

What Does the Research Say?

Research-based Characteristics of Effective Districts, Schools, and Classrooms that Promote English Learner Achievement

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The following document has been prepared not as an exhaustive meta-analysis of the research but as a research synthesis that distills the current themes from research. It is illustrative of the major trends in the field of educating English Learners and attempts to be integrative, providing district and school personnel with a cohesive set of research-based characteristics that are found in the research on effective districts, schools, and classrooms that promote English Learner achievement.

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Effective Districts

CHARACTERISTIC	DESCRIPTION	EXAMPLES
Achievement Focus	All district officials, personnel, and district-wide parent/community groups have as their primary mission increasing student academic achievement throughout the district. The district encourages schools to set reasonable goals for improving achievement.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • District mission statement directly references student achievement • Parent meeting agendas reflect improving student achievement • Board meeting agenda items reference increased student achievement
Coherence to support the focus	The district implements research-based integrated systems aimed at increasing student achievement, including school organization, curriculum, materials, instruction, assessments, supplementary services, and professional development. The district maintains these systems over time.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers are given regular time to collaborate across the district around student work, assessment results and lesson planning. These meetings are structured with clear outcomes that are implemented, reviewed and adjusted as a result of that collaborative review. The focus is on student results. • Professional development is focused around meeting students' needs as identified by the analysis of achievement data. • Curriculum materials are researched-based, linked to state standards, and SBE adopted or approved.
Resources aligned with achievement focus	The districts' fiscal and personnel resources are aligned with curriculum, instruction, assessment and professional development to ensure support for the focus on student achievement. These resources are	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student achievement data drives district goal setting. Time, people and funds are directed to those goals • LEAP goals are derived from student subgroup data and all resources are clearly and obviously connected to those goals. • Budget reflects student needs as identified by

	allocated based on achievement needs of student subgroups.	<p>achievement data.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff development calendars reflect student achievement needs. • Hiring is focused on appropriately trained teachers in areas where student achievement needs are greatest.
Leadership for instructional improvement	District leaders convey the importance of addressing the academic needs of all students. They provide relevant professional development opportunities for teachers and administrators to help improve instruction to reach high academic standards.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff development calendars reflect (1) leadership training opportunities for site and district administrators in research-based practices and instructional leadership and (2) curriculum-based strategies focused on specific achievement needs of underachieving subgroups.
Accountability for achievement	The district emphasizes that school administrators and faculty are responsible for student achievement. District monitors student progress and implements a system of consequences for student performance.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The district has common benchmark assessments across grade levels and curricular areas that provide information on student mastery of content standards. • The district uses multiple data points from state and local assessments to monitor student progress, inform student placement, classroom instructional practices and the need for interventions. • The Superintendent, district office administrators and site administrators are held accountable for improving student achievement through the evaluation process.
Data-informed decision-making	The district engages in an ongoing analysis of school and district data that informs allocation of resources and decisions about school organization, curriculum, materials, instruction, supplementary services, and professional development.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • District and site administrators regularly examine and discuss achievement data by student subgroups. Focus is on results and awareness of the students who are succeeding and those who are not. • Administrators focus on results rather than on inputs and on outcomes rather than activities. • Site and district staff know their EL students' achievement and language acquisition as a function of time in district. They know who their newcomer students are, and who their long-term EL students are and focus on the instructional implications for each group. • Site and district staff regularly monitor trends in the EL

		<p>population. They know about their students' mobility, drop-out rates, and how long it takes to become proficient in English.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers and administrators regularly evaluate new programs, interventions and classroom strategies. Changes are made when student achievement gains are not realized. • School-level data is routinely shared with site staff. • Turn-around time for district benchmark assessment data is quick. • Parents and students are an active part of the assessment process. They know what content must be mastered and where the student is on the path to mastery.
<p>Distributed leadership</p>	<p>Leadership is a collaborative enterprise composed of district officials, school administrators, and faculty committed to improving schools' capabilities to address students' academic needs. District leaders enhance decision-making capacities of this community of practice.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • District and site administrators as well as teachers are involved in the design and implementation of policies and programs. • Leadership teams are utilized at the district and site level. • There is clear and transparent two-way communication between administration and leadership teams to all staff members and families.

