

Northwestern College, Iowa

NWCommons

Master's Theses & Capstone Projects

Education

Summer 2023

Improving Reading Comprehension and Vocabulary for English Language Learners

Rachael Vande Hoef

Follow this and additional works at: https://nwcommons.nwciowa.edu/education_masters



Part of the [Early Childhood Education Commons](#)

**Improving Reading Comprehension and Vocabulary
for English Language Learners**

Rachael Vande Hoef

Capstone Project: A School Improvement Plan

Northwestern College, Orange City, Iowa

Abstract

Research on the education of English Language Learners (ELL) has shown that ELL students underperform native English speakers academically. Right from the start, students' home language impacts school readiness amongst ELL students. Fortunately, implementing vocabulary and reading interventions is successful in closing learning gaps among ELL students. The implementation of a blended learning approach has been found to increase literary gains among ELL students. Given this research, a school improvement plan was developed to enhance the literary gains of ELL students. This multi-faceted plan involves teacher collaboration, parental engagement, vocabulary and reading interventions, as well as a blended learning approach.

Keywords: English Language Learners, parental engagement, reading interventions, vocabulary interventions, blended learning

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	2
Introduction.....	4
Literature Review.....	5
Site Profile	15
Community Characteristics.....	16
School District Characteristics.....	16
School Building Characteristics.....	17
Student Portfolio & Performance.....	18
Curriculum, Instruction, & Assessment.....	18
Professional Development Practices.....	19
Needs Assessment.....	19
Data Analysis	21
Data Summary	21
School Strengths	24
School Challenges.....	25
Assessment Options	25
Action Plan.....	25
Implementation of School Improvement Plan	29
Intro.....	29
Timeline	29
Role Clarifications and Assignments.....	30
Progress Monitoring.....	31
Limitations	32

Improving Reading Comprehension and Vocabulary for English Language Learners

English Language Learners (ELLs) are students whose native language for speaking, reading, and/or writing is other than English (Ludwig et al., 2019). According to the 2023 Conditions of Education Report, 10.3% of students enrolled in public schools in the United States were ELLs (National Center for Education Statistics, 2023). Ludwig et al. highlight that the population of ELLs in North American schools is rapidly growing. The concern is that ELLs are entering school with lower literacy skills and are at risk of lagging behind academically (Ludwig et al., 2019). The problem is ELL students continue to be discrepant in reading when compared to non-ELL peers. According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress, 9% of fourth grade ELLs scored at or above proficiency (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). Researchers have explored the role that narrative skills, family involvement, shared readings, vocabulary instruction, teacher perceptions, blended learning, and reading interventions play in improving the literacy outcomes of ELLs.

Research for this literature review utilized both Google Scholar and the DeWitt Library at Northwestern College to collect scholarly journals. All scholarly journals included in this literature review were published within the past ten years. The author focused on finding articles connected to reading interventions and ELLs, especially research studies that included early elementary education, as Kinsey Elementary school serves students grades K-3. The scope of research also included studies involving preschool settings and upper elementary grades. This large perimeter of exploration allowed the author to consider several strategies deemed appropriate for educating ELLs.

Three main strategies were found to be highly effective in improving the literacy outcomes of ELLs: family involvement, explicit vocabulary instruction, and the implementation

of a blended learning model. The belief is that when educators at Kinsey Elementary School work collaboratively with colleagues, school leaders, and family members, the MAPS reading scores of ELL students will improve. Growth in ELL students' reading scores will occur because teachers will be implementing evidence-based best practices.

The literature review has been organized by key themes deemed effective in implementing reading interventions for ELLs. The literature review will begin with the importance of family involvement in developing vocabulary and literacy skills for ELL students. Next the literature review will cover the importance reading inventions have in fostering growth in literacy and vocabulary development. The literature review will then focus on explicit vocabulary instruction in small groups during the literacy block. Finally, the literature review will focus on the importance of a blended learning model to improve both vocabulary and literacy skills of ELL students.

Review of the Literature

Parental Engagement

High parental engagement positively impacts preschool children's language abilities, whether the students are ELL are not. Hammer et al. (2016) conducted a study to determine the impact parental engagement had on preschool children's language abilities. Participants in the study included 73 Spanish speaking Latino mothers and their preschool children. The study took place over the course of four months during home visits. The intervention sessions lasted 90 minutes and consisted of interactive reading lessons that encouraged parent-child interactions. The interactive reading lessons focused on mothers engaging their children with questions regarding story illustrations and story elements. Additionally, mothers were encouraged to expand on their children's responses to promote speech development. At the conclusion of the

study, researchers found that children involved in the interactive reading intervention made greater gains in number of new words spoken when compared to preschool students in the control group. Hammer et al.'s (2016) findings suggest that parental engagement has a positive impact on children's language and literacy development.

The importance of children's home language and its relation to student success was also explored by Mancilla-Martinez et al. (2020). In their research, Mancilla-Martinez et al. involved 59 first and third grade students from the southern United States to explore the impact home language has on reading comprehension abilities. The students involved in the study were all identified as dual language learners whose home language was Spanish. Researchers used t-tests to determine if a gap existed between students' English word reading and English receptive vocabulary. Researchers then conducted structured equation modeling to determine the effect home language had on students' reading comprehension abilities. Like the findings of Hammer et al. (2016), home language use was found to have a positive impact on students' reading performance. Notably, Mancilla-Martinez et al. uncovered a gap in English word reading and vocabulary among ELL students. The researchers additionally discovered that English word reading ability was a strong predictor of reading comprehension. The study conducted by Mancilla-Martinez et al. affirms the important role parental engagement plays in positive learning outcomes among students.

Grover et al. (2020) conducted a study involving 464 dual language learners ages three to five to explore whether a shared reading intervention implemented both at home and school would have a positive impact on children's non-native language skills. At the conclusion of the study, the intervention was found to have significant impact on second language skills among the study participants. Notably, students grew in vocabulary development, grammar skills, and

emotional intelligence. Like in Hammer et al. (2016) and Mancilla-Martinez (2020), home involvement was found to have positive impacts on literacy and vocabulary development. In addition, Grover et al. (2020) explored the importance of collaborative home-school interventions. Collaborative home-school interventions have the potential to increase literacy gains among ELL students.

Ramirez (2021) explored the impact maternal responsiveness of Latino mothers had on their bilingual children. The study involved nine mothers and their two-year-old children. Researchers video-taped mother-child interactions over the course of 30 months. The study findings highlighted the positive impact maternal responsiveness had on children's language development. Along with Hammer et al. (2016), Mancilla-Martinez et al. (2020), and Grover et al. (2020), in this study parental engagement was found to positively affect children's learning outcomes. Though Ramirez (2021) explored only language development, this study further supports the notion of involving parents in increasing literary outcomes of children.

Reading Interventions for English Language Learners

Reading interventions have been found to improve literacy scores for ELL students. Bedore et. al (2020) explored the impact the Language and Literacy Together (LLT) intervention would have on Spanish-English bilingual students. The LLT intervention is designed to improve both oral language and literacy abilities among dual language learners. The research study took place in Texas and involved 63 first-grade students. For the duration of eight weeks, students participated in 50 minutes of intervention three times a week. The intervention occurred in small groups of one to five students. The main findings of the study showed that students participating in the intervention made significant gains in both their Spanish and English oral language skills when compared to students in the control group. Furthermore, students

involved in the intervention made gains in reading comprehension. Interestingly, it is important to note that the study found there to be no significant gains in grammatical skills. Bedore et al.'s (2020) research suggests that targeted reading interventions benefit ELL students.

