

The following excerpt, “Conclusions and Recommendations,” from the report *Succeeding with English Language Learners: Lessons Learned from the Great City Schools*, has been reprinted with permission from the Council of the Great City Schools. The document is an open-source document made available to Users by the Attribution-NoDerivs CC BY-ND license <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nd/4.0/>. This license allows redistribution, commercial and noncommercial, as long as it is passed along unchanged and in whole, with credit to the Council of the Great City Schools. As such, the excerpt below is unchanged. It uses the term “English Language Learner (ELL)” to refer to students otherwise referred to as “ELs” in the EL Tool Kit.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Despite the diversity of the districts profiled in this study, a fairly consistent picture emerged of the preconditions and practices that existed in improving districts. These strategies for improving ELL achievement closely mirrored those identified in *Foundations for Success* as having contributed to districts’ efforts to improve teaching and learning for all students. However, such across-the-board district reform efforts do not automatically or inevitably lead to high quality ELL programming. Districts that saw improvement of their ELL instructional program—and of ELL student achievement— demonstrated the capacity and political will to explicitly address the academic needs of English Language Learners.

While no school or school district has found a way to meet every student’s needs and to close the gap between ELLs and native English speakers, clearly some districts are setting higher standards for all of their students and making progress toward these goals. Based on what we have learned from their experiences and approaches to reform, several broad-based recommendations can be made to help district leaders think about ELL program reform efforts in their own cities. These recommendations fall into two broad categories: context and strategy.

### CONTEXTUAL RECOMMENDATIONS

It was clear from the results of this study that improving the academic achievement of English language learners involved more than instructional strategy and traditional bilingual education models. It also meant creating an environment conducive to implementing and sustaining districtwide reform efforts. To create these preconditions for progress, the Council would propose that districts-

- Develop a clear instructional vision and high expectations for ELLs. This means being clear about academic goals for these students, communicating these goals emphatically to stakeholders in the district, and ensuring that ELLs are held to the same high standards as other students throughout the district.
- Approach external pressure to improve services for ELLs and other students as an asset rather than a liability. Rather than addressing state or court directives defensively or adopting measures aimed solely at ensuring legal compliance, external requirements should be approached as mandates for long-term, systemic reform efforts to raise student achievement.
- Incorporate accountability for ELLs organizationally into the broader instructional operation of the school district. This entails being clear at the leadership level that everyone is accountable for the academic attainment of these students—not simply ELL teachers and ELL department staff. This not only spurs collaboration, but it provides greater assurance that these students have broader and fuller access to the general education curriculum and resources.
- Empower strong ELL program administrators to oversee progress. Prioritizing ELL reform also means appointing and empowering someone in the district to serve as a “point person” on ELL issues. In improving districts, the office of ELLs and its director were included in the highest levels of decision making and given the authority to oversee implementation of the district’s strategy for ELL reform.
- Pursue community support for initiatives designed to accelerate achievement among English language learners. Having the community behind the district’s efforts to improve academic performance helps create the political conditions under which reforms can be sustained.

## STRATEGIC AND INSTRUCTIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

The contextual recommendations allow for reforms to be articulated and sustained, but the district must couple them with a convincing instructional strategy that is capable of teaching ELLs to the highest standards. The Council of the Great City Schools would propose that districts—

- Review general education and ELL programs to ensure that there is an explicit focus on building academic literacy and cultivating English language development. Focusing on academic literacy among ELLs—and all students—and providing them with specific language acquisition strategies are critical steps for ensuring the long-term academic success of students.
- Ensure that all teachers of ELLs have access to high-quality professional development that provides differentiated instructional strategies, promotes the effective use of student assessment data, and develops skills for supporting second-language acquisition across the curriculum. This professional development should be made jointly available to ELL and general education teachers and evaluated for how well it is implemented and its effects on student achievement.
- Assess district standards for hiring, placing, and retaining teachers, paraprofessionals, and staff members who work directly with ELLs to ensure that these students have access to highly qualified personnel. While these decisions are sometimes shaped by state policy, in other cases they are the result of locally determined policies and collective bargaining agreements that districts should be mindful of as they craft their ELL programs.
- Conduct a comprehensive assessment of the level of access that ELLs have to the entire spectrum of district course offerings, including gifted and talented programs and special education. The results of these simple analyses can reveal to districts whether ELLs—and others—have equal access to educational opportunities and are held to the same academic standards as other students.
- Ensure that resources generated by and allocated for English language learners are properly and effectively expended to provide quality ELL instruction and services. Districts also should be careful to not allow the categorical nature of various funding sources to limit ELL programming or services. General education funds, federal Title I funds, categorical state funds, and other resources can be used to ensure that these students get the support and instruction they need across the board.
- Develop a system for tracking multiple measures of ELLs' educational progress. The collection and analysis of data on the characteristics, teachers, English proficiency level, program placement, and academic attainment of ELLs are critical to ensuring the success of these students. This means integrating all data on ELLs into the district's general database to ensure broader access and to promote regular review of this data by school and district instructional staff and the board.