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Effective Schools

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Instructional leadership for achievement	School administrators and staff are empowered to make decisions about school organization, instruction, supplementary services, and professional development to improve student achievement.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Under the umbrella of district goals, school sites create achievement goals that directly reflect their particular student data and the subgroups of students that need the most support. • Goals are specific, measurable, attainable, results-oriented, and time-bound. • Student achievement is the focus of the work of the professional learning communities at each site. • Site administrators and teachers work together to develop interventions that address the needs presented by their unique student population. • Site administrators and teachers work collaboratively to design and implement school structures, student groupings, placement, and course offerings that foster EL achievement. • Site administrators provide staff with collaboration time to study and discuss current research and theory on effective teaching practices. • Teachers share effective practices with one another. These are practices that have led to visible, measurable student achievement results. • Site administrators ensure that general and categorical funds are used appropriately to support English/reading/language arts and mathematics programs goals of the school. • Parent meeting agendas reflect improving student

		achievement.
Clear & focused mission of achievement	School administrators and teachers maintain student achievement as their primary focus.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • District and school mission statements directly reference student achievement. • SPSA achievement goals are derived from student subgroup data and all resources are clearly and obviously connected to those goals.
Safe & positive school climate	Students and staff feel physically and emotionally safe and valued as members of the school community. Adults set clear expectations for student behavior and enforce consequences.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are established routines for the smooth running of the school that all understand. • Instructional time is protected from interruptions. • Teachers are protected from internal and external distractions. • School sites and the district office establish norms of professional conduct that promote collaboration and collegiality. • Schools have programs that teach self-discipline and responsibility. • Schools have systems for identifying and proactively planning for students who have a history of or potential for violent or extreme behaviors. • All staff take ownership and responsibility for all students and for the overall climate of the campus.
High expectations for all students	School administrators and teachers hold high expectations for student performance and behavior irrespective of socioeconomic status, migrant status, language ability, gender, ethnicity, or race.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Structures are in place at each school site to support students who experience difficulty in learning. Student learning is the constant. Time and support are the variables. • Students who experience difficulty are required to put in extra time and utilize extra support. • At each school site there is evidence of a focus on what is learned as opposed to what is taught. • Site and district administrators conduct regular classroom walk-throughs that focus on student learning. These visits are used to initiate open-ended dialogue with teachers on how student learning could be enhanced in their classrooms.

<p>Staff take responsibility for student learning</p>	<p>School administrators and teachers address the academic needs of all students. They continually strategize how the school can improve student achievement.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers and principals work together to support students who experience difficulty learning. There exists a coordinated, sequential system in place at each site so that teachers can get help from other staff members and school resources to ensure each student’s success. • Student achievement is monitored on a timely basis so that student learning gaps are remediated before they become irreparable.
<p>Opportunity to learn rigorous standards-aligned content</p>	<p>School delivers resource-rich, standards-aligned curriculum and materials. Teachers utilize an array of instructional strategies to provide students access to this curriculum. School provides access to advance-level courses to all students, irrespective of socioeconomic status, migrant status, language ability, gender, ethnicity, or race.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is evidence of strategic supports for ELs in the classroom including but not limited to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Repetition of key words or phrases ○ Lots of functional, context-relevant speech used by students and teachers ○ Rich feedback opportunities ○ Low student anxiety ○ Cooperative learning groups • Schedule reviews indicate adherence to the appropriate number of instruction minutes for all courses. • Master schedule audits indicate that English learners are enrolled in A-G courses and appropriate support classes as needed. • Grade audits, graduation records and other achievement records indicate that English learners are successfully completing the coursework necessary for a diploma and are eligible for post-secondary schooling. • Teachers use SBE-adopted (kindergarten-grade 8) or standards-aligned (grade 9-12) English/reading/language arts and mathematics instructional materials, including intervention materials.
<p>Frequent monitoring of student progress to inform instruction</p>	<p>Teachers deliver formative, summative, informal, and formal assessments to determine</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Site administrators are knowledgeable about the state and federal accountability systems and routinely reference them in staff meetings, parent

	<p>student mastery of state standards. Teachers utilize data from assessments to adjust lesson plans as needed to bring students to mastery, differentiating instruction as necessary.</p>	<p>meetings, and teacher work groups.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data is transparent and routinely shared with staff. Data walls and data related goals are visible on school campuses. • Schools administer the district’s common benchmark assessments and school staff use the data to inform instruction. • Teachers give ongoing common progress-monitoring assessments. • Teacher teams work collaboratively to identify the criteria to be used in student assessment (e.g., rubrics, exemplars) and to ensure consistency among team members when assessing student work. • Assessment is used to inform and motivate students. Students are involved with their own assessment and monitor their progress toward mastery. • Parents are trained on the assessment process and are encouraged to communicate frequently with their children about their progress.
<p>Positive home-school relations</p>	<p>Families feel comfortable interacting with school personnel. The school involves families in students’ education in culturally sensitive ways.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication from the schools is done in ways that parents can access and understand. For example, written communication goes home in the parents’ first language; communication is verbal if parents are not literate. • Parents of English learners participate in school and district advisory and governance committees. • Interpreters are readily available for parents who need them. • Parents are provided many opportunities to learn about the educational system including things they can do to support their children’s achievement at home regardless of their own educational attainment or language proficiency.

<p>Staff development focused on EL needs</p>	<p>Professional development is centered on practical strategies that improve teachers' skills in delivering differentiated, meaningful, academically engaging content to ELs.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that professional development is long term, sustained, builds capacity, and has a strong research-base.. • On-going coaching, feedback and reflection are components of successful professional development. • Site administrators monitor teacher implementation of strategies learned in professional development. • School administrators and staff have received training on SBE-adopted instructional materials.
<p>Coherent program/instructional plan based on context</p>	<p>The school implements research-based integrated systems aimed at increasing student achievement, including school organization, the master schedule, curriculum, materials, instruction, assessment, supplementary services, and professional development. These research-based instructional programs are adapted to the community contexts and resources available at the school.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Master schedule audits indicate that English learners are enrolled in A-G courses and appropriate support classes as needed • Grade audits, graduation records and other achievement records indicate that English learners are successfully completing the coursework necessary for a diploma and are eligible for post-secondary schooling. • There is consistent time dedicated to specific English language development and students are grouped for ELD by language proficiency. • Instructional time is protected from interruption. Students are grouped thoughtfully and flexible groupings are used so that students needs can be targeted and monitored over time.

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Effective Classroom Instruction

CHARACTERISTIC	DESCRIPTION	EXAMPLES
Engagement in structured, academic talk	Teachers provide multiple opportunities for student conversations on academically relevant topics, structuring tasks so that ELs engage with native speakers for extended discussions. Conversations allow students to talk about ideas and explore topics that are interesting, engaging, and relevant to them. There is a high level of participation with no one dominant voice. Teachers structure the topics and conversational tasks but allow students to engage with each other in extended conversations about the topic.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students learn the language functions that are necessary for performing successfully in content classes such as analyzing, evaluating, justifying and persuading. • Academic language is a key focus of ELD/ESL as well as content classes. • Teachers provide structured, collaborative activities that scaffold EL understanding of content. • Classroom observations and walk-throughs for learning indicate a high level of student language use to complete grade-appropriate work.
Enrollment in academically challenging coursework	Curriculum is coherent, rigorous, rich, and meaningful. Teachers provide scaffolds for cognitively complex content. High school EL students who wish to attend college are placed in courses that meet college-entrance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student placement at the elementary level is thoughtful and takes into consideration the child's language proficiency and prior schooling. Flexible grouping occurs during the day to best meet the students' academic and linguistic needs. • Counselors at the secondary level understand the placement options and course progressions for EL

	requirements.	<p>students. They use assessment data to place new students and meet frequently with current students to ensure that their course schedules match post-secondary career goals.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High-level courses (e.g., AP, GATE) are provided to all students, regardless of race, national origin, language, or gender. • Secondary ELs have access to advanced and college preparatory courses along with support classes or services. • Interventions and support classes are available to all ELs as needed to be successful in the core content.
Systematic, explicit, intensive, differentiated reading skill instruction	<p>Systematic instruction in reading skills is aimed at building fluency and comprehension across the content areas. Instruction in phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency and text-level comprehension strategies are based on students' assessed needs. Teachers monitor student progress through use of ongoing literacy assessments, which provide data for differentiated instruction. Texts are matched to student reading skills. Peer-assisted reading and rereading of text is provided to foster development of fluent reading.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students who struggle with reading are provided targeted interventions that address the specific skills needed. • Students are assessed frequently and feedback is shared with all the adults who work with the student as well as the parents and students themselves. • Reading interventions and support classes extend into the secondary schools for students who require them. • Middle and high school content teachers provide explicit vocabulary and comprehension instruction in order to help ELs access the content of increasingly complex texts. • In content-based literacy, teachers identify two types of objectives for each lesson: one for content learning and another for language and literacy learning. • Beginning literacy instruction (phonemic awareness, decoding, vocabulary, fluency, comprehension) is provided to secondary ELs with limited or interrupted schooling in the L1, as needed.
Development of L1 literacy skills along with oral proficiency and literacy in English	<p>In contexts that have adequate resources and community support to offer an alternative program, ELs learn to read in English while learning to read in</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • L1 and English literacy instruction occur at separate times during the school day and with different teachers, who are specifically trained to teach the language. • Teachers have native or nearly-native fluency in the

	<p>L1, with this instruction provided at different times of the day; English oral proficiency is not made a prerequisite. ELs with L1 literacy skills progress quickly and successfully in L2 literacy due to carefully planned cross-language transfer.</p>	<p>language of instruction and model academic language in their teaching.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instruction is standards-based. If standards are not available in the language of instruction, ELA standards are modified for use with L1 and consideration is taken to teach skills sequentially with awareness of transfer to ELA skills. • English literacy is taught using materials and strategies that ensure ELs understand the text they are reading. • Teachers ensure cross-language transfer by explaining skills that transfer from L1 to English and explicitly teaching skills needed to read in English that are different from skills in the L1 (e.g., multiple vowel sounds and spellings in English, variant/irregular English vowel patterns, contrastive syntax, etc.). • Progress in L1 and English literacy is monitored on an ongoing basis, not just with annual standardized tests.
<p>Instructional scaffolding for comprehensibility of content</p>	<p>Teachers separate the main cognitive goal of the lesson into smaller, achievable tasks, using specific techniques to make the content comprehensible (e.g., pictures, graphic organizers, dramatizations). Teachers demonstrate and model tasks and continuously check for understanding of each task, adjusting the lesson to accommodate students' needs.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Content is adapted to all levels of student language proficiency. • Concepts are explicitly linked to students' background experiences. • There is evidence of meaningful activities that integrate lesson concepts • Adult speech is appropriate for students' level of proficiency. • Academic text is explained clearly. • A variety of techniques are used to make content concepts understandable. • Student grouping configurations support language and content objectives of the lesson. • Supplementary materials used ensure access to content.
<p>Systematic assessment of students'</p>	<p>Teachers use formative, summative, informal, and formal assessments to determine</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mastery of ELA, Math, and ELD standards is monitored on an interim basis, not just annually. • Student groupings are flexible, temporary, and

<p>strengths and needs</p>	<p>student mastery of ELD and academic content standards. Teachers engage in ongoing monitoring of progress and modification of instruction to meet assessed language and content needs.</p>	<p>adjusted based on regular assessment results.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students and parents are given regular feedback on their progress toward mastery of standards. • Spot checks for understanding, group and individual student response, and anecdotal observations are part of the regular classroom practice in addition to more formal assessment procedures.
<p>Appropriately-prepared teachers</p>	<p>Teachers are knowledgeable and skilled in using strategies to make core content accessible to ELs. Teachers teach in their area of certification/authorization, with few-to-none teaching out-of-field. Teachers are knowledgeable of cultural differences and bridge gaps between school and home cultures, as necessary.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Districts provide time limits under which teachers must obtain the appropriate credentials to work with English learners. Support is given to teachers to obtain their credential, but if teachers do not obtain their credential in a reasonable amount of time, they are given assignments without contact with English learners. If no such assignment exists, the district moves to make the teacher a permanent substitute or moves to dismiss due to lack of placement opportunity. • Districts equitably distribute teachers to ensure that inexperienced, unqualified, or out-of-field teachers do not teach poor and minority students at disproportionately higher rates than their peers. • Teachers are provided regular and on-going staff development above the requirements of their English learner credentialing in the most current research-based strategies for working with English learners.
<p>Development of Academic English including vocabulary</p>	<p>Teachers include academic vocabulary objectives in their daily instruction to help students master the language of academic discourse (oral and written). They integrate vocabulary instruction into daily oral and written work, providing multiple opportunities for students to use the new vocabulary in meaningful contexts.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Both content and language objectives are clearly defined for students and are supported by lesson delivery. • There is rigorous, direct, varied and explicit instruction in vocabulary development and reading comprehension. • Instruction moves from the simple, familiar and concrete to the more abstract and unfamiliar. • Students are exposed to rich texts and have significant opportunities to engage in structured, academic talk.

<p>Effective instructional strategies</p>	<p>Teachers consistently implement an array of research-based instructional strategies that allow diverse learners to gain multiple opportunities to practice and eventually to master both the English language and academic content and skills.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explicit opportunities are provided to increase student engagement in classroom activities. • Teachers elicit students to be engaged in the academic learning. Student engagement is mandatory. • Students have regular peer-assisted learning opportunities. • Homework is used judiciously; is appropriate to the students age and development, reinforces concepts already taught and requires minimal or no support from an adult.
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Research-Based Characteristics of Effective Districts	<i>Anderson (2003)</i>	<i>Daily et al. (2005)</i>	<i>Datnow et al. (2007)</i>	<i>Elmore (2000)</i>	<i>Fullan (2000)</i>	<i>Gates Foundation (2005)</i>	<i>McLaughlin & Talbert (2002)</i>	<i>Parrish et al. (2006)</i>	<i>Shannon & Blymsa (2004)</i>	<i>Skrla et al., (2000)</i>	<i>Snipes et al. (2002)</i>	<i>Togneri & Anderson (2003)</i>	<i>Waters & Marzano (2003)</i>	<i>Woody et al. (2006)</i>
Achievement Focus	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		
Coherence to support the focus	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Resources aligned with achievement focus						✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Leadership for instructional improvement	✓			✓						✓	✓		✓	
Accountability for achievement			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓		
Data-informed decision-making	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Distributed leadership	✓			✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		

Research-Based Characteristics of Effective Schools for English Learners	<i>August and Hakuta (1997)</i> <i>Genessee et al. (2005)</i> <i>Gold (2006)</i> <i>Lezotte (1997)</i> <i>Parrish et al. (2006)</i> <i>Reyes et al. (2006)</i> <i>Waits et al. (1999)</i> <i>Williams et al. (2006)</i> <i>Williams et al. (2007)</i>								
Instructional leadership for achievement	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Clear and focused mission of achievement		✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	
Safe and positive school climate for achievement	✓	✓	✓	✓					
High expectations for all students	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓				
Staff take responsibility for student learning			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Opportunity to learn rigorous standards-aligned content		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	
Frequent monitoring of student progress to inform instruction	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Positive home-school relations	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓			
Staff development focused on EL needs	✓				✓	✓			
Coherent program/instructional plan based on context	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