Farnia and Geva (2013) conducted a study to determine whether the Simple View of Reading (SVR) was an effective instructional strategy for ELL students. The six-year study involved 553 ELL students in grades four through six in Ontario, Canada. Schools involved in the study implemented the SVR as their core literacy instruction. Farnia and Geva (2013) compared the rate of growth ELL students made versus native English speakers. Findings from the study showed that on sixth grade reading comprehension tests, ELLs performed lower than their peers who were native English speakers. In fact, the rate of growth in ELLs leveled off whereas the rate of growth among native English speakers continued to rise. Like Bedore et al. (2020) Farnia and Geva (2013) highlight the importance of effective reading instruction. However, Farnia and Geva's (2013) study sheds light on the need to increase the rate of growth among ELL students. The findings from Farnia and Geva's (2013) study imply the need for reading interventions that will improve the rate of growth amongst ELL students.

Considering the impact of teacher's perceptions regarding implementing the Sheltered Instruction Observational Protocol (SIOP) was a research study conducted by Inceli (2015). Inceli (2015) explored whether teachers believed the SIOP model could improve outcomes for ELL students and investigated how teachers implemented the SIOP model within their classrooms. Study participants included ten English language instructors in Turkey. Qualitative research was conducted in the form of teacher interviews. The researchers found that eight instructors believed creating student interest improved learning outcomes. Seven of the teachers interviewed felt that helping students understand context supported higher learning. In addition,

seven instructors believed that providing students with appropriate scaffolding throughout the learning process improved learning outcomes. Like both Bedore et al. (2020) and Farnia and Geva (2013), Inceli (2015) notes the importance of reading strategies designed to improve learning outcomes of ELL students. Unlike the previous studies noted, Inceli (2015) considered how teacher perceptions play in improving learning outcomes for students. Inceli's (2015) study further proposes the need for reading interventions targeted at improving literacy skills of ELL students.

Jacoby and Lesaux (2017) conducted a study that investigated the effects of language and literacy instruction on Latino dual language learners. The study participants included both teachers and students in 20 Head Start classrooms located in the northeastern United States. Over the span of five months researchers utilized The Observation Measure of Language and Literacy Instruction to gather data regarding language use during literacy instruction. Study findings revealed that on average, dual language learners were exposed to an average of 6.7 language and literacy lessons in one instructional day. The study also found that on average, teachers spend 19% of their daily instructional time on teacher-led language and literacy instruction. Furthermore, the study noted that 74% of language and literacy lessons were conducted through whole group instruction, which accounted for the largest type of literacy instruction. Interestingly, the researchers found that 13% of literacy instruction encouraged extended discourse. Like Inceli (2015), Jacoby and Lesaux (2017) explore the role that teachers have in literacy development regarding ELL students. Unlike the studies completed by Bedore et al (2020) and Farnia and Geva (2013), Jacoby and Lesaux (2017) did not explore a specific intervention tool; rather, the study focused on the type and amount of literacy instruction

provided within preschool classrooms. The study's findings further suggest that teachers significantly impact the reading ability of ELL students.

In a 2017 study, Miller et al. examined the effect storytelling activities had on ELL students. Study participants included three Spanish-speaking third grade students receiving English as a second language (ESL) services through their school district. The study took place over the span of eight to 14 weeks in the southeastern United States. The *mis libros* intervention was implemented in one-on-one settings for a duration of 30 minutes. Results of the intervention showed that two of the three students were able to increase the number of words spoken each session with an additional increase in new words spoken. All three of the study participants showed a significant increase in the number of words spoken. One student involved in the study showed academic gains in the general education classroom. In addition to quantitative data, the researchers included qualitative data to determine how study participants felt about the intervention. Students participating in the intervention articulated that they enjoyed the writing component involved and believed that their spelling scores improved. Like Bedore et al. (2020), a specific reading intervention was implemented to improve the literacy skills of ELL students. Both Miller et al. (2017) and Inceli (2015) considered teacher perceptions within their research. However, unlike Farnia and Geva (2013) and Jacoby and Lesaux (2017), Miller et al. (2017) did not examine the effect core literacy instruction had on ELL students. The findings of Miller et al. (2017) further support the notion that reading interventions improve literacy outcomes of ELL students.

Tong et al. (2014) researched the effects of an interdisciplinary intervention involving reading and science had on improving literacy of ELL students. Participants in the study included 56 Spanish-speaking students from southeast Texas. Over the course of 23 weeks,

educators implemented the 5 E model (Engage, Explore, Explain, Elaborate, Evaluate) which integrated reading and writing instruction within the science curriculum. At the close of the study, participants showed a significant gain in both reading and language growth. The study results are consistent with findings from Bedore et al. (2020) and Miller et. al (2017) in which a specific reading intervention is shown to improve literacy scores of ELL students. Likewise, this study shows the impact instruction delivery has on ELL students along with the studies conducted by Farnia and Geva (2013), Inceli (2015), and Jacoby and Lesaux (2017). However, this study is unique in that it explored interdisciplinary intervention. This study further suggests that reading interventions are effective in increasing literacy skills among ELL students.

Exploring the impact the Passport to Literacy intervention had on ELL students' reading abilities was research conducted by Wanzek et al. (2017). The study involved 451 fourth grade students from the United States. For 25 weeks, students participated in a 30-minute small group intervention. The findings showed significant gains in students' reading comprehension. Interestingly, the intervention did not improve students' growth in word reading or vocabulary skills. Resembling the studies conducted by Bedore et. al (2020), Miller et al. (2017), and Tong et al. (2014), reading interventions have been proven to increase the reading abilities of ELL students. Contrary to Farnia and Geva (2013), Inceli (2015) and Jacoby and Lesaux (2017), Wanzek et al. (2017) focused their research on a specific small group reading intervention. The research conducted by Wanzek et al. (2017) once again suggests that reading interventions are an effective means to improving literacy skills of ELLs.

Vocabulary Interventions for English Language Learners

August et al. (2018) examined the effects an explicit vocabulary intervention had on ELL students. The 10-week intervention implemented both embedded and extended vocabulary

instruction. The study involved 187 second-grade Spanish-speaking students. Students involved in the study attended high-poverty urban elementary schools in the southern United States. The results found that students involved in the extended vocabulary instructional intervention made greater gains in their language abilities. The study results indicate that students benefit from explicit vocabulary instruction.

Brooks and Clenton (2021) explored the impact of vocabulary instruction on students' reading comprehension. This study took place in Japan and involved 31 international students ages 11-15. Study findings linked vocabulary knowledge as the strongest factor in reading comprehension as opposed to fluency or decoding skills. Like August et al.'s (2018) study, vocabulary was shown to be an important factor in students' reading achievement. However, unlike the study administered by August et al. (2018), Brooks and Clenton (2021) additionally researched the role of fluency and word decoding. The findings from the study completed by Brooks and Clenton (2021) further support the importance that vocabulary has on literacy development.

In their 2013 research, Cena et al. examined the impact a daily vocabulary intervention had on ELLs. For four years, the study followed 50 first-grade students who spoke Spanish as their first language. Study participants were from schools located in Oregon, Texas, and Washington. Cena et al. (2013) compared whether the Vocabulary Enhanced Systematic and Explicit Teaching Routine intervention or a general vocabulary instruction would produce greater literacy results amongst ELL students. The study found that students participating in the intervention had greater depth of knowledge on comprehension questions. Furthermore, the study found that students participating in the intervention group had higher expressive vocabulary scores. Like August et al. (2020), explicit vocabulary interventions were found to

have a positive outcome on ELLs. Unlike Brooks and Clenton (2021), fluency and word decoding were not examined in the study done by Cena et al. (2013). Once again, Cena et al.'s (2013) study highlights the positive impact vocabulary interventions have on ELLs.

