

School and District Leadership for Long-Term English Learners:

An Interview Study

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List of Abbreviations

ACCESS for ELLs	Assessing Comprehension and Communication in English State-to-State for English Language Learners
DLL	Dual Language Learner
ELD	English Language Development
ELP	English Language Proficiency
EL/ELL	English Learner/English Language Learner
ELP	English Language Proficiency
ESL	English as a Second Language
ESOL	English for Speakers of Other Languages
LEP	Limited English Proficient
LTEL/LTELL	Long-Term English Learner/Long-Term English Language Learner
MCA	Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment
MDE	Minnesota Department of Education
MTAS	Minnesota Test of Academic Skills
RAEL	Recently Arrived English Learners
RFEP	Reclassified Fluent English Proficient
SIOP	Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol
SLIFE	Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education

Abstract

Purpose: In recent years, there has been growing awareness among educators and researchers about long-term English learners (LTELs). Unfortunately, there is limited information on how leaders are supporting their LTELs, particularly at the high school level, or on these students' key characteristics in Minnesota. The purpose of this study was to explore how district and school leaders identify and support LTELs in Minnesota high schools, as well as to explore key characteristics of the state's LTELs.

Research Methods: This qualitative study examined data from 17 interviews with school and district leaders across eight school districts in Minnesota, as well as de-identified student demographic information and academic performance data from the Minnesota Department of Education.

Findings: This study identified four key findings: (a) No leaders identified a formal districtwide definition for LTELs, with some leaders citing little to no familiarity with the term "LTEL"; (b) LTELs represent nearly 40 percent of Minnesota's high school EL population. The majority of LTELs in study districts reached Levels 3 and 4 on the ACCESS assessment, with listening as their strongest area and speaking as their weakest domain; (c) Leaders indicated that a primary barrier for LTELs is that they are not receiving the instruction they need in general education classrooms; (d) Leaders primarily reported meeting their LTELs' needs through co-taught instruction, school-district collaborations, and strong high school EL staff.

Conclusions and Implications: This study concludes that a first step in addressing LTELs' needs would be for district leaders to establish and communicate a definition for LTELs so that decisions about serving those students can be made with consistency. In addition, district and school leaders need to seek ways to collaborate to address diverse EL needs at the secondary level, including reviewing student schedules and school programming, hiring EL staff, and reviewing EL instructional models. Leadership preparation programs can also assist in improving LTELs' education by including content about the diversity of the EL student population, the process of EL language acquisition, language assessments, and how to support a schoolwide focus on academic language.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Background and Context

Over three decades after the Supreme Court's ruling in *Lau v. Nichols* that school districts are responsible for meeting the needs of their students identified as English learners (ELs) (Lau v. Nichols, 1974), the academic achievement gap between ELs and their non-ELs peers stubbornly persists across the nation (Hussar et al., 2020). The EL student population, however, includes students with different education experiences (Sugarman, 2020) and linguistic backgrounds (U.S. Department of Education, Office of English Language Acquisition, 2017), each of which represent varied needs when it comes to ensuring ELs' academic success and progress toward English language proficiency. For example, the EL student population includes students with limited or interrupted formal education (SLIFE) and recently arrived English learners (RAEL), as well as ELs who are immigrant and refugee youth or migratory children (Minnesota Department of Education, 2018b). In addition to these EL student subgroups, states, districts, and schools are increasingly recognizing that many ELs have spent the majority – if not all – of their time in U.S. schools. Known as long-term ELs (LTELs), existing models of education have failed to ensure that these students have attained full English proficiency by the time they reach high school.

Existing research has documented how LTELs represent an often-overlooked student population. For example, Menken, Kleyn and Chae (2012) write that “despite the reality that large numbers of such students [LTELs] currently attend U.S. schools, there has been practically no research conducted about them to date, nor do specialized

educational programs exist to meet their needs” (p. 22). Kim and García (2014) describe the research base on LTELs as “scant” while Olsen (2014) notes that “it is particularly striking that this group of students has remained unnoticed and their needs unaddressed in a time of strong accountability measures, intense scrutiny of student achievement, and major school improvement initiatives designed to meet the needs of ‘all students’” (p. 3).

The limited LTEL research that has been conducted to date, however, has found that LTELs face unique challenges in reaching academic success (Olsen, 2014). In particular, while these students are often orally bilingual, they have limited academic literacy skills in English (Menken et al., 2012). Flores, Batalova, and Fix (2012), who define LTELs as students in EL status for five or more years, found that LTELs in Texas lag behind both their EL and non-EL peers academically in every grade level and are less likely to enroll in postsecondary institutions.

While national data on this subpopulation of students are not available, scholars estimate that between 50–70 percent of ELs in secondary schools were born in the U.S., which counters the image of EL students being primarily immigrants or refugees (Kim & García, 2014). Menken and colleagues (2012) report that LTELs represent about one-third of secondary ELs in New York City, while Olsen (2010) found that LTELs represent the majority (59 percent) of ELs in Grades 6–12 in California. Olsen (2014) argues that the large number of LTELs “is the starkest evidence of a school system still too unaware, ill prepared, and inadequately focused on the needs of ELLs” (p. 3).

Unfortunately, there is limited information on the impact that school leaders can have on academic outcomes for LTELs or, for that matter, ELs. In addition, while there is

a substantial body of knowledge focused on supporting ELs at the elementary level (Short & Fitzsimmons, 2007), less is known about how to support these students in high schools, where LTELs are concentrated (Menken et al., 2012). While there are some recent studies about leadership for ELs (which I review in Chapter 2), scholars note that “the role that leaders do or could play in the learning of EL students has been relatively absent from research conversations” (Elfers & Stritikus, 2014, p. 307). Menken (2013) also notes that “there is great demand from educators in the field for further information about how to serve this population of emergent bilinguals...who account for a significant proportion of the emergent bilingual population at the secondary level” (p. 457).

In Minnesota, LTELs also represent an area of concern for educators. Meeting notes from a 2016 EL Stakeholder Interest Group (ELSIG), hosted by the Minnesota Department of Education, indicate that “LTELs was the topic chosen by most ELSIG members at the December 14, 2015 ELSIG meeting in response to a survey of topics on which ELSIG members wanted to focus” (MDE, 2016b). The state does not have a formal definition of LTELs and none of the district leaders participating in the 2015 ELSIG meeting indicated that their district had a formal definition except for one, which defined an LTEL as “a student who has been eligible for EL services for at least six consecutive years.” Therefore, the characteristics of Minnesota’s LTELs are largely unknown, including how many are enrolled in the state, their language and cultural backgrounds, and where they are concentrated in terms of grade level and language proficiency, for example.

The Importance of English Language Proficiency

In the push toward helping students attain English language proficiency (ELP) – as defined by standardized language assessments, discussed shortly – it is worth evaluating how such an effort benefits ELs. One way to better understand the impact of attaining English proficiency on student outcomes is to look at how ELs compare to *former* ELs (also known as Reclassified Fluent English Proficient students, or RFEP). A few studies that have investigated these two groups compared math and reading scores on standardized assessments between ELs and RFEPs, and have found that ELs to underperform compared to RFEP students (Abedi & Herman, 2010; Painter & Flores, 2013). In particular, Abedi and Herman (2010) report that ELs’ scores were “considerably lower” than both RFEP students and their English-only peers (p. 729).

Painter and Flores (2013) found similar results, and also reported that ELs are less likely than RFEP students to finish high school. As they concluded, “When compared to those students that were reclassified at some point during elementary or middle school, [ELs] perform much worse on standardized tests and are less likely to finish high school successfully” (pp. 128–129). In fact, of their sample of all students within the Los Angeles Unified School District, the authors found that RFEP students performed similarly to English-only students across measures of 8th grade math and reading scores, AP course taking in high school, and passing the state’s high school exit exam. Moreover, RFEP students were less likely to drop out than English-only students or their EL peers.

Beyond K–12 achievement, research has further documented that fewer ELs enroll in postsecondary than RFEPs (or their English-only peers). For example, Johnson (2019) explained that “the college enrollment rate of ELs and young adults with limited English proficiency is less than half the rate of never-ELs and RFEPs, and ELs’ bachelor’s degree completion rate is as low as 12%” (p. 2).

Such student outcomes have important implications for the future success of all ELs as they move beyond K–12 and/or postsecondary schooling and into the workforce. For example, research has found that female high school graduates earn \$120,000–\$244,000 more in lifetime earnings as compared to female high school dropouts, and the differential is even greater for males and college graduates (Levin et al., 2007). As Johnson (2017) argued, fully supporting ELs benefits “not only Minnesota’s education system but the state’s future workforce. Educational policies that are meaningful, relevant, and inclusive to [sic] ELs are critical to their achievement, integration, and future leadership alongside their peers” (p. 57).

Minnesota’s English Learner Classification

The Minnesota Department of Education (MDE, 2017, 2018) defines an English learner as a student who: (a) uses a language other than English (as declared by a guardian on the Minnesota Language Survey); and (b) lacks the English skills needed to “participate fully in academic classes taught in English” (MDE, 2018, p. 4), based on language assessments and input from teachers and parents. For students in Minnesota, being classified as an EL means that the student has access to school and district services to support both language development and access to grade-level content. Such services

might include “a variety of programs, ranging from pullout to co-taught ESL instruction to a variety of dual language and immersion programs” (MDE, 2016a, p. 1).

Of note is that for school districts in Minnesota, the number of enrolled ELs affects the amount of supplementary state revenue allocated to the district in order to support the needs of ELs (MDE, 2018). In particular, state funding is allocated to districts based on the number of ELs who have attended Minnesota public schools¹ for fewer than seven years and who have been served through EL programming in the current fiscal year. Thus, schools with ELs who have attended US schools for *seven years or more* – in other words, LTELs – no longer receive additional state funding for these students, although they are still considered part of the EL subgroup.

According to the state’s definition of *English learner*, ELs represented 8.6 percent of Minnesota’s enrolled K–12 public school students in the 2019–20 school year ($n=75,018/867,999$) (Minnesota Department of Education [MDE], 2019a). This reflects an increase from 7.6 percent of the state’s K–12 population over the prior 10 years, since the 2009–10 school year ($n=62,810/822,697$) (MDE, 2009). While Spanish is spoken by the majority of EL students in 38 states (Ruiz Soto, Hooker, & Batalova, 2015), no home language other than English is spoken by the majority of Minnesota’s students. Specifically, among the students for whom English is not the primary home language, the most common home languages in 2019–20 included Spanish (35 percent), Somali (19 percent) and Hmong (14 percent) (MDE, 2019b).

¹ ELs must have “generated fewer than seven years of average daily membership (ADM) in Minnesota public schools” (Minnesota Department of Education, 2018, p. 12)

Unfortunately, the growing EL student population in Minnesota lags behind non-ELs on multiple measures of academic success. For example, results from Minnesota’s 2019 accountability tests (i.e., the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments [MCA-III] and Minnesota Test of Academic Skills [MTAS-III])² show that ELs do not reach levels of math and reading proficiency comparable to their non-EL peers. That is, while 56 percent of all students met or exceeded grade-level math standards in 2019, only 18 percent of ELs did so, an achievement gap of 38 percentage points. In reading, 60 percent of all students met or exceeded grade-level standards, compared to 14 percent of ELs, an achievement gap of 46 percentage points (MDE, 2019d). As further evidence of the achievement gap between ELs and non-ELs, only 66 percent of Minnesota’s ELs graduated in 2018; this was lower than the graduation rate of all students in the state (83 percent) and economically disadvantaged students in the state (70 percent), though it was higher than the graduation rate of students with disabilities (62 percent) (U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, 2018).

Accurately Defining and Assessing the EL Subgroup

Within the discussion of the scope of the achievement gap, it is necessary to acknowledge that how the very subgroup of ELs is defined distorts the achievement gap between ELs and non-ELs (Linguanti, 2001; Kieffer et al., 2008). Unlike student subgroups such as *race/ethnicity* and *special education*, *English learner* is not a fixed

²² The MCA-III is the state’s standardized academic assessment. The MTAS-III is the state’s alternative assessment for students with significant cognitive disabilities.

subgroup; that is, EL students are exited from the group precisely when they achieve English language proficiency. The achievement gap will therefore persist if English-proficient EL students are continually being exited from the EL subgroup. Umansky and colleagues (2017) explain that “To address this problem, researchers and policy makers are increasingly using a framework that holds the EL subgroup stable by defining a group of students as *ever-EL*” (p. 78) Such a framework accounts for the language growth attained by reclassified students by comparing all students who were ever classified as EL to those who were never classified as EL (non-ELs). While such a framework is beyond the focus of this research, it is important to note this area of concern with how the EL student subgroup is defined and a possible path forward in doing so more accurately.

In addition, the student assessments used to track student achievement may not in fact accurately capture the true content knowledge of ELs. Rather, ELs’ lower levels of ELP “depresses their performance on most tests, thus influencing the accuracy of the test as a measure of their content knowledge” (Abedi & Dietel, 2004, p. 783). Research has found that modifying or simplifying the language of test items can improve EL achievement by 10–20 percent, without reducing the rigor of the assessment (Abedi & Dietel, 2004). Therefore, while the language complexity of student assessments does not fully explain the large achievement gap between ELs and non-ELs, the measurement accuracy of such assessments is an important aspect to consider when determining the success – or lack thereof – of EL programming.

Long-Term English Learners

While there is no formal definition for LTELs, neither among researchers nor at the federal level, there have been recent efforts to better understand this student population, with definitions usually describing LTELs as students who have been classified as ELs in U.S. schools for five, six, or seven years or more. Most commonly, LTELs are defined in the literature as students who have been enrolled in U.S. schools for seven years or more without having reached English proficiency (Callahan & Shifrer, 2016; Freeman et al., 2003; Haas et al., 2014; Kim & García, 2014; Menken & Kleyn, 2010). However, some research has identified LTELs as students classified as ELs for six years or more (Olsen, 2014; REL West, 2016; Wise et al., 2018), while others use the five year criteria (Flores et al., 2012; Johnson, 2017).

Olsen (2014) includes additional criteria in her definition of LTELs. That is, in addition to defining LTELs as ELs who have been enrolled in U.S. schools for six years or more, she states that LTELs are struggling academically and have “stalled” in their progress toward ELP. Specifically, Olsen writes that “‘being stuck’ – academic struggles and lack of progress toward English proficiency – is the key to defining Long Term ELLs, not the number of years it takes them to become English proficient” (p. 4).

At the state level, only California holds a formal definition for LTELs, which it put in place in 2012 and amended in 2015 (California S. 750, 2015) to include any EL student who:

- is enrolled in any of grades 6 to 12, inclusive;
- has been enrolled in schools in the United States for 6 years or more;
- has remained at the same English language proficiency level for 2 or more consecutive prior years, or has regressed to a lower English language proficiency

level, as determined by the specified English language development test, or a score determined by the Superintendent of Public Instruction on any successor test; and

- for a pupil in any of grades 6 to 9, inclusive, scored far below basic or below basic on the specified English language arts standards-based achievement test, or a score determined by the Superintendent on any successor test.

This criteria, in other words, uses the length of time an EL student has been in U.S. schools (six years or more), as well as indicators of the student’s progress toward ELP and their academic achievement in English language arts.

At the federal level, recent guidelines from the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) require districts receiving Title III funding to track the number and percentage of ELs who have not been reclassified as English-proficient within five years of being classified as an EL student (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015). However, the legislation does not explicitly discuss or define LTELs. However, while states must provide this information in a biannual report to the U.S. Department of Education, “there is no mandate to report this number publicly alongside other data reported for accountability purposes, nor to use this category to report on student outcomes” (Sugarman, 2020, p. 14).

As educators and researchers move toward better understanding who LTELs are, it is necessary to reflect on the implications of using a new label to describe and define students. As with many labels used to “classify” students, “the LTEL label was created in an effort to improve educational outcomes for students, drawing educators’ awareness to the unique needs of a particular group of students” (Thompson, 2015, p. 2). In moving toward a more widely accepted definition of LTELs, however, Thompson (2015)

cautions that there can be dangers in creating labels as well, and that “it is important to remember how the categories we construct can blind us to students’ abilities” (p. 38).

Menken, Kleyn and Chae (2012) use the LTEL/LTELL label in their research while simultaneously problematizing its use, explaining that the label may perpetuate deficit-oriented perceptions of these ELs. They write that:

‘Long-term English language learner’ (LTELL) is the administrative term used by the New York City Department of Education and elsewhere. We find the term problematic, as we realize that the LTELL label may frame students as deficient. It results from English language proficiency testing, which, when coupled with deficit views of emergent bilinguals students, makes for a potentially dangerous and incomplete label... We use this term not only because it is the widely adopted and recognized administrative term, but also because we see it as descriptive of the students’ inadequate experiences in school; we do not intend it to propagate a negative perception of the students themselves (p. 122).

Given the need for a more nuanced understanding of the broad EL student population, I seek to shed light on needed areas of research for LTELs, while also acknowledging that the LTEL label may portray these students’ limitations rather than their strengths. Continuing the discussion on LTELs requires that we also continue the conversation about our use of this term, and that we revise and reassess its use along the way.

Problem Statement

Not only is there an academic achievement gap between ELs and non-ELs, but research suggests that LTELs lag even further behind their other EL peers academically. Limited research on LTELs and on how leaders can help meet their needs in secondary schools means that these students are without the supports they need to reach their full

academic potential or full English language proficiency. More information on LTELs' needs and school leadership for LTELs is needed.

Study Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to explore how district and school leaders identify and support LTELs in Minnesota high schools. Specifically, my research questions are:

1. How, if at all, do education leaders in Minnesota define who is considered an LTEL student?
2. How do LTELs compare to other ELs across demographic characteristics and measures of academic success, academic engagement, and English language proficiency?³
3. What do education leaders identify as barriers for LTELs in attaining English language proficiency?
4. How do education leaders report supporting LTELs' academic and English language development?

Defining Key Terminology

For clarity, I provide a few definitions of key terminology that I will use throughout my study. I provide a list of acronyms used in this work on page iv.

ACCESS for ELLs. ACCESS (officially known as “ACCESS for ELLs 2.0”) is a large-scale ELP assessment administered to students in K–12 who have been identified as ELs. It is given annually in Minnesota (as well as other states) to monitor students'

³ I will use districts' formal LTEL definitions, if available, to address this RQ. Absent a formal definition, I will define LTELs as “students eligible for EL services for seven years or more,” which is consistent with much of the literature.

progress in acquiring academic English. ACCESS assesses each of the four language domains of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The ACCESS assessment is only available to WIDA Consortium member states.⁴

English Language Proficiency (ELP). In Minnesota, an EL student is determined to have reached ELP once they receive an overall composite score of 4.5 on the ACCESS assessment, as well as a score of at least 3.5 on three of the four domains of reading, writing, speaking and listening⁵ (Minnesota Department of Education, 2017b). At this point, the student exits EL services and their status is changed from an EL student to a *reclassified fluent English proficient* (RFEP) student.

English Learners. Throughout this paper, I use the term “English learner” (EL) to describe students who are not yet proficient in English per the Minnesota Department of Education’s criteria. However, these students are also identified in the literature as English language learners (ELLs), Limited English Proficient (LEP) students, Dual Language Learners (DLLs), English as a Second Language (ESL) students, multilingual learners, and emergent bilinguals, among other terms and acronyms. These terms may appear in the cited works of authors that are used throughout this study.

General Education Teachers. I use the term “general education teachers” to refer to teachers who primarily teach in designated content area classrooms, such as

⁴ As of July 2020, 40 states and territories were part of the WIDA Consortium, including: Alabama, Alaska, Colorado, Delaware, District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Missouri, Montana, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, North Carolina, North Dakota, Northern Mariana Islands, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, U.S. Virgin Islands, Utah, Vermont, Virginia, Wisconsin, and Wyoming, as well as the Bureau of Indian Education and the Department of Defense Education Activity.

⁵ More information is provided in this chapter as part of RQ2.

social studies, science, math, and English. Other terms that are often used for these teachers – which may be used interchangeably in this study or by other authors who are cited in this work – include “mainstream teachers” or “content-area teachers.”

Secondary Schools. I will use the term “secondary schools” to refer to what are traditionally known as high schools in the U.S., or Grades 9–12. Other scholars may also include middle schools (often Grades 6–8) or junior high schools (often Grades 7–8) as part of what is conceptualized as secondary schooling. For example, a recent report from the Institute of Education Sciences (Kena et al., 2016) defined *secondary school* as “a school comprising any span of grades beginning with the next grade following an elementary or middle school (usually 7, 8, or 9) and ending with or below grade 12. Both junior high schools and senior high schools are included” (p. 305). However, because of the unique needs facing high school EL students, I focus on Grades 9–12 in this study.

Chapter 1 Summary and Overview of Study Chapters

In this chapter, I discussed why more information on LTELs’ needs and school leadership for LTELs is needed in the field and in the literature, followed by the purpose of my study and the four research questions that guided my work. For context, I provided an overview of ELs in Minnesota and how LTELs are currently defined in the literature, including critiques of the term “LTEL.” I also provided definitions of key terms that I use throughout my study.

In Chapter 2, I present my review of three bodies of literature that helped to inform my understanding of the research questions, including: (a) district and school leadership as a whole and for ELs in particular, (b) barriers that EL students face in

attaining ELP, and (c) current models of EL instruction in the United States. I also present the conceptual framework that I used to guide my study and my analysis.

In Chapter 3, I discuss my study methodology. I explain my use of a qualitative research approach, including 17 interviews with school and district leaders across eight school districts in Minnesota between June–October 2017. I also obtained de-identified student data from MDE for LTELs, other ELs, and non-ELs in order to examine select demographics and academic and language outcomes. In this chapter, I also discuss my study’s development, how I established “trustworthiness” in my research, and the study’s methodological limitations and delimitations.

In Chapter 4, I provide my findings for each of my research questions, drawing from the interview data as well as the student data. Findings provide insights into leaders’ definitions of or awareness about their LTEL students, how LTELs’ academic and language outcomes compare to other ELs, barriers that leaders perceive to be factors that limit LTELs’ progress, and how leaders report supporting their LTELs in high school.

Finally, I present my study’s conclusions by each of the four research questions, followed by my discussion of how these findings connect to the literature and how my research contributes to the existing knowledgebase across four broad areas: recognizing and defining LTELs as an EL student subgroup, understanding LTEL student outcomes, addressing instructional gaps for LTELs in content-area instruction, and creating intentional and robust systems of support for LTELs. Based on my findings and analysis, I conclude by offering recommendations for district and school leaders, education leadership preparation programs, and areas for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

To inform my study on how education leaders define and support LTELs in Minnesota high schools, I reviewed three primary bodies of literature. First, I reviewed the literature on district and school leadership to provide a context for how leadership supports student learning – broadly and for ELs in particular. Second, I reviewed the literature on the barriers that ELs face in attaining English language proficiency (ELP) to better understand the factors that play a role in shaping a student’s path linguistically and academically. Finally, I reviewed the literature on the current models of EL instruction in the U.S. to gain a deeper understanding of the various approaches leaders used in schools – and what the program outcomes are for students. As part of this review, I also present the conceptual framework that I used to guide my study and my analysis, informed and shaped by the literature presented in this chapter.

Prior to designing my study, I conducted an initial review of the literature as a way to explore possible areas of research based on “gaps” in the existing literature. Following data collection, I revisited the literature in order to better understand salient topics that emerged from my interviews (e.g., co-teaching) and to include new and relevant literature that had emerged in the two years since my initial review. My final review included research published within the last 30 years (1990–2020) from peer-reviewed professional journals, books, reports, and briefs from professional organizations. The primary databases I used to find these materials included Academic Search Premier, JSTOR, ProQuest, and SAGE Journals.

The Role of District and School Leadership in Supporting Student Achievement

Much of the literature on student academic outcomes has demonstrated the important and positive impact that high-quality teacher instruction can have on improving student outcomes (Rivkin et al., 2005). In recent decades, however, the role of district and school leaders has gained increasing attention from scholars investigating the many links to student achievement (Louis et al., 2010). In 2004, scholars conducting an extensive review of the research found that “leadership is second only to classroom instruction among all school-related factors that contribute to what students learn at school” (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004, p. 5).

Together, district and school leaders are “influential players in a systems approach to education reform” (Sanders, 2014, p. 234). Several scholars have investigated this important link between district and school leaders, particularly with regard to school reform (Chrispeels et al., 2008; Sanders, 2014). Such district-school partnerships can take on a variety of forms. For example, one case study found that an effective approach to district-school partnerships is through school leadership teams (SLTs), which consisted of school-level members as well as a district liaison (Chrispeels et al., 2008). Study results showed that the SLTs began to develop “shared mental models” about their work related to leadership tasks, or, in other words, shared understandings about how their work related to school and district goals and actions. Meanwhile, a quantitative study by Epstein, Galindo, and Sheldon (2011) explored the impact of district and school leadership actions on a reform initiative related to school-based programs of family and community involvement. The authors found that “consistent assistance from districts and

persistent work by school teams produced more specific activities for family and community involvement over time” (p. 484). Examples of ways in which districts facilitated the work of school leaders and school leadership teams included writing a leadership plan, identifying a budget, facilitating school teams and organizing regular meetings, encouraging school teams to replace team members that have left, celebrating best practices, and gathering at the end of the school year to discuss the next year’s plans, among other actions. Ultimately, the authors suggest that district-school partnerships are most effective when district leaders go beyond monitoring schools for compliance and instead actively participate in providing guidance and support to school leaders and leadership teams.

District Leadership

Despite the support that district leadership can bring to school leaders and student achievement, the school improvement literature has long presented school districts “mainly in the background of studies” or has found them to be “impediments to school improvement” (Honig & Rainey, 2015, p. 3). Other scholars have found that the available literature has generally “overlooked, ignored, and even dismissed the potential of districts as substantial contributors to systemic reform” (Rorrer, Skrla, & Scheurich, 2008, p. 307-308). Thus, the literature examining the functions of districts is not only limited, but also, often, focused on how districts may slow the advancement of their own schools and students.

Honig and Rainey (2015) explain that the reason for the findings on the restrictive nature of school districts may be, in part, because they have traditionally been “ill

equipped” to adequately support dynamic school improvement efforts as demanded by recent education reform movements and federal policy changes. The authors share that for much of the 20th century, school districts primarily served as administrative entities, managing enrollment and state and federal funds rather than providing instructional guidance to schools. During the 1960s and 1970s, school decentralization advocates demanded greater school-level autonomy and decision-making power, shifting authority away from districts to schools and communities (Honig & Rainey, 2012). Since the 1980s, however, the U.S. education system has increasingly turned to school districts to play a more active role in improving classroom instruction in an effort to boost student achievement on academic assessments (Honig & Rainey, 2015). As summarized by Stein and Coburn (2008), “once viewed as the main obstacle to reform, districts are now being asked to oversee instructional improvement on a heretofore unprecedented scale” (p. 584).

As school districts have become increasingly involved in improving student achievement, so too has their responsibility for addressing the needs of students who are learning English. As noted, in 1974, the Supreme Court’s ruling in *Lau v. Nichols* established federal policy that school districts are responsible for meeting the needs of their EL students as part of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (McCarthy, 2015). In this case, the Supreme Court ruled that “there is no equality of treatment merely by providing students with the same facilities, textbooks, teachers, and curriculum; for students who do not understand English are effectively foreclosed from any meaningful education” (Lau v. Nichols, 1974). The academic achievement of ELs was further

brought into the district spotlight as a result of federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) requirements in 2002 to disaggregate student achievement data, as districts were now held responsible for ensuring that their students met Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) criteria across student subgroup populations, including race/ethnicity status and EL status (Richard & Olson, 2004). For the first time, schools and districts could clearly see academic disparities between ELs and other students (Elfers & Stritikus, 2014). This subgroup disaggregation of student achievement continues to be a requirement for districts and schools under the recent Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015). In addition, ESSA legislation has placed even greater emphasis on EL achievement by requiring states to standardize criteria for EL identification and reclassification out of EL status, as well as including students' progress toward ELP as a measure of in their school accountability framework (Johnson, 2017). Prior to this, districts were able to create their own criteria for determining who could be identified as an EL student, leading to potential disruptions in students' participation in EL services when students transferred between districts or states with different eligibility requirements. This also made it difficult to compare EL progress across districts with a single state.

School Leadership

While district leadership provides an essential foundation for effective schooling for ELs and their peers, it is the school principal who leads the daily charge to improve the outcomes for students in their building. In fact, a recent value-added study by Branch, Hanushek, and Rivkin (2013) concluded that “highly effective principals raise the

achievement of a typical student in their schools by between two and seven months of learning in a single school year; ineffective principals lower achievement by the same amount” (p. 63). This study measured principal effectiveness by determining if students’ math achievement in a given school “is higher or lower than would be expected based on characteristics of students in that school, including their achievement in the prior year” (p. 64). The authors concluded that one of the strongest ways in which principals influence student achievement is by determining which teachers are brought on board to teach at the school. Other scholars have found that the principal’s influence occurs indirectly as a result of their actions related to school and classroom conditions (Hallinger, 2005).

It is clear, however, that schools and their leaders do not exist in a vacuum, and leaders’ impact is affected by a variety of contextual factors. For example, leaders’ behaviors are shaped by what are known as *internal antecedent variables*, such as a leader’s beliefs, values and experiences (Leithwood & Day, 2007). Other influential factors range from local and state-level educational policies to student backgrounds; as Louis and colleagues (2010) explain:

Features of state and district policies, practices, and other characteristics interact with one another and exert an influence on what school leaders do. These features also influence conditions in schools, classrooms, and the professional community of teachers...Other stakeholder groups, including the media, unions, professional associations, and community and business groups also influence school leadership practices. And of course leaders are influenced by their own professional learning experiences and by student and family backgrounds (p. 13).

In addition, research has found that high school leadership is enacted differently than in elementary schools due to a larger and more complex organizational size (including more staff and a larger budget), a school culture that tends to be characterized by more isolated content areas than found in elementary schools, more managerial roles and positions, and greater curriculum complexity (Leithwood, 2012). It is beyond the scope of this review to investigate in detail each of the factors affecting leadership behaviors, but worth acknowledging that principals are working within complex systems in their own unique communities and with their own personal beliefs.

The work of understanding leaders' actions and their connection to promising outcomes has led to several school leadership models. For example, Hallinger and Heck (1999) frame school leadership across three domains of *purposes, people, and structures and social systems*, while Conger and Kanungo (1998) discuss *visioning strategies, efficacy-building strategies, and content-changing strategies*. Still others conceptualize the effects of principal leadership on student learning through the domains of *professional capacity, program quality, the school learning climate, and parent-community ties* (Sebastian & Allensworth, 2012).

Drawing from leadership practices and research across diverse organizations, a model that has come to be known as the Ontario Leadership Framework (OLF) outlines five critical research-based domains of successful leadership in schools: *setting directions, building relationships and developing people, designing the organization to support the desired practices, managing the teaching and learning program, and securing accountability* (Leithwood, 2012). Each domain consists of a set of leadership

practices, representing 21 practices in all. The OLF reflects decades of development emerging from the work of Leithwood, Jantzi, and Steinbach (1999), who outlined the first three domains in their exploration of transformational leadership models among secondary school leaders, and the model has become more robust over time. This comprehensive framework constitutes “the basic core of successful leadership practices” (Leithwood et al., 2004) and has been used widely in the literature as a way of understanding district and principal leadership practices (Chrispeels et al., 2008; Day et al., 2016; Jacobson, 2011; Leithwood et al., 2004; Leithwood & Riehl, 2005; Louis et al., 2010). I present this framework in Figure 1, followed by a review of each of the domains and their core leadership practices as described in the literature.

Figure 1. School Leadership Domains (Leithwood, 2012)



Setting Directions. Leithwood, Jantzi, and Steinbach (1999) outlined *setting directions* as the first of three domains in their exploration of transformational leadership models among secondary school leaders. This domain includes four primary practices: building a shared vision, identifying short-term goals, holding high performance expectations, and communicating the vision and goals. These practices center on how leaders build motivation to create a collective and compelling mission, and collectively account for “the largest proportion of leadership effects” (Day & Leithwood, 2007, p. 6); in other words, these practices explain much of a leader’s impact. As such, the practices

within this domain are “among the most studied set of school leadership dimensions” (Belchetz & Leithwood, 2007, p. 121).

Building Relationships and Developing People. Undoubtedly, developing staff capacity is a critical component of being able to effectively achieve any group goal. This domain therefore recognizes the importance of understanding and supporting the work of individuals, which, in the case of school leadership, largely represents the work of teachers. The five specific practices in this domain include supporting and encouraging staff; building staff capacity, often through professional development opportunities; actively modeling “desired values and practices,” such as being visible in the school, staying informed of educational issues, and engaging with learning; building relationships with staff, students, and parents; and building relationships with teacher federation representatives (Leithwood et al., 1999).

Developing the Organization. The third leadership domain is characterized by building a collaborative school culture and the structures to support such collaboration; developing positive relationships with families, the community, and the broader educational community; maintaining a safe and orderly environment for student learning; and ensuring that resources are aligned with the school’s vision (Leithwood, 2012). This domain speaks to the importance of the organizational factors that support the work taking place in schools.

Improving the Instructional Program. In 2008, the fourth domain of *improving the instructional program* was added to the leadership framework in recognition of teaching and learning as the “core technology” of schools (Leithwood, 2012; Leithwood

& Jantzi, 2008). The four primary practices in this domain relate to staffing the instructional program, providing instructional support, monitoring progress in student learning and school improvement, and buffering staff from distractions from their work (Leithwood, 2012). This describes, in essence, a focus on “the coordination and control of instruction and curriculum” (Hallinger, 2005, p. 226). This domain stems from the work of Hallinger and Murphy (1985), though Hallinger’s subsequent work in recent decades has significantly contributed to the field of instructional leadership (Hallinger, 2005).

Securing Accountability. The fifth domain – *securing accountability* – reflects the current education policy context, which “places unprecedented demands on leaders to publicly demonstrate the progress being made toward accomplishing the purposes established for their organizations” (Leithwood, 2012, p. 12). This leadership domain consists of two practices: building staff members’ sense of internal accountability, and meeting the demands of external accountability.

School leadership models such as the OLF and others have been used by educators and policy makers to understand a range of leadership efforts, including the impact of leadership on student outcomes (Day et al., 2016) and how successful leadership is enacted in challenging, high-poverty schools (Jacobson, 2011). Within the broad literature base on school leadership, however, there are limited studies that specifically look at the role and responsibility of education leaders to address the needs of ELs in their schools and districts. As Elfers and Stritikus (2014) explain, “the role that

leaders do or could play in the learning of EL students has been relatively absent from research conversations on English learners” (p. 307), particularly at the high school level.

Though few in number, a subset of studies have specifically looked at school leaders who are considered to be “effective” or “successful” in working with ELs. For example, Theoharis and O’Toole (2011) explored the role of school leadership for ELs through the lens of social justice leadership, which specifically calls on leaders to serve as advocates for marginalized students. These scholars conducted case studies at two elementary schools in one district that were selected because the principals had introduced inclusive EL services and because of their leadership related to equity and inclusive practices. Specifically, the case study explored the ways in which “principals create asset-based, collaborative, and inclusive learning opportunities and services for ELs” (p. 655). The authors found that while both schools eliminated their EL pull-out programs, the principals each chose different paths forward. For example, one principal implemented a co-teaching model by integrating EL teachers into general education classrooms, and created collaborative planning time for teachers. The second principal, among other practices, worked to organized extensive staff development related to EL instruction such that 10 staff members eventually earned EL certification. In both schools, however, “inclusive ESL reform was not viewed as one more thing that needed to be addressed by an already full agenda; rather, it was an integral goal of their broader agenda and vision” (p. 675). The authors concluded that social justice leadership for ELs requires that principals hold an “asset-based” approach to language, have an understanding of EL teaching and learning best practices, and accept responsibility for all

students' development. While this work provided an important examination of how school leaders are working toward inclusive education for ELs, the case study was specific to elementary schools, which, as discussed, operate under a set of conditions that are distinct from the conditions present in secondary schools (Leithwood, 2012).

Elfers, Lucero, Stritikus, and Knapp (2013), meanwhile, offered a different perspective on leadership for ELs by focusing on how *general education teachers* are supported in meeting the needs of the growing numbers of ELs in their schools. While leadership was not the explicit focus of the research, the study provides critical lessons to be learned for leaders, and in fact served as the basis for a subsequent leadership-focused research article that I discuss below (Elfers & Stritikus, 2014). In the work of Elfers and colleagues (2013), however, the researchers conducted in-depth case studies of 12 schools across four districts, including two high schools. Similar to Theoharis and O'Toole (2011), the districts were selected, in part, because leaders were already engaged in purposeful practices to support ELs. The researchers ultimately determined that five essential supports were needed for teachers to work most effectively with ELs: (a) support for professional learning, (b) specialized staff support from paraprofessionals and coaches, (c) access to appropriate instructional resources, (d) a collegial community focused on EL-related issues, and (e) *school and district leadership* [emphasis added]. The authors reported that these five areas created a "system of supports," which they explained "refers to a set of intentional and differentiated efforts focused on the continuous improvement of teacher and student learning" (p. 170). Across several of these areas, the researchers noted that supports at the high school level were especially

challenging. For example, secondary teachers shared that they lacked EL-focused PD and access to grade- and content-specific resources for ELs in their classrooms, and while they knew there were EL specialists in the school, they did not always know what they did. The authors also found that the high school structure “limited collaboration, and several teachers reported receiving push-in support for their EL students from para-educators, but rarely collaborated with them” (p. 165). Finally, while the authors identified “school and district leadership” as the fifth system of support, they also acknowledged that such leadership was essential for all other supports. As they explained, the “teacher support activities and the coherence among them are in large measure a function of *leadership actions* taken by school and district administrators, program coordinators, specialists and others. Leadership actions...play an important role in building systems of support for classroom teachers” (p. 170).

Clearly, a focused look at leadership for ELs warranted further exploration. Building on the work of Elfers and colleagues (2013) as described above, Elfers and Stritikus (2014) used the same study data to focus on district and school leadership. Specifically, they examined the “intentional supports leaders put in place for classroom teachers and how this may be part of a broader teaching and learning effort” (p. 305). These authors noted that the study’s inclusion of only two high schools (versus seven elementary schools) “is a weakness of the study and an area that deserves greater attention” (p. 339). Nonetheless, the five main ways that district and school leaders in their case study schools supported general education teachers in their work with ELs was by: (a) focusing on high-quality instruction for ELs as integral to *everyone’s* work, (b)

blending school- and district-level leadership initiatives, (c) communicating a compelling rationale for meeting the needs of ELs, 4) differentiating support at the elementary and high school levels, and 5) using data for instructional improvement.

Diverging from the case study approach, Scanlan and López (2012) synthesized the literature related to effective instruction for culturally and linguistically diverse students in order to draw conclusions for school leaders about how to “craft effective integrated service delivery” for these students (p. 583). Based on the literature relating to how leaders can help ELs cultivate ELP, the authors concluded that leaders must first have a complete understanding of the various program models of EL instruction in order to choose one that is appropriate for their students, and that leaders must support linguistically-responsive teaching, in large part by ensuring that teachers are able to participate in professional development about language and content acquisition. As they explain, “Regardless of the language acquisition model in the school, leaders are responsible for ensuring that teachers develop fundamental understandings of language acquisition, including the concept of academic English and the intrinsic value of native language skills” (p. 596). Second, to ensure that students have access to a quality curriculum, Scanlan and López explained that leaders must prioritize quality teaching for ELs by, in part, ensuring that all teachers have an understanding of language development and that all content teachers begin to understand their role as language teachers as well. Finally, the authors share that leaders can promote sociocultural integration of all students by fostering a sense of belonging in school, such as by finding

ways for school experiences to unite students' home and school lives, and by creating relationships with students' families.

Finally, one study within the EL leadership literature explored how school leadership programs prepare principals to lead schools with ELs (Baecher et al., 2013). The authors conducted a multimethod case study on their own institution's advanced certificate program in administration and supervision and found, perhaps unsurprisingly, that the program devoted little time to explicitly addressing EL-related topics such as the sociocultural and bilingual foundations of education, second language acquisition processes, EL instructional methods, and assessment modifications for ELs. The EL area of greatest focus, according to faculty and the program participants, related to addressing differentiated instruction for ELs. However, the majority of faculty and program participants reported that there was no opportunity to discuss the instructional needs of LTELs. This is echoed in the work of Olsen (2014), who identified a lack of school leader preparation to support ELs as a factor limiting LTELs' success. As she wrote, "Few administrators and educators have had training or guidance in understanding what constitutes a strong English Language Learner program or the critical components of any particular model that impacts student success, so consistency in ELL programs across grade level is rare" (Olsen, 2014, p. 11).

Summary of District and School Leadership

In this chapter, I summarized the literature that has begun to document the critical link between district and principal leadership to successfully support school initiatives (Chrispeels et al., 2008; Epstein et al., 2011) and the measurable impact of principal

effectiveness on student outcomes (Branch, Hanushek, & Rivkin, 2013). In addition, I discussed the existing literature on effective leadership practices for ELs, based on case studies of successful district and school leaders (Elfers et al., 2013; Elfers & Stritikus, 2014; Theoharis & O’Toole, 2011); as well as an extensive literature review that served as a guide for school leaders in their work with culturally and linguistically diverse students (Scanlan & López, 2012).

Among the various leadership models, the research-based domains encompassed in the Ontario Leadership Framework (OLF) have been used widely in the literature as a way to understand effective school leadership practices. Based on the OLF’s strong research base and prominence in the education leadership literature, I have chosen this model as the conceptual framework for my study. However, to date, robust leadership frameworks such as the OLF have not been utilized as a foundation for understanding leadership practices as they related to ELs. Rather, the existing case studies of EL leadership have documented various sets of practices that school leaders have demonstrated in their work with ELs that are considered as successful. I argue that aligning these approaches would offer valuable insight into the kinds of effective leadership practices that have already been documented for working with ELs and where there are currently gaps in our understanding of what leaders could be – or may already be – doing.

To address the missing link between the broader school leadership literature and the EL leadership literature, I aligned the five OLF leadership domains with five corresponding EL leadership domains, as follows: *vision and expectations for ELs, staff*

capacity to support ELs, structures to support EL learning and inclusion, EL staffing and programming, and accountability for EL progress (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Leadership Domains for English Learners



Next, I aligned the OLF leadership practices with the related EL leadership practices that have been identified in the literature, organized by leadership domain (see Table 1). I use these EL leadership domains to guide my analyses in Chapter 4.

Table 1. Literature-based Conceptual Framework for EL Leadership Domains and Practices

Leadership Domains and Practices	EL Leadership Domains and Practices
Setting Directions	Vision and Equity for ELs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build a shared vision • Identify specific, shared short-term goals • Create high performance expectations • Communicate the vision and goals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make EL instruction a priority, including a focus on instructional practices that serve diverse learners (Elfers & Stritikus, 2014) • Prioritize inclusive EL services (Theoharis & O’Toole, 2011) • Communicate a compelling rationale for serving ELs (Elfers & Stritikus, 2014)
Building Relationships and Developing People	Staff Capacity to Support ELs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide support and demonstrate consideration for individual staff members • Stimulate growth in the professional capacities of staff • Model the school’s values and practices • Build trusting relationships with and among staff, students and parents • Establish productive working relationships with teacher federation representatives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take into account EL teachers when making instructional decisions (Elfers & Stritikus, 2014) • Offer professional development to <i>all</i> teachers to work with ELs (Elfers & Stritikus, 2014) • Model ways that instructional leaders can serve ELs (Elfers & Stritikus, 2014) • Offer professional development for teachers to build community with and among students (Theoharis & O’Toole, 2011)

Developing the Organization	Structures to Support EL Learning and Inclusion
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build collaborative cultures and distributing leadership 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a collegial community focused on EL-related issues (Elfers, Lucero, Stritikus, & Knapp, 2013)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Structure the organization to facilitate collaboration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create opportunities for staff to work collaboratively (Elfers & Stritikus, 2014) • Engage in strong two-way communication between school and district leaders (Elfers & Stritikus, 2014)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build productive relationships with families and the community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a welcoming environment for EL families (Elfers & Stritikus, 2014) • Establish an ongoing system of communication with families with a home language other than English (Theoharis & O’Toole, 2011)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connect the school to the wider environment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leverage local resources to serve ELs (Elfers & Stritikus, 2014)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain a safe and healthy environment 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allocate resources in support of the school's vision and goals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure access to appropriate instructional resources (Elfers, Lucero, Stritikus, & Knapp, 2013)
Improving the Instructional Program	EL Staffing and Programming
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff the instructional program 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adopt structural changes so that ELs receive all services within the general education classroom (Theoharis & O’Toole, 2011)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide instructional support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hire teachers that have the capacity to work with ELs or invest in current teachers to do so (Elfers & Stritikus, 2014) • Directly engage in teaching and learning initiatives (Elfers & Stritikus, 2014) • Ensure general education teachers have specialized staff support from paraprofessionals and coaches (Elfers, Lucero, Stritikus, & Knapp, 2013)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitor progress in student learning and school improvement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use data for instructional improvement (Elfers & Stritikus, 2014)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Buffer staff from distractions to their work 	

Securing Accountability	Accountability for EL Progress
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building staff members' sense of internal accountability • Meeting the demands for external accountability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resolve fragmentation between general education teachers and EL teachers by focusing on high-quality instruction (Elfers & Stritikus, 2014) • Encourage staff responsibility to serve ELs (Elfers & Stritikus, 2014) • Change staff responsibilities so that all teachers are responsible to plan for ELs within their general curriculum and setting (Theoharis & O'Toole) • Accept responsibility for all students' development (Theoharis & O'Toole, 2011)

While the leadership literature provides an essential foundation for understanding the actions of district and principal leaders to support student achievement, addressing the needs of any student is futile without understanding the root causes of their challenges. Thus, in the next section, I review the literature on the barriers that ELs face in attaining English proficiency, leading them to become, in time, LTELs.

Barriers to Attaining English Language Proficiency

Leading research in the field contends that it takes ELs between three to five years to develop oral English proficiency and four to seven years to develop academic English proficiency, on average (Hakuta et al., 2000). However, acquiring ‘academic literacy’ can be especially challenging for ELs at the high school level (Menken & Kleyn, 2010, p. 402). For example, in her longitudinal analysis of academic ELP outcomes of adolescent ELs, Slama (2014) found that the average EL student entering high school did not reach ELP until the end of 11th grade, or “11.8 school years since their entry into U.S. schools, [which exceeds] Hakuta and colleagues’ (2000) 4–7 year estimates” (p. 278). She further notes that while U.S.-born ELs enter high school with higher levels of academic ELP

than foreign-born ELs, foreign-born ELs acquired academic English at a faster pace and that “by the end of high school, foreign and U.S.-born ELLs demonstrated academic English proficiency that was indistinguishable from one another” (p. 278).

The second body of literature I reviewed therefore encompassed the barriers that students face in attaining ELP. Understanding these barriers is especially critical for district and school leaders if they are to (re)structure school programming and processes to better support ELs across all levels of schooling. It is worth noting that many of the factors identified in the literature as barriers for LTELs include challenges related to developing ELP *as well as* barriers for academic success, as a deep understanding of myriad high schools subjects relies on an understanding of subject-specific language that is often complex or technical. In addition, while many obstacles identified in the literature are faced by ELs as a whole, they may be particularly critical for LTELs. For example, a lack of teacher preparation to work with ELs affects *all* EL students but is perhaps experienced even more acutely by high school LTELs who are learning from high school teachers who are unfamiliar with literacy strategies to help students with advanced English vocabulary. With these considerations in mind, I turn to the literature to better understand the barriers confronting LTELs in their linguistic and academic development.

Oral Proficiency Can Mask Limited Academic Language Proficiency

As noted in Chapter 1, LTELs are often orally bilingual, yet they have limited literacy skills in both English and their home language (Menken et al., 2012). On the one hand, it is true that higher levels of oral proficiency often reflect higher levels of literacy

and vocabulary development in both one's first and second languages (Bialystok, 2007; Snow & Kang, 2006). However, Bialystok (2007) asserts that "oral proficiency in general provides no privileged access to literacy for bilingual children" (p.176) and that, in fact, oral proficiency in a language may mask a student's weaker abilities in reading and comprehension. Moreover, in their research on LTELs, Menken, Kleyn and Chae (2012) found that "despite their oral bilingualism, the students and their teachers overwhelmingly identify literacy in English as the greatest challenge LTELL students face in school" (p. 133). Many teachers may not be able to distinguish between their LTEL students and native English-speaking students (Menken, 2013) or may assume that students who are orally proficient in daily communication in their second language do not need the explicit instruction in vocabulary, decoding, and phonemic awareness that other ELs receive, which is vital for success in the classroom (Olvera, 2015).

The literature on English language acquisition helps to explain this dual nature of LTELs' linguistic abilities by reminding us that there are different expressions of English proficiency. Seminal research in the field of language acquisition distinguished between two primary types of proficiencies: *basic interpersonal communicative proficiency* (BICS), used on a daily basis amongst peers and family, and *cognitive academic language proficiency* (CALP), which is necessary for academic reading and writing success (Cummins, 1979). In other words, we use the English language in different ways for different purposes on a daily basis. For example, students use "informal" English for activities such as conversing, listening to music, traveling, personal reading and writing, and shopping, *as well as* more "formal" English for school-oriented activities such as

studying (grammar and vocabulary) and engaging in classroom activities, all of which require “very different combinations of oral practice, classroom study, and word-list learning” (Bialystok & Hakuta, 1994, p. 210).

While these two conceptualizations of English represent important aspects of understanding the varied ways that students understand and use English, other scholars have offered critiques of this approach. For example, Scanlan and López (2012) caution us that “the academic–conversational binary ... oversimplifies how language works in classrooms and schools” (p. 595), as students with strong “conversational English” skills can nonetheless be actively involved in rigorous academic work they find engaging. In other words, it is important to remember that the binary is not static or a rigid barrier to student success, even as it provides a helpful framework to understand the varied uses of English and the contexts in which they are utilized.

An additional consideration regarding the “academic English” versus “social English” binary comes from the field of raciolinguistics (Flores, 2020). In recent years, scholars within this area of study have focused on “theorizing language and race together, paying particular attention to how both social processes mediate and mutually constitute each other” (Alim et al., 2016, pp. 2–3). This dual lens of how we conceptualize race and language has important implications in the school setting, especially for ELs. For example, scholars such as Flores and Rosa (2015) explain that what has long been held as the appropriate language of schooling (or “academic language”) is in fact a representation of “white” English, writing that “appropriateness-based approaches to language education are implicated in the reproduction of racial normativity by expecting language-

minoritized students to model their linguistic practices after the white speaking subject” (p. 151). In this way, “white” English is privileged over the other varieties of English and ways that students utilize language.

Lack of Programming to Develop Home Language Proficiency

Another factor associated with learning a second language (L2) is a student’s proficiency in their home or “native” language (L1). Research has found that students who develop academic language and literacy skills in their L1 are able to transfer those skills to their L2 (Cummins, 2000; Menken, 2013). More specifically, Espinosa (2008) explains that “systematic, deliberate exposure to English during early childhood combined with ongoing opportunities to learn important concepts in the home language results in the highest achievement in both the [L1] and English by the end of 3rd grade” (p. 5). Unfortunately, LTELs are often not able to draw from a strong foundation of academic skills in their L1 (given that many enter U.S. schools in kindergarten) and high schools typically do not have programming to support ELs with these needs (Menken et al., 2012). As a result, Menken (2013) writes that LTELs often experience “low levels of academic language and literacy in the dominant language and in their home language” (p. 451).

Valenzuela (1999), in her ethnographic work about Latino youth in a Texas high school, explains that an education system that does not fully develop ELs’ native language or fully prepare them to be academically successful in English can be considered “subtractive schooling.” Callahan and Shrifir (2016) explain subtractive schooling as defining students “by what they lack or are perceived to lack,” while

Menken and Kleyn (2010) further explain this concept by writing that “schools have the potential to fail language minority students through programming and pedagogy that disregard and devalue students’ languages and cultures, and thus fail to attend to their specialized learning needs” (p. 401).

Insufficient Teacher Preparation to Work with ELs

Unequivocally, teachers play an important role in shaping student academic outcomes (Rivkin et al., 2005), and their role is especially important for disadvantaged student populations such as ELs (Gándara et al., 2005). However, many researchers argue that general education teachers lack sufficient preparation to work with ELs – including preparation in multiculturalism, language acquisition, and instructional strategies – leading these students to struggle throughout their time in school (Good, Masewicz, & Vogel, 2010; Calderón, Slavin & Sánchez, 2011; Samson & Lesaux, 2015; Poliakoff, 2006; Tellez & Waxman, 2005; U.S. Department of Education, 2010). Most teachers have also not had relevant or meaningful professional development opportunities to learn how to serve ELs as a whole (Lucas et al., 2008), or may not see language development as part of their content-area responsibilities (Ruiz-de-Velasco & Fix, 2000).

At the high school level in particular, teachers are often not prepared to teach literacy strategies across content areas, which are critical for LTELs (Menken et al., 2012; Olsen, 2014). In fact, knowledge of the research strategies that have shown to be effective for ELs “is often minimally reflected in the requirements of teacher preparation programs, in state certification exams, or in school based teacher evaluations” (Samson & Collins, 2012, p. 9). As a result, by the time ELs are in high school, “they are now served

almost exclusively in mainstream classes by regular subject-area teachers with no language development support” (Ruiz-de-Velasco & Fix, 2000, p. 47).

Isolated School Structures and Departments

An additional challenge facing LTELs relates to divisions that can exist between general education teachers and EL teachers working with high school students. For example, based on their study of immigrant students in high school, Ruiz-de-Velasco and Fix (2000) reported that EL teachers are often isolated from the subject-area teachers, and this is especially true at the secondary level. In addition, these teachers tend to be omitted from school decision-making processes. The authors found that a form of hierarchy existed between general education and EL teachers, which appeared to limit opportunities to collaborate. In particular, teachers in the study reported that “the division of labor and responsibility across a ‘mainstream’ and ‘special’ program divide reinforces a belief among many teachers and students that language development programs are remedial” (p. 60). EL courses may thus be seen as less important or valuable than mainstream courses (Ruiz-de-Velasco and Fix, 2000). For example, in one study that examined EL students’ perceptions of their coursework, researchers found that when EL students were grouped with other ELs *within* mainstream classes (known as “clustering”) – rather than separating ELs into their own classes – ELs described their courses as “normal” or “mixed with everyone” (Thompson, 2015). Similarly, Dabach (2014), in a study that explored teachers’ perceptions of their students’ learning experiences, found that teachers described how their students associated their EL courses (specifically, their “sheltered” EL courses, which will be discussed in the third body of reviewed literature) with a lack

of intelligence. The study further argued that “the longer students are in separate EL programs, and the more fluent they become in English, the more likely they are to attribute alternative meanings to their placements (e.g., ‘I must be stupid if I’m still in these classes’) – when, in fact, larger unresolved bureaucratic processes are often at work” (p. 118).

Inconsistent or Insufficient Programming

One barrier to attaining ELP for many LTELs is inconsistent district or school curricular programming, or programming that overlooks the students’ literacy needs across multiple subjects (Freeman et al., 2002; Menken et al., 2012). However, few high schools have been able to create approaches that address the specific needs of LTELs in a meaningful way (Olsen, 2014; Ruiz-de-Velasco & Fix, 2000; Short & Fitzsimmons, 2007). More specifically, districts have largely overlooked the need to distinguish between the needs of LTELs and newly-arrived ELs, who may need more support through English language development classes, for example (Kim & García, 2014; Olsen, 2014). Part of the reason for this is that without a strong research base on the LTEL student population and promising approaches to meeting their needs, schools and districts are not able to offer much guidance. Kim and García (2014) found that “few research-based guidelines are available to districts to inform their design of more effective programs for this subpopulation” (Kim & García, 2014, p. 311).

Course Tracking

Another barrier facing ELs relates to the current practice of many U.S. high schools of enrolling students in more- and less-rigorous academic courses, known as

“tracking.” Unfortunately, research has found that ELs are more likely than non-ELs to be placed in lower-track courses (Callahan, 2005; Harklau, 1994; Poliakoff, 2006). For example, a recent study from Callahan and Shrifler (2016) found “marked disparities in high school course taking patterns...with EL students experiencing significantly less academic exposure [than non-EL students]” (p. 463). Meanwhile, another study on tracking and high school ELs concluded that “track placement is a better predictor of English learners’ academic performance than proficiency in English, highlighting the important of quality instruction for English learners” (Callahan, 2005, p. 305).

The argument in favor of tracking is that course curricula can be designed (in terms of both content and pace) to meet the academic needs of students more effectively and efficiently than would be the case if all students proceeded through identical curricula (Callahan, 2005; Hanushek & Woessmann, 2005). However, the literature largely refutes the idea that tracking supports improved academic outcomes for students, and in some cases reports negative outcomes of this practice (Oakes, 2005; Schmidt, Burroughs, Zoido, & Houang, 2015). For example, in the U.S., scholars have documented how lower-income students are more likely to be placed into courses with “lower time on task and weaker instructional quality” (Schmidt et al., 2015). In addition, one recent study on secondary ELs’ course taking patterns (including the examination of students’ high school graduation coursework and college preparatory coursework) reported that “disparate [course] access remains the norm for EL students relative to their peers” (Callahan & Shifrer, 2016).

International research also documents the negative effects of tracking. Hanushek and Woessmann (2005) used international assessments of high school students (e.g., Programme for International Student Assessment [PISA]) to examine this issue. They compared countries that did and did not track their students before age 15 (which is approximately the age that students begin high school in the U.S., and the average age of PISA test-takers). Ultimately, the four countries with the greatest increases in academic inequality were all countries with early tracking (i.e., Germany, Greece, Czech Republic, Italy), while the six countries with the largest decreases in this measure did not track before age 15 (i.e., Turkey, New Zealand, Canada, U.S., Norway, Hong Kong). Thus, the authors reported that “the results consistently indicate that early tracking increases inequality in achievement” (p. 18) and that “there is very little evidence that there are efficiency gains associated with this increased inequality” (p. 19).

Linguistically Segregated Schools

Collier (1995) explains that an important component of language acquisition is the opportunity to hear and utilize the language in context and in a meaningful way. Her research led her to conclude that “classes in school that are highly interactive, emphasizing student problem-solving and discovery learning through thematic experiences across the curriculum are likely to provide the kind of social setting for natural language-acquisition to take place, simultaneously with academic and cognitive development” (p. 9). More recent research has also found that language development is related to the context and meaning of words as understood by the individual and that

students each bring a unique social and phonological awareness to the classroom (Short & Fitzsimmons, 2007).

Many ELs, however, are limited in their exposure to native English-speaking peers not only because of tracking or course placement but because of the very schools ELs attend. Olsen (2010) explains that many ELs in California, for example, go to school in “linguistically isolated communities,” leaving them “few opportunities to interact with/engage with native English speakers, to hear and learn English from other English learners” (p. 19). In addition to linguistic isolation in schools, ELs are more likely to be concentrated in schools that are designated as Title I (representing a large population of economically-disadvantaged students), in schools with high enrollment, and in schools with a high student-teacher ratio (Fry, 2008). Notably, when ELs “are not isolated in these low-achieving schools, their gap in test score results [between ELs and non-ELs] is considerably narrower” (Fry, 2008, p. i).

Student- or Family-Related Factors

Finally, while it is beyond the scope of this work to extensively review LTEL barriers beyond the school system, it is necessary to acknowledge that there may be variety of factors affecting ELs outside of the school system. These factors may serve as additional academic barriers for ELs as they progress through school and enter high school as LTELs. For example, ELs are more likely than non-ELs to have parents with lower levels of education (Capps, 2005), which is associated with lower levels of student achievement (Abedi & Dietel, 2004). In addition, ELs are also more likely to come from low-income households (Capps, 2005), and the relationship between lower

socioeconomic status and lower student achievement (regardless of EL status) has been documented in the literature (Rumberger & Tran, 2006).

Summary of EL Barriers to Attaining English Language Proficiency

In this section, I provided an overview of the literature documenting the barriers that students face in attaining ELP. The literature revealed that the challenges facing LTELs are vast and complex, and, ultimately, that many of these challenges are the work of education leaders to address. In her work documenting the extensive barriers for LTELs in California, Olsen (2010) concluded that, ultimately, these can all be considered to be “leadership issues”:

[There are] significant challenges facing districts in seeking to address the specific needs of Long Term English Learners. These barriers include: inadequate data and student information systems; shortage of teachers prepared with the knowledge and skills to effectively teach Long Term English Learners; lack of appropriate curriculum and materials targeted for this population; contradictory mandates and counsel; general misunderstandings and lack of knowledge of the research about effective practices for Long Term English Learners; inadequate assessments and systems to know how English Learners are doing or to identify English Learners who are not adequately progressing; widespread lack of understanding related to English Language Development and misunderstandings about what constitutes ‘English proficiency.’ These are all, fundamentally, policy issues. They are also *leadership* issues. (p. 3).

In other words, the barriers that LTELs face are not theirs to overcome alone. Rather, district and school leaders must have an understanding of the ways in which multiple school- and system-level factors affect student outcomes if they are to make informed decisions regarding their programming and processes to better support ELs as they progress through the U.S. education system.

Models of English Language Instruction

A third body of literature that I reviewed encompassed the current models of EL instruction in the U.S. in order to gain a deeper understanding of how educators structure schools and programming to help students learn English and what the language outcomes are for students. I first present an overview of the primary EL models of instruction, followed by a review of program effectiveness as documented in the literature.

As Calderon, Slavin, and Sánchez (2011) explain, “There is considerable controversy among policy makers, researchers, and educators about how best to ensure the language, reading, and academic success of English learners” (p. 107). Educators have addressed this controversy through a variety of approaches, and there are three general types of language instructional models currently used with ELs in U.S. public schools: (a) English-only, (b) transitional bilingual, and (c) dual language, which includes developmental bilingual and two-way immersion (Lindholm-Leary & Genesse, 2010; Sugarman, 2018). Regardless of program names, however, program classifications and requirements vary as a result of the fact that there are no national standards for defining the program types (Boyle et al., 2015).

I present an overview of the primary goals for each of these primary models of EL instruction in Figure 3, adapted from Sugarman (2018). First, English-only programs intend to build ELs’ English proficiency and literacy by using English as the sole medium of instruction for all academic content. These programs serve both ELs and non-ELs and represent the traditional schooling approach for all students in the U.S., especially at the secondary level (Southeast Comprehensive Center at American Institutes for Research,

2017). Next, transitional bilingual programs aim to build ELP by using students' home language at first (typically in kindergarten) and gradually transitioning to English over time (typically by Grades 2 or 3) (Umansky & Reardon, 2014). These programs aim to serve ELs. Finally, dual language programs intend to promote bilingualism and biliteracy in both students' home language and English (Sugarman, 2018). Dual language programs are typically either *maintenance bilingual programs* that promote bilingualism in both students' home language and English and generally consist of only EL students, or *dual immersion programs*, which also promote bilingualism in both languages but consist of both ELs and non-ELs (Umansky & Reardon, 2014).

Figure 3. Language Goals of Three Primary Models of EL Instruction



In a 2015 review of states' dual language education policies, researchers explained that it was challenging to truly compare programs given that there was great variability in what states considered to be "dual language" programs, and that "relatively few states have explicit requirements or expectations regarding particular program features" (Boyle, August, Tabaku, Cole, & Simpson-Baird, 2015, p. x). The great variability in program models and goals (e.g., is English proficiency and literacy the primary goal? Or is this the goal for both English and students' home language?) has led

to a variety of research findings about which programs are best for ELs, either academically or linguistically.

A number of studies have examined the effectiveness of the varied program models on ELs' *academic outcomes*, such as English Language Arts (ELA) scores (Valentino & Reardon, 2015) and literacy (August & Shanahan, 2006; Slavin et al., 2011). Broadly, Valentino and Reardon (2015) concluded that the existing research studies "yield quite mixed results, but suggest that at the very least, bilingual education (generally defined) does not hinder academic performance in English" (p. 616). On the one hand, in their own study that included ELA outcomes for ELs in different instructional programs, they found that by Grade 7, ELs in dual immersion and transitional bilingual programs had ELA scores that were *higher* than their EL peers in English-only programs. On the other hand, these positive long-term findings produced different short-term results: in Grade 2, ELs in dual immersion programs had *lower* ELA scores than their peers in English-only programs (while ELs in transitional bilingual programs scored *higher*, as they did in Grade 7 as well). Because of these changes in results over time for students in the dual immersion program, the researchers caution that short-term studies may not provide a full picture of how different instructional models will affect ELs' academic outcomes in the long term.

Other studies have looked at literacy outcomes for ELs across different program models (August & Shanahan, 2006; Slavin et al., 2011). For example, a multiyear randomized evaluation that examined English reading outcomes of ELs who were assigned to either transitional bilingual programs or English-only programs found no

significant differences in reading in English by Grade 4 (Slavin, Madden, Calderón, Chamberlain, & Hennessy, 2011). These researchers concluded that “policy should therefore focus on the quality of instruction rather than on the language of instruction” for ELs (p. 47).

August and Shanahan (2006), meanwhile, as part of a National Literacy Panel comprised of experts in language learning, literacy, and research methods, conducted a four-year review and evaluation of the research on ELs’ English literacy development. With regard to the role of students’ development of L2 literacy, they conclude from the studies that students’ literacy skills in their first language play an important role in helping them acquire literacy in their L2. As they explain:

[There is] ample research evidence that certain aspects of second-language literacy development are related to performance on similar constructs in the first language; this suggests that common underlying abilities play a significant role in both first and second-language development...[and] that well-developed literacy skills in the first language can facilitate second-language literacy development. (pp. 7–8)

To summarize these studies on the effectiveness of program models on ELs’ *academic outcomes*, Slavin et al. (2011) argue that language of instruction does not have a significant impact on ELs’ reading outcomes, while Valentino and Reardon (2015) found that the language of instruction *does* produce different ELA results for ELs – and that this is dependent on program model as well as whether the study is examining short- or long-term results. August and Shanahan (2006), in their synthesis of the research, found that strong L1 literacy skills can play a helpful role in helping students acquire L2

literacy, which has implications for how schools and teachers might consider structuring their programs and instructional approaches.

Other studies have examined program impacts on students' ELP and eventual reclassification. For example, in a study of reclassification rates of ELs in different kinds of programs, Umansky and Reardon (2014) concluded that ELs in the transitional bilingual and dual language models (as opposed to English-only models) were more likely in the long-term to attain ELP and be reclassified. However, according to a review by the Southeast Comprehensive Center at American Institutes for Research (2017), “despite the benefits that have been noted based on students’ participation in DL [dual language] programs, the majority of programs operate at the elementary level” (p. 3). The review continued on to explain that dual language programming may be particularly challenging for high schools to implement given the wide range of courses that would need to be taught in an additional language, a lack of funding, and a lack of qualified staff. As a result, ELs in high school largely spend their day in mainstream classrooms, with some EL classes (Reeves, 2006). Given that English-only programs remain the primary model of instruction used in U.S. high schools, I next review some of the models that LTELs typically encounter in high school, focusing on traditional English-only approaches.

Traditional English-Only Approaches in High School

Traditional forms of English-only instructional approaches used at the high school level include what is known as push-in instruction, classroom ESL, co-teaching, and sheltered instruction (or content-based ESL) (Sugarman, 2018). In push-in models of EL

instruction, ELs remain in their general education classrooms, and EL teachers work specifically with the EL students for a designated amount of time (Haas et al., 2016); that is, the EL teachers “push in” to the general education classroom. What is referred to as classroom ESL, meanwhile, is typically a specific class only for ELs and taught by an EL teacher. In this model, the focus may be specific to building English proficiency (broadly), or the focus may be on developing English skills particular to academic content areas such as science, math, English language arts, or social studies (Sugarman, 2018). Co-teaching and sheltered instruction, however, serve as the primary ways that ELs receive targeted content-area instruction with language support; I review each of these below.

Co-teaching. Within English-only approaches, a growing trend in EL instruction at the middle and high school levels is for ELs to be integrated with their non-EL classmates for the majority of their instructional time in school, as EL teachers and general education teachers “have increasingly been viewed as jointly responsible for helping ELs develop conversational and academic language and meaningfully participate in grade-level academic instruction” (Sugarman, 2018, p. 8). This often takes place in schools through co-teaching, in which the EL and content teachers work together to plan and deliver daily instruction.

Co-teaching emerged as an instructional approach from the field of special education (SPED). The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1994 required schools to serve their students with disabilities alongside their peers for core instruction, to the extent possible, along with supplemental services as needed (Solis et

al., 2012). Known as “inclusive education,” scholars argue that this approach is a matter of social justice for students with disabilities (Artiles et al., 2006), as this allows students with disabilities to have greater access to grade-level content courses with their peers rather than be isolated to educational programming exclusively for these students. As explained by Solis et al. (2012), in such a model, the general education and SPED teachers work together in the classroom “to provide needed supports, precluding the need for students with disabilities to leave the classroom to receive specialized assistance” (p. 499). In her review of effective co-teaching teams at the middle and high school levels, Dieker (2001) further explains that co-teaching for students with disabilities is especially critical at higher levels of education, given that “special educators at the secondary level cannot be expected to be masters of all content areas” (p. 15).

In 1999, Bahamonde and Friend posited that while co-teaching was primarily used to serve students with disabilities at the time, it “seems to offer bilingual programs a next evolutionary step by maximizing the skills of two types of teachers collaborating for the benefit of students” (p. 12). Since then, co-teaching has increasingly been promoted as a promising instructional approach for ELs (Honigsfeld & Dove, 2008). Purported benefits are that spending class time with native English-speaking peers, rather than in separate EL classes, allows ELs to be exposed to more grade-level and content-specific English throughout the day without needing to leave for supplemental instruction (Bahamonde & Friend, 1999), enables ELs to avoid the stigma of being “not as smart” that is often associated with EL classes (Bahamonde & Friend, 1999), and in turn allows ELs to benefit from greater cultural capital at school (August & Hakuta, 1997; Gándara,

Rumberger, Maxwell-Jolly, & Callahan, 2003). In one three-year case study of co-teaching ELs at an elementary school, researchers found that teachers who participated in co-teaching perceived their ELs to be more engaged in class, to be demonstrating fewer undesirable behaviors, and to be performing better academically (York-Barr et al., 2007). These scholars identified five key factors that contributed to successful co-teaching partnerships, including: (a) the perception from both teachers that the prior model of EL instruction was insufficient; (b) mandates from EL district-level staff to move toward inclusive instructional practices, including allowing additional time for co-planning; (c) small group instruction, which allowed for more individualized support; (d) collaborative classroom planning; and (e) different kinds of instructional models, made possible because of the two teachers present in the classroom.

It is important to note, however, that the literature on student outcomes as a result of co-teaching is limited. York-Barr and colleagues (2007) state that to date, “little research has been generated that provides evidence of the impact of collaborative instructional models on student learning and achievement” (p. 302). Moreover, the co-teaching literature remains rooted in its special education roots, with limited research on co-teaching for ELs, especially at the secondary level. As noted by Pappamihel (2012), “there are few actual accounts of how co-teaching is implemented school-wide with English learners in mainstream classrooms” (p. 1).

Sheltered Instruction. An additional instructional approach for ELs is what is known as sheltered instruction, which seeks to have ELs acquire content knowledge and ELP simultaneously (Stephens & Johnson, 2015) through the “the practice of integrating

language development with techniques to make curricular topics more comprehensible to ELLs” (Short, Fidelman, & Louguit, 2012, p. 335). Typically, sheltered instruction is delivered by content-area teachers who have training in EL instruction, with the goal of delivering grade-level content instruction to ELs to keep them on track to meet credit requirements needed for graduation (Christian, 2006; Short et al., 2012). Other scholars acknowledge that sheltered instruction has undertaken many forms, however; for example, some sheltered classes may consist of both ELs and non-ELs, while others are solely for EL students (Stephens & Johnson, 2015).

One example of a common approach to sheltered instruction is the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP). The Rennie Center for Education Research and Policy (2007) notes that is a program model that aims to support teachers in meeting the various needs of ELs by focusing on some of the following key elements:

- Student interaction
- English language production and comprehension
- Explicit statements of language and content learning objectives
- Supplementary and visual materials
- Referring to students’ prior knowledge in building new concepts and vocabulary

Research on the SIOP model yields mixed results for ELs, however. For example, one study that examined Grade 7 student achievement outcomes in science “did not find statistically significant differences between the posttest performance of students instructed through the SIOP Model and those instructed in comparison schools” (Echevarria, Richards-Tutor, Canges, & Francis, 2011, p. 347). This study randomly assigned ten middle schools from a large urban district to one of two conditions: either schools were assigned to have teachers participate in SIOP training and follow this

approach for four science units (i.e., treatment condition), or schools were assigned to have teachers conduct their science instruction as usual (i.e., control condition).⁶ These researchers speculated that one possible reason for the lack of a difference in student scores between the control and treatment schools was that the teachers' level of implementation of the SIOP model was "not optimal" in that it varied greatly across teachers in the study. Indeed, they found that teachers who were determined to have implemented the SIOP model with high fidelity were also the teachers whose students made the greatest improvements.

On the other hand, results from a two-year study found positive results on state language proficiency tests for ELs in Grades 6–12 whose teachers used the SIOP model (Short et al., 2012). This study used a quasi-experimental design, with one group of treatment teachers receiving professional development in the SIOP model and one group of control teachers participating in their district professional development as usual. The study took place in New Jersey and used results from the IDEA Language Proficiency Tests, which was the state's standardized language assessment. Researchers found that, on average, there were statistically significant differences in test scores for writing, oral language, and Total English proficiency scores, indicating that "implementation of the SIOP model had a positive impact on the development of English language proficiency among the ELLs in classes with SIOP-trained teachers" (p. 353).

⁶ The authors also note, however, that two control schools dropped out of the study prior to data collection, and so "results must be interpreted as a quasiexperiment, with some caution" (Echevarria et al., 2011, p. 338).

In addition to SIOP, Markos and Himmel (2016) identify other common sheltered instruction models as: CALLA – Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach; SDAIE – Specially Designed Academic Instruction in English; and GLAD – Guided Language Acquisition and Design. While the approaches have some differences, they share common principles of focusing on both content and language, relating content to students’ prior knowledge, explicitly teaching vocabulary, and promoting language use (Markos & Himmel, 2016).

Summary of the Models of EL Instruction

The third body of literature that I discussed related to the current models of English language instruction used in the U.S. with ELs. This provided a foundation for understanding the multiple ways in which leaders structure schools and programming to help ELs acquire English, and to understand how these program models lead to different language outcomes for students. The three general models of EL instruction include: (a) English-only/English immersion, (b) transitional bilingual, and (c) dual language, which includes developmental bilingual and two-way immersion (Lindholm-Leary & Genesse, 2010; Sugarman, 2018). Approaches used at the high school level typically include English-only instruction, potentially with co-teaching or sheltered instruction (Sugarman, 2018). Co-teaching is increasingly being used as an approach to inclusive education for ELs (Theoharis & O’Toole, 2011) although, to date, research has not documented the impact of coteaching on student achievement (York-Barr et al., 2007).

The literature on language and academic outcomes for ELs based on program models of instruction yields conflicting results, at times. At the very least, the literature

has documented that bilingual education programs do not limit academic outcomes (Valentino and Reardon, 2015). As far as ELP outcomes, Umansky and Reardon (2014) concluded that ELs in the transitional bilingual and dual language models (as opposed to English-only models) were more likely in the long-term to attain ELP and be reclassified. Despite these results, however, dual language programs are largely at the elementary level (Southeast Comprehensive Center at American Institutes for Research, 2017).

Chapter 2 Summary

In summary, my review included three primary bodies of literature: (a) the role of district and school leadership in supporting student achievement, (b) barriers ELs face in attaining ELP, and (c) models of EL instruction. To address the missing link between the broader school leadership literature and the EL leadership literature, I aligned the OLF leadership domains and practices with related EL leadership practices that have been demonstrated across schools in this review. Collectively, this literature provides a foundation for understanding leaders' reported actions and understandings of LTELs, and will allow me to identify areas in my own research that have not yet been discussed in the EL leadership literature.

Chapter 3: Methodology

To investigate how district and school leaders define and support long-term English learners (LTELs) in Minnesota high schools, I proposed the following research questions: (a) How, if at all, do education leaders in Minnesota define who is considered an LTEL student? (b) How do LTELs compare to other ELs across demographic characteristics and measures of academic success, engagement, and English language proficiency? (c) What do education leaders identify as barriers for LTELs in attaining English language proficiency? and (d) How do education leaders report supporting LTELs' academic and English language development? In this chapter, I describe the research methodology I used to explore these questions.

Rationale for Qualitative Interview Research

Qualitative inquiry has a rich and ever-evolving role in the field of education research (Erikson, 2018). Merriam (2009) explains that in contrast to purely “traditional” or “scientific” research, “qualitative researchers are interested in *understanding the meaning people have constructed*, that is, how people make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world” (p. 13). Similarly, Erikson (2018) explains that qualitative research intends to “describe narratively what particular people do in their everyday lives and what their actions mean to them” (p. 36).

I have chosen qualitative inquiry as the approach for my study given my need to gain a detailed understanding of a topic that has largely gone unexplored in Minnesota – specifically, how education leaders report identifying and supporting their LTELs in Minnesota’s high schools. This need for understanding fits well with Creswell’s (2013)

justification for qualitative research, which acknowledges the complexity that this approach to inquiry can address:

We conduct qualitative research because a problem or issue needs to be *explored*... We also conduct qualitative research because we need a *complex*, detailed understanding of the issue. This can only be established by talking directly with people, going to their homes or places of work, and allowing them to tell the stories unencumbered by what we expect to find or what we have read in the literature (pp. 47-48; emphasis in original text).

Within qualitative research, Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) explain that the qualitative research interview offers an opportunity to gain critical insight directly from individuals. As they write, such an approach aims to “understand the world from the subjects’ points of view, to unfold the meaning of their experiences, to uncover their lived world prior to scientific explanations” (p. 3). In addition, the extent to which my findings are applicable in other settings – known as transferability – will be important for educators in other districts or states, should they choose to apply findings to their own contexts. Thus, I sought to conduct interviews across multiple sites in order to expand the transferability of my findings for leaders in other school sites (Jenkins et al., 2018).

Role of the Researcher and Participants in Qualitative Inquiry

Merriam (2009) states that a characteristic of all qualitative research “is that the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis” (p. 15). This approach recognizes that all forms of data collection and analysis are interpreted and presented through the perspective of the researcher – informed through data collection but understood through the researcher’s own biases and lived experiences.

Researchers such as Talmy (2010) extend this discussion by arguing that in the field of applied linguistics, for example, the qualitative interview can be viewed as a form

of social interaction rather than purely a research instrument. That is, the information shared with me through interviews was shaped by the context of the interview and the identity the interviewee is choosing to portray, as well as my own role as the interviewer in shaping the narrative of the interviewee. Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) similarly state that the “inter-view” is in fact “where knowledge is constructed in the inter-action between the interviewer and the interviewee” (p. 4). In this vein, I acknowledge that my own demeanor and responses are integral to the information elicited from and shared by the interviewee. In this study, however, I have chosen to code and report interviewees’ statements as presented to me (i.e., at face value), rather than examine how the interviewees and I have co-constructed our conversation (Talmy, 2010).

Researcher Positionality and Assumptions. As the researcher, I seek to clearly state my own positionality and assumptions as they relate to this work. I believe both of these areas have implications for how I conducted my research, the data I acquired from my interviews, and my subsequent interpretation of the data. As a white, middle-class, English-speaking female, I have not experienced the U.S. public school system in the way that many ELs have – that is, in my educational experiences, I have nearly always been in majority-white classrooms with majority-English-speaking peers. However, I see opportunities to serve as an ally of ELs in our schools, and I hope that my research will add to the knowledgebase about Minnesota’s LTELs such that leaders can be more informed about how to support these students.

My own experience working with ELs emerged from a non-local context (i.e., not in Minnesota). Rather, following my graduation from college, I participated in a service

program in which I worked as an elementary school English teacher and as an organizer of an after-school tutoring program for a non-profit organization in Puerto Rico. My students were learning English as a foreign language, in many ways, as the language of their daily lives (both formal and informal) was almost entirely in Spanish. However, I came to learn how English language instruction has become a symbol of political and cultural conflict over the past century on the island, presented as both an opportunity for future growth and an affront to the island's strong Puerto Rican identity.

I view efforts to help ELs in Minnesota (and across the U.S.) develop all areas of their English proficiency as an important way in which schools can support not only ELs' academic experiences, but their future career opportunities as well. I also believe that this cannot be done *at the expense of* the diverse languages and experiences ELs learn from their families. In other words, I believe that we – as educators and researchers – can simultaneously promote English proficiency as well as the contributions that each EL student brings to the classroom; that language learning can challenge how and what we think about; and that we all have a role in finding ways to affirm the value of a multilingual, multicultural society. It is through this lens that I carried out this research study.

Overview of Study Development

In order to arrive at a coherent and cohesive study design, the study underwent a process of development that began several years before data collection began. After conducting an initial literature review (as discussed in Chapter 2), I conducted

exploratory interviews with five district-level EL leaders⁷ in districts of varying sizes in Minnesota and one EL specialist from the Minnesota Department of Education. I specifically asked about some of the topics that emerged from my initial literature review and asked about the concerns they were currently grappling with in meeting the needs of their ELs. These conversations allowed me to understand areas of need not only in the literature but also in practice, and I used the feedback gained from these interviews to help me refine my dissertation topic on LTELs and my research questions of interest. Finally, after my dissertation proposal was approved by my faculty committee, I obtained approval from the University of Minnesota's Institutional Review Board (IRB) to begin my study (see Appendix A for a copy of my IRB Approval).

Study Design

In this section I present the study's (a) setting and participants, (b) data collection methods, (c) data analysis methods, and (d) data reporting.

Setting and Participant Selection

I selected the school districts for my research using a purposeful sampling approach. To begin, following criteria established by Elfers and colleagues (2013), I selected districts only if the size of their EL population was equal to or greater than the state's proportion of ELs, which was 8 percent in Minnesota in 2018. In addition, I determined that the study districts must represent a range of urban, suburban, and rural sites in order to enhance the potential for the transferability of my findings – in other

⁷ The specific title of the position overseeing each district's EL programming varied, such as "EL Coordinator" or "EL Supervisor."

words, the potential for leaders across different contexts to apply aspects of my findings to their own leadership in schools and districts.

In some cases, districts were initially identified based on conversations with the district EL leaders during my exploratory research a year prior to beginning my data collection; in other cases, districts were referred to me by faculty in my academic program or recommended to me during my interviews. One individual that would have represented one of the largest districts in the state did not return an invitation to participate, nor did the director of a local charter school. Finally, each district's high school was included in the study; in districts with more than one high school, I selected the school site based on the recommendation of the district's EL leader or based on a referral from faculty in my academic program.

My research took place across eight public school districts in Minnesota. These districts spanned city, suburban, and town/rural settings,⁸ ranging in size from approximately 2,000 students to 36,000 students. The size of the districts' EL populations ranged from 8–25 percent of the general student population. In four districts, the majority of the student population was eligible for free- or reduced-price lunch (FRPL), while in the other four districts, between 41–45 percent did so. The districts served EL students with a wide variety of home languages, with Spanish as the most common language across all districts (though Spanish was not necessarily spoken by the *majority* of ELs in each district). Other common languages (spoken by at least 10 percent of the EL population) included Somali and Hmong. This also reflects the primary languages served

⁸ Classifications are based on NCES categories, further explained in Table 1.

in Minnesota as a whole in 2018–19, which included Spanish (35 percent), Somali (19 percent), and Hmong (14 percent) (Minnesota Department of Education, 2018a).

In Table 2, I present the study districts by their district ID (identified as A–H), district location (i.e., city, suburban, or town/rural), the number of students in the district, the percentage of students that are identified as ELs, the percentage of students who are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch (FRPL), the number of languages spoken by the district’s ELs, and the primary home languages of the district’s ELs.

Table 2. Study District Characteristics

District ID	District Location ¹	No. of Students ²	% EL ²	% FRPL ²	No. Languages Spoken by District’s ELs	Primary Home Languages Among District’s ELs ³
A	Suburban	4,000	25%	62%	25–50	78% Spanish
B	City	36,000	21%	57%	75+	45% Spanish, 38% Somali
C	Suburban	2,000	19%	75%	25–50	54% Spanish, 24% Hmong
D	Town/Rural	5,000	19%	55%	25–50	58% Spanish
E	Suburban	8,000	15%	45%	51–75	29% Spanish, 17% Hmong
F	City	11,000	14%	41%	51–75	51% Spanish, 21% Somali
G	Suburban	5,000	12%	41%	25–50	64% Spanish
H	Town/Rural	5,000	8%	42%	25–50	53% Spanish, 36% Somali

1. *District Location*: Classifications are based on categorizations from National Center for Education Statistics, 2018–19 School Year (most recent available). NCES categorizes school districts as one of four basic types (City, Suburban, Town, Rural), using definitions from the U.S. Census Bureau. Here, I present *town* and *rural* collectively as “town/rural.”

2. *No. of Students, % FRPL, % EL*: Data from Minnesota Report Card, 2018–19 Enrollment. Student populations are rounded to the nearest 1000.

3. *Primary Languages Spoken Among District’s ELs*: Defined as representing at least 10% of the languages spoken among EL students in that particular district. Data from the Minnesota Department of Education Data Reports and Analytics, 2018–19 Primary Home Language Totals.

I conducted individual interviews with nine district-level leaders and eight school-level leaders for this study, for a total of 17 interviewees. Within each district, I identified and interviewed the individual responsible for the district's EL instruction and programming; however, each district had their own title for this role (such as "English Learner Coordinator" or "English Learner Supervisor"); in seven districts, "English learner" was used in the title, while one district used "multi-language learner." In some cases, overseeing EL programming was the sole responsibility for these individuals, while in other cases, these individuals were also responsible for overseeing other student populations or programming, such as Native American education, migrant education, or Adult Basic Education. In addition, in one district, an interviewee recommended that I also speak with the District Director of Secondary Education, as this individual had previously served as the high school principal and could provide both a school- and district-level perspective on the role of leadership as it relates to ELs. Thus, I refer to all district-level individuals that I interviewed for this study as "district leaders," with the acknowledgement that they may serve ELs in different capacities. Finally, in addition to the district leaders, I spoke with "school leaders"; this included the high school principal in seven districts, and the assistant principal in one district, as a conflict for the principal arose at the time of our scheduled interview.

In Table 3, I present the interviewees' characteristics, including their district ID, their interviewee ID (identified as 1–17), their leadership level (district or school), and their prior experience, as shared with me during their interview.

Table 3. Interviewee Characteristics

District ID	Interviewee ID	Leadership Level	Experience
A	1	District	Has served in this role for 4 years. Previously served outside of the district as an elementary teacher, as a teacher on special assignment (TOSA) and as a supervisor.
	2	School	Has served in this role for 3 years. Previously served outside of the district as a high school principal for 5 years.
B	3	District	Has served in this role for 7 years.
	4	School	Has served in this role for 2 years, including interim year. Previously served outside of the district as a teacher for 12 years.
C	5	District	Has served in this role for 3 years. Previously served in the district as an elementary education assistant, a middle school science teacher, and an instructional coach.
	6	School	Has served in this role for less than 1 year (going into first full school year in 2018–19). Previously served as the school’s assistant principal, and in the district as a teacher and coach.
D	7	District	Has served in this role for 1 year. Previously served in the district as a middle school assistant principal for 5 years, and as a middle school math teacher for 9 years.
	8	School	Has served in this role for 1 year. Previously served as the school’s assistant principal for 5 years, and as a teacher at the school for 14 years.
E	9	District	Has served in this role for 3 years. Previously worked with a national educational consortium for 2 years, and for 15 years in work related to teacher leadership and EL-related professional development for teachers.
	10	School	Has served in this role for 1 year. Previously served as principal at middle and high schools for 8 years, and as assistant principal at middle and high schools for 3 years.
	11	District	Has served in the role of District Director of Secondary Education for 1 year. Previously served as a high school principal in the district for 8 years.
F	12	District	Has served in role for 4 years. Previously served as a middle school teacher in the district for 10 years.
	13	School	Has served in this role for 1 year. Previously served as the school’s assistant principal for 10 years, as an administrator in other schools, and as a school counselor.
G	14	District	Has served in this role for 1 year. Previously served as an elementary ESL teacher in the district for 7 years.
	15	School	Has served in this role for 4 years. Previously served as a high school science teacher for 20 years and as an athletic director and coach.
H	16	District	Has served in role for 1 year. Previously served as an elementary principal and as a university-level teacher educator and assistant professor.
	17	School	Has served in this role for 7 years. Previously served as an elementary principal for 8 years and as an assistant principal at a junior high school.

Note: Across all districts, “District” represents individuals who were responsible for EL programming, except for Interviewee 11, who had a different district-level role. “School” includes all high school principals and the assistant principal in the study.

Data Collection Methods

To answer my research questions and triangulate my findings, I collected data through interviews and document review of LTEL data obtained from the Minnesota Department of Education. I discuss each of these sources below.

Interviews. In my study, 17 one-on-one interviews represented my primary method of data collection. This allowed me to gain insight directly from education leaders about their work and experiences with LTELs in their schools and districts. To conduct my interviews, I used semi-structured interview protocols designed to gain an in-depth understanding of district and school leaders' awareness of LTELs, what they perceived as barriers to LTELs' success, how they described LTELs' language and academic development, and the ways in which they describe working to help LTELs succeed in school. (See Appendices B and C for the school leader consent form and protocol, respectively, and Appendices D and E for the district leader consent form and protocol).

The majority of the interviews took place in the interviewees' district or school office between June–October, 2018, with one interview taking place in the individual's home (as their office was being renovated and a quiet space was needed for recording purposes) and one interview taking place on the phone (per the interviewee's request, due to a tight schedule). Prior to beginning each interview, I verbally explained the purpose of my study, that interviewees could choose not to answer any question, and that I would not use any names (of districts, schools, or individuals) in my reporting to ensure confidentiality. All interviewees subsequently signed a consent form to begin the

interview. All except one interviewee granted permission for me to audio-record our conversation; for the non-recorded interview, I relied on handwritten notes. On average, district leader interviews lasted one hour (ranging from 35–75 minutes) and school leader interviews lasted 40 minutes (ranging from 30–70 minutes).

Extant Document Collection. Another source of data used in qualitative research is document review (Creswell, 2013). Some documents used in qualitative research are public records, which Merriam (2009) defines as the “official, ongoing records of a society’s activities” (p. 140). Specifically, to help address my research question regarding how Minnesota’s LTELs are performing with regard to their academic achievement and English language proficiency (ELP), I submitted a data request to the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) for de-identified student data from the study districts as well as state-level data. However, as discussed in Chapter 1, MDE does not have a definition for LTELs, and various definitions are used in the literature. Thus, I needed to set my own parameters around who to define as an LTEL. Ultimately, I chose the definition that was *most common* in the literature, and defined LTELs as students who have not yet reached ELP *after six years* in Minnesota schools (in other words, **students who are ELs for seven years or more**). I requested data be separated by LTELs, ELs who are not yet LTELs (“other ELs”), and non-ELs.

Variables I included in my data request to MDE included measures of academic performance (based on reading, math, and science scores from the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment, as well as graduation rates), measures of school attendance (including consistent attendance and the number of schools attended in one school year),

and measures of ELP (including ACCESS proficiency levels by domain, as well as overall ACCESS composite scores). I also requested demographic variables to gain a better understanding of some of the characteristics of the LTEL subgroup (including race/ethnicity, gender, free- and reduced-price lunch eligibility, and special education eligibility).

Data Analysis

I initially had all interviews transcribed by uploading the audio files to Trint, an automated transcription service. Following this, I read all interview transcription files, along with the audio, to correct misinterpretations, which tended to arise with program names and acronyms. This process allowed me to immerse myself back into the interviews and to produce 17 interview data files (16 transcripts and one notes file).

Next, I utilized the qualitative data analysis software NVivo to classify and code the interview data, informed by literature review as discussed in Chapter 2. While my framework provided a foundation for coding, I did not limit myself to categories I had established *a priori* and added new categories as needed. Throughout my coding process, I continually developed, combined, or eliminated codes as I gained a deeper understanding of the data (see Appendix F for codebook frequency table). This resulted in a set of key themes relevant to each of my research questions. My approach follows a coding process presented by Creswell (2013), who recommends that the researcher be open to new codes that may be needed in the analysis, even if they have set out to conduct the analysis according “prefigured” categories based on the literature. I acknowledge that while I strove to create clear themes and coding, my process for doing

so was shaped by my own interpretations of the data and my experience participating in each of the interviews. As such, my interpretations must be understood to be subjective.

To analyze the de-identified student data, I examined differences in outcomes between the different student subgroups I had designated (LTELs, other ELs, and non-ELs) and looked for patterns or differences across each measure. When looking at ELP outcomes, I examined the data by LTELs as compared to other ELs. I used this data in conjunction with the information shared with me during interviews about LTELs' progress to get a sense of how LTELs are performing and how existing programs appear to be meeting their academic and linguistic needs.

Data Reporting

As I reviewed my interview transcripts and coded interviewees' statements into categories (and sub-categories) across each of the research questions, I documented my findings in detail in Chapter 4. Within each research question, I reviewed and reported on all coded statements by theme. To further illustrate my synthesis of the coded statements and to highlight interviewees' own voices, I selected quotations that illustrated the topic at hand and that represented diverse perspectives, including both school and district leaders' statements as well as statements from across all districts. For all quotations used in this report, I indicate the interviewee's ID and district ID. In addition, in my reporting of the quotations, I chose to omit text when respondents discussed another topic area, which I represent with an ellipses (...). Square brackets within quotations indicate words that I have chosen to add for clarity, but that were not part of the original statement.

Methodological Limitations and Delimitations of the Study

One limitation or potential weakness of this study is that some leaders' perspectives may be represented less than others given two factors. First, one interviewee declined to have our interview recorded; as I relied on handwritten notes for this leaders' perspective, I was unable to verify the accuracy of verbatim quotations, and opted to include only select words that this individual used, rather than full quotations.

Second, one individual requested to conduct the interview over the phone due to a tight schedule, which presented both advantages and disadvantages over face-to-face interviews. Vogl (2013) notes that in phone interviews, participants may be more likely to share information that is less socially desirable or more personal than they would during face-to-face interviews, because they do not have to "lose face" when talking with the interviewer (p. 136). Conversely, not being able to interact in person may limit the trust that the interviewer is able to establish (or cause other communication complications) given that participants can only rely on verbal signals. In this interaction, I found that the lack of visual clues did affect the interview. For example, I found that I could not nod during natural silences or where I normally would to encourage the speaker, which led to periodic accidental interruptions. Though I believe the conversation continued smoothly overall, these moments may have limited my data by interrupting the speaker's thought process or the comfortable flow of the dialogue. In a face-to-face interview, meanwhile, I could have observed if the interviewee had finished speaking as opposed to just taking a moment to pause, and the interviewee could have seen if I was silent because I was taking notes or simply listening. Conducting the interview over the

phone thus contributed to an interaction that likely would have developed differently in a face-to-face setting.

In addition to these limitations, I also imposed my own delimitations on the study in order to limit the scope of my research. One such delimitation is that I selected a sample of leaders across only eight districts in Minnesota. Thus, the study results will not necessarily be representative of LTELs or school leaders either in the state or in the U.S. more broadly. Admittedly, such broad generalizability was not an intended outcome of this study, although I sought to account for a range of perspectives by including districts across city, suburban, and town/rural contexts.

A second delimitation is that this study sought to identify the perceptions and statements about LTELs from school leaders and leaders of districts' EL programming, and not from other individuals in the school system. Admittedly, there are many other individuals that serve in leadership capacities within schools and districts, including teacher leaders other district-level positions that can play a significant role in shaping the educational outcomes for LTELs. Thus, my narrow focus on "leadership" in this work may not fully recognize all of the ways in which education leaders in various capacities can contribute to a system of supports for LTELs. Future areas of study could account for more of the complexities of education leadership in addressing LTELs' needs, which were beyond the scope of my current study.

Chapter 3 Summary

In this chapter I presented the methodology I used to conduct my research study. I discussed my use of a qualitative approach to investigate my research questions as they

relate to education leadership for LTEs in Minnesota's high schools, an overview of my study's development, and my methods for data collection, analysis, and reporting.

My study sample consisted of 17 district- and school-level leaders across eight Minnesota school districts. I primarily utilized one-on-one interviews to gather data, as well as student data from MDE. I analyzed the data by coding interviewee's statements into primary themes, largely drawing from the literature-based conceptual framework presented in Chapter 2. To ensure the "trustworthiness" of my study, I described how I utilized rich, thick, description of my interviewees' statements, I shared my own biases and assumptions as a researcher, and I drew from both interviews and MDE data in presenting my findings. Finally, I presented some of the key methodological limitations and delimitations of my study. In Chapter 4, I turn to my presentation of the findings emerging from the methods of data collection and analysis described in this chapter.

Chapter 4: Findings

The purpose of this study was to explore how district and school leaders reported defining and supporting LTELs in Minnesota high schools. In this chapter, I present my findings by each of the four research questions that guided my study, including: (a) How, if at all, do education leaders in Minnesota define who is considered an LTEL student? (b) How do LTELs compare to other ELs across demographic characteristics and measures of academic success, academic engagement, and English language proficiency? (c) What do education leaders identify as barriers for LTELs in attaining English language proficiency? and (d) How do education leaders report supporting LTELs' academic and English language development?

RQ1: How, if at all, do education leaders define who is considered an LTEL student?

In this section, I discuss how leaders reported defining their district's LTELs, if at all; how leaders described their own awareness about these students, as well as the levels of awareness about LTELs for others in the district; and the benefits and concerns interviewees thought would arise should there be a more formal definition for LTELs.

Defining LTELs

My interviews with the leaders identified for this study revealed that no education leaders reported that their district had a formal definition for LTELs. There was also a lack of clarity and consistency in how education leaders informally defined or identified these students, though this varied across districts. More specifically, leaders described: a working definition used by the district leader (12% of interviewees, $n=2$); a working

definition, with some inconsistencies or lack of clarity (24%, $n=4$); no district definition, but growing awareness and conversations around LTELs (29%, $n=5$), and little to no familiarity with the term “LTEL” (35%, $n=6$). I discuss each of these areas below.

Working Definition of LTELs. Two district leaders (12% of interviewees) shared that while their districts do not formally define LTEL students, there are working definitions used by the district’s English Learner Coordinator (ELC) or EL department when discussing these students. One of these leaders defined LTELs as students receiving EL services for six years or more, though they did not discuss how this definition was currently used or shared with others. The second leader described LTELs as ELs receiving services for seven years or more, and was the only interviewee to discuss sharing the informal definition and information about LTELs with one of the district’s high schools. For example, when asked if the district currently has a definition for LTELs, this individual replied:

No. Well, I have a definition [for LTELs], but I would say, to be fair, it’s... not formalized. In practice, it’s kids who...have been in [EL] service for longer than six years...This is the definition we presented to [a high school]. (Interviewee 12, District F)

These two leaders both referenced seeking the available research when approaching the work of defining who the district would consider an LTEL student. For example, one district leader discussed using guidelines from Laurie Olsen’s work “Reparable Harm,” as well as recommendations from Gabriela Uro, Director of the Council of the Great City Schools. A second district leader mentioned using research from California and New York, where much of the existing research on LTELs is based.

Working Definition for LTELs, With Some Inconsistencies or Lack of

Clarity. Four leaders (24% of interviewees, including three district leaders and one school leader) each described their working definitions as ELs receiving services as five, six, seven, or eight years or more – though one leader subsequently shared that their district did *not* have a definition for LTELs. In fact, each of these discussions reflected some inconsistencies or a lack of clarity around defining who would be considered an LTEL. For example, although there is neither a state nor federal definition for these students, three district interviewees [incorrectly] referenced using such definitions. It is possible that the leaders were referring to new ESSA guidelines from the state that require districts to report the number of ELs who have received EL services for five years or more. Also, the three district interviewees each either offered a definition and subsequently said that a clearer definition would be helpful, or changed how they were defining LTELs over the course of the interview. For example, one district leader first explained the definition their district uses as follows:

Well we follow the definition from California, and I think the state has now adopted it too, which is basically five or more years in an EL program [and] still below grade level. (Interviewee 9, District E)

Later, the interviewee described the district’s work related to LTELs as an “*emerging conversation*” and shared that it would be beneficial to have a “*more defined term of the students.*” In other words, it was unclear the extent to which the district had a clear definition for LTELs, as initially indicated. This individual explained:

It’s still an emerging conversation...We’re just getting to the point where we’re tracking [LTELs] to see who they are. (Interviewee 9, District E)

Another district leader, meanwhile, first described LTELs in terms of the “*federal definition*,” explaining that it related to funding the district received for ELs. Later, she separated the LTEL definition from funding and explained that the district would “*probably*” define LTELs as ELs who have received service for eight years or more:

If I'm going by a federal definition, [it would be] the five-year LTEL. ... Maybe what I'd say is, if I take the funding out, and just say, like in our EL department, we would probably use more of that seven-year [definition]. We'd probably say kids who are beyond their seven years of service. So, eight years, nine years. (Interviewee 1, District A)

The third district leader first referenced the “*state definition*” of LTELs, but after looking through some materials, restated that their district does not in fact follow a definition for LTELs. As they explained:

We have the state definition. We have to report to the state. [Interviewee looks on phone for the definition] ... I guess there's no state definition, but there are state documents to raise awareness. So we don't have a district definition [for LTELs]. (Interviewee 16, District H)

Finally, one school leader confirmed the working definition discussed by the district leader (defined as a student receiving services for seven years or more), though she nonetheless expressed some hesitation, and shared that the district leader would be the person to confirm how LTELs are defined. This demonstrates some consistency between the district and school leaders, but a lack of clarity nonetheless:

I think [the definition] would be seven years...but [the district EL leader] would be the person to ask for that. I would be guesstimating. (Interviewee 13, District F)

No Definition, but Emerging Conversations on Defining LTELs. Five leaders (29% of interviewees, including three district leaders and two school leaders) explained that while their districts did not use an informal or working definition for LTELs, they

shared what they would perceive an LTEL student to be, or how their district EL team has been starting to think about these students. One school leader used a personal definition of a student receiving three years or more of EL service (though this individual explained that their school's EL department does discuss students who have been in EL service for five years):

My own definition is anyone who's been labeled and placed in EL programming for more than three years. The team definition, I'm assuming, is similar, based on our conversations, because we do talk about those students who have...been in EL programming for five years and are... still at a Level 3. (Interviewee 4, District B)

Another district leader explained that ELs who have been receiving consistent EL services for five years and who are behind their projected growth targets by two years would be students they would have concerns about, or who, in other words, might be a student who would “*emerge as an LTEL.*” Thus, while this district did not have a definition for LTEs, the leader described how their EL team was thinking about EL trajectories, as follows:

We've talked about [how to] decide who would be an LTEL....The way that I've looked at it up until this point has been our kids with five years of consistent service that are not making projected growth targets and are behind by two years. And so that's more of who would we suspect would emerge as an LTEL. (Interviewee 5, District C)

Meanwhile, three individuals described a possible LTEL definition as falling within the five-to-seven-year timeframe as an EL student. These leaders identified this timeframe as an important window to look more closely at individual students' progress and development. As some of these leaders explained:

I would say the district doesn't necessarily have a definition. Not a clear definition. So with process, procedures, it's not clearly defined, no...I feel that there is a window...beginning between years 5–7, that we need to begin to say 'What's going on? What would be the individual's plan? And truly what else can we do?'. (Interviewee 7, District D)

If we were to identify the LTELs? ...That 5–7 range, I would say that that's when we would want to start flagging students to see what their progress is like. (Interviewee 14, District G)

Little or no Familiarity with Term “LTELs.” Finally, six leaders (35%, including one district leader and five school leaders) expressed a lack of clarity or awareness of the term “LTEL.” In fact, five of these interviewees – representing five of the seven school leaders in the study – were candid in their responses by sharing that they had little to no familiarity with the term “long-term English learner” prior to my contacting them about the study. For example, one leader explained that their understanding of what LTELs would be was “*slim to none.*” Given that there is no federal or state-level definition for LTELs, nor are EL data expected to be disaggregated to present LTEL student outcomes, it may be unsurprising that school leaders would be unfamiliar with this term. When asked if they were familiar with this term or what their level of understanding was about the term “LTEL,”, three school leaders shared the following:

You know when you mentioned [LTELs] I was kind of like 'I wonder what that is?' So, no, we haven't really [discussed this term]. (Interviewee 17, District H)

I would say I'm familiar with [the term], but I had to look again to see, 'LTEL.' So it's not a vernacular that that I would commonly use. (Interviewee 15, District G)

Meanwhile, three of these six leaders appeared to seek clarity from me as the researcher by proposing their understanding of LTELs and asking for confirmation. For example, one of these school leaders asked if an LTEL student was a student receiving EL services for five years or more, which most aligns with the concept of defining LTELs by their number of years they have been in EL services:

*I don't have a clear understanding of who's considered an LTEL – is it if they've received [EL] services or need services beyond five years?
(Interviewee 2, District A)*

However, a second school leader (District E) explained that they were familiar with ELs who have demonstrated language proficiency and have *exited* EL services, and asked if this was the student subgroup I was referring to. This is, in fact, a student subgroup known as students who are *reclassified fluent English proficient (RFEP)*, and not LTELs. Per federal guidelines, school districts are required to monitor RFEP students for two years after exiting EL services to ensure they “have not exited EL services prematurely” (U.S. Department of Education, Office of English Language Acquisition, 2016). Thus, this school leader’s statement may reflect a lack of clarity about some of the nuances of existing EL terminology and current data monitoring of ELs. As this leader shared:

I've never heard that term. I've heard of the monitoring. So we have kids who, ...with the ACCESS test, they have tested out, and so now they go to a monitoring process. I'm assuming those are learners that you're talking about? (Interviewee 10, District E)

Finally, the third leader who sought clarity about LTELs from me as a researcher was the one district leader not serving in the English Learner Coordinator (ELC) role. This leader asked if LTELs were students who “*continue to be at Level 4, Level 5, year*

after year.” Thus, this leader did describe LTELs as students who continued in EL services for some time. However, they also described LTELs as students falling within Levels 4 and 5 of the ACCESS assessment, but not moving “*beyond*” this. Specifically, when asked how this leader would describe this group of students, they explained:

Other than a commonsense approach, that’s what it is, right? Students who aren’t able to pass beyond Level 5 [on the ACCESS test] and they continue to be Level 4, Level 5, year after year at the high school level? (Interviewee 11, District E)

This understanding reflects Minnesota’s exit criteria to an extent; to exit EL services in Minnesota, an EL student must receive an overall composite score of 4.5 on the ACCESS test, as well as a score of at least 3.5 on three of the four domains of reading, writing, speaking and listening⁹ (Minnesota Department of Education, 2017b). Many students, therefore, may not even be reaching Levels 4 or 5 on the assessment.

Awareness of LTELs

In addition to sharing how, if at all, their districts defined or discussed who would be considered an LTEL student, interviewees also described the extent to which individuals in their districts were *aware* of this subgroup of ELs. Many leaders revealed that while they perceived awareness about LTELs to be strong among the districts’ EL teams, they reported otherwise mixed levels of awareness across their districts. Given that six interviewees had shared that they had little to no familiarity with the term LTEL, I directed my questions about awareness to the interviewees that otherwise expressed familiarity with the term ($n=11$). Of these 11 individuals, 7 leaders (64%) discussed

⁹ More information is provided in this chapter as part of RQ2.

awareness at the level of EL teams or departments, 6 leaders (55%) discussed general awareness across the district, 5 leaders (45%) described the awareness of administrators, and 4 leaders (36%) discussed the awareness of general education teachers.

EL Team and Department-Level Awareness. Education leaders were most in agreement in their perception that their districts' EL teams and departments were very aware of LTELs and their needs (64%, $n=7/11$); this included six district leaders and one school leader. Some of these leaders shared that the EL team has talked about who the team would consider to be an LTEL, while others shared that their EL teams discussed LTELs in terms of possible future programming and services. As some of these individuals shared:

On the EL team, there is very much an awareness of [LTELs]. In fact just this year [2017–18] we started talking about really the need for kind of an LTEL class that's different.... We've had a lot of conversations as a staff about this. (Interviewee 9, District E)

Our EL program...[is] very aware. I would say that our sheltered content EL teachers are also aware at the secondary level. (Interviewee 12, District F)

It's something definitely that secondary EL teachers are talking about, that we're really, really concerned about. (Interviewee 14, District G)

District-Level Awareness. Six education leaders (55%) shared the extent to which they believed their district as a whole was aware of LTELs; this included five district leaders and one school leader. Of these individuals, four reported that individuals in their districts aware of these students. For example, one leader shared that LTELs are “definitely being talked about,” while two leaders shared the perception that individuals in the district are “very aware” of LTELs. Two education leaders, on the other hand,

expressed that there was a limited district-level awareness about LTELs, with one district leader sharing, “*I don't think there's much awareness of them as LTELs.*”

Administration-Level Awareness. Five district leaders (45%) shared the extent to which they believed that administrators in their district are aware of LTELs. Of these leaders, two reported that administrators were either “*aware*” or “*very aware*” of LTELs, while three reported that there was not much awareness of LTELs among the districts’ administrators. The district leaders who reported that there was not much awareness are consistent with the five school leaders in the study who shared that they were not familiar with the LTEL term. As one of these district leaders shared:

I think if you were to ask any of the building principals, ‘Who is an LTEL in your district?’ ...I don't know if they would know. (Interviewee 1, District A)

Awareness Among General Education Teachers. Four district leaders (36%) shared that they believe the general education teachers in their district had either limited or mixed levels of awareness about LTELs. One of the district leaders specifically mentioned that what general education teachers have learned about ELs has been through their co-teaching work with other EL teachers, but that EL teachers may not have used the term “LTEL” in their conversations. As some of these leaders reflected:

Teacher awareness is probably hit or miss...EL teams have done a lot with their co-teachers – they probably don't use terms like ‘LTELs’; they don't get to that level. We have tried... ‘Here are the proficiency levels’ or ‘Here are can-do [statements].’ (Interviewee 1, District A)

I think the classroom teachers are somewhat aware [of LTELs]...It's probably the EL teachers [with the highest levels of awareness], then maybe administrators because they get more PD through the district, and then classroom teachers. (Interviewee 12, District F)

Benefits and Concerns of Defining LTELs

Benefits of Defining LTELs. Within the discussion of identifying who LTELs are, 13 of the 17 education leaders participating in the study (76% of interviewees) spoke about the ways in which they perceived a formal definition would be beneficial— this included five district leaders and eight school leaders. Leaders explained that the primary benefits of defining LTELs were that they would be able to use this information about their students to inform programming and staffing decisions ($n=12$) and that this would give them and their staff a better understanding of the students themselves, as well as raise awareness about this student subgroup ($n=5$). I discuss these areas below.

Informing Leaders' Programming and Staffing Decisions. Broadly, 12 of the 13 leaders explained that defining LTELs would allow them to better identify programming needs and opportunities for these students, such as if different programs are needed for LTELs compared to other ELs, or whether LTELs need additional support in specific content areas or academic areas (such as writing or in a science course). These programming decisions, in turn, would affect staffing decisions and how leaders allocate their EL staff. More specifically, six leaders explained that they would be able to address programming or staffing needs because they would be better able to disaggregate their student data, or expressed that better understanding LTEL data would be an important first step in addressing their needs. For example, one school leader stated “*I believe in data,*” explaining that it would be necessary to determine not only how many LTELs the school has, but where they are experiencing success or not. Some of these leaders explained how they would use data to inform LTEL programming as follows:

I would use that information in budgeting and planning for an upcoming school year... for staffing, for professional development, and programming. (Interviewee 2, District A)

[We need to] find out how many [LTELs] we have, and look at their grades, look at their attendance...If they're successful, why are they successful, and what classes aren't they successful in? ...In order for us to move forward, we have to do our homework. I believe in data. (Interviewee 10, District E)

[Data would help to] pinpoint the areas where they're struggling the most – if it's writing, if it's reading comprehension, if it's auditory – so that we could redirect both any interventions that we're providing but also our general education programs to support students in different ways. (Interviewee 15, District G)

Contributing to a Better Understanding of LTELs. Five leaders (one district leader and four school leaders) shared that a formal definition of LTELs would provide them – and their staff – a better understanding of who their students are, or that it would help to raise awareness about these students. Specifically, four leaders stated that an LTEL definition would allow them to understand some of LTELs' key characteristics, with one school leader sharing that this was important because teachers need to know “every learner” they work with (District F). This leader, and one other, shared:

Leaders need to know, what is an LTEL?...When did they start and when really should we be looking for that exit? And if they're not exiting, what are those leverage points that we need to be having to help them exit so they can be successful in postsecondary? (Interviewee 10, District E)

It would be helpful for me to know – what's the definition of an LTEL? I think it'd be [helpful] for me to be able to communicate to our staff, 'This is what an LTEL is, this is a traditional student, these are the different challenges that they have.' ... We need our teachers to know every learner that standing in front of you. (Interviewee 13, District F)

Two of these five leaders also spoke broadly about how an LTEL definition would bring greater awareness about these students. For example, one school district leader believed that an LTEL definition would be helpful because it would keep these students on leaders' "radar." Meanwhile, a school leader reflected that having an LTEL definition would serve as an important step in acknowledging these students as an area of need, which is, in turn, connected to funding:

I'm sure it would be beneficial for...there to be a common definition or common language across the country...I'm thinking that the language is in a lot of way hooked to need, and need would determine funding and the supports needed for these students. (Interviewee 2, District A)

Concerns with Defining an LTEL Student Subgroup. In addition to the benefits presented by interviewees, three leaders also shared their concerns or hesitations related to defining the LTEL student subgroup. For example, two district leaders explained that the term "long-term English learner" was "deficit based" or that it had a "negative connotation" because it highlighted the number of years they have been unable to attain EL proficiency. One of these leaders reflected on the fact that the term "LTEL" has not gained the widespread recognition that terms for other EL subgroups have acquired, such as Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education (SLIFE); SLIFE students are a now-commonly recognized student subgroup among educators and policy makers in Minnesota, especially as the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) now requires districts to report annually on the number of SLIFE students enrolled. This requirement was included as part of legislation known as the LEAPS Act (Learning for English Academic Proficiency and Success Act), which passed in Minnesota in 2014

(Minnesota Department of Education, 2020b). These two district leaders explained their concerns or hesitations as follows:

I feel a little uncomfortable with the term LTELs [for] daily usage...because it has a negative connotation: 'You're still here. You failed again'...I don't know what a more neutral term would be...to use on a daily basis...[Because] it's not their fault they're still in the system. We don't technically really know why they're still in the system other than they're not able to read and write at the level to get out of the test. (Interviewee 9, District E)

[The term LTEL] seems deficit based...I think we need to land on a term and right now it doesn't seem to be a huge focus of MDE... I think there are people who are interested [in defining LTELs], but it's not like SLIFE, [which] became a really big term and it got incorporated into the LEAPS Act. (Interviewee 12, District F)

A school leader, meanwhile, noted that it would be important to work with teachers and staff on their “mindset” if they were going to be told that some of their EL students were LTELs; however, if all teachers engaged in this work of learning about LTELs, the interviewee did not perceive that defining this group of students would be a problem:

I think there has to be a lot of work around [the term LTEL] in terms of mindset. But...when you've worked on your mindset for the whole building, if you add a new term to categorize a student, it shouldn't be a problem. (Interviewee 6, District C)

RQ1 Key Finding and Summary

Key Finding 1. All leaders indicated that there is no formal districtwide definition for LTELs, with some leaders citing little to no familiarity with the term LTEL. Interviewees stated that a formal definition would aid in their programming and staffing

decisions, and would provide them and their staff with a better understanding of who their LTEL students are.

Summary. As part of my first research question, I sought to explore how, if at all, education leaders define who is considered an LTEL student in their districts. In sum, my interviews revealed that no education leaders or districts are currently using a formal definition for LTELs, and there was also a lack of clarity and consistency in how education leaders informally identified these students. Most commonly, leaders shared that they either had little to no familiarity with the term “LTEL,” or that there were emerging conversations in the district about which students would be considered LTELs. Two district leaders, however, shared that while their districts did not have formal definitions for these students, they had developed working definitions for LTELs based on existing research.

Beyond defining LTELs, education leaders also described the extent to which individuals in their districts were *aware* of this particular group of EL students. Unsurprisingly, interviewees explained that the districts’ EL teachers and teams were well-aware of LTELs, although many leaders described mixed levels of awareness across their districts as a whole, including both administrators and general education teachers. Some leaders stated that an LTEL definition would not only bring greater awareness about these students, but that it would also help leaders and staff better understand *who* LTELs are and what their key characteristics are. Nonetheless, a few school leaders acknowledged that LTEL is a deficit-based term, as it highlights students’ difficulty in acquiring English language proficiency, rather than their strengths or assets.

RQ2: How do LTELs compare to other ELs across demographic characteristics and measures of academic success, academic engagement, and English language proficiency?

In this section, I discuss key demographic and academic characteristics of LTELs and other ELs. To explore my second research question, I utilized two data sources: (a) data from the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) to compare outcomes for LTELs and other ELs (statewide and by district), and (b) interview data in which I had asked education leaders about their LTELs' English language proficiency (ELP). I did not provide leaders with specific data to respond to, as I conducted the interviews prior to receiving any data from MDE; rather, I asked leaders for their perceptions of how their ELs are doing on the ACCESS assessment and across the domains of listening, reading, writing and speaking.

Minnesota's LTEL Enrollment and Demographics, Grades 9–12

For the 2017–18 school year, ELs represented approximately 6 percent of all students enrolled in Grades 9–12 in Minnesota public schools ($n=16,462/279,544$ students); LTELs represented 38 percent of this high school EL population ($n=6,275$), compared to 62 percent of other ELs ($n=10,187$). Demographic data reveal a few differences between LTELs and other ELs. First, a greater number of LTELs are male (59%) as compared to other ELs (53%) or non-ELs (51%). With regard to race/ethnicity, compared to other ELs, a greater number of LTELs are Hispanic or Latino (48% vs. 30% of other ELs) or Asian (31% vs. 19% of other ELs), while fewer LTELs are Black or African American (19% vs. 47% of other ELs) or White (2% vs. 4% of other ELs).

Finally, while approximately equal numbers of LTELs and other ELs are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch (86% and 87%, respectively), this is not the case for special education services (SPED). That is, while only 7 percent of other ELs are eligible for SPED, one-third of LTELs are SPED-eligible (33%) (see Table 4).

Table 4. Statewide Demographic Characteristics for LTELs, Other ELs, and Non-ELs in Grades 9–12

	LTELs ^a (n=6,275)		Other ELs ^b (n=10,187)		Non-ELs ^c (n=263,082)	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Gender						
Male	3,684	59%	5,390	53%	134,745	51%
Female	2,591	41%	4,797	47%	128,337	49%
Race/Ethnicity ^d						
American Indian or Alaska Native	3	<1%	6	<1%	4934	2%
Asian	1,932	31%	1,906	19%	15,042	6%
Black or African American	1173	19%	4,786	47%	25,644	10%
Hispanic or Latino	2,984	48%	3,024	30%	18,776	7%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	4	<1%	27	<1%	177	<1%
White	155	2%	415	4%	189,829	72%
Two or More Races	24	<1%	23	<1%	8,680	3%
Free or Reduced-Price Lunch	5,377	86%	8,880	87%	84,066	32%
Special Education	2,095	33%	672	7%	39,342	15%

Note. All data are from the 2017–18 school year, the most recent year available with complete data records. MDE does not collect data on students' EL status in non-MN school. For example, if a student qualified for EL services in California in Grades K–2, moved to Minnesota and was an EL student starting in Grade 3, the earliest they would be considered an LTEL based on the available MDE data is Grade 9. Meanwhile, an EL student who started in a *Minnesota* kindergarten classroom could potentially be identified as an LTEL as early as Grade 6.

- a. LTELs include students who have a total of 7 years or more of enrollment records (including the 2017–18 school year and any past years) where they were classified as EL. Students who switch between EL and non-EL in a given year will have only a portion of their EL-enrollment records counted toward the total of 7 years needed to qualify as an LTEL.
- b. Other ELs include students who have been classified as EL at any point in the 2017–18 school year, but where the total years of enrollment (including the 2017–18 school year and any past years) where they were identified as EL is less than 7.
- c. Non-EL students include any student who was not classified as EL at any point in the 2017–18 school year, regardless of their past EL status or number of years previously enrolled as an EL.
- d. The seven race/ethnicity categories are reported by MDE following federal guidelines established in 2007. More information available at <https://education.mn.gov/MDE/dse/count/>.

Academic Success and Engagement

To understand LTELs' academic success and engagement, I examined three measures: standardized test scores, graduation rates, and attendance rates (see

Table 5). First, to examine progress according to academic measures, I compared LTEL outcomes to those of other ELs and non-ELs on Minnesota's standardized test, the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment (MCA). Overall, academic proficiency levels for ELs are vastly below those of non-ELs, with gaps in proficiency between ELs and non-ELs ranging from 44 percent in math (from 5.8% for other ELs to 49.3% for non-ELs) to 56 percent for reading (from 6.6% for LTELs to 62.5% for non-ELs). Looking at differences between LTELs and other ELs, the two groups achieve at similar levels in reading and science; however, LTELs appear to underperform in science as compared to other ELs, with 2.5 percent of LTELs attaining science proficiency, compared to 5.8 percent of other ELs.

Notably, no more than 7 percent of either LTELs or other ELs reach proficiency levels across the subject areas of reading, math, or science on the MCAs. It is especially alarming that these proficiency scores are so low for LTELs given that, by definition, these students have been in U.S. schools for seven years or more.

An additional measure used to assess students' academic success is graduation from high school. The data reveal that approximately two-thirds of LTELs (66.9%) graduated from high school in 2017–18, which was higher than the graduation rate for other ELs (57.2%) but lower than that of non-ELs (84.1%). Next, a measure used to understand levels of academic engagement is school attendance. The Minnesota Department of Education uses a measure of “consistent attendance,” which is the percentage of students attending more than 90% of the days they are enrolled in school (Minnesota Department of Education, 2020a).¹⁰ LTELs represent the lowest levels of consistent attendance among the three groups (69.1%), compared to other ELs (75.7%) and non-ELs (78.2%).

Finally, I also examined differences in the average number of schools attended in a given school year for each of the three identified groups. On the whole, LTELs and other ELs reflect similar attendance, with LTELs attending 1.49 schools in the 2017–18 school year and other ELs attending 1.47 schools, in comparison with non-ELs, who attend 1.22 schools, on average. This indicates high mobility rates for ELs as compared to non-ELs. In Table 5, I present the percentage of LTELs, other ELs, and non-ELs who attained proficiency on the 2017–18 statewide MCAs, as well as graduation rates, a

¹⁰ Consistent attendance is used as part of the state's accountability system under the Every Student Succeeds Act. MDE (2019a) explains that “consistent attendance on its own is an important predictor of a student's academic success. In general, students who attend school consistently are more likely to achieve academically, graduate high school and succeed in their careers, college experience, or both after high school... Consistent attendance can also be a useful indicator of underlying student and family engagement, as well as school climate more broadly. Low consistent attendance – either for students overall or particular student groups – may indicate that students and/or families do not feel connected to school as a result of school climate issues, or they face other outside barriers that the school can help to address. Students may also choose not to attend as a result of ineffective teaching and learning practices or unequal implementation of school policies.”

measure of consistent attendance (as an indicator for engagement), and the average number of schools attended in 2017–18 for each of these groups.

Table 5. Statewide Academic Achievement and Engagement for LTELs, Other ELs, and Non-ELs in Grades 9–12

	LTELs		Other ELs		Non-ELs	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
MCA Proficiency Rates						
Reading	1,562	6.6%	2,224	6.4%	56,492	62.5%
Math	1,011	2.5%	1,738	5.8%	54,357	49.3%
Science	1,477	3.9%	1,955	4.3%	54,567	55.0%
Graduation Rates	953	66.9%	1,674	57.2%	64,521	84.1%
Consistent Attendance	<i>n/a</i>	69.1%	<i>n/a</i>	75.7%	<i>n/a</i>	78.2%
Avg. No. of Schools Attended	<i>n/a</i>	1.49	<i>n/a</i>	1.47	<i>n/a</i>	1.22

Note. All data are from the 2017–18 school year, the most recent year available with complete data records. The *n* for the MCAs represents the number of students tested; the *n* for graduation rates represents the cohort size. The MCA reading test is completed by students in Grade 10, the MCA math test is completed by students in Grade 11, and the MCA science test is given to students in the year they complete their instruction in life science (Minnesota Department of Education, 2018c).

English Language Proficiency

To measure EL students’ English language proficiency (ELP), Minnesota administers the ACCESS 2.0.¹¹ The ACCESS test, developed by WIDA, measures ELP across four domains: listening, reading, writing and speaking. Within each domain, students fall within one of six levels, from Level 1 to Level 6 (WIDA, 2019), with each level corresponding to additional progress toward a student’s full proficiency in English (see Figure 4).

¹¹ ELs who qualify for SPED take an alternate assessment, Alternate ACCESS. Data from the Alternate ACCESS is not included here.

Figure 4. ACCESS English Language Proficiency Levels

Level 1 Entering	Level 2 Emerging	Level 3 Developing	Level 4 Expanding	Level 5 Bridging	Level 6 Reaching
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Note. Figure from WIDA (2019)

The standards and benchmarks for each level are specific to each of the domain areas, as well as a student’s grade level. To represent some of the variation across domains, I present the Level 3 descriptions for Grades 1–12 across each domain in Table 6, as provided in the ACCESS interpretive guide for score reports (WIDA, 2019).

Table 6. ACCESS Level 3 Descriptions Across Domains

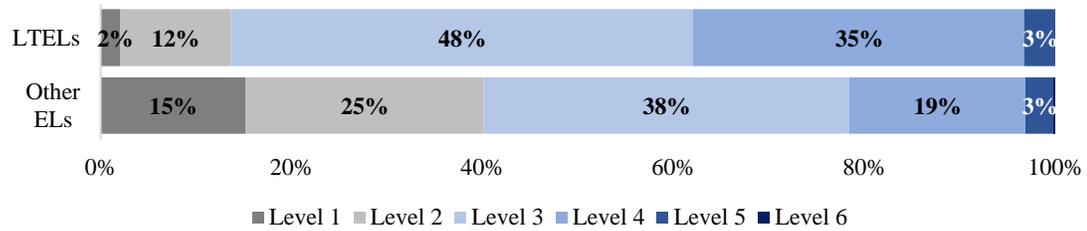
Domain	Students at this level generally can...
Listening	<p>...understand oral language related to specific common topics in school and can participate in class discussions, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connect spoken ideas to own experiences • Find, select, and order information from oral descriptions • Identify the causes and effects of events or situations discussed orally • Classify pros and cons of issues in discussions
Speaking	<p>...communicate ideas and details orally in English using several connected sentences and can participate in short conversations and discussions in school, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relate stories or events • Share ideas and provide details • Describe processes or procedures • Give opinions with reasons
Reading	<p>...understand written language related to common topics in school and can participate in class discussions, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Classify main ideas and examples in written information • Identify main information that tells who, what, when or where something happened • Identify steps in written processes and procedures • Recognize language related to claims and supporting evidence
Writing	<p>...communicate in writing in English using language related to common topics in school, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describe familiar issues and events • Create stories or short narratives • Describe processes and procedures with some details • Give opinions with reasons in a few short sentences

In addition to receiving a proficiency score between Levels 1–6 within each domain, students receive an overall “composite” score that encompasses all of the domains.¹² The composite score is what is used to determine if an EL student is sufficiently proficient in English to no longer be considered an EL student – to reach this point, a student’s composite score must be at least 4.5 and the student *must also have* a score of at least 3.5 in three of the four domains (Minnesota Department of Education, 2017b). This score is considered a summary of a student’s performance, although students may have similar overall composite scores with very different scores across each of the domains (WIDA, 2019).

ACCESS Overall Composite Score Findings. Examining the data for LTELs and other ELs in Minnesota reveals some key differences in their overall levels of ELP. Over three-quarters of LTELs (83%) attain proficiency scores within Levels 3 and 4, compared to 57% of other ELs (see Figure 5). However, only 3% of both LTELs and other ELs reach Level 5. This indicates that, overall, LTELs have higher levels of English proficiency than other ELs, yet nearly all LTELs (97%) are still not reaching higher levels of English language proficiency (Level 5 or above), as measured by ACCESS.

Figure 5. Statewide Overall Composite ACCESS Proficiency Levels for LTELs and Other ELs in Grades 9–12

¹² The composite score weights each of the domains differently, with reading and writing each contributing 35% of the composite score, and listening and speaking each contributing 15% of the composite score (WIDA, 2019).



Note. This figure represents EL students in Grades 9–12 in the 2017–18 school year, including 4,604 LTELs and 7,967 other ELs who had an overall composite score.

Similar to the statewide data, over 75% of LTELs across all districts in the study also fell into Levels 3 or 4 for their overall composite proficiency score, ranging from 77% (Districts C and F) to 92% (District G). A smaller percentage of other ELs reached these levels, ranging from 37% (District H) to 65% (District F). Meanwhile, while 14% of statewide LTELs fell into Levels 1 and 2, the percentage of LTELs doing so among the district in this study ranged from 5% (District G) to 23% (District F). I present the overall composite ACCESS proficiency levels for LTELs and other ELs, statewide and by district, in Table 7.

Table 7. Overall Composite ACCESS Proficiency Levels for LTELs and Other ELs, Statewide and by District

	<i>n</i>	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5	Level 6
Statewide LTELs	4,604	2%	12%	48%	35%	3%	-
Other ELs	7,967	15%	25%	38%	19%	3%	-
District A LTELs	90	1%	13%	61%	24%	-	-
Other ELs	88	18%	23%	39%	19%	1%	-
District B LTELs	591	5%	15%	45%	33%	3%	-
Other ELs	1,129	16%	31%	35%	16%	2%	-
District C LTELs	62	2%	13%	42%	35%	8%	-
Other ELs	57	19%	18%	44%	19%	-	-
District D LTELs	58	3%	12%	57%	28%	-	-
Other ELs	112	9%	25%	44%	20%	3%	-
District E LTELs	86	1%	8%	49%	34%	8%	-

	Other ELs	148	7%	26%	35%	26%	5%	-
District F	LTEs	97	2%	21%	51%	26%	1%	-
	Other ELs	120	10%	23%	42%	23%	3%	-
District G	LTEs	62	-	5%	60%	32%	3%	-
	Other ELs	45	16%	24%	31%	20%	9%	-
District H	LTEs	37	3%	16%	70%	11%	-	-
	Other ELs	30	23%	40%	30%	7%	-	-

When discussing their LTEs' performance on the ACCESS assessment, three district leaders shared their LTEs tended to fall within Level 3 for their overall composite score (Districts D, F and G), which also aligns with the data for these districts. A fourth district leader, meanwhile, believed that LTEs tended to have slightly higher overall composite scores, falling within Levels 4 and 5 (District E); yet, the data for this district reflect that 42% of LTEs fall within Levels 4 and 5, while 49% fall within Level 3. This inconsistency may reflect the fact that districts currently do not disaggregate EL data between LTEs and other ELs, and thus the district leader may perceive that LTEs are performing more highly than they are in reality.

When discussing their LTE students' progress on ACCESS, the four leaders above, in addition to two district leaders and a school leader, shared that their LTEs have stalled on their progress; these leaders explained that their students' ELP progress has "*plateaued*" or "*flat-lined*," that LTEs are "*stuck*," or that they have remained at a certain level for a long time. One leader also expressed frustration that they did not know how to help students continue to make progress (District D), while another believed that students were "*stuck because of their literacy levels*" (District E):

We see kids plateau...It can become frustrating because you've tried lots of different things and you don't see them moving. (Interviewee 8, District D)

I think that what happens...is that they really get stuck because of their literacy levels. So as they're taking their language assessment test again and again, their literacy does not qualify them to meet the [exit] criteria; it keeps them in English learner services. (Interviewee 9, District E)

Meanwhile, two of these leaders reflected that LTELs have become “stuck” despite the students’ strong “*academic survival skills*” or social language skills. One leader continued to explain that these skills have allowed them to do well in their general education classrooms or to “*seem like just another native [English] speaker,*” but that, nonetheless, LTELs have not been able to make further progress toward their English language proficiency (Interviewee 12, District F). As they each explained:

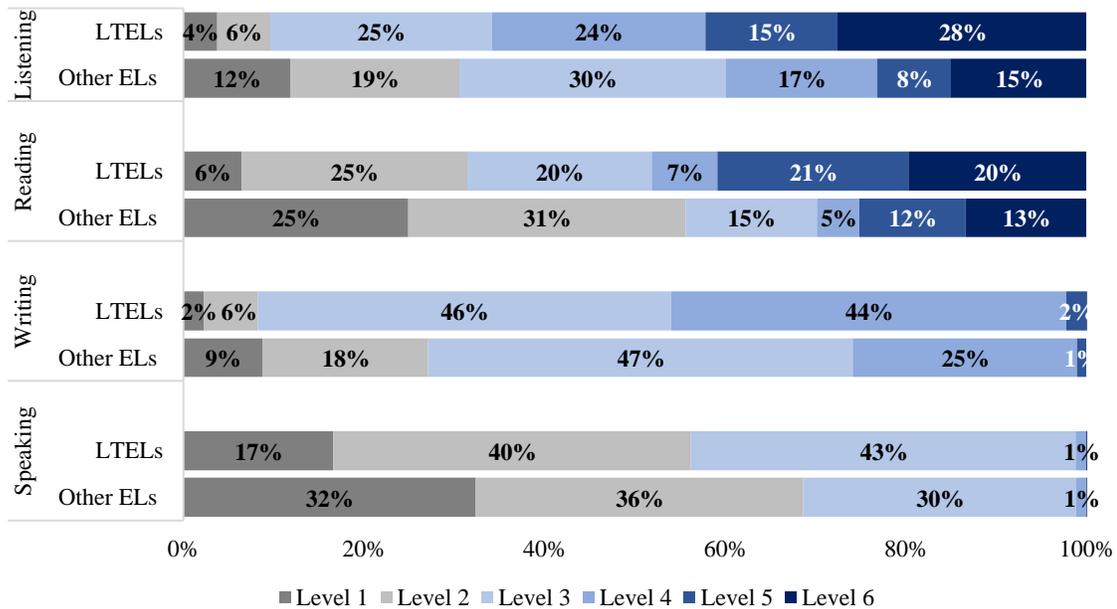
Some of our students that are looking like they would be classified as long-term ELs are doing well in other classrooms because they have this really strong academic survival skill. They're able to make it work. But when we get down and we're really looking at their language use and their flexibility with their language, we're not able to grow it quite enough to exit them out. They're just kind of stuck. (Interviewee 5, District C)
[LTELs'] social languages makes them seem like just another native [English] speaker, but their progress towards English proficiency, they're stuck, or they're at a [Level] 3. (Interviewee 12, District F)

These leaders’ statements about how students tend to “*plateau*” at Level 3 aligns with the statewide and district-level data, with 48% of statewide LTELs performing at Level 3 for their overall composite proficiency level. In some cases, leaders offered additional insight into the domains that were most challenging for these students or where they were experiencing success, which I explore in the section that follows.

ACCESS Domain-Specific Findings. To gain a better understanding of how LTELs are performing across the domains, I examined LTELs’ and other ELs’ levels of

ELP in listening, reading, writing and speaking. The data reveal that more LTELs, as compared to other ELs, reach higher proficiency levels across all domains. I present the ACCESS levels of ELP across the four domains for LTELs and other ELs in the 2017–18 school year in Figure 6, followed by interview data from the study’s education leaders.

Figure 6. Statewide Overall Composite ACCESS Proficiency Levels for LTELs and Other ELs, by Domain



Note. This figure represents EL students in Grades 9–12 in the 2017–18 school year.

Listening. Statewide, the domain with the greatest number of ELs achieving at Levels 4–6 was listening (66% of LTELs and 40% of other ELs), although students represented all levels from 1 through 6; this included 10% of LTELs performing at Levels 1–2, compared to 31% of other ELs. Along with reading, listening is considered a “receptive skill” because it reflects students’ ability to understand language rather than to actively produce it, as is the case for the areas of writing and speaking, which are known as “productive skills” (WIDA, 2019).

At the district level, similar to the statewide data, listening generally was the domain with the highest numbers of LTELs performing at higher levels on the ACCESS assessment. Specifically, at least half of all LTELs performed at Levels 4–6 in listening, ranging from 50% of all LTELs in District D, to 69% of LTELs in District E. Relatively few LTELs performed at Levels 1–2 in this domain, ranging from 6% in District E to 14% in District H. I present the percentage of ELs performing at each level in the ACCESS listening domain, statewide and by district, in Table 8.

Table 8. ACCESS Listening Levels for LTELs and Other ELs, Statewide and by District

	<i>n</i>	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5	Level 6
Statewide LTELs	4,832	4%	6%	25%	24%	15%	28%
Other ELs	8,150	12%	19%	30%	17%	8%	15%
District A LTELs	90	3%	6%	27%	24%	13%	27%
Other ELs	89	12%	15%	25%	21%	10%	17%
District B LTELs	639	6%	7%	24%	23%	16%	24%
Other ELs	1,165	12%	21%	30%	16%	9%	12%
District C LTELs	62	5%	3%	26%	21%	16%	29%
Other ELs	58	10%	26%	17%	22%	9%	16%
District D LTELs	58	3%	10%	36%	19%	10%	21%
Other ELs	113	12%	12%	33%	19%	12%	12%
District E LTELs	86	1%	5%	26%	23%	13%	33%
Other ELs	152	9%	16%	34%	16%	6%	19%
District F LTELs	106	4%	4%	32%	24%	12%	25%
Other ELs	123	9%	15%	33%	23%	10%	11%
District G LTELs	64	3%	8%	25%	16%	14%	34%
Other ELs	45	13%	13%	24%	9%	11%	29%
District H LTELs	37	11%	3%	22%	32%	19%	14%
Other ELs	30	13%	23%	37%	10%	3%	13%

When asked to discuss their EL students' performance across the ACCESS STEM domains, there was consensus among seven leaders (including six district leaders and one school leader) that their ELs were performing well in the listening domain; an additional district leader shared that their LTELs *"have done really well with the receptive language"* (Interviewee 14, District G). Two of these leaders expressed that their students largely perform at Level 6 in listening, with one leader stating that *"everybody gets a 6,"* (Interviewee 12, District F) and another sharing that *"In listening, [ELs] tend to have 6s, so they tend to do very well"* (Interviewee 16, District H).

However, the statewide and district-level data reflect more variability. For example, the percentage of LTELs performing at Level 6 in Districts F and H were 25% and 14%, respectively. Another district leader noted that the high listening scores are a source of concern only in the sense that their district does not see these listening skills translating into other areas:

With the LTELs, listening tends to be really high. We had a good chunk of kids at a 6 in listening, which is little bit concerning to us as a staff, that we have all these kids that have such strong skills in listening and it's not translating over into other domains, especially into another receptive domain like reading. (Interviewee 5, District C)

Thus, for the listening domain, leaders' positive perceptions of their LTELs' performance on the listening domain of the access assessment aligned well with the district-level data, although fewer LTELs are performing at Level 6 than may be believed by some leaders, as reflected by statements such as *"everybody gets a 6."*

Reading. The next domain with the greatest number of ELs achieving between Levels 4–6 statewide is reading (48% of LTELs and 30% of other ELs), and, similar to

listening, students represented all Levels 1–6. *Unlike* listening, however, which had 10% of LTELs within Levels 1–2, the reading domain represents 31% of LTELs within Levels 1–2. In other words, approximately one-third of ELs who have been in U.S. school for at least seven years fall into the lowest levels of the ACCESS assessment’s reading domain.

District-level data reflects variability across districts. For example, the percentage of LTELs performing at Levels 4–6 in reading ranged from 19% (District H) to 49% (Districts B and E); in contrast, the range of LTELs performing at Levels 1–2 ranged from 29% (District E) to 62% (District H). In other words, District E represented both high numbers of LTELs at high levels of proficiency and the fewest number of LTELs at the lowest levels (note, however, that this is comparable to the statewide data); in contrast, District H had the fewest number of LTELs achieving at high levels and the greatest number of LTELs achieving at low levels. I present the percentage of ELs performing at each level in the ACCESS reading domain, statewide and by district, in Table 9.

Table 9. ACCESS Reading Levels for LTELs and Other ELs, Statewide and by District

		<i>n</i>	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5	Level 6
Statewide	LTELs	4,792	6%	25%	20%	7%	21%	20%
	Other ELs	8,116	25%	31%	15%	5%	12%	13%
District A	LTELs	90	7%	32%	24%	7%	20%	10%
	Other ELs	88	24%	32%	15%	5%	11%	14%
District B	LTELs	622	10%	22%	19%	8%	21%	20%
	Other ELs	1,156	29%	31%	12%	5%	11%	12%
District C	LTELs	62	3%	35%	16%	6%	15%	24%
	Other ELs	58	26%	34%	17%	9%	5%	9%
District D	LTELs	58	7%	24%	29%	12%	12%	16%
	Other ELs	114	19%	28%	18%	2%	17%	17%
District E	LTELs	86	5%	24%	22%	5%	21%	23%
	Other ELs	150	19%	26%	15%	3%	19%	18%
District F	LTELs	105	6%	41%	23%	2%	20%	9%
	Other ELs	123	23%	20%	21%	6%	19%	11%
District G	LTELs	64	3%	30%	28%	11%	13%	16%
	Other ELs	45	24%	31%	11%	2%	9%	22%
District H	LTELs	37	8%	54%	19%	3%	5%	11%
	Other ELs	30	27%	57%	10%	-	7%	-

The six leaders who discussed the reading scores or receptive skills of their districts' ELs (all district leaders) expressed mixed feedback. Specifically, three district leaders noting that this was an area of strength for their ELs (Districts D, G and H). One of these leaders shared that, in addition to listening, LTELs tend to do well in reading (Interviewee 7, District D). This is consistent with the data for this district, which demonstrate that 28% of LTELs are performing at Levels 4–6, making it the strongest area for LTELs after listening in this district. However, nearly one-third of LTELs in this

district (31%) are performing at Levels 1–2, making it the district’s most challenging area after speaking.

The district leader in District H, meanwhile, explained that *“if there isn't some reason that they're struggling in reading that isn't a language-based problem, then usually they do really well in reading”* (Interviewee 16). Recall, however, that District H had the fewest number of LTELs achieving at high levels among the study districts and the greatest number of LTELs achieving at low levels. It could be the case that the leader was referring to reading as a strong area relative to the other domains for students within this district, given that reading represents the second-strongest area for this district (with 19% at Levels 4–6), followed by writing (16%) and speaking (3%).

Meanwhile, three leaders shared that reading was an area in which their students’ scores were low (Districts A, C, and E). The data reflect this, showing that more LTELs perform at Levels 4–6 in listening and writing for two of these districts (Districts A and E), as compared to reading. However, these districts also had many LTELs performing at Levels 1–2, including 39% in District A and 29% in District E. For one district (District C), reading is the second-strongest domain after listening (with 45% of LTELs performing at Levels 4–6), but nearly an equal number (39%) are at Levels 1–2. Despite this dichotomy of students falling within both high and low reading levels, the district leader viewed this as a challenging area for students, sharing the following:

Reading scores were concerning for us...So that's a place where we need to partner more with our general education teachers. (Interviewee 5, District C)

Ultimately, given the relatively higher numbers of students performing at Levels 4–6 in reading across districts (as compared to the writing and speaking domains), this does appear, in some ways, as an area of strength across districts; conversely, the large proportion of ELs performing at Levels 1 and 2 also justifies some of the concerns these leaders may have had. Interestingly, some leaders chose to frame this domain as an area of strength, whereas others highlighted their concerns. No district leaders mentioned this as a domain that reflected *both* a strength and a challenge, despite the substantial number of students falling within both the lower and upper levels of the ACCESS assessment.

Writing. Statewide, compared to the other domains, the writing domain reflects both the smallest percentage of students within Levels 1 and 2 for LTELs (8%) and other ELs (27%), as well as very few students within Levels 5 and 6 (2% of LTELs and 1% of other ELs); in fact, no ELs performed at Level 6 statewide. Therefore, the majority of both LTELs (90%) and other ELs (72%) are concentrated within Levels 3 and 4 (comparatively, while the reading domain has 41% of LTELs within Levels 5 and 6, there are also 31% of LTELs within Levels 1 and 2). Thus, while these students appear to have strong foundational skills in writing, few students are able to score beyond Level 4.

District data revealed a pattern similar to the statewide data, with the majority of ELs concentrated in Levels 3 and 4; for LTELs, this ranged from 85% of LTELs (District D) to 95% of LTELs (District C), while for other ELs, this ranged from 60% (District H) to 83% (District E). No ELs within these districts reached Level 6 in their writing proficiency. I present the percentage of ELs performing at each level in the ACCESS reading domain, statewide and by district, in Table 10.

Table 10. ACCESS Writing Levels for LTELs and Other ELs, Statewide and by District

	<i>n</i>	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5	Level 6
Statewide LTELs	4,657	2%	6%	46%	44%	2%	-
Other ELs	8,022	9%	18%	47%	25%	1%	-
District A LTELs	90	2%	6%	52%	39%	1%	-
Other ELs	88	10%	19%	42%	28%	-	-
District B LTELs	603	5%	7%	48%	38%	1%	-
Other ELs	1,139	11%	21%	49%	19%	-	-
District C LTELs	62	2%	3%	53%	42%	-	-
Other ELs	58	12%	17%	48%	22%	-	-
District D LTELs	58	3%	10%	52%	33%	2%	-
Other ELs	113	9%	12%	50%	25%	4%	-
District E LTELs	86	1%	3%	37%	52%	6%	-
Other ELs	149	3%	13%	48%	35%	1%	-
District F LTELs	98	2%	10%	48%	40%	-	-
Other ELs	121	4%	19%	37%	37%	2%	-
District G LTELs	62	-	2%	50%	44%	5%	-
Other ELs	45	13%	13%	40%	31%	2%	-
District H LTELs	37	-	11%	73%	16%	-	-
Other ELs	30	13%	27%	40%	20%	-	-

Similar to the leaders’ perceptions of their students’ reading scores, the eight leaders who discussed the writing skills of their districts’ ELs (six district leaders and two school leaders) also expressed mixed feedback, with four leaders describing writing as an area of strength, and four leaders describing writing as an area needing improvement. Interestingly, both of the district and school leaders within District C both mentioned writing as a stronger domain for their ELs, while the two leaders within District G provided mixed perceptions (the district leader noted this was a strength, and the school noted this was a challenge). Part of the reason for the varied feedback may be due to the fact that, as noted, I did not provide leaders with specific data to respond to; rather, I

asked for their perceptions of how their ELs are doing across the ACCESS domains. In addition, it is likely the case that district leaders are more familiar with specific ACCESS domain scores than school leaders may be.

All four leaders who described their students' writing scores as strong attributed the scores to intentional efforts to improve students' writing skills over the past few years, because of the fact that their students' scores in this area had previously been low.

As some of these leaders explained:

As an EL team we focused a lot on writing, partially because I wasn't seeing it happening in mainstream classrooms... We did look at... who has been in the program for a long time? What domain are they really low in? And oftentimes... we noticed it was writing. So then the goal became, let's create a writing course to try to meet this very specific need, to see if we can bump up their skills in this area and send them on their way. (Interviewee 1, District A)

Previously writing was the area that was holding our kids in [EL] service, and so we've spent three years being really intentionally focused on writing. We saw that our writing scores are [now] looking strong. (Interviewee 5, District C)

The productive language, particularly the writing, was where we historically, as a district, were the lowest. Since the ACCESS 2.0, we are killing it with writing... [At] our elementary level and early middle school, we adopted a new writing curriculum that I'm sure contributed to some rise in those scores. (Interviewee 14, District G)

Consistent with the leaders' perceptions of their LTELs' writing performance, these three districts also represent three of the four districts with the greatest number of LTELs performing at Levels 4–6 in the writing domain, including 40% of LTELs in District A, 42% in District C, and 49% in District G.

Notably, only one district had more LTELs performing at these levels, with 58% of LTELs reaching Levels 4–6 in writing in District E. However, this district leader, along with three others, perceived writing to be more challenging for their LTELs. Two of these statements reflect some inconsistencies when compared to the data. First, as noted, while District E’s leader believed that LTELs typically perform at Levels 2 and 3 in writing, writing is in fact the second-strongest domain for LTELs in the district (after listening); also, this district had fewer LTELs performing at Levels 1–2 (4%) as compared to all but one other district. A school leader in District G, meanwhile, reflected that, *“Our writing is an area that, as I recall, that could improve. I think that’s probably a natural lag in terms of the others”* (Interviewee 15). Yet, according to the data, the district’s LTELs appear to be doing well in this area, as compared to the other domains, which the district leader pointed out as well. However, the district leader had noted that *“historically”* the district was not doing as well in the domains requiring productive language; one possibility for this inconsistency is that the school leader’s statements may reflect information learned in years past, but not necessarily the updated information since the district adopted the new writing focus.

In two other districts, the leaders’ perceptions that LTELs are not performing as well in writing aligns with their district data. In District D, for example, writing was the domain in which the fewest number of LTELs performed at Levels 4–6 (35%), after listening. In addition, across all districts, District D had the highest number of LTELs performing at Levels 1–2 in writing (13%). The district leader explained that students may not be able to relate to the writing prompts they are given on the assessment:

On the ACCESS, are the students able to...write what they know? They might not be able to relate and connect with the writing prompt, and then we suddenly see some students' writing scores...[where] they may have said 'I just didn't know what else I could have written.' (Interviewee 7, District D)

Finally, the district leader in District H identified writing as a “*big problem.*”

Similar to District D, this was the district’s weakest area after speaking (with 16% of LTELs reaching Levels 4–6). This also represented the smallest proportion of LTELs reaching Levels 4–6 among all districts in the study. The district leader explained that the strong academic focus on reading and math in schools has left students without skills that they need for strong academic writing (District H):

Writing was...a big problem. We focus so much on reading and math, reading and math, reading and math, and then all of sudden kids get to secondary and those skills don't transfer into...academic writing...So writing holds them back. (Interviewee 16, District H)

In summary, as noted, the majority of both LTELs (90%) and other ELs (72%) are concentrated within Levels 3 and 4 in their writing proficiency. Districts, however, diverged in their students’ writing performance as well as their leaders’ perceptions of the students’ proficiency levels. Of note is that in the three districts with among the higher levels of writing proficiency for their LTEL students, the leaders each described an intentional effort over the previous few years to work on building their EL students’ writing skills; in contrast, leaders in districts with lower writing scores did not discuss efforts underway to address their concerns in this area.

Speaking. Finally, compared to the other domains, the area with the greatest number of LTELs and other ELs achieving at the lowest levels of the ACCESS

assessment is speaking. Specifically, nearly all LTELs and other ELs (99% each) are performing at Levels 1–3. Given their time in U.S. schools, it is notable that the majority of LTELs (57%) are performing at Levels 1 and 2 in speaking – compared to 68% of other ELs, a gap of only 11 percentage points. Statewide, no ELs reached Levels 5 or 6 in speaking, and only 1% of LTELs and 1% other ELs reached Level 4.

Similar to the statewide data, the majority of LTELs and other ELs across the sample districts also performed at Levels 1 and 2 in speaking. For LTELs, this ranged from 52% (District E) to 69% (District A). No ELs within these districts reached either Level 5 or Level 6 in their speaking proficiency, and few reached Level 4 (no more than 3% in any district). Thus, on the whole, this domain represented the fewest number of LTELs achieving at Levels 4–6 across all districts. I present the percentage of ELs performing at each level in the ACCESS speaking domain, statewide and by district, in Table 11.

Table 11. ACCESS Speaking Levels for LTELs and Other ELs, Statewide and by District

	<i>n</i>	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5	Level 6
Statewide LTELs	4,623	17%	40%	43%	1%	-	-
Other ELs	7,997	32%	36%	30%	1%	-	-
District A LTELs	90	21%	48%	30%	1%	-	-
Other ELs	88	32%	36%	31%	1%	-	-
District B LTELs	596	21%	39%	39%	-	-	-
Other ELs	1,135	37%	34%	28%	1%	-	-
District C LTELs	62	16%	39%	45%	-	-	-
Other ELs	57	42%	25%	32%	2%	-	-
District D LTELs	58	21%	41%	38%	-	-	-
Other ELs	112	28%	37%	33%	3%	-	-
District E LTELs	86	14%	38%	45%	2%	-	-
Other ELs	148	23%	41%	34%	2%	-	-
District F LTELs	98	19%	43%	37%	1%	-	-
Other ELs	121	27%	36%	35%	2%	-	-
District G LTELs	62	18%	39%	44%	-	-	-
Other ELs	45	33%	33%	33%	-	-	-
District H LTELs	37	5%	54%	38%	3%	-	-
Other ELs	30	47%	40%	13%	-	-	-

Nine education leaders (seven district leaders and two school leaders) discussed their ELs’ speaking scores on the ACCESS test. Nearly all of these leaders ($n=7$) described this as a domain in which scores have been low for their students, although two leaders perceived that this was an area in which their ELs were doing well. Two additional leaders (one district leader and one school leader) did not specifically discuss their students’ ACCESS speaking scores, but did discuss their students’ oral language development, which I include in this section as well. Thus, this section encompasses feedback from 11 education leaders (eight district leaders and three school leaders).

Reflecting on their students' speaking skills, nine leaders shared why they believe their EL students may not be performing as well in this domain (some provided more than one reason). Most commonly, leaders indicated that many ELs may not have adequate opportunities to speak in the classroom, thus limiting their academic oral language development ($n=5$); three of these leaders shared that they learned this after either observing classrooms or "shadowing" ELs (i.e., following ELs through the course of a day to observe their experience as a student). In these instances, one district leader commented that many students continue to receive "*sit and get*" instruction in the classroom (which is characterized by the teacher leading instruction, with students receiving few opportunities to speak or actively participate) (Interviewee 1, District A).

Another district leader reflected:

About 2 years ago we spent a significant amount of time...shadowing our EL students throughout the school day...Our [EL] kids were really quiet and weren't being asked or expected to engage in academic talk throughout their school day. And that was a big piece of learning for our teachers, especially at the secondary level...If the expectation is not that our students are engaged in conversation and rigorous academic talk [with general education teachers], then when are they going to practice those skills? (Interviewee 5, District C)

The third district leader described how a colleague explained to her that many teachers view their "*lecture style*" approach not as a hinderance for students, but as a way to prepare students for college:

I've been in a lot of classrooms...I observed one student who didn't talk for 70 minutes. To be fair, no one talked. I think there's a lot of lecture-style teaching going on...One of my one of the coaches who I was [doing a PD

session with], she said, 'You know, the classroom teachers...think that they're preparing the kids for college.' (Interviewee 12, District F)

Next, four district leaders noted that a reason for low speaking scores could be due to the potentially uncomfortable structure of the speaking assessment. For example, these leaders reflected that students may be intimidated by speaking to a computer and using headphones (two of these leaders also noted that a way to improve the students' speaking scores would be to help students become more comfortable with the computer, headphones, and microphone). They explained the challenge of the assessment set-up as follows:

The speaking test has been really, really challenging. That is where we're getting our lowest scores right now...There are some pieces that around the interaction with the headset and microphone and computer that is very unnatural for kids. (Interviewee 12, District F)

Speaking [scores are] really low...The students now...use a headphone [and] they speak into a microphone. And so whether or not that's equipment malfunction or it just sounds weird to hear your voice when you're speaking into a microphone... we're just not sure. (Interviewee 14, District G)

Furthermore, one of these district leaders believed that, especially for students at the high school level, the speaking assessment is “awkward” and “embarrassing,” sharing the following:

The speaking portion of the assessment is not working right now... Speaking is just very awkward and so if you get a high school kid who's shy or just annoyed that they have to take the test and they're pulled out of classes and then they have to talk about [a prompt], they just they won't do it and then they won't exit...It's just really embarrassing for them to do that. (Interviewee 16, District H)

In addition to the lack of speaking opportunities in the classroom and the setup of the speaking portion of the ACCESS assessment, two district leaders reflected that their

students' low scores in this domain may be a function of how the assessment is scored, and noted that this portion of the assessment was changed significantly from prior years. The district leader in District F, for example, shared that speaking *“was the part of the test that they changed the most...So in order to get proficient [the test developers] just made it much harder”* (Interviewee 12). Similarly, the district leader in District D reflected that:

There's been a big discrepancy in our speaking scores, from prior to [this year] ...and this year...Speaking scores were a lot lower...[It's] not just our district's concern, but other districts' concern as well, as I've reached out to other EL coordinators. But the speaking is just significantly lower; [it was] was scored a lot lower. It's a concern. (Interviewee 7, District D)

Finally, as noted, two leaders (one district leader and one school leader) reflected that their ELs were generally doing well in speaking. As the district leader in District E shared, *“I'd have to go look at some more data...But I'd say pretty consistently [students receive] 5s on listening [and] speaking.”* However, the data reflect that speaking is the most challenging area for both LTELs and other ELs in these districts (Districts E and G), as well as the other districts, with the majority of all ELs performing at Levels 1 and 2. For example, in District E, 52% of LTELs performed at Levels 1 and 2, along with 64% of other ELs. Similarly, in District G, 56% of LTELs performed at Levels 1 and 2, along with 67% of other ELs. Of note is that these two leaders also shared that their students generally performed well in the writing domain, which was not consistent with the data. It may be the case that these leaders have the perception that the students' strong oral social English proficiency has carried over into their oral academic English proficiency.

While many of the education leaders in this study provided insight into their EL students' strengths and challenges across the ACCESS domains, some leaders nonetheless expressed hesitation with the assessment or what their ELs were expected to demonstrate as part of the assessment. I explore these concerns in the section that follows.

Concerns with the ACCESS Assessment

In addition to discussing LTELs' performance on the ACCESS assessment (overall and across domains), seven leaders also expressed concerns or questions they had related to the test and their EL students' performance (including four district leaders and three school leaders). For example, four leaders believed – or questioned – if the number of tests that students are required to take in school plays a role in ELs' performance on ACCESS. One school leader described this as “*test fatigue*” (Interviewee 8, District D), while another school leader shared that students’ “*investment in doing another assessment may wane*” (Interviewee 15, District G):

*Our kids are tested so much – is there test fatigue that goes into some of what we do?...Do we get to a point where...they don't see the value in the test and so maybe they don't put forth as much effort as they should?
(Interviewee 8, District D)*

*There are so many assessments that our students face, that their investment in doing another assessment may wane. So a sophomore who was born in this country may not put the credence or effort into [the] ACCESS test and their marks look lower than the year before.
(Interviewee 15, District G)*

Meanwhile, a school leader shared that not only is ACCESS a long assessment, but that this also means that ELs are required to miss even more classroom instruction.

This leader explained that, “*The test is a long test...so then...they're not in the classroom, where they already struggling*” (Interviewee 13, District F).

Three district leaders also explained that they had concerns related to the assessment’s scoring or exit criteria on the ACCESS assessment. For example, one district leader reiterated that exiting EL services is a matter of attaining a given score on the assessment, and shared that EL students’ “*English-speaking peers may not have exited if they took [the assessment either]*” (Interviewee 1, District A). The second district leader also stated that “*we're really beholden to the WIDA exit criteria*” (Interviewee 14, District G). This leader continued on to explain that, as a result, even if a student achieves Level 5 across multiple domains but does poorly in one area, the student’s overall composite score may be lower than the cutoff criteria to exit EL services. The third district leader in District F noted concerns about the changes in the speaking portion of the assessment, as already discussed.

Finally, the district leader in District H reflected that the “*monolingual nature of the assessment*” does not reflect all of students’ “*linguistic resources...so they're more proficient than these scores show...They just don't fit into the box that we have created*” (Interviewee 16). In other words, students who are able to otherwise communicate and navigate their daily lives by drawing from multiple languages and forms of interaction may ultimately become LTELs because the ACCESS assessment defines ELP more narrowly and without the context of social interaction.

RQ2 Key Finding and Summary

Key Finding 2. LTELs represent nearly 40 percent of Minnesota’s high school EL population. Compared to other ELs, more LTELs were eligible for special education, and slightly fewer LTELs attain science and math proficiency. Across districts, the majority of LTELs are in Levels 3 and 4 on the ACCESS assessment, with listening as LTELs’ strongest area and speaking as the most challenging domain.

Summary. In this section, I explored how LTELs are performing academically and with regard to their English language development. I found that LTELs represented 38 percent of the state’s EL high school population, compared to 62 percent of other ELs, and that fully one-third of LTELs are eligible for SPED (33%), compared to 7 percent of other ELs in Minnesota (while 15% of non-ELs are eligible for SPED).

When examining academic achievement outcomes on the state’s standardized assessment (the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment), findings revealed that LTELs underperform in science and math as compared to other ELs, with comparable proficiency levels in reading. However, no more than 7 percent of either LTELs or other ELs reach proficiency levels across the subject areas of reading, math, or science on the MCAs. Second, although LTELs have higher levels of English proficiency than other ELs, over three-quarters of LTELs across all districts in the study fell into Levels 3 or 4 for their overall composite proficiency score on the ACCESS assessment (which is similar to statewide data). Finally, overall, ELs (both LTELs and other ELs) demonstrate their highest levels of proficiency in listening, and their lowest levels of proficiency in speaking. I review these areas below, along with an overview of my data sources. A

positive finding is that districts in which leaders described purposeful efforts to improve their students' productive writing skills also reflected promising student outcomes, as measured by the writing domain on the ACCESS assessment (although the data are not longitudinal, they provide a context for comparative analysis across districts).

In addition, when asked to reflect on their students' performance on the ACCESS assessment, leaders' statements about their LTELs' listening and speaking skills largely aligned with the data. That is, leaders who discussed this acknowledged that listening was an area of strength for their students, and nearly all leaders identified speaking as the most challenging domain. However, there were some inconsistencies as well, with some leaders identifying certain domains as strengths that the data reflected as more difficult for students. One explanation for this is that, as noted, leaders were only asked for their perceptions of their students' performance, and were not presented with data to respond to. Second, no leaders stated that they had looked at their students' ACCESS data by LTELs vs. other ELs, based on their own districts' working definitions about who would constitute being an LTEL or otherwise.

In this section, leaders also offered some insight into why LTELs may have succeeded or struggled in certain domains on the ACCESS assessment. However, in the section that follows, I explore more deeply the barriers that leaders identified as limiting LTELs from attaining English language proficiency despite their years in U.S. schools.

RQ3: What do education leaders identify as barriers for LTELs in attaining English language proficiency?

In Chapter 2, I provided an overview of the literature documenting the barriers that students face in attaining English language proficiency (ELP). These key barriers included a lack of programming to develop home language proficiency (Menken et al., 2012); insufficient teacher preparation to work with ELs (Good, Masewicz, & Vogel, 2010; Calderón, Slavin & Sánchez, 2011; Samson & Lesaux, 2015); isolated school structures and departments (Ruiz-de-Velasco and Fix, 2000); inconsistent or insufficient programming (Olsen, 2014; Ruiz-de-Velasco & Fix, 2000; Short & Fitzsimmons, 2007); course tracking (Gamoran & Berends, 1987, p. 429); subtractive schooling (Valenzuela, 1999); linguistically segregated schools (Olsen, 2010); and several other student- and family-related factors (Capps, 2005; Olsen, 2010). I argued that understanding these barriers is necessary for district and school leaders in order to (re)structure school programming and processes to better support ELs across all levels of schooling.

To better understand what Minnesota's education leaders stated as barriers for their ELs in attaining ELP (as measured by the ACCESS assessment), I drew from interviewee statements across a variety of areas, including: challenges they faced in their work to help students attain ELP; what they explained would be needed in their school or district to help students attain ELP; needed areas of professional development; and factors they explicitly identified as reasons why they believed students had not yet attained ELP by the time they were in high school. Collectively, these responses provide

a broad picture of the ways in which leaders believed LTELs have been limited in their attainment of ELP.

To interpret the data, I utilized the conceptual framework for the five EL leadership domains presented in Chapter 2 (see Figure 2). These domains included *vision and expectations for ELs*, *staff capacity to support ELs*, *structures to support EL learning and inclusion*, *EL staffing and programming*, and *accountability for EL progress*. I also document student- and family-related factors as noted by interviewees, though these fall outside of the identified EL leadership domains.

All 17 leaders identified at least one factor limiting LTELs' progress in school and in their efforts to attain ELP, with nearly all leaders describing barriers related to *EL staffing and programming* (94%, $n=16$). This was followed by barriers related to *staff capacity to support ELs* (88%, $n=15$), *vision and expectations for ELs* (53%, $n=9$), *accountability for EL progress* (53%, $n=9$), and *structures to support EL learning and inclusion* (41%, $n=7$). Twelve leaders (71%) also described barriers related to *student- or family-related* factors. I present these findings in the sections that follow, organized by EL leadership domain.

Barriers Related to Vision and Expectations for ELs

First, nine education leaders (53%, including four district leaders and five school leaders) identified barriers for LTELs related to the first EL leadership domain, *vision and expectations for ELs*. Specifically, leaders described lower expectations for ELs ($n=6$) or a lack of district-level vision for their ELs ($n=4$), which I review below.

Lower Expectations for ELs. Six education leaders (35%; two district leaders and four school leaders) believed that, across our education system, ELs were held to lower expectations or less rigorous academic content than their non-EL peers. As one school leader summarized, *“It all comes down to the way kids are perceived by their teacher and the expectations we intentionally and unintentionally lower [for them]”* (Interviewee 6, District C). This leader, as well as two others, framed their discussion in terms of the need to strive for more equity for ELs. These individuals emphasized the importance of offering ELs more opportunities to demonstrate what they know and feel valued as equal learners in the classroom. For example, as two leaders reflected:

There are belief gap issues that we have to address – and not necessarily with our ESL team or our mainstream teachers here; I’m talking systemwide – in understanding that our students are capable of doing more than they show us sometimes...I do wonder how many students are long-term ELs simply because they haven’t been given the opportunities to show what they know and show their growth. (Interviewee 4, District B)

I really think it comes back to equity and opportunity. I think even if we have the perfect classes and co-teaching but there aren’t opportunities and there isn’t this expectation that you are a learner, [to] have opportunities, [to be] a leader, [then] you have kids get really burned out. (Interviewee 16, District H)

In addition, three school leaders discussed how the U.S. education system is predominantly white and how this can affect non-white students. One of these leaders explained how our education system as a whole, which is largely led by white, female teachers, has lower expectations for students such as ELs who are more likely to be brown and black:

The public education system tends to consist of 80% white females...So you have ELs...[who] enter into a white system...in which inherently,

because of who's standing in front of them, expectations are lowered for them. We have low expectations across our system for brown and black students, period, [and] we know that's pervasive across the country. (Interviewee 2, District A)

A second school leader shared that when non-white students don't fit into the existing system, it is the student that is viewed as the problem, rather than looking at ways in which the "rigidness" of the system may not support students:

Educational is an institution that is extremely white and rigid. And when kids don't fit into this rigidness, we always say there's something wrong with the kid, whereas this rigidness needs to relax. And we need to say, 'What is your story?' (Interviewee 10, District E)

Meanwhile, a district leader explained that the high school's understanding of its students can be understood through how it portrays its student population symbolically; specifically, the images of student athletes and musicians painted throughout the high school's hallways are of *white* students. The leader explained that this, in effect, demonstrates that *white* student experiences are "normal," while other students are not:

If you walk through the high school...all of the murals, pictures, everything, is white – mainly athletes or some musicians. So symbolically, that's a challenge. Like who's normal, what's normative and what's a problem or an issue. (Interviewee 16, District H)

Some leaders also shared specific examples of the ways in which general education teachers may not challenge their ELs with appropriate high-level questioning or content. For example, one district leader explained that "classroom teachers aren't rating [ELs'] output at [an] upper academic level" (Interviewee 1, District A).

Meanwhile, a school leader in District C shared how ELs interpreted their teachers'

limited, non-descriptive feedback to them as indicators of what their teachers expected of them. He provided the following anecdote that he learned through a student focus group:

Some of our Spanish-speaking students...[thought] that the teachers didn't...value them to be learning at high levels because of the fact that their language levels [weren't] as strong in English as their peers...[The students shared that] when the teacher would walk around to give feedback to students on their work, the feedback was very descriptive to English-speaking students, [but the teachers] walked by [EL students] and would just say 'good job' or 'keep working' – very brief interactions. (Interviewee 6, District C)

Finally, one district leader explained that some EL teachers may not be aware of the academic level required of students in the general education classroom, and thus may hold lower language expectations for them in their EL classes. She explained that in some cases, when she would observe an EL teacher who had not been in a co-teaching environment or who might not have been aware of the grade-level content expectations, she did not think the ELs were being challenged appropriately. As this leader shared:

There were kids that were still working on the calendar and months of the year in February...they had been in Level 2 for two years, so they should have been well beyond that...I would say [they haven't progressed] partially because the rigor was so low...If you have this low expectation, you're not pushing [your students]. (Interviewee 1, District A)

Lack of District-Level Vision for ELs. Four education leaders (24%; two district leaders and two school leaders) believed a reason why LTELs have not yet attained ELP by the time they are in high school is because of the lack of a districtwide vision for their ELs. As a result, three leaders explained that ELs may have experienced a variety of interventions and programming (e.g., a mix of push-in and pull-out programs) during their time in K–12 school, potentially resulting in gaps in certain skills or knowledge. For

example, one school leader emphasized that meeting LTELs' needs cannot be the sole responsibility of high schools; rather, districts must have a cohesive plan from PreK–12 to ensure that their needs are being addressed appropriately. As two school leaders explained:

There seems to have been a lack of consistency in vision for ELs in [the district]...There was a time here...that the idea to mainstream students was the end-all-be-all...And so there was a push-in model...Then you get a new director who says 'We should pull out students and give them the foundational skills,' so [then there is] inconsistency in programming. (Interviewee 4, District B)

Kids come into our high school in 9th grade and sometimes people look at us like 'So now what are you going to do?' We need to really put together a good plan from PreK–12...because if we're not providing good services at the elementary [level], then kids are going to struggle at the middle school and then at the high school. (Interviewee 17, District H)

The two district leaders, meanwhile, discussed how upper levels of the district's administration did not appear to prioritize a districtwide approach or belief about how to systemically support ELs. One of these leaders shared that while their district largely respects schools' autonomy, this can prove challenging when trying to implement districtwide policies for supporting ELs, as schools can choose whether or not to “opt in” to these practices:

Coherence from the top [is a challenge]...We're structured [such that] there's a lot of autonomy at the sites, and that can be very good. But then if you have something you want to work on...it becomes an opt-in model. (Interviewee 12, District F)

This leader believed that the ability for school sites to choose which PD to participate in reflected the lack of a clear and coherent districtwide vision of core instruction for its students, particularly for ELs. This leader continued to explain that:

[There] needs to be an acknowledgement...from the top... that not all instruction is meeting the needs of the kids...There needs to be professional development around it that's not necessarily choice-based, [but rather], 'This is just how we work and do things and there is a protocol for how we teach and what we do.' (Interviewee 12, District F)

The second district leader discussing a lack of a districtwide approach to support ELs described the problem as a “*mission issue*” in that not all administrators appeared to value the need for all teachers to learn important techniques for teaching ELs (Interviewee 9, District F). The individual explained that while in some districts, the fact that all teachers must receive training in language and literacy is a “*non-negotiable*,” they cited a “*lack of awareness by all administrators of the essential need for this in all classrooms*” within their own district.

Barriers Related to Staff Capacity to Support ELs

Among the most common barriers that education leaders identified for their LTELs related to the second EL leadership domain, *staff capacity to support ELs* (88%, $n=15$); this included nine district leaders and six school leaders. Specifically, leaders stated that ELs are not receiving the instruction they need in their general education classrooms (such as a focus on language and literacy, for example) ($n=11$); that there was not enough professional development (PD) to support general education teachers’ work with ELs or that they are challenged as leaders in providing adequate PD ($n=8$); that school leaders did not necessarily have sufficient background knowledge related to ELs ($n=6$); that teachers’ relationships with EL students could be improved ($n=3$); and a greater focus on “newcomer” ELs rather than the distinct needs of LTELs ($n=3$). I review these areas below.

General Education Instruction Not Meeting ELs' Needs. First, the majority of leaders (65%, $n=11$) described general education instruction as a limiting factor for ELs or shared that it has not met their needs in some way (including seven district leaders and four school leaders). Of these leaders, eight specifically noted that there is lack of focus on language and literacy in the general education classroom. Specifically, leaders noted that for ELs to succeed in the general education classroom, teachers must have clear learning targets, offer language-embedded context, and have an understanding of the difference between conversational English and academic English. However, these leaders did not always think that teachers were clear on these best practices for ELs, with one district leader in District A explaining that LTELs might be missing some foundational language and literacy skills, but that “*high school doesn't go back to basics in reading or basics of writing*” (Interviewee 1). Other leaders offered the following explanations for why their LTELs have not reached ELP despite their years in U.S. schools:

To me the answer for all ELs, but in particular LTELs, is [that] teachers all need to know how to integrate literacy instruction and language instruction into their content...At the secondary level, [literacy training has] been a vacuum for about as long as I've been in education. (Interviewee 9, District E)

I think the instruction doesn't meet their needs...I think teaching academic language is really important...[LTELs] need a language-embedded context because if they don't understand what the words mean, they're not going to make connections. (Interviewee 12, District F)

What teachers will see often is [LTELs] communicating really well. And so I think...we can do a better job of educating our teachers to understand language – that conversational language is one of the first things to acquire...and that academic language is one of the last things. (Interviewee 13, District F)

In addition, five leaders (including three district leaders and two school leaders) noted that within the general education classroom, ELs often have limited opportunities to speak, due to lecture-style instructional approaches (discussed previously under RQ2 as part of leaders' explanation for their students' low speaking scores on the ACCESS test). For example, one district leader in District B explained that after their district's EL department shadowed their ELs, they determined that 85% of students' classroom time is characterized by the teacher speaking, with limited opportunities for peer-to-peer interactions or oral language development.

Third, three leaders described how EL teaching strategies are not a priority in general education teachers' instruction. These three district leaders each explained how general education teachers are often asked to take on many responsibilities or to "*wear two million hats*" (Interviewee 14, District G), which then causes their focus on ELs to get "*pushed to the back burner*" (Interviewee 1, District A). As a result, integrating best practices for ELs can seem like an added-on responsibility, with one district leader explaining that for some teachers, "*It's inconvenient to try to learn something complex when you're already pretty good at what you do*" (Interviewee 9, District E). As they explained:

[General education teachers] have some new math curriculum, they have some new literacy. So I'd say that any time they had in their minds around EL [instruction] or how to make that more accessible, that got pushed to the back burner because now I have this new curriculum. (Interviewee 1, District A)

I don't want to dump on mainstream teachers at all, because...they have so much going on in their classrooms...I'm just also going to be an agitator in the system because it needs to change. I would say that they all

try and they're interested. But it's inconvenient to try to learn something complex when you're already pretty good at what you do. (Interviewee 9, District E)

We have a lot of things going on in the district at all times. And teachers... wear two million hats. So it's really just finding it's not that teachers don't care. They do care. It's really finding the time to make all of this work. (Interviewee 14, District G)

Thus, while leaders acknowledged why learning about EL instructional practices might be difficult for general education teachers, who already have many competing priorities, these leaders nonetheless described this as a factor limiting LTELs' progress. As a result, LTELs (and ELs broadly) are often in general education classrooms in which there may be a focus on content instruction and concepts without the added focus on content-specific *language* development. In addition, students often have few opportunities to practice utilizing the language with peers, as instruction in many cases is presented as a traditional lecture, with students expected to listen rather than to engage in the lesson as active participants.

Professional Development Challenges. Eight leaders discussed challenges or concerns related to general education teachers' professional development (PD) to work with ELs (47%, including seven district leaders and one school leader). This included the concern that there was not PD to support general education teachers' work with ELs ($n=6$) as well as challenges the leaders described in providing adequate PD ($n=6$).

First, six individuals (five district leaders and one school leader) noted that there was, in general, not enough PD provided to teachers to support their work with ELs. Two

of these leaders from within District E specified that the district lacked EL training for new teachers entering the district, with one district leader sharing:

We don't do a good job in providing training to any new teacher. So all new teachers receive additional AVID instructional practices training, but zero sheltered content or EL instructional practices training. (Interviewee 11, District E)

Meanwhile, the district leader in District F explained that there was not enough PD specifically about teaching *language*, and what high-quality instruction means as far as language goals as distinct from other students' needs that may be specific to their race or socioeconomic status. When asked about extent to which general education teachers in their district have the knowledge and skills to work with LTELs, this leader stated:

I don't think they have enough training around it and to differentiate between kids of color, kids who are poor. I think there's a lot of crossover similarities, but I think there is some really specific distinct needs with language...So if we're talking about high-quality instruction...where does the language fit into that? Because sometimes we default to 'It's just good teaching'...So that becomes challenging. (Interviewee 12, District F)

In addition, the district leader in District G noted shortages of substitute teachers to allow teachers to participate in EL training, which are needed to provide teachers time outside of the classroom to “*bring their curriculum, talk with their EL teacher, look at their data [and do] a really get deep [into] what is happening in their own classroom*” (Interviewee 14, District G).

Next, as noted, six individuals (five district leaders and one school leader) shared some of their challenges in providing adequate PD related to EL instruction. For example, a few district leaders noted that they only have limited time during districtwide PD days to provide general education teachers with EL strategies and skills, and that such

“workshop models” are not sustained or long-term. They expressed their concerns as follows:

We're still not seeing enough of the strategies and the instructional practices getting to kids in classrooms yet...It has to stay at the forefront of people's minds. We create these workshop models because that's the time that we have. And it's not necessarily the best way to teach people to do something new. (Interviewee 5, District C)

There are [many school] buildings and there's a variety of skill sets and variety of time...I think the question with secondary is always – how do you engage in PD with that many teachers?...It's hard to want to do a lot of PD on a big release day because it's not it's not long-term and it's not job-embedded. (Interviewee 12, District F)

When I asked one leader about their work with general education teachers, they lamented that their work in this area has been limited because of time, even though “ideally that would be a huge part of my job” (Interviewee 7, District D). Still another district leader shared that there is no district-level PD for teachers related to ELs, and so any PD that general education teachers receive is “through EL teachers” (Interviewee 11, District E).

In other words, these leaders, particularly at the district level, explained that they viewed the lack of PD for general education teachers as a factor limiting students’ progress, even though they each noted the many competing priorities for teachers’ time and attention. These leaders continued to explain that it can be challenging to find job-embedded ways to work with teachers on how to improve their EL instruction, and that they offered what they could through workshop models, if possible, even though they did not view this as an ideal long-term approach.

School Leaders' Limited Preparation to Work with ELs. Next, six leaders (35%, including five district leaders and one school leader) shared that school leaders' training related to ELs was often limited or non-existent. One school leader shared that their own principal training lacked a focus on ELs, and a district leader reflected that school leaders may not necessarily know the distinction between LTELs and newcomers, for example, and how that affects their needs. As these leaders explained:

As far as [my own] principal preparation, I don't know that we ever really talked much about EL students. And it's probably something that we should, because there is a real need there. (Interviewee 8, District D)

I think the principals are supportive. So it's not about that. Whether the knowledge base is completely there, it depends. I think it's understanding ...the difference between LTELs and a newcomer and what their needs are and what interventions are helpful or not helpful. And maybe just knowledge of language. (Interviewee 12, District F)

Another district leader explained that due to principals' lack of knowledge about EL instruction, their ability to strengthen EL teachers' instruction is limited, resulting in different expectations for general education teachers and EL teachers. This leader explained that there have been changes in EL techniques and instruction over time, but that teachers may not necessarily have “*kept up with the changes*” (Interviewee 1, District A). Thus, even when there is poor EL instruction, school leaders may not realize this because they do not know “*what to look for.*” For example, when asked what factors might lead students to continue as ELs despite their time in U.S. schools, this leader shared the following:

Honestly I'd say some [of the issue] is not great EL teaching. I mean in every district...things have shifted. So you have some people that really have not kept up with changes; you have administration in buildings that

either don't know what to look for or what to push or they don't consider it to be that important, so they don't have the expectation [of EL teachers] that they do of the classroom teacher. (Interviewee 1, District A)

This district leader continued on to explain that in many cases, they partner with principals to conduct walkthroughs to observe EL teachers' instruction, followed by conversations afterward about strengths and gaps in the lessons. Yet, they explained that school leaders may not necessarily look for the same EL components when observing general education teachers' instruction. This is critical, as this is where the majority of students spend their time in school.

However, many leaders also shared that, despite this, school leaders were receptive to learning about their EL students from the district EL leader or the schools' EL teams, who they turned to for support. For example, one district leader explained that *“most principals really trust their EL teachers to make sound decisions for the students, and trust us as a department to make sound decisions”* (Interviewee 14, District G).

Thus, in the same way that many leaders in this study noted the multiple demands on general education teachers, the leaders also acknowledged school leaders' varied responsibilities, and spoke about school leaders' general support for the decisions and input offered by EL teams and the EL district leaders. Yet, interviewees acknowledged that school leaders' training and knowledge about ELs and language is often minimal, and explained that this can affect ELs' learning given that leaders may not be able to distinguish between different ELs' needs or be able to appropriately observe EL teachers' instruction.

Limited Teacher-Student Connections. Three leaders reflected that a lack of better teacher-student relationships could be a limiting factor for LTELs (18%, including one district leader and two school leaders). Each of these leaders shared that not all teachers were necessarily aware of their students' background. For example, one district leader described meeting with a teacher who was “*surprised*” to learn that one of their 8th grade ELs was not a “*newer*” EL student, but in fact was born in the U.S. and had been receiving EL service since kindergarten (Interviewee 7, District D). Meanwhile, a school leader described having conversations with EL students and learned that at least one student has an illegal job outside of school. The leader continued on to explain that students may not always feel comfortable sharing this information with their teachers, and that this is especially true now, as a result of the nation's current “*climate*”:

One of the jobs he works is illegal. You know, especially now in our climate, [students] are not going to say a lot of stuff. So they might not even tell their teacher. They might just say it's nothing. So then because they don't share it, then the teachers can only assume that [the problem] is one of these other things. (Interviewee 13, District F)

By noting this student's illegal job and the fact that this was in tension with the nation's current climate, this leader may have been alluding to the nation's increasingly anti-immigrant rhetoric and legislation (Morey, 2018), and shared that this may lead ELs to refrain from discussing their personal information. Teachers, in turn, may attribute their EL students' lack of progress to other factors, without knowing about their students' other obligations.

Relatedly, the two school leaders discussed how limited teacher-student relationships can affect ELs' learning in the classroom. Interestingly, each of these

leaders provided an example of how a positive relationship with a student can help diffuse problematic student behaviors in the classroom such as cell phone use. They described a scenario in which a teacher needs to remind a student to put away their cell phone, and how teachers can encourage students to do so by connecting with them through the use of their name and other positive reinforcement, versus a scenario in which a teacher appears to be more guided by rules or frustration, resulting in potentially lost instructional time for the student if they are sent to the office. These leaders provided the following examples:

We have some teachers who governed their classroom through a lens of rules...I'm the first one to say, 'They're in front of you. You're the expert. They need to learn.' But there's two ways to do that- you can say, 'Hey [name], let's get that book out, c'mon, I know you can do this. Let's learn.' That's me coaching you, that's me having a relationship with you around positive encouragement. Or I can say 'You know my rule, you have your cell phone out. Go to the office.' Now I just robbed you of 54 minutes of instruction. (Interviewee 13, District F)

If you know a kid's name, say 'Hey so-and-so, I see you, now let's go...' You're going to get more out of that student than you are with 'Put your phone away' – no name, no contact, just 'Put your phone away.' If I were them, I wouldn't do what you said either because you're not engaging me as a human being and you just see me as someone in your class that's messing up your job...So I think our long-term learners, if they're not in a relationship with adults, they're not going to learn. They're not going to make any progress. (Interviewee 10, District E)

These leaders identified the importance of teacher-student relationships in helping students progress through school, and noted that for LTELs, this could be a factor affecting their achievement. They shared that teachers may not be aware of their students' educational histories or their current situations, which may include circumstances students do not feel comfortable discussing at school but that nonetheless affect their

academic achievement. In addition, leaders provided examples of how students may disengage from teachers if they feel that teachers are not connecting with them and acknowledging them as individuals.

Limitations Related to EL Teachers' Instruction. Next, three interviewees (18%, including two district leaders and one school leader) described concerns they had related to EL teachers' instruction. Two of these leaders shared that while EL teachers are well trained in language acquisition, literacy training is not necessarily part of their preparation or background knowledge, and that this can be a limiting factor in LTELs' development:

Bringing knowledge of literacy to EL [teachers is important], because EL teachers don't have a strong understanding of how kids learn to read, ironically. We're all about language acquisition, but really we're also supposed to be teaching reading and writing, and we don't know what that looks like. (Interviewee 16, District H)

This leader appears to highlight the distinction between teaching students foundational literacy skills involved in learning how to read, versus language acquisition skills related to understanding and communicating in a new language. A school leader who identified as a former literacy specialist highlighted a similar concern. When asked what kinds of needs EL teachers might have, he responded:

I would say a little bit more background in reading instruction in particular...When we're talking about reading instruction in the elementary level, and in particular around the foundational skills, there is a certain way to do that that I don't think either people have been trained for or have the time scheduled programmatically to do. (Interviewee 4, District B)

Also, as noted above, another district leader cited one barrier for LTELs, in some cases, as “*not great EL teaching*” as a result of the fact that not all teachers have necessarily kept up with changing needs and instructional techniques over the years.

Thus, while leaders in general described their EL teams and departments as experienced and knowledgeable about their ELs (see RQ1), some leaders also raised some concerns. This included a lack of training in literacy instruction for EL teachers, as well as the perception that some EL teachers may not be using current best practices for their EL students.

Focus on Newcomer ELs. Finally, three individuals (18%, including two district leaders and one school leader) discussed the challenge of balancing very different needs and levels of awareness between two distinct groups of EL students: LTELs and students who are “newcomer ELs” or “new-to-country” ELs. While many districts want – and need – to address the needs of newcomer ELs, there is a sense that this may overshadow the needs of LTELs. One school leader, when asked about the kinds of conversations that might be happening in the district related to LTELs or thinking about who these students are, shared that while they “*try to meet kids at the level that they're at so that they can find success in classes,*” they also “*tend to get a lot of newcomers at the high school...and so that really takes a lot of our focus*” (Interviewee 8, District D). Two district leaders echoed this statement about the attention on newcomer ELs within their districts, sharing:

One of the things we struggle with is that often we spend a lot of time thinking about our new-to-country kids, which is...a good thing, but they make up about 3% of our population. So I remind people of that... Actually

we had some newer-to-country kids who were proficient on the ACCESS this year and a lot of LTELs weren't. (Interviewee 12, District F)

People really worry about newcomers, so we had a newcomer committee and a newcomer booklet and we purchased all these resources for newcomers. But our biggest problem is LTELs. ...I think people see a newcomer and they don't know what to do, but they see an LTEL and that's kind of 'blame the victim' type thing: 'Well they just don't try. Well the family has so many problems. They're too mobile.' (Interviewee 16, District H)

These statements lend insight into some of the concerns raised across districts about administrators' and teachers' levels of awareness related to LTELs (see RQ1). In some districts, it appears that there may be a greater level of understanding of newcomer ELs as a student subgroup, and that district members have responded to these needs with distinct resources, as noted by Interviewee 16. However, as this leader continued to explain, people often appear to “*blame*” LTELs for their behaviors lack of progress, rather than identifying what supports these students need. I further review the ways in which staff take accountability for their ELs under the fifth EL leadership domain, *accountability for EL progress*.

Barriers Related to Structures to Support EL Learning and Inclusion

Seven education leaders (41%, including four district leaders and three school leaders) identified barriers for LTELs related to the school or district's organizational structures. Specifically, leaders discussed time and resource-related challenges ($n=6$) and a lack of communication among schools about students' educational histories ($n=1$).

Time and Resource-Related Challenges. Six education leaders described a lack of time and resources as a factor that limited how leaders can support ELs' success (35%,

including four district leaders and two school leaders). Four leaders described the need for more time, with two district leaders elaborating to explain that more time would help them to either meet with administrators and staff about their EL students or to actually spend more time in the classroom to observe the experience of their EL students. When asked what challenges these leaders face in their work, these two leaders explained:

My schedule is just full all the time with meetings and things and I want to be in the classrooms and be meeting with the teachers and building staff. I would love to do just shadowing all the time of our students to really gauge what their experiences are like...So that's my biggest challenge. (Interviewee 14, District G)

Sometimes it's time – just having enough time to be able to sit down and have those conversations. (Interviewee 7, District D)

Others described a need for more funding for transportation ($n=2$), which would potentially allow more LTELs to participate in after-school tutoring activities. As one school leader explained:

Transportation is a real barrier. This year...we had an activities bus where kids could stay for tutoring and then get a bus home. But we can't afford that all the time. Having a way for families to get home is really important...So transportation is a factor. (Interviewee 13, District F)

These six leaders highlighted the ways in which limited time and resources can affect the learning of their LTELs. Specifically, limited time means fewer opportunities for district leaders to discuss ELs' needs with school leaders or general education teachers, or to pursue other means to learn about their ELs, such as “shadowing” them in their classrooms. Limited funding also affects ELs by potentially limiting their access to after-school supports such as tutoring.

Lack of Communication About Students' Educational Pathways. In addition, one school leader (6%) explained that there is a lack of communication between school buildings as EL students transition from one form of programming to another, and that, as a result, schools often are not able to identify gaps in their students' educational histories. This leader reflected:

There is a lack of communication between school buildings...When a student leaves elementary school and goes to middle school, what follows is the ACCESS score and the [EL] label...[But] what sort of programming were they receiving? Were they in a push-in or pull out [model]? What content areas was the push-in happening in?...Making decisions about the type of programming and the type of intervention they need is difficult when we don't know what was done previously. (Interviewee 4, District B)

Across the five EL leadership domains, challenges related to *structures to support EL learning and inclusion* were mentioned least by the leaders in this study. However, leaders did highlight time and resource-related difficulties in providing necessary support to their ELs, as well as the challenge of understanding students' educational histories when there is a lack of communication among school buildings as students move from one level to another (e.g., middle school to high school), which in turn limits leaders' understanding of the kinds of EL programming they have received during their time in school.

Barriers Related to EL Staffing and Programming

Nearly all education leaders in the study (94%, $n=16$) identified challenges for LTELs related to EL staffing and the programming that EL students have participated in throughout their time in school (this included eight district leaders and eight school leaders). Specifically, leaders discussed challenges related to LTELs' courses and

programming ($n=13$), EL staffing ($n=7$), and monitoring their students' progress ($n=5$). I review these areas below.

Challenges Related to Courses and Programming. Thirteen education leaders (76%, including eight district leaders and five school leaders) described a variety of challenges related to LTEL students' courses and programming. First, seven of these leaders described challenges with scheduling. Specific challenges for leaders included ensuring that EL students obtain the appropriate number of credits to graduate ($n=3$), trying to meet EL students' diverse needs as far as scheduling ($n=3$), and a concern that EL courses may limit students' opportunities to enroll in other classes ($n=1$). As some of these individuals shared:

What barriers are [we] placing in front of our students for not only college access but simply career access when we [keep them in] EL programming versus allowing them into courses of the trades, for example? (Interviewee 11, District E)

The problem is that [EL students] have to have an EL class to work on their language, and they also have to start counting credits [toward graduation]. There's often not enough time in the day to embed a support piece. (Interviewee 13, District F)

The schedule is probably one of the bigger roadblocks...At the high school [level]...you've got to get credits in and there are benchmarks that students need to meet in order to graduate. (Interviewee 17, District H)

In addition, four district leaders shared that LTELs have been limited by districts' lack of programming to help them develop their first language (L1), or L1 assessments to help determine students' level of home language proficiency when they enter school. As some of these leaders shared:

We've got to get home language literacy in place for kids. And we don't have home language literacy programming options for students until high school. And so that's a piece of it...We know that our students that have strong home language literacy are able to translate that over into a smoother path toward having that strong academic English proficiency. (Interviewee 5, District C)

I don't think they have literacy in their parents' first language or potentially their first language, which is not through any fault of their own. We don't provide it. (Interviewee 12, District F)

These interviewees echoed the long-standing research that students who develop academic language and literacy skills in their first language (L1) are able to transfer those skills to a second language (Cummins, 2000; Menken, 2013). However, without assessments to *determine* students' L1 proficiency levels, teachers are limited in their understanding of students' literacy. This leader continued on to explain the need for L1 language assessments beyond Spanish, as students represent a broad range of language backgrounds. Understanding a students' L1 proficiency can provide a foundation for shaping instruction, which this leader explains as follows:

We really need a better tool in place to get an accurate measurement of students' home language and literacy...So if I have an 8th grader and I'm not seeing strong literacy skills in English but they're multilingual and I don't know how to measure their literacy skills in their other language or languages, those are two different questions. If they're highly literate in a home language, instruction looks one way, and if they're not, it should look very different. (Interviewee 5, District C)

Thus, without early L1 testing *or* programming available for students, both ELs and their teachers may be challenged in building from students' existing L1 knowledge.

Finally, two leaders cited LTELs' history of inconsistent programming during their time in U.S. schools as a barrier for their success. One of these leaders connected

this to an inconsistent district vision for ELs as a whole, while the other believed that “*from a very young age, [ELs have] gotten many, many interventions...They're just kind of tired out*” (Interviewee 12, District F).

These 13 leaders thus described a range of coursework- and programmatic-related challenges. Such difficulties related to creating appropriate schedules that ensure that ELs are meeting graduation and EL service requirements, limited understanding of LTELs’ L1 literacy due to a lack of L1 programming and assessments, and inconsistent programming for LTELs throughout their time in school.

Staffing-Related Challenges. Seven education leaders (41%, including four district leaders and three school leaders) discussed staffing-related challenges. The majority of these leaders ($n=6$) shared that they could better support ELs with through more EL-related staff, and that many of their staff limitations were due to funding concerns. For example, four leaders cited a need for more EL full-time teachers (referred to as teachers with full-time equivalency, or “FTE”), paraprofessionals, or interpreters. The support personnel in particular would serve to give students another individual to turn to for help, and funding for interpreters would help to engage more families. As one of these leaders shared:

If I had another half of an FTE, I would hire another para[professional] for ELs, just for another person that the kids could go to that could help them understand something. (Interviewee 13, District F)

Meanwhile, three of the seven leaders explained how dual-licensed teachers would be beneficial to supporting ELs, in part because of the reduced expense to have one teacher in a classroom versus two (i.e., the content teacher and the EL teacher), and

in part because this teacher would then be able to use EL best practices in their content-area instruction. Two leaders noted:

If we have people that are dual-licensed...they're more apt to use that other lens: 'I'm teaching language as well as my content'...They sound different and they move a little differently in their classroom spaces. (Interviewee 1, District A)

In secondary, you...have to pay two teachers to teach one class, and with...budget cuts, that's always hard...Most districts are trying to find dual-licensed teachers so that [the teacher would] have an EL license and a [content area] license. That would be ideal. (Interviewee 16, District H)

In addition to challenges related to EL staff, another staffing concern described by two district leaders related to high turnover among teachers or education assistants (EAs). The teacher turnover presented a challenge because teachers who may have participated in EL training through the district have left, and that knowledge is then lost within the district. One of these district leaders lamented that “*Unfortunately that whole team that was trained are [now] elsewhere*” (Interviewee 1, District A). The second district leader, while noting that “*we've had pretty significant teacher turnover*” also shared that the turnover among their EAs has been challenging for the district because of the important role they play in working with their EL students, particularly in the math and science content areas, “*since that is where our students tend to struggle most*” (Interviewee 5, District C). However, these positions are not high-paying, which can make it difficult for the district to retain some of their strongest EAs, who are often bilingual and work well with the students. This leader explained the challenge related to their EA positions as follows:

They're not particularly high paying roles and we depend on them a lot and the kids depend on them a lot. Last year, one of our EAs who had been with us for a very long time left, and we spent the entire year trying to fill that position. And it was not successful. We had multiple people come in and – you know, the nature of an entry-level position sometimes is that these are not people who stay long. And that was tough. That was really tough on the kids and on the teachers because they expect that that person is there to support them. (Interviewee 5, District C)

Finally, one interviewee stated that in her first year as the school leader, the school's EL department was “*challenged*” as a result of a veteran teacher who served as the EL department lead, but who did not hold the same beliefs and priorities as the school leader, which in turn limited programming opportunities for students. This leader explained:

When you have two new teachers and you have this veteran teacher who's been in the EL department for like 30 years, if the person does not share the same beliefs and values and convictions that you share, then there's only so far you can go. And so because she was responsible for programming that particular year, because she was the lead, a lot didn't happen. (Interviewee 2, District A)

Ultimately, the school leader stated that the school's EL lead appeared to prioritize her own scheduling needs, versus making programming decisions based on the students' needs. She explained that, for example, the veteran teacher would provide a list of the number of Level 1 courses the department planned to offer in the coming year before knowing how many students in Level 1 would be in the building.

Thus, these leaders described multiple ways in which staffing improvements could serve to improve their LTEL outcomes. In addition to some discussion related to the challenge of turnover among teachers or educational assistants, their statements largely reflected a need for more funding to bring in more EL staff (including teachers as

well as other roles such as paraprofessionals and interpreters). These reflections demonstrate the many ways in which additional staff can support EL students' academic needs as well as their need to connect with adults in school and better connect with families.

Challenges Related to Monitoring Students' Progress. Five education leaders discussed difficulties related to the use of data to monitor students' progress (29%, including three district leaders and two school leaders). These leaders expressed that teachers may not be fully utilizing the student data available to them to help inform their instruction. For example, one school leader connected a lack of using data to the fact that “*we keep doing the same thing*” despite low scores on the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments (MCAs), the state's standardized test (Interviewee 17, District H). A school leader explained that they observed that one grade level's professional learning community (PLC) was not using data to understand their EL students, so this was an area that needed to change. These leaders shared:

I had been working with the 9th grade PLC, and...they weren't looking at their data. So I made them bring their data: 'Who are these kids?...Where and where aren't they being successful?' (Interviewee 10, District E)

It's a change...[to] really [look] at different sources of data to be able to make informed decisions about whether what you're doing is working or not. We haven't been overly successful in having our kids pass MCA tests, but we keep doing the same thing. So something isn't working there. (Interviewee 17, District H)

Meanwhile, one district leader shared that that *EL teachers* may not fully understand their students' ACCESS data, as training has not been available for them to

look at the finer points of the assessment in order to determine the specific areas *within* each of the domains that students need to improve. For example:

[We need] more training for EL teachers to understand the [ACCESS] assessment a little better... We have these domains, but then what specifically about the writing [is challenging for students]? Is it the vocabulary level, is it the sentence structure level? I don't think we've parsed it down to that level. (Interviewee 1, District A)

Some leaders also expressed challenges related to the data systems themselves.

For example, one district leader said the district's data system is "*old and archaic*" (Interviewee 3, District B). Another district leader expressed a desire for formative assessments that can be used more systematically in the district to understand students' progress, as currently "*it's challenging when every teacher is doing it in a different way*" (Interviewee 5, District C). This leader continued on to state that this was necessary in order to "*come to a common place with progress monitoring and the tools that we're using and how we're rating the achievement levels.*"

In other words, these leaders noted two challenges related to monitoring students' progress – not only does it appear that some of the existing data systems and forms of assessment are limited, but that teachers are not always using the data available to them regarding their students' achievement. In response, leaders suggested steps forward that their districts needed to take, including training for teachers to better understand the assessments, and the development of more formative measures for teachers to use districtwide.

Barriers Related to Accountability for EL Progress

Nine education leaders (53%, including five district leaders and four school leaders) identified barriers for LTELs related to the fifth EL leadership domain, *accountability for EL progress*. These leaders discussed the ways in which general education teachers and EL teachers take accountability (or not) for their EL students' progress, including the challenge of moving toward the mindset that ELs are the responsibility of *all* teachers in a school ($n=7$), the challenge of districts as a whole taking responsibility for ELs such that they do not "*slip through the cracks*" as they progress through each grade level ($n=3$), and a "*blame the victim*" mentality that can arise toward students such as LTELs ($n=2$). I review these areas below.

Accepting Schoolwide Responsibility for ELs. Seven leaders (41%, including four district leaders and three school leaders) shared that it has been challenging for teachers to move toward a mindset that EL students are *all* teachers' students, and not the sole responsibility of EL teachers. One district leader explained that this has been a challenge for both general education teachers and EL teachers, and that while "*some people have really taken ownership of [ELs] ... [for] some people, it's still hard. And it's hard on both sides*" (Interviewee 5, District C).

Meanwhile, three teachers framed this primarily as a challenge for general education teachers, and that accountability for students such as ELs or students who are in special education have "*been looked at historically as 'It's your student' or 'It's your student'*" (Interviewee 14, District G). Three leaders also discussed how, in some instances, EL teachers' sense of protectiveness of their students may inadvertently be

holding EL students back from more fully immersing themselves in general education classrooms; in fact, all three of these individuals shared that EL teachers may “coddle” their students or “hold them close”:

The EL teachers have a hard time giving kids up a little bit too. We just want to protect them and hold them close and tight all day. But that doesn't work either. (Interviewee 5, District C)

Sometimes there's a little bit of coddling...It's not that [EL teachers] don't want [ELs] to be pushed to fly, however, it's believing in them that they can be in the mainstream with a co-taught [teacher] versus just the [EL] service. Maybe sometimes that hinders [EL students], and holds them back a little bit longer. (Interviewee 7, District D)

Our ELL teachers hold them closely...Coddle, protect, want to hang on too much. I think that gives some of our general education teachers...the thought that 'OK, those are your kids.' (Interviewee 15, District G)

Perhaps as a result of this mentality that EL students are the responsibility of EL teachers versus all teachers, a district leader and a school leader each noted that a challenge in addressing their LTELs’ development is that EL teachers can feel, at times, that they are on a “separate team” than general education teachers. The district leader explained that this can manifest itself when EL teachers participate in PLC meetings with general education teachers; while some EL teachers have the confidence to speak up about how they believe lessons can be improved to meet ELs’ needs, others may feel intimidated by the responsibility of taking on a leadership role to advocate for ELs in this setting. These leaders explained:

I think the ESL teachers, much like our special ed resource teachers, feel that they are separate teams in the building. And when they come in and push in or speak up about certain issues, they're seen as the 'special ed resource teacher' [or] the 'ESL teacher.' (Interviewee 4, District B)

Within our secondary EL team, we have you know people who feel really confident going into a PLC and advocating for ELs...And then on the other side of things, we have a couple of [EL] teachers who – that feels really risky for them right now. And we're still building just, how do you participate and advocate for your EL students in the PLC? How do you feel comfortable speaking up? (Interviewee 5, District C)

Similar to the perceived divide, at times, between EL teachers and general education teachers, two district leaders also noted that there can be a lack of communication between special education programming and EL programming, even when they are serving the same student. As a result, some students were receiving numerous pull-out interventions, which disrupts their learning. In both cases, the leaders noted that this was an area they were working to improve. As one district leader noted:

We are working against some misconceptions and really educating people, bringing people together...So what should special ed teachers know about EL and what should EL teachers know about special ed? Because it ends up being the same kids being pulled out all the time with random interventions that aren't really complimentary. (Interviewee 16, District H)

These seven leaders thus described a variety of ways in which both teachers and students are often silo-ed into separate learning environments or “*separate teams*,” as one school leader shared (Interviewee 4, District B). These divisions occur between general education teachers and EL teachers, and between special education services and EL services, both of which result in the perception that EL students may not be the responsibility of *all* teachers within a school building, but that they are the primary responsibility only of EL teachers. When EL teachers and general education teachers view themselves as part of separate teams as well, or when EL teachers do not feel

empowered to advocate for their students, the individuals who are most impacted are the EL students whose specific needs are not being met in the classroom.

Systemic Challenge – “ELs Slip Through the Cracks.” Next, three individuals (18%, including one district leader and two school leaders) discussed a systemic challenge of trying to identify and meet students’ needs early on such that they don’t reach high school with significant gaps in their academic English language development, as is the case for LTELs. A school leader explained that part of this may be because some teachers at early grade levels view their Latinx students as “*compliant*” in school, doing their work and not demonstrating disruptive behaviors that might otherwise draw attention to themselves (Interviewee 4, District B). As a result, teachers may give more attention to students who need re-direction, and the EL students’ needs may go unaddressed; nonetheless, they’ll continue to progress through school without some of these early skills. A district leader, meanwhile, explained that students may move from grade level to grade because teachers did not know how to help them at the time, and assume that they’ll get what they need “*somewhere else*” (Interviewee 9, District E). As two leaders explained:

It's a systemic thing, but the teachers or the adults in the buildings see our Latinx students as compliant...They slip through the cracks because they looked like they are doing school well. They're sitting in the classroom. They're working. And therefore other students may get more attention because of that...So now you've had a student in middle school who hasn't grown very much going into high school. (Interviewee 4, District B)

It's a systemic thing. They may be doing OK in third grade. Fourth grade all of a sudden it kind of kicks their butt. And then that teacher's like, 'Well, they'll just get through this year and next year they'll get it.' Everybody thinks the kids are going to get it somewhere else. And the

reality is, that's who turns into a long-term EL. Because they didn't get it and nobody knew what to do when they started to not get it. (Interviewee 9, District E)

In thinking about how many ELs come to be LTELs by the time they are in high school, these three leaders stated that a contributing factor is that there are gaps in the education system as a whole such that some students are continually moved through their schooling experience without an adult helping to identify critical areas of need. