so has the challenge of ensuring that teachers have the capacity to meet their diverse learning needs. In a recent national evaluation of Title III, district administrators across the U.S. reported a lack of expertise among mainstream classroom teachers in addressing ELL needs, as well as difficulty in recruiting secondary-level content area teachers who possess such expertise.[7] Analyses of nationally representative data from the *Schools and Staffing Survey* found that teachers' rates of participation in professional development (PD) related to teaching ELLs declined between 2004 and 2008, despite the nation's increasing ELL population.[8]

Given ELLs' unique learning needs and their overrepresentation in low-performing schools,[9] it is important for policymakers and educators to understand how such schools are addressing the needs of ELLs as they try to turn around a history of low performance. The Study of School Turnaround, a federally funded case study exploration of improvement efforts in 35 schools receiving School Improvement Grants (SIG), selected a purposive subsample of 11 schools with high proportions of ELLs (see Box 1 for more information about SIG). To find out how ELLs in

these schools were faring, we conducted site visits in fall 2011 and fall 2012, corresponding to the second and third years of SIG implementation. The site visits included interviews and focus groups with district and school administrators, teachers, instructional support staff and external providers, parents, and in the case of high schools: ELL students (see Box 2 for a description of the study and sample).

BOX 1. SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT GRANTS

The School Improvement Grant (SIG) program was originally authorized under Title I section 1003(g) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) in 2001. SIG provides formula-based federal funds to states that then competitively award these funds to districts applying for SIG on behalf of their low-performing schools. SIG underwent three shifts with the passage of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) in 2009. First, ARRA targeted funds to a much smaller segment of low-performing schools—those that were in the bottom 5 percent of performance and that had been low performing over an extended period of time. Second, ARRA limited the acceptable reform options in these schools to a prescribed set of four intervention models with the following key requirements:

- **Turnaround.** Replace the principal and no less than 50 percent of the teaching staff; implement strategies to recruit, place, and retain skilled staff; provide job-embedded PD; implement significant instructional reforms; promote data use; increase learning time; provide social-emotional and community-oriented services and supports; and allow sufficient operational flexibility (e.g., allow the school to make decisions in areas such as hiring, firing, and budgeting).
- **Transformation.** Replace the principal of the school; develop a teacher and leader evaluation system that takes into account student progress; implement strategies to recruit, place, and retain skilled staff; provide job-embedded PD; implement comprehensive instructional reforms; promote data use; increase learning time; create community-oriented schools; and provide operational flexibility and sustained support.
- **Restart.** Reopen the school under the management of a charter school operator, a charter management organization, or an education management organization.
- **Closure.** Close the school and reassign students to higher-achieving schools in the district that are within reasonable proximity of the closed school.

Third, ARRA provided a substantial increase in annual SIG funding over three years. For fiscal year 2009, ARRA added $3 billion to the $546 million in regular SIG 2009 appropriations. Each of these shifts has potentially significant implications for the nature of improvement efforts in schools receiving SIG.

The first brief in this two-part series, *A Focused Look at Schools Receiving School Improvement Grants That Have High Percentages of English Language Learner Students*,[10] focused on the 11 schools' initial improvement conditions under SIG, examining the schools' context, their approaches to improvement, the supports they were providing to ELLs, and their capacity to address the unique needs of their ELLs. This exploration, based on site visits in fall 2011, revealed that teachers' capacity for serving ELLs was an area of concern. Administrators from 10 of the 11 schools described limitations in the skills and expertise of their teachers to meet ELLs' unique needs, and teachers themselves expressed mixed views about their ability to serve ELLs. This finding prompted us to probe more deeply into the 11 schools' efforts to build teacher capacity for serving ELLs when we returned for our second site visit in fall 2012.

In this second brief, we draw on data from both rounds of data collection to investigate the ways in which the 11 ELL sample schools employed two approaches to build teacher capacity for serving ELLs: (1) making staffing decisions that allow the school to acquire or better leverage teacher expertise and experience related to ELLs, and (2) providing professional learning opportunities for teachers to advance their ELL-related knowledge and skills.

BOX 2. STUDY OVERVIEW AND SAMPLE

Overview

The Study of School Turnaround is designed to describe the characteristics of a set of SIG schools, the decisions and strategies the schools and their school districts undertake, and the challenges they face as they attempt to improve school performance. Starting in 2010–11 and for a period of three years, this study documented the change process in a purposive sample of 35 case study schools from a variety of state and local contexts. Drawn from the sample of 35 schools, the study includes three overlapping subsamples: a "core" group of 25 schools, a set of 11 schools with high proportions of ELLs (the focus of this brief), and a set of 9 schools in rural settings. This study is not intended to examine student achievement outcomes and does not include a representative sample of SIG schools nationwide. Rather, the study is an in-depth examination of how the SIG program is being implemented in a set of case study schools.

Study Sample

The 11 schools that are the focus of this brief were purposefully selected to include schools serving high proportions of ELLs and schools representing a range of characteristics, including geographic regions, levels of urbanicity, grade levels, and language groups. The sample included the following:

- Five high schools and six elementary schools situated in a mix of urban, suburban, and rural locales across nine districts and four states.
- Schools with a median of 45 percent of students who were ELLs in the 2008–09 school year.
- Schools with a median of 90 percent of students who qualified for free or reduced-price lunch in the 2008–09 school year.
- Schools with a median of 95 percent of students who were classified as ethnic minorities in the 2008–09 school year.
- Schools that reported serving students from numerous native language backgrounds, with 7 of the 11 schools reporting that Spanish was the language spoken by the majority of their ELLs.
- Schools that reported serving ELLs of diverse backgrounds, including undocumented students, recent immigrants with limited prior schooling, refugees, children of migrant farm workers, and speakers of low-incidence languages.
- Schools that are implementing either the SIG turnaround (four schools) or SIG transformation model (seven schools).

Overview of Schools in the ELL Sample

The 11 schools in the ELL sample were purposefully selected based on their large ELL populations, which in 2008–09, ranged from 35 percent to 90 percent of total school enrollment, with a median of 45 percent ELLs.[11] In comparison, SIG-awarded schools nationwide served a median of 6 percent ELLs.[12] The 11 schools were also selected to include diverse school settings and grade levels. The 11 schools are located in 9 districts and 4 states, with 2 states historically having had large ELL populations and 2 states having experienced high growth in their ELL populations in recent years.[13] The sample includes five high schools and six elementary schools, which are situated in a mix of urban, suburban, and rural locations. All 11 schools are characterized by high levels of poverty, high percentages of minority students, and persistent low achievement. The percentage of students who qualified for free or reduced-price lunch in these schools ranged from 40 to 100 percent in 2008–09, with a median of 90 percent. The percentage of students in these schools who were classified as racial or ethnic minorities ranged from 45 to 100 percent in 2008–09, with a median of 95 percent.[14] In comparison, SIG-awarded schools nationwide served a median of 72 percent of students who qualified for free or reduced-price lunch and a median of 88 percent of students who were classified as racial or ethnic minorities that year.[15]

The 11 schools serve communities with varying cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Respondents from multiple stakeholder groups in 10 of the 11 schools (see Box 3 and Appendix A for an explanation of how respondent groups are identified, as well as details about the data collection and analytic methods) reported one majority language among their ELLs, with 7 of these 10 schools reporting Spanish as the majority language. Nevertheless, respondents from all schools reported serving students who spoke languages such as Tagalog, Hmong, Vietnamese, Cantonese, Mandarin, Karen, and Somali, Oromo, and other African languages. Respondents

in one elementary school (with a majority of ELL Spanish speakers) reported 17 native languages among its ELLs. One high school, also with a majority of Spanish speakers, reportedly served students representing 47 countries of origin from Asia, the Middle East, and Latin America.

In addition to linguistic diversity, respondents in all schools described a range of subpopulations among the ELLs they served, such as undocumented students, recent immigrants with limited prior schooling, students who entered the United States as refugees, children of migrant farm workers, and speakers of low-incidence languages. Respondents also described a diversity of English proficiency levels among ELLs, including newcomers just beginning to learn English and long-term ELLs in high school, who had been in ELL status for many years.

Of the 11 schools, 7 are implementing the SIG transformation model and 4 the SIG turnaround model. Both models required the principal to be replaced, and the turnaround model required at least 50 percent of the teachers to be replaced as well (see Box 1 for a description of the four intervention models allowable under SIG).

BOX 3. DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYTIC METHODS

Data Collection

Study team members collected data through a teacher survey and site visits to all 11 ELL sample schools in fall 2011 and fall 2012. In spring 2012, the study team conducted site visits at 6 of the 11 ELL sample schools as part of the study's core and rural sample data collection, and telephone interviews with administrators in the 5 other ELL sample schools. Unless otherwise indicated, qualitative data presented in this brief are from fall 2011 and fall 2012. Site visits lasted approximately two days in each school, during which time the study team, guided by semistructured protocols, conducted one-on-one interviews and focus groups with district and school stakeholders. For each school, the study team interviewed an average of two district administrators, one school administrator, eight teachers, three instructional coaches, one external provider (where relevant), and five parents. (External providers offered services such as instructional coaching for teachers, leadership coaching, and PD.) At high schools, the study team also interviewed an average of six students. Because this ELL study is part of the larger Study of School Turnaround, interviews for the ELL sample schools included questions about the general school improvement process, in addition to questions and more specialized probes to ensure that we gathered sufficient data to examine certain ELL issues of interest. Interview topics included the overall change process in each school, the capacity of staff to meet the needs of ELLs, school goals related to ELLs, PD provided to teachers of ELLs, and services provided to ELLs and their parents. Data collection instruments can be found at http://www.air.org/topic/education/study-of-school-turnaround-ELL-protocol-survey.

All teachers in each school were asked to complete a brief survey in fall 2011, spring 2012, and fall 2012. As with the interviews, the survey included both general questions about teaching and the school, as well as more specialized questions focused on ELLs. Questions related to the teacher's role in the school, education, experience, teaching strategies used for ELLs, and PD. Unless otherwise indicated, survey data were analyzed only for schools with response rates greater than 50 percent. In fall 2011, 9 of 11 schools met this threshold, with an average response rate of 76 percent. In spring 2012 and fall 2012, all 11 schools met this threshold, with average response rates of 73 and 74 percent.

Analytic Methods

The study team analyzed and synthesized qualitative site visit data and quantitative teacher survey data for each school. The synthesized data were entered into a secure online repository to examine themes and trends across schools. Analysts categorized the schools along specific topics of interest and confirmed the categorizations with site visitors. All data regarding school practices are based on respondent self-reports and reflect no external verification or assessment of the quality of those practices. Respondents' perceptions could be based on a number of factors, including but not limited to their own experience working at the school, conversations with others who have previously worked at the school, experiences living in the community and understanding the school's reputation, or inferences about what the school may have been like based on what it currently looks like.

To examine the prevalence of particular issues across schools in the sample, analysts generated simple school counts, such as the number of schools where respondents reported a specific practice, contextual feature, or challenge. To produce such counts, analysts applied a set of decision rules that outlined clear standards of evidence for inclusion: for a school to be included in a given count, either the school principal or at least two other respondents had to report the given practice or phenomenon, with no dissent from other respondents. In cases where respondents reported divergent views, those differences are noted in the text. When reporting information provided by only one respondent group (e.g.,

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BOX 3. DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYTIC METHODS

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principals, teachers), we identify the respondent group as the source of that information. We use the general term "respondents" when reporting information provided by more than one respondent group. Unless otherwise indicated, descriptive statistics on the survey data are provided for all schools with sufficiently high response rates (greater than 50 percent).

Throughout this brief, we incorporate direct quotations from study respondents as they enhance the clarity and relevance of the study, which is based largely on qualitative data. These data uniquely provide detailed, contextual information that can convey meaning through illustrative examples. Quotes were purposefully selected to enrich the findings arrived at through systematic, carefully documented analyses. These quotes are not representative of all quotes in our data, and they are only meant to illustrate a particular finding, not to formally justify it. All descriptions of the ELL sample schools use pseudonyms, and identifying characteristics of schools and individuals have been masked (e.g., the reported gender of respondents was randomly assigned). See Appendix A for additional information on the data collection and analytic methods, as well as the survey items used in this brief.

Instructional Context. According to interview data collected in fall 2011 and fall 2012, the 11 schools varied somewhat in their approaches to delivering instruction and specialized supports to ELLs, but these reported approaches generally reflected common practice for serving ELLs.[16] Administrators and teachers in all six elementary schools reported that mainstream teachers provided content instruction to ELLs alongside their English-proficient peers in grade-level classrooms. In two elementary schools, mainstream classroom teachers were also responsible for providing ELLs with English as a second language (ESL) instruction—explicit language instruction that is focused on developing students' English proficiency—during a designated part of the school day. In the remaining four elementary schools, ELLs received language support from ESL teachers[17] or tutors through push-in services (in which ESL teachers or tutors provide support to ELLs in the mainstream classroom for a portion of the day) and pull-out services (in which ESL teachers or tutors provide small-group instruction to ELLs outside the mainstream classroom for a portion of the day).

Respondents[18] in all five high schools reported placing ELLs into ESL classes on the basis of their English proficiency. Respondents in all five high schools also reported offering a combination of sheltered content classes that were designed specifically for ELLs and mainstream content classes that included both ELLs and English-proficient students. In four high schools, respondents reported providing specialized supports for ELLs who had recently arrived in the U.S., such as newcomer programs and classes.

Respondents in 5 of the 11 schools—including 4 elementary and 1 high school—indicated that bilingual teachers and tutors provided support in students' native languages, where needed, to make content accessible for ELLs. Respondents in two of these five schools reported offering content classes to beginning-level ELLs in their native language, and respondents in one school reported offering classes on the native culture and language of its largest ELL language group. Respondents in another five schools indicated that at least some classes with ELLs employed a coteaching model of instruction, which calls for ESL teachers to pair with mainstream content teachers to jointly prepare and deliver classroom instruction.

Despite some variation in how these schools organized instruction for ELLs, most teachers in these schools worked with ELLs regularly. In fall 2012, 98 percent of teacher survey respondents across the 11 schools reported providing instruction to at least 1 ELL each week. The number of ELLs they reported teaching each week ranged from 1 to 500 with a median of 20 and an interquartile range of 34.

Teacher Capacity for Serving ELLs

For the purposes of this brief, we conceptualize teacher capacity for serving ELLs as the collective ability of a school's teaching staff to address ELLs' educational needs. This collective ability includes teachers' aggregate knowledge, skills, and dispositions for providing high-quality instruction and support to ELLs, as well as how

teacher competencies are distributed and accessed to promote ELLs' learning. For instance, teachers' placement in classes or departments that benefit from their particular skill set could enhance staff capacity, as could the presence of staff interaction patterns that promote a productive exchange of ideas and expertise among teachers.

Interview respondents in 10 of the 11 schools identified instructional staff within the school whom they described as assets in serving ELLs. Specifically, respondents in fall 2012 from these schools described ESL teachers (five schools), lead teachers (two schools), ELL coaches (one school), academic coaches (one school), tutors (one school), resource teachers (one school), a community or parent liaison (one school), bilingual staff (one school), and the principal (one school) as resources for supporting ELLs. In seven schools, administrators and teachers reported that at least some teachers had specific strengths in serving ELLs, such as skill in using specialized instructional strategies for making content comprehensible to ELLs, knowledge of students' native languages, or dedication to ELLs.

Interview respondents in most schools also reported limitations in their instructional staff's capacity for serving ELLs. As noted in the previous brief on high-ELL SIG schools,[19] school administrators reported struggling with low levels of staff experience and expertise in addressing ELL needs during the 2011–12 school year. In fall 2012, interview respondents in 9 of the 11 schools continued to describe challenges with teachers' ability to address ELL needs. For example, respondents in four schools mentioned that teachers lacked knowledge on how to differentiate instruction for diverse learners, including how to provide vocabulary instruction and academic language instruction for ELLs. Interview respondents in four schools indicated that teachers needed more training on instructional techniques for ELLs. As a teacher in one of these schools explained, "I don't feel like I have the adequate knowledge to teach language development like [ELLs] need." Respondents in two schools indicated that teachers lacked sufficient training on how to implement a recently adopted coteaching model of instruction.

As another example, respondents in one school reported that teachers were not prepared for recent increases in the number of newcomer students. Respondents explained that their high school had traditionally served long-term ELL students and that teachers were overwhelmed by a sudden influx of newcomers in fall 2012, many of whom were students with interrupted formal education. When the school year began, there were not enough newcomer students to create a separate class, and so these students were placed into mainstream content classes where teachers reportedly lacked knowledge and experience in supporting students with very low levels of English. One teacher explained, "I just got a whole bunch of newcomers thrown into a regular class, and it is really difficult…. I have kids who do not know the word 'the.' This was never supposed to be a newcomer school, but we also can't deny them from coming here."

Fall 2012 teacher survey responses provide further indication that some teachers experienced challenges in addressing ELLs' needs. Across all 11 schools, the percentage of teacher survey respondents who reported sometimes feeling overwhelmed by the challenges of teaching ELLs ranged from 30 percent to 88 percent.[20]

In the following sections, we examine the 11 schools' efforts to build teacher capacity for serving ELLs through two main avenues. First, we investigate the use of teacher staffing decisions for hiring and assignment, which could enhance teacher capacity by (1) adding new staff with relevant knowledge and skills, and (2) improving the distribution of staff knowledge and skills across roles and class assignments. We then explore the use of PD opportunities, which can enhance teacher capacity by (1) increasing teachers' knowledge and skills (through learning), and (2) fostering staff interaction patterns that promote an ongoing sharing of expertise (through collaboration).

Building Teacher Capacity Through Staffing Decisions

Case studies of school turnaround have documented how hiring a skilled and committed instructional staff is one approach to try to build teacher capacity for improving student outcomes,[21] and the SIG intervention models are consistent with this approach. The turnaround and transformation models require schools to employ strategies for recruiting, placing, and retaining skilled staff. The turnaround model also requires schools to replace

at least half the teaching staff with individuals who possess locally determined competencies relevant to the school's improvement needs. For schools that serve a high proportion of ELLs, securing and retaining staff who are prepared to address ELL needs can be particularly important to the schools' improvement efforts. For example, case studies of six New York City middle schools that successfully turned around a history of low performance revealed that as part of their strategy to better serve ELLs, these schools hired new staff, strategically assigned staff to particular classes, and offered specialized programs to address academic and nonacademic needs.[22]

In this section, we explore the extent to which the 11 ELL sample schools sought (1) to enhance teacher capacity by hiring individuals with ELL-related skills or expertise, and (2) to leverage existing capacity in the school by assigning teachers with particular types of ELL experience or expertise to classes with the greatest needs.

Teacher Hiring Practices

District and school administrators at 3 of the 11 schools reported considering ELL expertise and experience when hiring classroom teachers. In fall 2012, respondents in these three high schools, where ELLs received content instruction in sheltered and mainstream content classes, provided examples of how they screened mainstream teacher applicants for relevant expertise or experience with ELLs. At the first school, the assistant principal reported targeting applicants for mainstream teaching positions who were bilingual, had experience teaching ELLs, or had linguistic backgrounds similar to those of the students. At the second school, the mathematics coach (who was involved in hiring decisions) explained, "We asked them straight up: who did you teach, what percentages of your classes were ELL, how did you scaffold tasks to make sure they had access to language and to enter the content? So we actually didn't hire anyone who didn't have that sort of experience." The coach added that it would have been beneficial to observe teacher candidates working in classes with large percentages of ELLs prior to making final hiring decisions, but the school lacked sufficient time and resources to do so. At the third school, the principal reported that he took ELL experience into consideration for hiring decisions to the extent that the applicant pool provided such options.

When asked, respondents in the remaining eight schools were unable to provide examples of the way in which their schools or districts took ELL expertise into consideration when hiring mainstream teachers. At two of these schools, the principals explained that they were unable to engage in such hiring practices. When asked if the district weighs ELL expertise as a factor when hiring classroom teachers, the principal from a small rural school with more than one-third ELLs said, "Not here. We're too small." At the other school, administrators indicated that budget cuts prevented them from recruiting any new teachers.

The two elementary schools where mainstream classroom teachers were dually responsible for providing ESL and academic content instruction to ELLs were among those in which ELL experience and expertise reportedly did *not* factor into teacher hiring decisions. One of these two schools had adopted the SIG turnaround model and therefore had an opportunity to recruit teachers with ELL-related competencies as part of the the turnaround model's requirement to replace at least 50 percent of the teaching staff. In fall 2011, the school's principal explained, however, that teachers' ELL expertise was not considered in the staff replacement process, even though nearly three-quarters of the school's students are ELLs. As the principal noted, "Some of the teachers that came in literally had not taught [ESL] ever before. They came from schools where they had been successful in the classroom, but with a different kind of population." When asked about the criteria for selecting teachers, the school's external provider indicated that they were looking for teachers who were "willing to work above and beyond, willing to be part of change and have the flexibility that comes with change, and the quality of the teacher." At the other of these two schools, the principal indicated that the school's teacher hiring decisions did not emphasize ELL expertise but rather teachers' willingness to learn and adapt to the school's needs. The principal explained, "I want somebody who's willing to learn…. I want somebody who can have a conversation with me and be open-minded about learning new strategies."

District and school administrators at all 11 schools reported considering ELL expertise and training when hiring ESL teachers and ELL specialists. All 11 schools in the ELL sample are located in districts or states that

require ESL teachers to hold endorsements or certification in ESL instruction. One official in a moderately large urban district noted during a fall 2012 interview, "These new ESL teachers are highly trained. They come with lots of skill…. They have to have expertise or knowledge of [state English language proficiency (ELP) standards], coteaching, [and] formative assessment to inform instructional practice." In another urban district, a district administrator admitted that because of a shortage of qualified teachers, the district resorted to hiring ESL teachers from the Teach For America (TFA) corps—that is, teachers with no prior teaching experience or expertise in the needs of ELLs. The district ELL director nonetheless felt that the TFA teachers were capable and adequately supported in this role, noting that "Because we identified ESL as a need, we kind of handpicked the ESL teachers from the [TFA] cohort, so over the summer we sent them readings. I was involved in their summer planning sessions. Before the first week of school, I met with them for an entire week to get them ESL focused…."

According to the program models that the ELL sample schools reportedly used for ELL instruction, ELL students—particularly those with higher English proficiency—often worked with ESL teachers or specialists for only short periods during the school day. Thus, considering ELL-related expertise when hiring ESL teachers but not when hiring content teachers may have left intermediate and mainstreamed ELLs without expert support during much of their instructional time.

Respondents in 7 of the 11 schools reported teacher recruitment or retention challenges that may have inhibited efforts to attract teachers with ELL-related expertise. As the TFA example above suggests, recruitment challenges appeared to hinder some administrators from hiring teachers who were skilled in addressing ELL needs. In five of the seven schools with reported challenges, respondents described difficulty recruiting or retaining all types of teachers. For example, two schools were located in geographically isolated rural areas. The principal at one of these schools in a fall 2012 interview reported losing teachers to more desirable locations once they gained experience and training, while the superintendent of the other school described a "diminishing teacher applicant pool." In the remaining two of seven schools with reported challenges, respondents described particular difficulty hiring classroom teachers who are knowledgeable about ELL issues. An administrator from one of these schools explained, "I think the challenge is the candidates that were presented to us…. You don't see teachers that have, say, a licensure as an ELL [specialist] and being a regular ed teacher as well."

On the other hand, principals from 4 of the 11 schools reported no challenges recruiting or retaining teachers. Two of these schools are high schools in which respondents considered ELL experience or expertise in teacher hiring decisions. The district in which these two schools are located supported them with targeted recruitment strategies because the schools had a prior designation as "hard to staff." These strategies reportedly included a teacher stipend and a priority when identifying and interviewing candidates. In the two other schools, the principals reported that a poor economy and diminished job prospects, even for strong teachers, had resulted in a larger pool of applicants. Nonetheless, neither principal reported considering ELL expertise when hiring mainstream classroom teachers.

Teacher Assignment Practices

Administrators and teachers in 2 of the 11 schools reported efforts to strategically assign classroom teachers to particular classes on the basis of their ELL-related skills. At one of these two schools, there was reportedly no special consideration of ELL experience or expertise in assigning teachers to regular grade-level classrooms. However, in fall 2012 the principal and coaches indicated that there was some consideration of ELL experience and expertise when assigning teachers to groups of students for the school's daily ESL instruction period. The principal explained that during daily ESL instruction, when students are grouped according to their English-proficiency levels, teachers are assigned strategically on the basis of student needs: "At kindergarten, we may want our strongest teachers with the beginners [in the English language]; at other grade levels, may want stronger teachers with [ELL] kids who haven't been progressing." At the second school, two teachers described how their ability to provide instruction in students' native languages factored into their assignment to work with particular groups of ELLs. One of these teachers explained how she was purposefully assigned to coteach a class with an

especially high number of ELLs, not because she had specialized training in ELL instruction but because she spoke the native language of one of the school's major language groups. She indicated that she was paired with a coteacher who spoke another of the school's prominent home languages and had specialized ESL training that allowed her to tailor instruction to student needs.

The principal at a third school—a high school—described having intentions to reassign teachers on the basis of their experience in serving ELLs but postponing such efforts in response to teacher resistance. The principal explained how he wanted to alter teacher assignments to address a divide between teachers in the school's newcomer program, who had the strongest skills and experience in addressing ELL needs, and teachers in the school's mainstream classrooms, who had less ELL expertise and were stuggling to meet the needs of the school's long-term ELLs. The principal indicated that he attempted to reassign a mainstream content teacher to a newcomer program class to give the mainstream teacher more exposure to ELL issues and foster greater collaboration across the two groups of teachers. However, teachers' strong reactions against the proposed staffing change prompted him to delay the shift. He expained, "We had many meetings about it. People were literally crying and screaming. I backed away, and I said, 'We'll stop right now…. But you have to understand that this is not going away…. We can't keep backing away.'"

When asked about their teacher assignment practices, respondents in the remaining eight schools mentioned no efforts to strategically assign teachers on the basis of their skills or experience in teaching ELLs. The principal of one of these schools mentioned that the school's small size made it difficult to make strategic decisions about teacher assignment in general. He indicated that veteran teachers' preferences tended to drive the teacher assignment process, which sometimes resulted in the school's new teachers being "thrown into" the classroom assignments that none of the veteran teachers wanted.

Building Teacher Capacity Through Professional Learning

Providing professional learning opportunities or professional development (PD) could potentially build teachers' capacity in ways that benefit ELLs even if the PD does not focus on ELL-specific learning needs (see the first brief in this series for a discussion of ELLs' unique learning needs[23]). For example, PD that enhances a teacher's understanding of math content might improve that teacher's effectiveness in teaching math to all students, including ELLs. However, teachers of ELLs may also benefit from PD that emphasizes specialized knowledge, skills, and beliefs that are important for addressing ELLs' unique needs.[24] For example, a recent correlational study of New York City teachers found that teachers who were effective at supporting ELLs' academic achievement were also more likely to have participated in PD focused on ELL-specific instructional strategies.[25] For the purposes of this brief, we focus on the ELL-related PD that teachers reported receiving in our 11 schools during the second year of SIG implementation (summer 2011 and the 2011−12 school year). These reports of PD are based on focus groups, interviews, and teacher survey data collected in fall 2011 and spring 2012. We used a broad definition of PD, including a range of formats (e.g., workshops, courses, teacher collaboration meetings, common planning time, informal teacher collaboration, instructional coaching, and classroom observations) and staffing structures (e.g., led by school-level facilitators such as administrators, coaches, and teachers, or by district staff and outside experts).

Teacher Participation in ELL-Related PD

Interview respondents from all 11 schools described professional learning opportunities in 2011–12 that targeted the unique needs of ELLs, and respondents from 7 schools reported that some of these opportunities were job embedded. The types of PD described included sessions on sheltered content instruction, coteaching and other methods of ELL instruction, as well as coursework toward ESL certification.

Literature reviews have highlighted job-embedded PD, which provide teachers with ongoing professional learning support that is tightly linked to their practice, as a potentially promising way to build teacher capacity.[26]

Job-embedded PD commonly takes the form of collaborative teacher meetings, instructional coaching, or mentoring, and is a required component of the SIG transformation and turnaround models. Respondents in four of the seven ELL sample schools reporting job-embedded PD related to ELL instruction indicated that teachers had opportunities to work one-on-one with an ELL coach. Respondents in three schools reported using a coteaching model for providing instruction to ELLs in content area classes. Under this model, the collaboration that occurs between ESL and mainstream teachers as they jointly plan and deliver instruction, aims to provide opportunities for them to support one another's growth. Respondents in one school reported convening a professional learning community that focused specifically on addressing the needs of ELLs, and respondents in another school highlighted how the school's professional learning community on literacy, although not explicity devoted to ELL issues, often focused on literacy instruction for ELLs because of the school's large ELL population.

Although interview and focus group data provide important contextual information for understanding each school's experiences with ELL-related PD (see Box 4 for one school's experiences), to more systematically investigate patterns across and within the 11 schools, we now turn to teacher survey data collected in fall 2011 and spring 2012, which reflect input from a broader sample of teachers.

Most teacher survey respondents in all 11 schools reported participating in ELL-related PD during the 2011–12 school year. In 10 of the 11 schools, over 70 percent of teacher survey respondents reported receiving at least 1 hour of ELL-related PD during the 2011–12 school year, and in 3 of those schools, over 90 percent reported that to be the case.[27] In the 11th school, 54 percent reported receiving at least 1 hour of ELL-related PD.

BOX 4. ASPEN BRANCH ELEMENTARY: OFFERING A RANGE OF PROFESSIONAL LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES FOCUSED ON ELL INSTRUCTION

Teachers at Aspen Branch described having access to a range of professional learning activities related to addressing the needs of ELLs, who make up more than half of their student population.

Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) training and support.[28] All Aspen Branch teachers reportedly participated in five days of training in fall 2010 on the SIOP model, learning to integrate instruction for developing English proficiency into their content-based lessons so that students can learn and practice English as it is used within the context of each academic discipline. As part of a districtwide initiative in 2011–12, teachers reportedly continued to receive ongoing support from a district SIOP coach, who visited the school weekly. (Although SIOP coaching is available to all schools in the district, Aspen Branch reportedly received more frequent visits from a SIOP coach because of its status as a SIG school.)

Teacher collaboration. Using the coteaching model, mainstream teachers reportedly collaborated with ESL teachers to provide instruction for ELLs in grade-level classrooms. Mainstream teachers in a focus group indicated that, as a result of this collaboration, they felt more prepared than in previous years to work with ELLs. ESL teachers attributed an increase in coordination between ESL and content teachers, as well as improvements in attitudes toward ELLs, to this model. In addition, ESL teachers reportedly had the option of shadowing teachers in other schools to learn from colleagues throughout the district.

Ongoing courses and workshops. All teachers at Aspen Branch—including ESL teachers and mainstream teachers—reportedly had access to a range of ongoing professional learning opportunities aimed at addressing the needs of ELLs. The school reported offering whole-staff PD sessions, some of which addressed ELL instruction (including a demonstration lesson provided by an ESL teacher). The district reported offering a variety of courses that were available to all teachers, several of which focused on ELL-specific issues. In addition, ESL teachers reportedly attended quarterly district ELL PD sessions and were required to take one course per semester through the district site.

On average, teacher survey respondents reported that ELL-related PD accounted for a relatively modest percentage of their total PD hours. In summer 2011 and the 2011–12 school year, teachers across the 11 schools reported receiving an average of 150 hours of PD, ranging from 99 hours at Pelham Pike Elementary to 224 hours at Copper Bell High (see Figure 1).[29] Teachers across the 11 schools reported receiving an average of 27.5 hours of ELL-related PD, ranging from 13 hours at Pelham Pike Elementary to 41 hours at Crimson Maple Elementary (see Figure 1).[30] On average across the 11 schools, teachers' ELL-related PD constituted less than 20 percent of their total reported PD hours, ranging from 7 percent at Copper Bell High (16 out of 224 hours) to 27 percent at Dorado Lake Elementary (32 out of 119 hours).

Figure 1. Average Number of Hours of ELL-Related PD and Average Number of Hours of Other PD That Teachers Reported Receiving During Summer 2011 and the 2011–12 School Year, by School
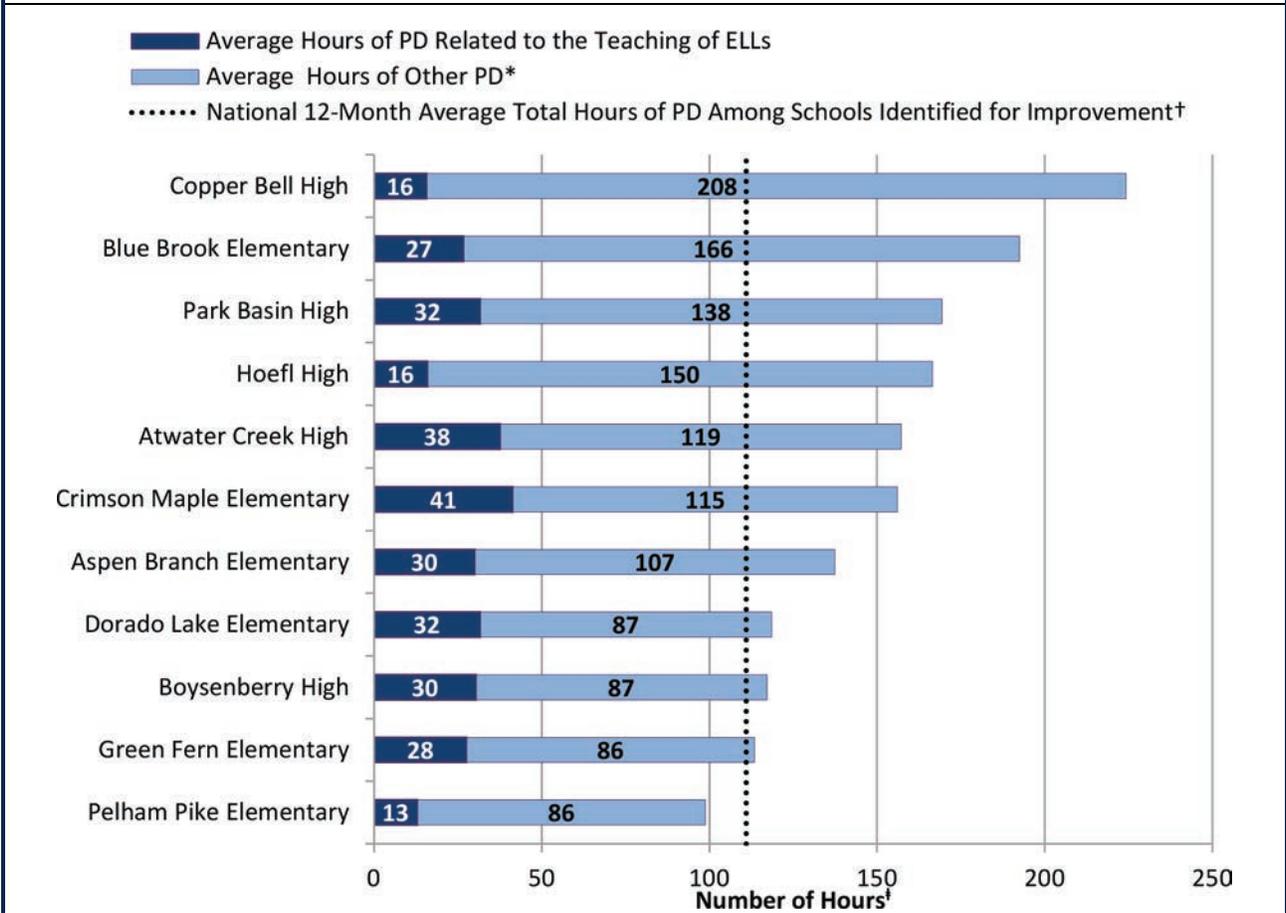
Source: SST teacher survey, fall 2011 and spring 2012
Notes: Includes 370–380 teachers in 11 ELL sample schools. All school names are pseudonyms. Although Green Fern and Boysenberry's fall 2011 survey response rates were slightly below 50 percent, their data are included here.
*PD includes (1) workshops, conferences, institutes, or seminars; (2) professional learning community or meetings of colleagues designed to enhance professional learning; (3) formal coaching or mentoring; (4) course extended over several weeks, such as a college course; (5) other types of PD activities.
[†]Average (111 hours) is from a nationally representative survey of teachers' PD experiences during the 2005–06 school year and summer 2006 (U.S. Department of Education, 2009).
[‡]Calculated as the sum of teachers' average reported hours of PD in summer 2011 and teachers' average reported hours of PD during the 2011–12 school year.

Teachers' reported hours of ELL-related PD varied within the 11 schools.[31] The average interquartile range (the difference between the 25th and 75th percentile of teachers' number of hours of ELL-related PD during the 2011−12 school year) was 16 hours. In three schools it was under 10 hours, indicating less variability in the hours of ELL-related PD received by teachers in those schools, and in three schools it was over 25 hours, indicating more variability.

In one school, interviewed teachers in fall 2011 explained that although teachers received frequent PD time embedded into the school day, the district and school did not target any ELL-focused PD to the school's mainstream content teachers, who represented the majority of the teaching staff. Interview respondents at two additional high schools similarly indicated that mainstream teachers with ELLs in their classes had less access to ELL-focused PD than ESL teachers. Teacher survey data from spring 2012 suggested differences between mainstream and ESL teachers with regard to ELL-related PD. In five schools, at least one teacher survey respondent identified ESL or bilingual education as their main teaching assignment in 2011−12. On average, these types of teacher respondents reported more hours of ELL-related PD than the average teacher respondent in their school.

In addition to examining teachers' participation in ELL-related PD, we also considered the extent to which teachers' overall PD during the 2011−12 school year incorporated topics related to ELL instruction. To gauge how much teachers perceived their PD to have emphasized such topics, we calculated the percentage of teacher survey respondents who reported that their overall PD focused to a moderate or large extent on each of the following: (1) specific instructional strategies to use with ELLs within content classes, (2) specific instructional strategies to use with ELLs to advance their English proficiency, (3) selecting appropriate instructional materials for ELLs, (4) ways to use assessment data to plan instruction for ELLs, and (5) second language development. Table 1 displays school-level results for each of these five topics.

Table 1. Percentage of Teachers Reporting That Their Overall PD During the 2011–12 School Year Included an Emphasis on Five Topics Related to ELLs,[*] by School					
	Specific instructional strategies to use with ELLs within content classes	Specific instructional strategies to use with ELLs to advance their English proficiency	Selecting appropriate instructional materials for ELLs	Ways to use assessment data to plan instruction for ELLs	Second language development
Atwater Creek High	75%	72%	73%	69%	61%
Dorado Lake Elementary	73%	64%	55%	45%	18%
Green Fern Elementary	71%	94%	50%	56%	40%
Boysenberry High	69%	64%	42%	38%	26%
Blue Brook Elementary	68%	68%	68%	71%	61%
Park Basin High	59%	55%	59%	42%	40%
Crimson Maple Elementary	53%	48%	48%	50%	35%
Pelham Pike Elementary	48%	39%	41%	65%	25%
Hoefl High	47%	42%	29%	21%	25%
Copper Bell High	44%	54%	46%	36%	16%
Aspen Branch Elementary	42%	25%	42%	42%	33%
All 11 schools †	*60%*	*58%*	*53%*	*51%*	*38%*

Source: SST teacher survey, spring 2012
Notes: Includes 270–290 teachers in 11 ELL sample schools. All school names are pseudonyms.
*Teachers' PD activities are considered to have included an emphasis on a particular topic if teachers reported that their PD activities focused on that topic to either a moderate or large extent.
†Calculated as the school means weighted by the number of teacher respondents from each school.

Teacher survey respondents were most likely to report that (1) instructional strategies to use with ELLs within content classes or (2) instructional strategies to advance English proficiency was a moderate or large emphasis of their PD, and least likely to report that second language development was a moderate or large emphasis. Over 50 percent of teacher survey respondents reported that their PD had a moderate or large emphasis on instructional strategies to use with ELLs within content classes in 7 schools, on instructional strategies to advance English proficiency in 7 schools, on selecting appropriate instructional materials for ELLs in 5 schools, on using data to plan instruction for ELLs in 5 schools, and on second language development in 2 schools.

In 9 of the 11 schools, over 50 percent of teacher survey respondents reported that their PD had a moderate or large emphasis on at least one of the five ELL-related topics we examined. In two schools, over 50 percent of teacher survey respondents reported an emphasis on all five of the topics, and at another school, over 50 percent of teachers reported an emphasis on four of the five topics. There were two schools, however, where none of the topics were viewed by over 50 percent of teacher respondents as having been a moderate or large emphasis of their PD. Most teacher survey respondents in these schools felt that their PD focused on each ELL topic to a small extent or not at all.

Perceived Effect of PD on Teacher Effectiveness

Teacher professional learning opportunities aim to build teacher capacity in ways that enhance their ability to promote student success. However, there is little evidence rigorously and consistently demonstrating that PD is effective in improving teacher practice and student outcomes,[32] and a national survey of teachers found mixed perceptions of PD's usefulness.[33] In this section, we examine the extent to which teachers in the 11 ELL sample schools perceived their 2011−12 PD to have improved their effectiveness as a teacher of ELLs. We also explore whether particular features of teachers' PD appeared to be associated with their perceptions of effectiveness.

On average across all 11 schools, 52 percent of teacher survey respondents felt that their PD improved their effectiveness as teachers of ELLs to a moderate or large extent. Teachers' perceptions of improvement as a result of their 2011−12 PD varied across the 11 schools. In 6 of 11 schools, more than half (53 to 83 percent) of teacher survey respondents felt that their PD improved their effectiveness as teachers of ELLs to a moderate or large extent. In the remaining 5 schools, more than half (58 to 79 percent) of teacher survey respondents felt that their PD improved their effectiveness as teachers of ELLs to a small extent or not at all.

Interview data from fall 2011 and spring 2012 help shed light on what teachers in the 11 schools found useful—and not useful—in their professional learning activities. Teachers in eight schools reported that they were able to turn to other teachers, coaches, specialists, and school staff for support in 2011−12, and teachers in four of those schools cited their collaborative work with other teachers as an important support for their professional learning. For example, at one high school, content teachers described how informal classroom walkthroughs and one-on-one work with coaches provided teachers with valuable feedback and support focused on improving instruction for ELLs. One teacher noted, "We get informal walkthroughs to see if your content and language objectives are up, and they are observing to see if you are giving all students the opportunity to participate. I know they are looking through the lens of how we are supporting the needs of our developing EL[L] students." Interviewed ESL teachers at this high school indicated that the school's ELL-focused professional learning community offered an important forum for teachers to collaborate on the needs of ELLs with lower proficiency levels. In contrast to this collaborative focus, respondents at one of the elementary schools described few opportunities for teacher interaction during their PD, which reportedly diminished teachers' engagement with the PD's content. Other teachers mentioned problems with the content itself, explaining that the information presented at some of their professional learning sessions did not align with their learning needs (see Box 5 for additional information on the perceived effectiveness of PD in one case study school).

BOX 5. PELHAM PIKE ELEMENTARY: MIXED VIEWS OF GRADE-LEVEL TEAM MEETINGS

At Pelham Pike, an elementary school located in a migrant farmworker community, teacher survey respondents reported that relatively few hours of their PD during the 2011–12 school year related specifically to the teaching of ELLs (an average of 8 out of 75 hours of total PD). Most teacher survey respondents (66 percent) also felt that their 2011–12 PD improved their effectiveness as a teacher of ELLs to a small extent or not at all.

Similarly, interviewed teachers at Pelham Pike expressed mixed views of their PD's usefulness, often indicating that the PD was insufficiently tailored to address teachers' professional learning needs. One teacher reflected, "Some of the PDs weren't necessary. I think that if the administration spent more time in teachers' rooms and saw what was going on, that they would have a better idea of what PD the teachers really need." PD reportedly took place primarily in the context of grade-level teacher meetings (including weekly meetings, professional learning communities, and longer sessions during early release days). One teacher noted, "I hate any training on my half days, because the kids aren't here, and I could get so much done in my room. And so I feel like a lot of times I sit there and I listen to the same thing said in just a little different way, and it bores me." Teachers in one of the fall 2011 focus groups agreed that the required weekly meetings demanded too much time (and took place during teachers' planning time), did not provide useful information, and were not interactive or applicable to their classrooms. One interviewed teacher, however, who was new to the school at the time, described the weekly meetings as beneficial.

To more systematically investigate the conditions under which teachers found PD more useful in building their capacity to serve ELLs, we drew on teacher survey data to explore whether such factors as teachers' reported hours of ELL-related PD or their PD's reported emphasis on particular ELL-related topics appeared to be associated with their perceptions of improved effectiveness.

Schools where higher percentages of teachers reported a moderate or large PD emphasis on strategies to advance English proficiency and strategies to use with ELLs within content classes generally appeared to have higher percentages of teachers who felt their PD improved their effectiveness as teachers of ELLs to a moderate or large extent (see Figure 2). Figure 2 also shows a similar, albeit somewhat weaker, apparent association for the other three ELL-related topics and for teachers' reported average hours of ELL-related PD.

It is important to caution that even though Figure 2 indicates apparent associations between these various reported features of the PD and teachers' perceptions of improved teacher effectiveness, none of these associations were tested for statistical significance in our small sample of 11 SIG schools. Furthermore, we cannot infer that any of these associations are causal. For example, it is possible that teachers who received PD that emphasized these particular ELL topics gleaned knowledge and skills from those experiences that improved their effectiveness in teaching ELLs, but it also is possible that teachers whose effectiveness improved through other PD were then more likely to seek out PD that emphasized these ELL topics. Other unmeasured factors may also have simultaneously affected the PD's emphasis on these ELL topics as well as teachers' perceived improvement. For example, a strong school leader might enhance teachers' access to PD focused on these ELL topics while also shaping the PD in other unmeasured ways that make it more likely for teachers to perceive improvement. Finally, these reports are all based on teachers' judgments of their own effectiveness, which may be of limited accuracy.

Figure 2. Comparing the Percentage of Teachers Perceiving Moderate or Large Improvement in ELL Teaching Effectiveness to the Percentage of Teachers Reporting a Moderate or Large PD Emphasis on Five ELL-Related Topics and to the Number of ELL-Related PD Hours During the 2011–12 School Year, by School
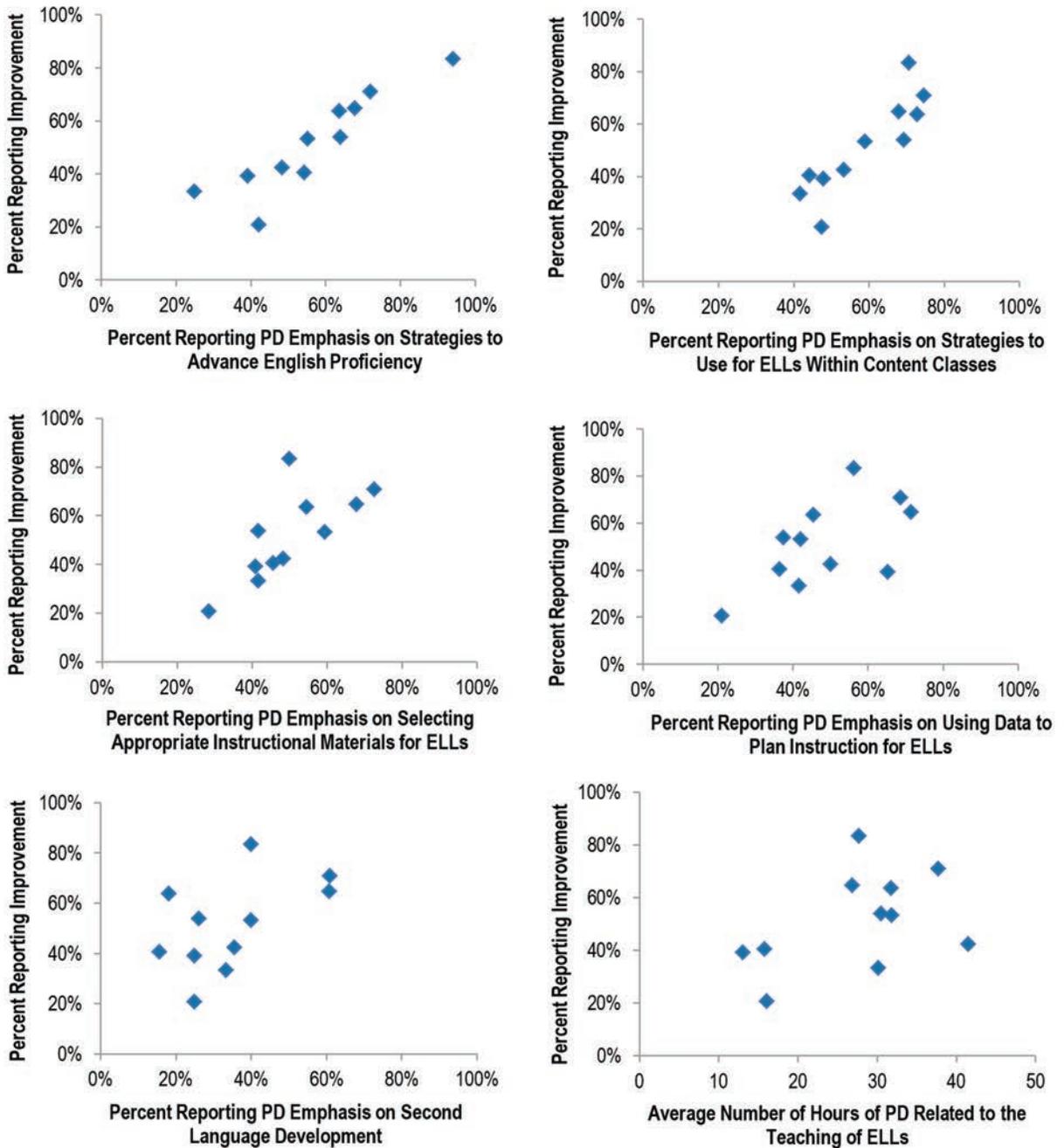
Source: SST teacher survey, fall 2011 and spring 2012
Notes: Includes 270–380 teachers in 11 ELL sample schools. Each diamond plot corresponds to a school.

Conclusion

Correlational and case study research on school turnaround has highlighted the importance of building teachers' knowledge and skills.[34] The SIG program's turnaround and transformation models reflect this emphasis

in the research by requiring significant staffing changes and the provision of high-quality, job-embedded PD. Our analysis of the 11 ELL sample schools' improvement efforts uncovered a generally low emphasis on using strategic staffing practices, such as hiring or assigning teachers based on ELL expertise, as a means of enhancing teacher capacity for serving ELLs. Respondents from only three schools described weighing candidates' ELL experience or expertise when hiring classroom teachers, and respondents from only two schools reported weighing such expertise when assigning teachers to particular classes. In several cases, schools reportedly faced recruitment challenges that limited their hiring options, and administrators in at least two of these schools indicated that such challenges hindered their ability to factor in ELL expertise when hiring classroom teachers. School leaders from another two schools, however, indicated that they had access to a large pool of applicants but still did not emphasize ELL expertise as a factor in hiring teachers. Respondents from all schools did indicate that ELL expertise was a relevant consideration for hiring ESL teachers or other ELL specialists, but in some cases, schools ended up hiring candidates with little to no classroom experience to fill these roles.

The 11 schools appeared to place relatively more emphasis on developing the capacity of staff through professional learning opportunities (PD). Teachers in our 11 schools reported a generally high number of hours and a high rate of participation in PD overall and in PD related to ELLs. However, participation rates and hours varied across and within schools, and the percentage of total PD hours that were related to ELLs tended to be fairly modest (less than 20 percent). Teachers' participation in PD that reportedly emphasized instructional strategies to advance ELLs' English proficiency or support ELLs in content classes also varied and appeared to be positively associated with teachers' perceptions of improvement in their effectiveness as teachers of ELLs. Interviewed teachers identified the inclusion of opportunities for interaction and collaboration, as well as the relevance of the content as important features that distinguished useful PD activities.

As the ELL population in U.S. schools continues to grow and as states begin implementing new academic standards and assessments (and aligned ELP standards and assessments), the need to build teaching capacity to foster ELLs' academic and language-learning success will remain a critical issue. For persistently low-performing schools, this need can be particularly acute and difficult to address. Although prior research has examined the use of staffing and PD strategies to improve capacity, relatively little is known about how such strategies can help build capacity for serving ELLs in low-performing schools that are trying to improve. The data presented in this brief suggest that—at least in this small set of SIG schools—few are leveraging all of the potential capacity-building strategies at their disposal.

Our findings should be interpreted with caution, however. The small sample of 11 schools in 9 districts and 4 states is not representative of all SIG schools, making it inappropriate to draw generalizations about SIG or other low-performing schools more broadly. Furthermore, our desire to collect consistent data across all 11 schools limited our ability to probe deeply into the nuances of each school's capacity-building efforts. Still, our findings shed some light into ELL capacity-building efforts in low-performing schools and point to areas in need of deeper and broader research. For instance, more research is needed on how state certification and teacher preparation policies can help build a pipeline of teachers—particularly mainstream classroom teachers—who possess ELL-related capacity and are prepared to work in a school turnaround context. Additional research is needed to understand how districts and schools can design staff recruitment and assignment policies to ensure that low-performing schools are able to attract teachers skilled in meeting the needs of ELLs and appropriately leverage their expertise. An important component of such research would involve exploring the types of resources (e.g., financial, informational, technological) and other supports that states, districts, teacher preparation programs, external support providers, and schools can provide to promote these capacity-building efforts. Finally, enhancing the knowledge base around how ELL expertise can be effectively shared and enhanced through staff collaboration could provide meaningful insights into how low-performing schools and their districts can develop more sustainable means of improving staff capacity to serve ELLs.

Appendix A
Data Collection and Analytic Methods

The Study of School Turnaround is a set of case studies examining the school improvement process in a diverse sample of schools receiving funds from the SIG program. For three years starting in 2010–11, this study has documented the change process in a purposive sample of 35 schools from a variety of state and local contexts. It is designed to describe the characteristics of these SIG schools, the decisions and strategies the schools and their school districts undertake, and the challenges they face as they attempt to improve school performance.

The study includes three overlapping subsamples drawn from the sample of 35 schools: (1) a "core" group of 25 schools, (2) 11 schools with a high proportion of ELLs, and (3) 9 schools in rural settings. This brief focuses on the 11 schools with a high proportion of ELLs, which were purposively selected to include schools representing a range of geographic regions, levels of urbanicity, grade levels, and language groups. The sample includes five high schools and six elementary schools from nine districts and four states. The ELL populations at these schools ranged from 35 percent to 90 percent of the total student enrollment (with a median of 45 percent ELLs) during the 2008–09 school year.

Data collection for the Study of School Turnaround has relied on two data sources: (1) site visits to the schools and (2) a teacher survey. This brief primarily uses interview and focus group data from site visits conducted with all 11 ELL sample schools in fall 2011 and fall 2012. To a more limited extent, it also draws on data collected in spring 2012 through site visits to ELL schools that were included in the study's core and rural sample data collection and through telephone interviews with administrators in ELL schools that were not part of the core and rural sample data collection. The brief uses survey data from teacher surveys conducted in fall 2011, spring 2012, and fall 2012.

Site Visits

Site visits took place in fall 2011, spring 2012, and fall 2012, each lasting about two days. Two researchers from the study team visited each school, with one conducting the interviews and the other taking notes. With the permission of respondents, conversations were also audio-recorded. All but 2 of the 318 interviews and focus groups were recorded.

At each school, the study team conducted one-on-one interviews and focus groups with district and school stakeholders. The study team interviewed an average of two district administrators, one school administrator, eight teachers, three instructional coaches, one external provider (where relevant), five parents, and six students.[a] Respondents were selected in coordination with district and school personnel to solicit a variety of perspectives on the schools' history and current change strategy. In other words, respondents were not randomly selected, so it should not be assumed that their perceptions are necessarily representative of their entire respondent groups.

Interviewers followed semistructured interview protocols that provided key questions for interviewees and critical probes to ask if necessary. However, to build rapport with school staff, the interview structure allowed for conversation and discussion. Interviewers also remained flexible to follow up on themes that emerged during interviews that they felt warranted more attention. Interviewers sought to collect respondents' input on the topics on which they were most knowledgeable, as well as their perspectives on key issues identified by the study team in advance. Interview and focus group topics included: the overall change process in each school; the capacity of staff to meet the needs of ELLs; school goals related to ELLs, PD provided to teachers of ELLs; teacher recruitment, hiring, and assignment practices; and services provided to ELLs and their parents.

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[a] Only high school students were interviewed.

This brief encompasses a study of *low-performing SIG schools* that have high proportions of ELLs, as opposed to a study of ELL students more generally. Our primary aim is thus similar across the "core," ELL, and rural samples: to learn about the improvement process in these low-performing schools. So we used a similar battery of questions across the three samples that covered general topics of interest, such as perceptions of performance problems, improvement strategies, challenges to improvement, and leadership. We wanted to provide all respondents with an open opportunity to share their views on these issues related to school improvement more generally. Nevertheless, because we hypothesized that the schools' particular ELL context could be relevant, we also included questions and probes specifically related to the school's approach to meeting the needs of their ELLs. For example, the interview protocol for principals included questions such as the following:

> **Do you feel teachers at your school have the skills and knowledge needed to be successful with the ELL students at your school? Why/why not?**
>
> **Do teachers at your school engage in professional learning that specifically addresses ELL instruction? If so, what? What is the district's role?**
>
> **Are there any special efforts to recruit teachers with ELL expertise to your school?**
>
> **How are teachers at your school assigned to classes with ELLs? What factors are considered?**
>
> **Are there any special efforts to recruit teachers with ELL expertise to your school?**

Questions such as these allowed us to examine issues that were particular to the improvement process in low-performing schools with high proportions of ELLs.

This brief drew on interviews and focus groups with a total of 613 respondents across the 318 interviews and focus groups, as follows:[b]

- 48   district-level staff
- 33   principals
- 18   assistant principals and other school administrators
- 18   ELL coordinators
- 241 teachers (individually interviewed and focus group participants)
- 59   instructional coaches
- 16   external providers
- 26   community-parent liaisons
- 75   parents[c]
- 79   students (from five high schools)

Audio-recorded interviews and focus group notes were transcribed to "near-verbatim" quality. The interview and focus group notes were reviewed by the senior site visitor and were revised until they met the quality

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[b] Respondent counts are summed over all three rounds of site visits. In many cases, the same staff member was interviewed multiple times. For example, the same principal of a school could have been interviewed on three separate occasions, and so this would count as three respondents for the "principals" category.

[c] The number of parents participating varied across schools. The school staff recruited parents to participate in our discussions. Thus, these parents were likely those who were already more involved in the school than other parents. It should not be assumed that their perceptions are necessarily representative of all parents at the school.

standards established for the study team. That is, senior staff reviewed the notes to ensure they were very close to a transcription, explained acronyms, identified the role of individuals described in the interviews and focus groups, and included consistent background information about each data collection activity.

The qualitative site visit data were analyzed using the following three-stage process (for more detailed information on the process, please see Le Floch et al. [2014][d]):

Stage 1—Preliminary Data Capture. Shortly after each site visit, researchers entered descriptive information about the visit (e.g., number of completed interviews, data collection challenges, a description of school context) into a Web-based preliminary data repository.

Stage 2—Data Repository. Site visitors reviewed notes from interviews and focus groups to enter school-specific data in a Web-based, password-protected data repository in a Web-based platform. The data repository consisted of open- and closed-ended questions for which site visitors summarized the data for each school, and indicated the numbers and types of respondents on which each summary was based.

Stage 3—Analysis. Analysts conducted cross-case analyses and categorized the schools along topics of interest based on the repository data in conjunction with the transcribed interviews. All information on school practices is based on respondents' self-reports and reflects no external assessment of the quality of those practices. To examine the prevalence of particular issues across schools in the sample, analysts generated simple counts (such as the number of schools where respondents reported a specific practice, contextual feature, or challenge). To produce such counts, analysts applied a set of decision rules that outlined clear standards of evidence for inclusion: for a school to be included in a given count, either the school principal or at least two other respondents had to report the given practice or phenomenon, with no dissent from other respondents. In cases where respondents reported divergent views, those differences are noted in the text. When reporting information provided by only one respondent group (for example, principals or teachers), the respondent group is identified as the source of that information. We use the general term *respondents* when reporting information provided by more than one respondent group.

Throughout this brief, we incorporate direct quotations from study respondents as they enhance the clarity and relevance of the study, which is based on qualitative data. These data uniquely provide detailed, contextual information that can convey meaning through illustrative examples. Quotations were purposively selected to enrich the findings arrived at through systematic, carefully documented analyses. These quotations are not representative of all quotations in our data, and they are meant only to enrich a particular finding, not to formally justify it.

Teacher Survey

To complement the site visits, which included qualitative interviews and focus groups with a limited number of purposively-selected teachers, all teachers in each school were invited in fall 2011, spring 2012, and fall 2012 to complete a brief survey. The survey was administered in Web-based and hard-copy formats, and the three waves yielded a total of 369, 392, and 332 teacher responses in the 11 ELL schools. There were no monetary incentives provided for participation in the survey.

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[d] Le Floch, K. C., Birman, B., O'Day, J., Hurlburt, S., Mercado-Garcia, D., Goff, R., Manship, K., Brown, S., Therriault, S. B., Rosenberg, L., Angus, M. H., & Hulsey, L. (2014). *Case studies of schools receiving School Improvement Grants: Findings after the first year of implementation* (NCEE 2014-4015). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance.

In fall 2011, the average response rate was 74 percent and ranged from 40 to 100 percent in each school. Unless otherwise indicated, survey data were analyzed for 9 of the 11 schools where response rates were greater than 50 percent. Among those 9 schools, the average response rate was 76 percent. In spring 2012, the average response rate was 73 percent and ranged from 55 to 95 percent in each school. In fall 2012, the average response rate was 74 percent and ranged from 54 to 100 percent in each school. All schools had at least a 50 percent response rate in spring 2012 and fall 2012, thus all 11 schools were included in the analysis of both waves.

Schools in the Study of School Turnaround's core, rural, and ELL subsamples received a standard set of survey questions, which included items related to the research questions for those components of the study. The full survey instrument was developed from surveys administered in other studies and used items with reliable scales. (For more information, please see Le Floch et al. [2014].) It included questions asking teachers to respond to topics such as school roles and experiences, school climate and culture, school improvement efforts, and perceived challenges with the school and teaching environment. Teachers in the ELL subsample also received a supplemental set of questions about topics related to ELLs, such as experience, knowledge and skills related to teaching ELLs, teaching strategies used for ELL students, school goals related to ELLs, and PD.

Given the focus of this brief, teacher survey data were primarily used to examine teachers' teaching assignments, participation in general PD activities and PD activities related to ELLs, and perceptions of the PD's effectiveness for teaching ELLs (see below for the survey items used in this brief).

Selected Items From the Teacher Surveys

Fall 2011 Items:

4. **In the current school year (2011–12), what is your <u>main</u> teaching assignment at <u>this</u> school? That is the field in which you teach the most classes.**

    (Select only one response. If your teaching time is equally divided among 2 or more fields, choose one.)

    ☐ Self-Contained/All Subjects

    ☐ English/Language Arts/Reading

    ☐ Mathematics

    ☐ Science

    ☐ Social Sciences (History/Government/Civics/Geography)

    ☐ Foreign Language

    ☐ Arts/Music

    ☐ Special Education

    ☐ English as a Second Language (ESL/Bilingual Education)

    ☐ Other (please specify):_____

15. **Did you participate in any professional development activities during the summer of 2011?**

    ☐　　**No**　　→　　**Skip to question 20**

    ☐　　**Yes**　　→　　**Go to question 16**

17. During the summer of 2011, approximately how many hours total did you spend in each of the following professional development activities?

If the answer is "none", please enter 0.

	Professional Development Activities	Number of hours
a.	Workshops, Conferences, Institutes or Seminars.	
b.	Professional learning community or meeting of colleagues deigned to enhance professional learning.	
c.	Formal coaching or mentoring.	
d.	Course extended over several weeks, such as a college course.	
e.	Other (please specify):	

18. During the summer of 2011, approximately how many of the professional development hours which you mentioned in question 16 were related to the teaching of ELL students?

Total number of hours:

Spring 2012 Items:

5. In the current school year (2011–12), what is your main teaching assignment at this school, that is, the field in which you teach the most classes?

(Select <u>only</u> one response. If your teaching time is equally divided among 2 or more fields, choose one.)

- ☐ Self-Contained/All Subjects
- ☐ English/Language Arts/Reading
- ☐ Mathematics
- ☐ Science
- ☐ Social Sciences (History/Government/Civics/Geography)
- ☐ Foreign Language
- ☐ Arts/Music
- ☐ Special Education
- ☐ English as a Second Language (ESL/Bilingual Education)
- ☐ Other specify:_____

13. Did you participate in any professional development activities during the 2011–12 school year?

☐ No → **Skip to question 19**

☐ Yes → **Go to question 14**

14. During the 2011–12 school year, approximately how many hours total did you spend in each of the following professional development activities?

(If the answer is "none", please enter 0.)

Professional Development Activities	
a.	Workshops, Conferences, Institutes or Seminars.	
b.	Professional learning community or meetings of colleagues designed to enhance professional learning.	
c.	Formal coaching or mentoring.	
d.	Course extended over several weeks, such as a college course.	
e.	Other (please specify):	

16. During the 2011-12 school year, approximately how many of the professional development hours which you mentioned in question 14 were related to the teaching of ELL students?

Total number of hours:

17. During the 2011-12 school year, to what extent did the professional development activities in which you participated focus on any of the following topics related to ELLs?

(Check one number in each row.)

		Large extent	Moderate extent	Small extent	Not at all	N/A
a.	Ways to use assessment data to plan instruction for ELL students.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
b.	Selecting appropriate instructional materials for ELL students.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
c.	Specific instructional strategies to use with ELL students *to advance their English proficiency.*	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
d.	Specific instructional strategies to use with ELL students *within content classes.*	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
e.	Second language development.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
f.	Other (please specify):	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

18. During the 2011-12 school year, to what extent have your professional development activities:

(Check one number in each row.)

		Large extent	Moderate extent	Small extent	Not at all	N/A
a.	Improved your effectiveness as a teacher of ELLs?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Fall 2012 Item:

5. At this school, how many ELL students do you teach over the course of a week?

Total number of students:

(If none, enter 0.)

The complete teacher surveys can be found at http://www.air.org/topic/education/study-of-school-turnaround-ELL-protocol-survey.

Endnotes

[1] Cosentino de Cohen, C., Deterding, N., & Clewell, B.C. (2005). *Who's left behind? Immigrant children in high and low LEP schools.* Washington, DC: The Urban Institute.

[2] Arias, M.B., & Morillo-Campbell, M. (2008). *Promoting ELL parental involvement: Challenges in contested times.* Lansing, MI: Great Lakes Center for Education Research and Practice.

[3] Short, D.J., & Boyson, B.A. (2012). Helping newcomer students succeed in secondary schools and beyond. Washington, DC: Center for Applied Linguistics. Retrieved from http://carnegie.org/fileadmin/Media/Publications/Reporter/23/helping-newcomer-students-succeed-in-secondary-schools-and-beyond.pdf.

[4] Francis, D., Rivera, M., Lesaux, N., Kieffer, M., & Rivera, H. (2006). *Practical guidelines for the education of English language learners: Research-based recommendations for serving adolescent newcomers*. Portsmouth, NH: RMC Research Corporation, Center on Instruction. Retrieved from http://carnegie.org/fileadmin/Media/Publications/ell_newcomers.pdf.

[5] DeCapua, A., Smathers, W., & Tang, L. (2007). Schooling, interrupted. *Educational Leadership*, *64*(6), 40–46.

[6] U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2013). *The condition of education 2013* (NCES 2013-037), English Language Learners. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_cgf.asp.

[7] Title III of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act*, as amended by *No Child Left Behind*, issues formula-based grants to states that then subgrant these funds to applicant districts on the basis of the size of their ELL population. In 2008–09, approximately 27 percent of U.S. school districts received funding through Title III to support ELLs' attainment of English proficiency and mastery of grade-level academic content. Tanenbaum, C., Boyle, A., Soga, K., Le Floch, K.C., Golden, L., Petroccia, M., et al. (2012). *National evaluation of Title III implementation report on state and local implementation*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Planning, Evaluation, and Policy Development, Policy and Program Studies Service.

[8] Wei, R., Darling-Hammond, L., & Adamson, F. (2010). *Professional development in the United States: Trends and challenges (Phase II of a three-phase study)*. Oxford, OH: National Staff Development Council. Retrieved from http://www.learningforward.org/docs/pdf/nsdcstudytechnicalreport2010.pdf?sfvrsn=0.

[9] Tanenbaum et al., op. cit.

[10] Golden, L., Harris, B., Mercado-Garcia, D., Boyle, A., Le Floch, K.C., & O'Day, J. (2014). *A Focused look at schools receiving School Improvement Grants that have a high percentage of English language learner students* (NCEE 2014-2014). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance. Retrieved from http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/pubs/20144014/pdf/20144014.pdf.

[11] Based on analyses of school-level demographic data from U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences. (2011). *Baseline SIG database.* Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from http://www2.ed.gov/programs/sif/index.html.

[12] Ibid.; The national median percentage of ELLs served in SIG-awarded schools is based on data from 2008–09 for 953 schools out of 1,243 SIG-awarded schools from Cohort 1 (FY09 SIG competition round) that had adequate data available across 49 states and the District of Columbia. It does not include data for SIG-awarded schools in Hawaii or the Bureau of Indian Education.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Ibid.; The national median percentage of students who qualified for free or reduced-price lunch and the percentage of students classified as racial or ethnic minorities in SIG-awarded schools are based on data from 2008–09 for 1,234 schools and 1,242 schools out of a total of 1,243 SIG-awarded schools from Cohort 1 (FY09 SIG competition round) that had adequate data available across 49 states and the District of Columbia. They do not include data for SIG-awarded schools in Hawaii or the Bureau of Indian Education.

[16] A nationally representative survey of districts receiving Title III funds to support ELL instruction found instructional programs using English as a second language (ESL) instruction and content instruction in English designed for ELLs to be the most commonly reported ELL services among Title III districts in 2009–10, with 98 percent and 87 percent of such districts providing these services to at least some ELLs. In the same survey, 57 percent of officials from Title III districts reported providing instruction for at least some ELLs in some of their schools that included students' native language(s) (See Tanenbaum et al., op. cit.).

[17] Although districts vary in their use of terms, for the purposes of this brief, "ESL teacher" is defined as any teacher with a certification or degree in ESL who specializes in the instruction of ELL students. ESL teachers may teach ESL classes, content area classes, or both.

[18] When reporting information provided by only one respondent group (e.g., principals, teachers), the respondent group is identified as the source of that information. The general term *respondent* is used when reporting information provided by more than one respondent group.

[19] Golden et al., op. cit.

[20] As reported in the previous brief on ELL SIG schools, in eight of the nine schools with reportable survey data in fall 2011, a majority of teacher survey respondents reported sometimes feeling overwhelmed by the challenge of teaching ELLs.

[21] Herman, R., Dawson, P., Dee, T., Greene, J., Maynard, R., Redding, S., & Darwin, M. (2008). *Turning around chronically low-performing schools: A practice guide* (NCEE 2008-4020). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance.

[22] Villavicencio, A., & Grayman, J.K. (2012). *Learning from "turnaround" middle schools: Strategies for success.* New York: The Research Alliance for New York City Schools.

[23] Golden et al., op. cit.

[24] Ballantyne, K.G., Sanderman, A.R., & Levy, J. (2008). *Educating English language learners: Building teacher capacity. National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition and Language Instructional Educational Programs.* Retrieved from http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED521360.pdf.; Samson, J.F., & Collins, B.A. (2012). *Preparing all teachers to meet the needs of English language learners: Applying research to policy and practice for teacher effectiveness.* Washington, DC: Center for American Progress. Retrieved from http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/education/report/2012/04/30/11372/preparing-all-teachers-to-meet-the-needs-of-english-language-learners/.

[25] Master, B., Loeb, S., Whitney, C., & Wyckoff, J. (2012). *Different skills: Identifying differentially effective teachers of English language learners.* CALDER Working Paper 68. Washington, DC: National Center for Analysis of Longitudinal Data in Education Research. Retrieved from http://www.caldercenter.org/sites/default/files/Master-et-al.pdf.

[26] Guskey, T. (2003). What makes professional development effective? *Phi Delta Kappan*, *84*(10), 748–750.; Hawley, W.D., & Valli, L. (1999). The essentials of effective professional development: A new consensus. In L. Darling-Hammond & G. Sykes (Eds.), *Teaching as the learning profession: Handbook of policy and practice* (pp. 127–150). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

[27] Although not an exact comparison, a nationally representative survey of teachers found that 70 percent of teachers of ELLs participated in PD on instructional strategies for ELLs in 2005–06. U.S. Department of Education, Office of Planning, Evaluation, and Policy Development, Policy and Program Studies Service (2009). *State and local implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act, volume VIII—Teacher quality under* NCLB*: Final report*. Washington, DC: Author.

[28] SIOP is an instructional approach in which teachers modify the way they teach academic content so that lessons are comprehensible to ELLs. For more information on the SIOP model, see http://www.cal.org/siop/.

[29] Although not an exact comparison, a nationally representative survey of teachers found that in a 12-month period, teachers in schools identified for improvement under Title I spent an average of 111 hours on PD activities (U.S. Department of Education, 2009, op. cit.). SIG provided an unprecedented infusion of resources into these low-performing schools in part to bolster PD activities, so the fact that our 11 schools reported an average of 150 hours of PD is perhaps not too surprising.

Other possible explanations for the difference are that the national survey covered PD experiences in 2005–06, as opposed to 2011–12, that our case study sample is not representative of the schools in the national sample, and that SIG targeted a narrower set of schools identified for improvement under Title I of the *No Child Left Behind Act* (i.e., those that were in the bottom 5 percent). However, both the national survey and our study survey used similar definitions for PD, which reflect a 12-month time period and broadly encompassed traditional forms of PD such as workshops, institutes, and coursework, as well as job-embedded forms of PD such as professional learning communities and coaching. Both the national survey and our study survey are based on teachers' retrospective self-reports, so any errors of recall should have a similar effect on the data.

[30] Although not an exact comparison, a nationally representative survey of teachers found that general education teachers who taught ELLs participated in an average of 10.7 hours of professional development on instructional strategies for ELLs in 2005–06 (U.S. Department of Education, 2009, op. cit.). See previous endnote for possible explanations for the difference between the ELL-related PD hours in the national sample and in our case study sample.

[31] Note that variation in teachers' reported number of hours of ELL-related professional development may reflect differences in teachers' actual participation in professional development activities, as well as differences in teachers' perceptions as to which of their professional development activities related to the teaching of ELLs.

[32] Yoon, K.S., Duncan, T., Lee, S.W.-Y., Scarloss, B., & Shapley, K. (2007). *Reviewing the evidence on how teacher professional development affects student achievement* (Issues & Answers Report, REL 2007-No. 033). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Regional Educational Laboratory Southwest. Retrieved from http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/southwest/pdf/rel_2007033.pdf.

[33] Wei et al., op. cit.

[34] Herman et al., op. cit.; Hansen, M. (2013). *Investigating the role of human resources in school turnaround: A decomposition of improving schools in two states*. CALDER Working Paper 89. Washington, DC: National Center for Analysis of Longitudinal Data in Education Research. Retrieved from http://www.caldercenter.org/publications/upload/wp89.pdf.

For more information on the full study, please visit:

http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/projects/evaluation/other_schoolturnaround.asp