Restrepo et al. (2013) researched whether a bilingual Spanish-English vocabulary intervention was more effective than an English-only vocabulary intervention. The study included 202 Head Start preschool students from the southwestern United States. Following twelve weeks of intervention, the study found that the bilingual vocabulary produced greater gains than the English-only intervention. Like August et al. (2020), Brooks and Clenton (2021), and Cena et al. (2013), vocabulary interventions were found to positively influence ELLs literacy scores. However, Restrepo et al.'s (2013) research was unique in that it explored the implementation of a bilingual intervention. The research done by Restrepo et al. further supports the importance of vocabulary interventions have on improving literacy among ELL students.

Exploring the impact ELLs' native language and second language vocabulary skills have on reading comprehension was a study conducted by Uchikoshi et al. (2018). The study involved 112 first-grade students from northern California. Researchers tested decoding, vocabulary, and narrative abilities in first grade and again in second grade. The results of the study revealed that English vocabulary abilities had a strong impact on English reading comprehension skills. These findings highlight the importance of vocabulary acquisition among ELL students as in August et al. (2018), Brooks and Clenton (2021), Cena et al. (2013), and Restrepo et al. (2013). However, Uchikoshi et al.'s (2018) research did not implement a specific vocabulary intervention; rather, the research looked at data to determine the role vocabulary played in the reading comprehension of ELL students. Uchikoshi et al. (2018) seems to suggest that vocabulary development in ELL students is paramount in improving literacy outcomes.

Blended Learning Model

A blended learning model has proven effective in improving literacy scores of ELL students. A blended learning model involves incorporating teacher-led instruction, small group instruction, independent student work, and technology within a learning environment. Cassady et al. (2018) examined whether the intervention of a computer-assisted learning program would have an impact on ELL students. A total of 1,490 kindergarten and first-grade students in the southwestern United States were involved in the study. The intervention tested was the implementation of the Imagine Learning Program to examine its impact on emergent literacy skills. Students used the software program at least four times a week for 20 minutes. At the close of the study both kindergarten and first grade students showed significant gains in their reading growth. Specific reading domains in which students showed gains included phonological awareness, phonics, reading comprehension, and vocabulary. This study implies that a blended learning model has a positive impact on the reading scores of ELL students.

In a 2018 study Kazakoff et al. tested whether a personalized, blended learning intervention would benefit reading abilities of both ELLs and native English speakers. Participants included 442 ELLs and 442 native English speakers from grades kindergarten through fifth. The study occurred in the midwestern United States. An online program entitled Core 5 was implemented for an average of 50-52 hours during one school year. At the conclusion of the study, ELL students at all grade levels showed significant reading growth. Notably, ELL students made greater academic progress than non-ELL students. Along with Cassady et al. (2018), Kazakoff et al.'s (2018) study showed that a blended learning intervention had a positive effect on ELLs' literacy skills. Kazakoff et al.'s (2018) study is different in that it

explored the effect blended learning interventions have on non-ELLs in addition to ELLs.

Kazakoff et al.'s (2018) implies that a blended learning model is beneficial for ELL students.

The effects of on-line reading support were investigated in a study conducted by Košak-Babuder et al. (2019). Their research took place in Slovenia and involved 280 students ages 11-12 years. Of the participants, 47 students were identified as having dyslexia. The study measured students' reading comprehension through different modalities, including independent reading, computer-assisted read aloud, and oral reading. Study results revealed that when encountering a difficult text, students with dyslexia benefited from computer-assisted reading. Furthermore, computer-assisted reading was more beneficial to students with dyslexia than listening to an adult read aloud. Like Cassady et al. (2018) and Kazakoff et al. (2018), a blended learning model was shown to benefit students. However, Košak-Babuder et al.'s (2019) study is different because they did not involve ELL students. By reasoning from evidence in Košak-Babuder et al.'s (2019) study, a blended learning model can support students' reading comprehension.

Leacox and Jackson (2014) investigated the effects of technology-enhanced read aloud when compared to adult read aloud. In their study, Leacox and Jackson (2014) involved 24 preschool and kindergarten ELL students from the southeastern United States. The study results showed that technology-enhanced read aloud had greater impact than teacher read aloud on students' comprehension. This study is similar to Košak-Babuder et al. (2019) in examining the effects of computer-assisted read aloud. This study is unlike Cassady et al. (2018) and Kazakoff et al. (2018), who implemented specific technology interventions in their research. Leacox and Jackson's (2014) study further affirms the benefits a blended learning model has on literacy outcomes of ELL students.

School Profile

Community Characteristics

Sioux Center is a mid-sized town of 8,273 residents that continues to grow. Sioux Center is located in the northwest corner of Iowa. According to the 2020 U.S. census, 94.5% of the population is white, .4% is Black/African American, American Indians make up .1% of the population, 1.1% of Sioux Center residents are Asian, 2% of residents are mixed race, and 10.7% of the town's population is Hispanic or Latino (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020). The town of Sioux Center has both a private school (grades TK-8) and public school system (grades TK-12).

School District Characteristics

The Sioux Center Community School district includes Kinsey Elementary School (TK-3), Sioux Center Intermediate School (4-5), Sioux Center Middle School (6-8), and Sioux Center High School (9-12). Kinsey Elementary School has an enrollment of 505 students. The total number of students enrolled at Sioux Center Community School District amounts to 1,538. District demographics show that 53.4% of students are white, 41.8% of students are Hispanic, .5% of the student population is Native American, Multi-racial students account for 2.1% of the student population, 1.6% of students are Black/African American, .1% of students are Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, and Asian students account for .5% of the student population. Male students constitute 52.6% of the student population and female students account for 47.4% (State of Iowa, 2022).

The mission of the Sioux Center Community School District is “educating a whole student for a whole lifetime” (Sioux Center Community School District, 2023). Through collaborative efforts involving school leaders, teachers, board members, community members, parents, and students, the district has adopted the Portrait of a Graduate as the school's vision. The vision seeks to prepare students for college, career, and life. The Portrait of a Graduate

includes productive collaboration, skilled communication, community and cultural connections, creativity and innovation, health, and wellness, and determined and empowered learning. Prior to graduating from high school, students are required to prepare a culminating activity highlighting how the Portrait of a Graduate pertains to them personally (Sioux Center Community School District, 2023).

School Building Characteristics

Kinsey Elementary School serves students grades TK-3 with an enrollment of 505 students. When examining the demographics of Kinsey Elementary, 50.7% of students are white, 43.8% are Hispanic, 1% are Native American, 2.8% are multi-racial, 1.2% are Black/African American, .2% of the students are Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, and .4% of the student population are Asian. Male students make up 55% of the student population whereas female students account for 45% of the population.

The Sioux Center Community School District strives to partner with and involve parents in their child's education. At Kinsey Elementary School there are a variety of tools used and opportunities provided to involve parents. The online platform of Seesaw is used to communicate with parents. Parents can view student work and can communicate directly with classroom teachers. Likewise, teachers use Seesaw to share announcements and classroom information with parents. Parents are encouraged to attend the Open House at the start of each school year. Two informative meetings are offered for families wishing to learn more about Kinsey Elementary School during the Open House night. Additionally, parents are encouraged to attend two parent-teacher conferences offered throughout the school year. Furthermore, parents can view student grades online using the Infinite Campus parent portal. In addition, any parent can join the Parent Advisory Committee, which meets once a month in the Kinsey Elementary library. The school

advertises parent meetings through both social media and paper mail. Further means of communication are offered through paper copies of announcements sent home to students, the school website, grade level Facebook accounts, and the Kinsey Elementary Twitter feed.

Student Portfolio and Performance

According to the Iowa schools' performance profile, Kinsey Elementary received an overall acceptable rating of 51.33 out of 100, which is slightly below the state average performance of 54.65 out of 100. When examining subject area data, Kinsey Elementary scored a 48.52 in English Language Arts and a 40.61 in mathematics, which is once again marginally below the state average of 50 (State of Iowa, 2022). In addition to standardized testing, students at Kinsey Elementary School are assessed on their proficiency of grade-level standards.

Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment

Kinsey Elementary School uses the MAPS (Measures of Academic Progress) assessment to track student learning goals. Students complete the assessment three times per year-in the fall, winter, and spring. Each student has a personal learning goal they aim to achieve. Additionally, the FASTbridge (Formative Assessment Systems for Teachers) assessment is administered three times per year in the fall, winter, and spring. Each student aspires to reach grade level benchmarks and/or improve their testing scores. Furthermore, both the STAR (Standardized Test for the Achievement of Reading) reading and math assessment are administered each quarter to assess students' grade equivalency level. Third-grade students complete the ISASP (Iowa Statewide Assessment of Student Progress) assessments to measure their knowledge on academic achievement. Considering the mental health and well-being of students is a high priority at Kinsey Elementary School. Students learn about the Habits of Mind, which connect with the school's vision of Portrait of a Graduate. The Habits of Mind are an age-appropriate tool

enabling elementary students to gauge their social/emotional growth along with the support of teachers.

Professional Development and Teacher Responsibilities

Currently teachers at Kinsey Elementary School use professional development time twice per month to align rubrics and assessments to the Iowa Core learning standards. Previously, teachers had developed proficiency rubrics that assessed student work with the grades of proficient, developing, and beginning. Presently, teachers are improving grade level rubrics and assessments by including an exceeding mark for student grades. Additionally, teachers are developing activities that implement the Habits of Mind into classroom practices. Furthermore, teachers are required to complete two “Warrior Walks” over the course of the school year. “Warrior Walks” enables teachers to observe colleagues conducting lessons they are interested in learning more about or improving their own teaching practices. Following the “Warrior Walks” teachers spend time reflecting on their observation. Moreover, they provide colleagues with helpful feedback related to their observations. Furthermore, Kinsey Elementary has the goal that teachers will “engage in continuous learning as well as seek opportunities for leadership development” (Sioux Center Community School District, 2023).

Needs Assessment

At Kinsey Elementary School the number of Hispanic students has steadily increased from 34% in the year 2018 to 43.8% in 2022 (State of Iowa, 2022). It is important to note that not all Hispanic students require ESL services. However, in the 2022-2023 school year, 169 students at Kinsey were receiving ESL services. Furthermore, ESL students at Kinsey Elementary School underperformed their non-ESL peers on the 2022-2023 MAPS reading

assessment in all literary domains. For this reason, Kinsey Elementary School needs to reevaluate how they service ESL students.

Currently ESL students at Kinsey Elementary School are identified through both a home language survey and the English Language Proficiency Assessment (ELPA) to determine their level of language abilities. Once students' language proficiency has been evaluated, students are provided services based on their language needs. Students scoring near proficient will meet with an ESL teacher once per week to read and discuss books to gain AR (Accelerated Reader) points. Students who demonstrate the need for additional language support receive daily 30-minute instructional support outside of the general education classroom. Presently there are three ESL teachers who meet with small groups of five to seven students. Each grade level has a specific ESL intervention time assigned. ESL instructional support consists of vocabulary development and the use of the Imagine Learning software program. ESL teachers do not work collaboratively with classroom teachers, and there is a disconnect between classroom instruction and ESL instruction, particularly in academic vocabulary being taught. Furthermore, there is no parental involvement regarding ESL services.

A re-evaluation of how we approach educating our ESL students at Kinsey Elementary School is necessary. Not only will a more comprehensive literacy approach benefit ESL students, but it will benefit all students attending Kinsey Elementary School. In their review of recent research regarding ESL students, August (2018) shares that vocabulary support provided in both whole-class and small-group settings benefit ESL students. Implementing an intervention plan that involves classroom teachers and ESL teachers collaborating in teaching explicit vocabulary words in both settings will improve vocabulary development of ESL students. Furthermore, August (2018) points out that connecting to students' home environments will increase literary

outcomes for ESL students. Finally, the studies conducted by Košak-Babuder et al. (2019), Cassidy et al. (2018), Kazakoff et al, (2018), and Leacox and Jackson (2014) all support the implementation of a blended learning approach to improve the literary outcomes of ESL students. Therefore, a comprehensive approach that involves teacher collaboration, parental involvement, and blended learning should be considered in improving the literacy performance of ESL students.

Data Analysis

Data Summary

Data was gathered from the MAPS reading assessment administered during the 2022-2023 school year at Kinsey Elementary. The MAPS assessment is given to students in grades K-3 three times an academic school year (in the fall, winter, and spring). Data from the MAPS reading assessment is used to measure student growth in various literary domains, including foundational skills, language and writing, literature and informational text, and vocabulary use and functions. As shown in Figure 1, Kinsey Elementary School has a large ESL population. Further examination of MAPS data at each grade level (see Figures 2-5) reveals that ESL students underperform non-ESL students in all literary domains.

Figure 1

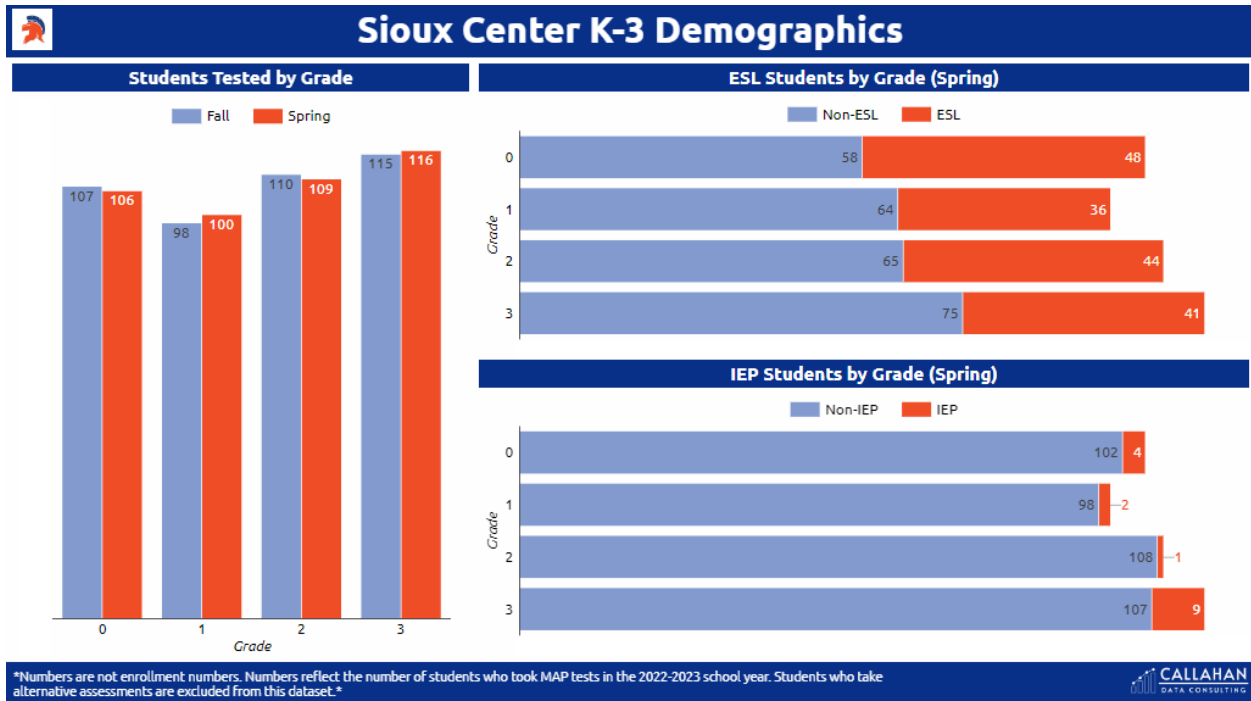


Figure 2

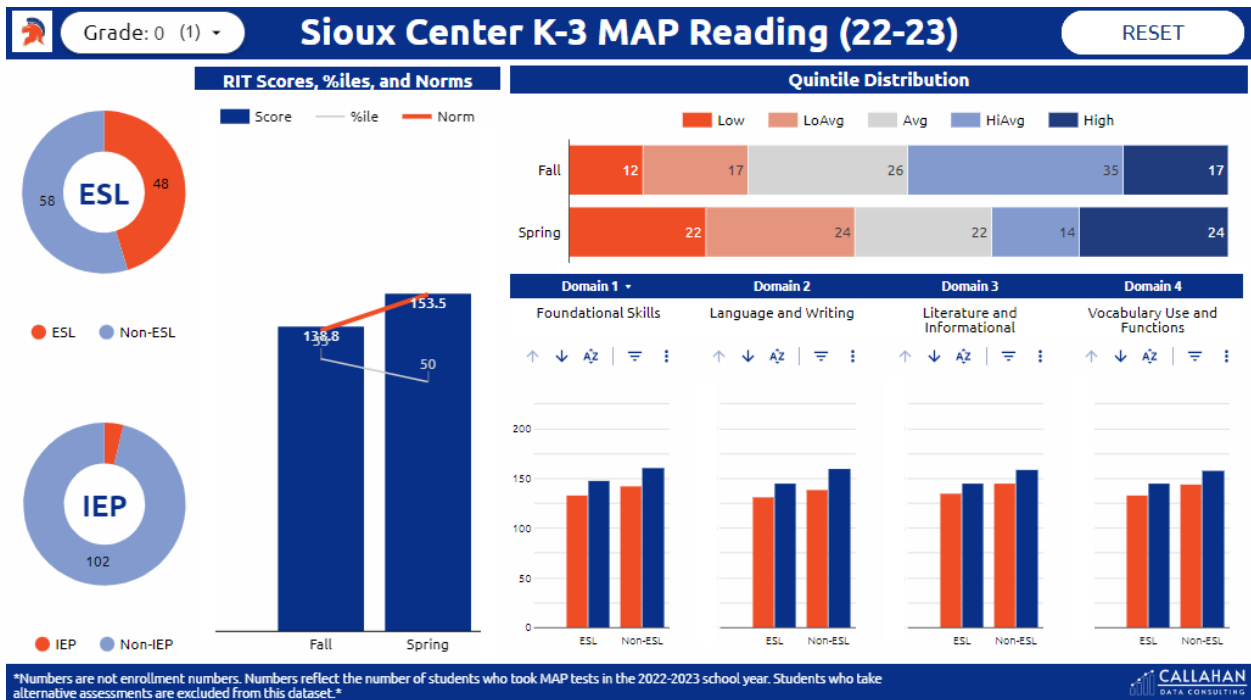


Figure 3

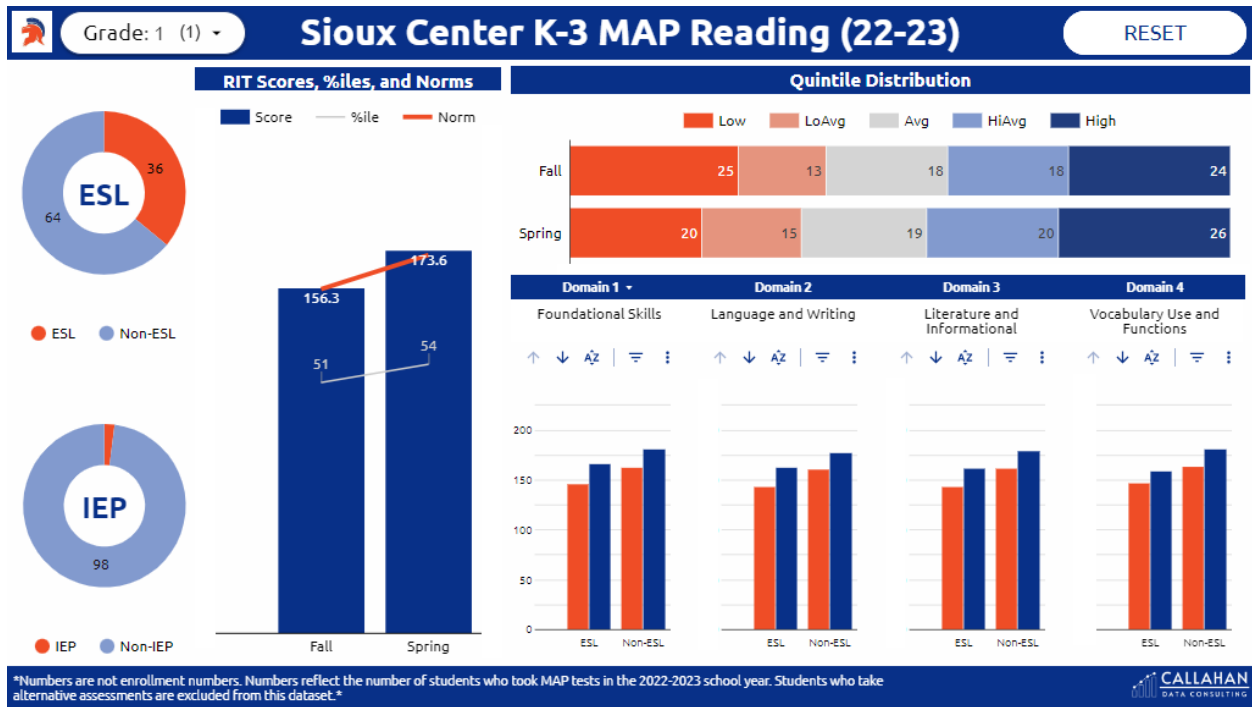


Figure 4

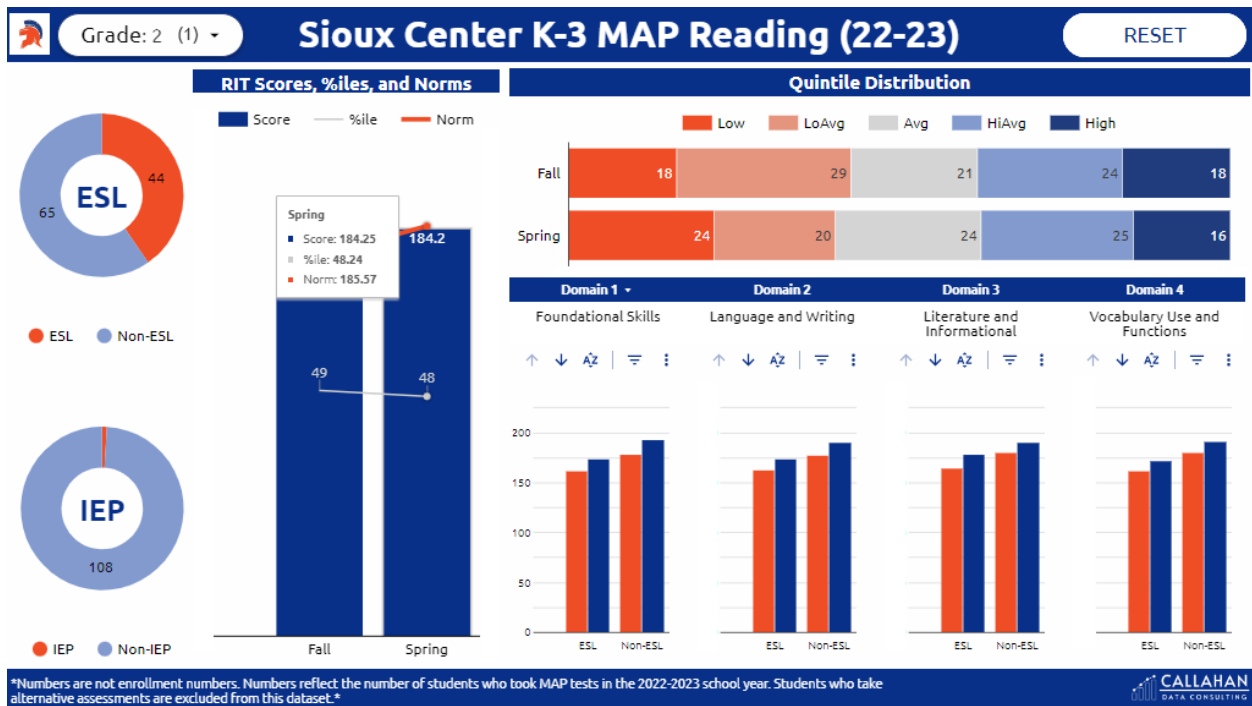
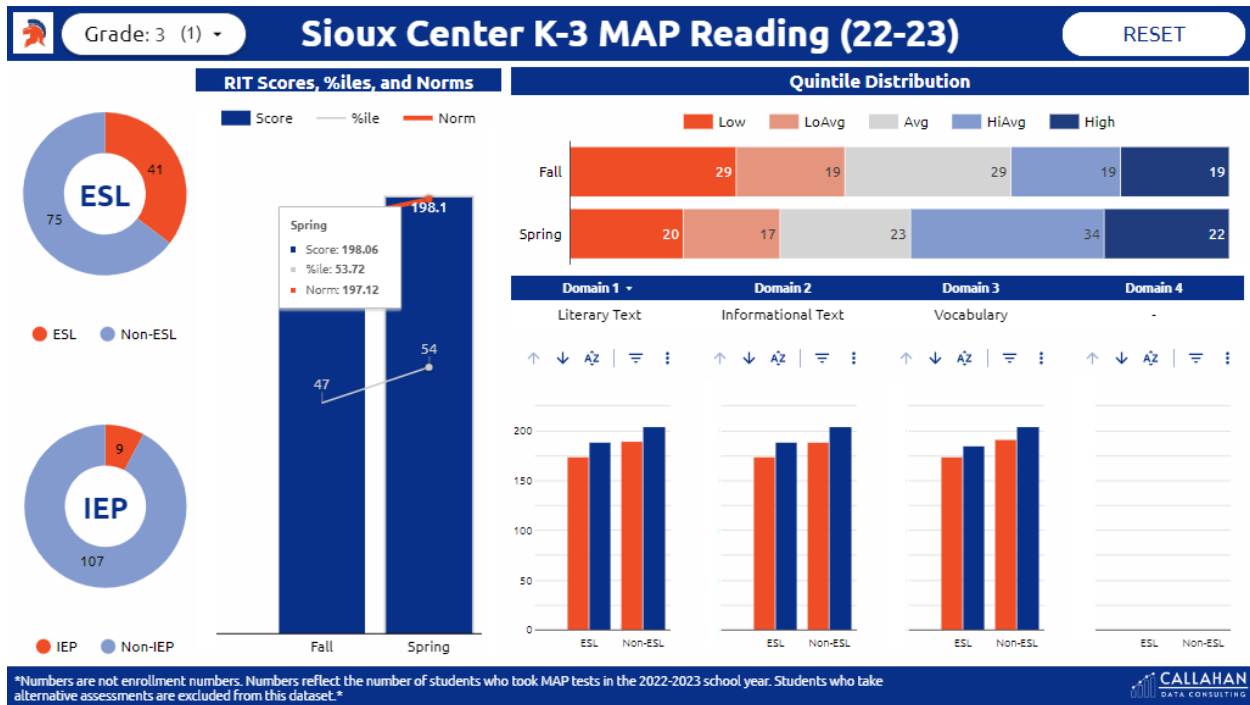


Figure 5



School Strengths

Examination of MAPS assessment data shows that Kinsey Elementary school scores above the normative range in all literary domains. Furthermore, ESL students score above the normative range in all literary domains of the assessment. Additionally, third-grade students moved from 47% to 54% in their overall performance on the MAPS reading assessment (see Figure 5). Likewise, in their overall performance on the MAPS reading assessment, first-grade students advance from 51% to 54% (see Figure 3). In addition, first grade had 25 students testing in the low category during the fall assessment, whereas on the spring assessment five fewer students (20) students achieved a low score (see Figure 3). Among kindergarten students, performance data reveals that 17 students received a high rating on the MAPS reading assessment in the fall and improved to 24 students receiving a high rating in the spring (see Figure 2).

School Challenges

According to the MAPS reading assessment data, ESL students underperform non-ESL students in all literary domains school wide (see Figures 2-5). Closer examination of assessment data displayed that second-grade overall performance on the MAPS reading assessment dropped from 49% to 48% (see Figure 4). Similarly, kindergarten students regressed from an overall performance score of 55% to 50% (see Figure 2).

Assessment Options

Future research and data analysis could include additional assessments such as AIMS-web reading and/or the STAR reading assessment. For this school improvement plan, data collection focused on the MAPS reading assessment given that it breaks reading performance into specific literary domains. Furthermore, as a building Kinsey Elementary uses the MAPS assessment as their primary means for goal setting and data analysis.

Action Plan

Strategies

Following a review of the literature regarding improving literary scores of ESL students, several key themes emerged. The overarching themes included parental involvement, reading interventions, vocabulary interventions, and the implementation of a blended learning model. Considering the key findings from the review of literature and areas in need of improvement at Kinsey Elementary School, a multi-faceted school improvement plan is being proposed. The comprehensive plan will include home/school collaboration, teacher collaboration involving implementing specific reading and vocabulary interventions, and a blended learning approach. In their review of the latest research regarding effective strategies for educating ESL students,

August (2018) recommended implementing small-group intervention, providing teachers with adequate professional development, and connecting to students' home language and culture to improve literary outcomes.

Foremost, the action plan begins with adequate teacher training. In their 2013 study, Cena et al. provided professional development training for teachers implementing vocabulary intervention. Adequate teacher training allowed for the intervention to have a positive impact on ELL students' vocabulary usage (Cena et al., 2013). Prior to the start of the school year, teachers at Kinsey Elementary will be provided with professional development. The teacher training will empower the educators to implement the school improvement plan (see Figure 6). Teachers will receive training on how to effectively implement a blended learning model, be provided with a plan to implement a family engagement intervention, and be informed of future professional development time that will be set aside to allow for teacher collaboration. The joint effort of teachers will be aimed at implementing reading and vocabulary interventions that improve the literacy outcomes of ESL students.

Another key component of the school improvement plan is the involvement of family engagement. As shown in Ramirez (2021), parental engagement has the potential to increase language development amongst ELL students. At Kinsey Elementary School's annual Open House night, three informative meetings will be held in the school's library. Holding three meetings gives parents flexibility to attend a time that is most convenient for them. Translators will be present at the meetings. The parental engagement component at Kinsey Elementary will be called "Book Buddies." Each day students will come home with a book (the same book all week). A book tote will store both the book and a book log for parents to sign (see Figure 7). Students have the option to practice reading their book to their parents, or they can choose to

have their parents read the book aloud to them. Each day the children will return their book to school. Students will receive a sticker for each day that they read at home. Once students complete a whole sticker chart, they will receive rewards such as free books and gift certificates to local restaurants. To eliminate the barrier of language or illiteracy in families, QR codes can be scanned to hear the classroom teacher reading the book aloud. All families will be encouraged to participate in the program; both non-ESL and ESL students can benefit from the program. As found in Grover et al. (2020), a home/school intervention improved vocabulary development, grammar skills, and emotional intelligence amongst ELL students.

Another vital component of the school improvement plan is the strategic planning and collaboration of classroom teachers, ESL teachers, and Title teachers. Each week, the Sioux Center Community School district engages in professional development time known as “Power Hours.” Once a week, students dismiss an hour early, enabling teachers to have dedicated professional learning time. During the “Power Hour” teacher teams will use the Raz-Kids program to choose an appropriate leveled text for their specific intervention groups. The Raz-Kids program offers both a printable version of a text and an online version. Teachers will print the reading text they choose to use for intervention time. The same leveled text will be sent home in students’ “Book Buddy” bags to encourage parental engagement and to improve reading fluency by engaging in repeated readings. For a duration of one school week, students will be reading the same text both at home and during their allotted intervention time. Teachers will use a lesson plan (see Figure 8) to collaboratively choose specific reading and vocabulary interventions. Strategic and explicit vocabulary instruction across subject areas has been shown to improve both reading and vocabulary scores of ELL students (Tong et al., 2014). Research supports the practice of teachers

collaborating to improve literacy outcomes of ESL students in both special programs and in the general education classroom.

The final component of the school improvement plan is the implementation of a blended learning model. In Kazakoff et al. (2018) and Leacox and Jackson (2014), the use of technology in a blended learning approach was found to improve both vocabulary and reading abilities of ESL students. Using the framework of learning rounds, students will be assigned the online Raz-Kids story they are reading during intervention time. The online component of Raz-Kids allows students to hear a story being read aloud with the feature of highlighted text. The implementation of a blended learning approach is aimed at improving fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary skills of ELL students.

Figure 6

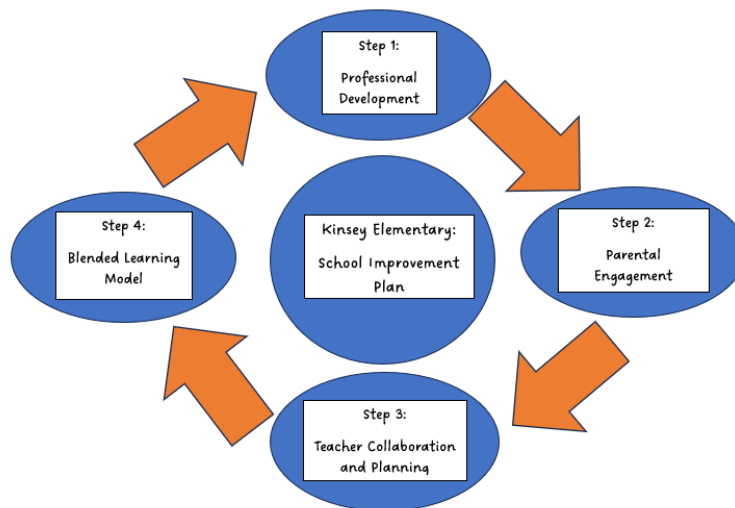


Figure 7

HOME READING LOG Name: _____

Date	Title of Book	Parent Signature
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		
6.		
7.		
8.		
9.		
10.		

Figure 8

TOPIC	Small Group Reading
TEACHER	Kinsey Elementary School
GRADE	2

SAMPLE READING AND VOCABULARY INTERVENTION PLAN

KEY LEARNING(S)	UNIT ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS	OPTIONAL INSTRUCTIONAL TOOLS	
Connect to prior knowledge to identify the main idea of a non-fiction text	How do I identify the main idea of a text?	Online resources available	
MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY
-Build on student's background knowledge by completing a word web	-Complete a Main Idea/Key Details Graphic Organizer	-Work with a partner to use vocabulary words orally. Choose one vocabulary word to draw a picture of.	-Highlight the vocabulary words in the text, discuss with a partner the meaning of the word.
VOCABULARY #1	VOCABULARY #2	VOCABULARY #3	VOCABULARY #4
habitat	camouflage	prey	nocturnal

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

-Friday intervention time will be for a comprehension and vocabulary check. Teachers will determine whether students are ready for a new text.

Implementation of School Improvement Plan

Timeline

To successfully implement the proposed school improvement plan, a strategic timeline is necessary. Prior to the start of the 2023-2024 school year, district leaders will approve a professional development calendar. Likewise, the informational meetings regarding the parental engagement component of the improvement plan will be scheduled and advertised. Professional development days before the start of the school year will be dedicated to informing teachers of the intended improvement plan. Additionally, the professional development time will be focused on empowering teachers to collaborate effectively and learn additional reading and vocabulary strategies that are evidence-based best practices for instructing ESL students. Furthermore, the approved professional development calendar will include the scheduled “Power Hour” time that teachers will use for collaboration and strategic planning of interventions and “Book Buddy” resources. The district will employ the resources of instructional coaches, teacher leaders, and Area Education Agency (AEA) staff to support teachers during the professional development opportunities. Furthermore, teachers within the Sioux Center Community district can access on-line professional development resources developed by district instructional coaches.

Staff Responsibilities

Administrators and Teacher Leaders

Prior to the start of the 2023-2024 school year, district administration, instructional coaches, and teacher leaders will meet during the first week of August. The school leadership team will collaboratively develop the two required professional development days that occur before the new school year begins. Moreover, the leadership team will schedule the focus of weekly “Power Hour” professional development times. The leadership team will acquire resources to empower teachers to implement effective strategies to improve reading and vocabulary interventions. Instructional coaches will be assigned the task of distributing the

“Book Buddy” resources, which include parent logs, informational letters, and book totes to each grade level team.

During the “Power Hour” meetings, teacher leaders will have the responsibility of leading the collaborative planning process. Administrators and instructional coaches will be available to support teachers as needed. Teacher teams can schedule an administrator or instructional coach to provide additional support during collaboration meetings. In the case of not being scheduled to meet with a particular teacher team, administrators and instructional coaches will check in with teams to support and encourage their work.

AEA

The Northwest AEA will provide a half-day training on the first professional development day prior to the start of the school year. The professional development training will focus on effective evidence-based reading and vocabulary interventions for ESL students. Furthermore, the Northwest AEA will be scheduled once per month to provide additional professional development opportunities regarding effective practices for improving literary outcomes of ESL students. Additionally, AEA staff will be available to provide support via email contact to further support teachers.

Progress Monitoring Plan

The MAPS reading assessment will be used to determine whether the school improvement plan has been effective. At the conclusion of the 2023-2024 school year, teachers will analyze data from the spring testing session to determine the interventions’ effectiveness. The school’s data coach will break down the data for teachers to analyze. The school district will dedicate the last three “Power Hour” meetings to interpreting testing data. Following the data analysis, adjustments can be made to the school improvement plan with the goal of making it

more effective. Teacher input will also be an important consideration in making changes to the current school improvement plan. Teachers will be given the opportunity to share both what they feel worked well with the school improvement plan and any challenges they may have faced throughout the school year.

Barriers and Challenges

There are several obstacles to consider regarding the effective implementation of the proposed school improvement plan. Barriers may include reluctant teacher engagement, inadequate planning time, unexpected school closures, and low parental involvement. Teachers must believe in the importance of the proposed plan. Without the willingness of teachers to engage in the school improvement plan, it will fail to become effective. Through the course of the school year, numerous demands are placed on teachers. Therefore, it is imperative that school leaders reserve the dedicated professional development time for teachers to effectively implement the school improvement plan. Another barrier to the implementation of this proposed plan is unexpected school closures. Weather-related school closings, late starts, and early dismissals can have a large impact on student instructional time. Likewise, extended student absences due to illness can also have an impact on the intervention's effectiveness. Finally, without parental engagement, the home piece of this school improvement plan will not be effective.

Conclusion

Improving the literacy outcomes among ELL students is the primary focus of this school improvement plan. The current underperformance of ELL students compared to non-ELL students is problematic at Kinsey Elementary School (*Callahan Data Consulting, 2022*). This plan responds to this problem by acknowledging the importance of family engagement, explicit

vocabulary and reading interventions, and the implementation of a blended learning model. Studies explored within the review of the literature suggest that the main components of the school improvement plan have the potential to increase literary gains among ELL students. Implementing a multi-tiered intervention plan that involves all stakeholders could positively impact not only ELL students but all students attending Kinsey Elementary School.

References

- August, D. (2018). Educating English language learners: A review of the latest research. *The American Educator*, 42(3), 4. <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1192670.pdf>
- August, D., Artzi, L., Barr, C. M., & Francis, D. J. (2018). The moderating influence of instructional intensity and word type on the acquisition of academic vocabulary in young English language learners. *Reading and Writing*, 31(4), 965–989. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11145-018-9821-1>
- Bedore, L. M., Peña, E. D., Fiestas, C. E., & Lugo-Neris, M. J. (2020). Language and literacy together: Supporting grammatical development in dual language learners with risk for language and learning difficulties. *Language Speech and Hearing Services in Schools*, 51(2), 282–297. https://doi.org/10.1044/2020_lshss-19-00055
- Brooks, G., & Clenton, J. (2021). Exploring the importance of vocabulary for English as an additional language learners' reading comprehension. *Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching*, 11(3), 351–376. <https://doi.org/10.14746/ssllt.2021.11.3.3>
- Callahan Data Consulting. (2022). Callahan Data Consulting. Retrieved August 1, 2023, from, <https://www.callahandata.org>
- Cassady, J. C., Smith, L. C., & Simpson, T. J. (2018). Supporting emergent literacy for English language learners with computer-assisted instruction. *Journal of Research in Reading*, 41(2), 350–369. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9817.12110>
- Cena, J., Baker, D. L., Kameenui, E. J., Baker, S. E., Park, Y., & Smolkowski, K. (2013). The impact of a systematic and explicit vocabulary intervention in Spanish with Spanish-speaking English learners in first grade. *Reading and Writing*, 26(8), 1289–1316. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11145-012-9419-y>

Farnia, F., & Geva, E. (2013). Growth and predictors of change in English language learners' reading comprehension. *Journal of Research in Reading, 36*(4), 389–421.

<https://doi.org/10.1111/jrir.12003>

Grøver, V., Rydland, V., Gustafsson, J., & Snow, C. E. (2020). Shared book reading in preschool supports bilingual children's second-language learning: A cluster-randomized trial. *Child Development, 91*(6), 2192–2210. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cdev.13348>

Hammer, C. S., & Sawyer, B. E. (2016). Effects of a culturally responsive interactive book-reading intervention on the language abilities of preschool dual language learners: A pilot study. *NHSA Dialog, 19*(2).

<https://journals.charlotte.edu/dialog/article/download/421/538>

U.S. Department of Education. (2017). Retrieved August 1, 2023, from, <https://www.ed.gov/>

Inceli, O. (2015). The perceptions of English teachers to the SIOP® Model and its impact on limited English proficiency. *Journal of Ethnic and Cultural Studies, 2*(1), 15–28.

<https://doi.org/10.29333/ejecs/13>

Jacoby, J. W., & Lesaux, N. K. (2017). Language and literacy instruction in preschool classes that serve Latino dual language learners. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 40*, 77–86. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecresq.2016.10.001>

Kazakoff, E. R., Macaruso, P., & Hook, P. (2018). Efficacy of a blended learning approach to elementary school reading instruction for students who are English learners. *Educational Technology Research and Development, 66*(2), 429–449. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11423-017-9565-7>

- Košak-Babuder, M., Kormos, J., Ratajezak, M., & Pižorn, K. (2019). The effect of read-aloud assistance on the text comprehension of dyslexic and non-dyslexic English language learners. *Language Testing*, *36*(1), 51–75. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0265532218756946>
- Leacox, L., & Jackson, C. W. (2014). Spanish vocabulary-bridging technology-enhanced instruction for young English language learners' word learning. *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy*, *14*(2), 175–197. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468798412458518>
- Ludwig, C., Guo, K., & Georgiou, G. (2019). Are reading interventions for English language learners effective? A meta-analysis. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, *52*(3), 220–231. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022219419825855>
- Mancilla-Martinez, J., Hwang, J. S., Oh, M. J., & McClain, J. B. (2020). Early elementary grade dual language learners from Spanish-speaking homes struggling with English reading comprehension: The dormant role of language skills. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, *112*(5), 880–894. <https://doi.org/10.1037/edu0000402>
- Miller, R. K., Mackiewicz, S. M., & Correa, V. I. (2017). A multi-modal intervention for English language learners: Preliminary results. *Education and Treatment of Children*, *40*(2), 209–232. <https://doi.org/10.1353/etc.2017.0010>
- National Center for Education Statistics. (2023, May 24). *Condition of Education 2023*. <https://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2023144>
- Ramirez, R. (2021). Latino mothers' responsiveness and bilingual language development in young children from 24 to 36 Months. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, *50*(3), 459–467. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-021-01167-4>
- Restrepo, M. A., Morgan, G. J., & Thompson, M. M. (2013). The efficacy of a vocabulary intervention for dual-language learners with language impairment. *Journal of Speech*

Language and Hearing Research, 56(2), 748–765. [https://doi.org/10.1044/1092-4388\(2012/11-0173\)x](https://doi.org/10.1044/1092-4388(2012/11-0173)x)

Sioux Center Community School District. (2023). Retrieved July 17, 2023, from, <https://www.scwarriors.org>.

State of Iowa. (2022). *Department of Education - Iowa School Performance Profiles*. Retrieved July 17, 2023, from, <https://www.iaschoolperformance.gov/ECP/Home/Index?y=2022>

Tong, F., Irby, B. J., Lara-Alecio, R., & Koch, J. (2014). Integrating literacy and science for English language learners: From learning-to-read to reading-to-learn. *Journal of Educational Research*, 107(5), 410–426. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220671.2013.833072>

Uchikoshi, Y., Yang, L., & Liu, S. (2018). Role of narrative skills on reading comprehension: Spanish–English and Cantonese–English dual language learners. *Reading and Writing*, 31(2), 381–404. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11145-017-9790-9>

US Census Bureau. (2023, July 3). *Census.gov*. [Census.gov](https://www.census.gov/). <https://www.census.gov/>

Wanzek, J., Petscher, Y., Otaiba, S. A., Rivas, B., Jones, F. G., Kent, S. C., Schatschneider, C., & Mehta, P. D. (2017). Effects of a yearlong supplemental reading intervention for students with reading difficulties in fourth grade. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 109(8), 1103–1119. <https://doi.org/10.1037/edu0000184>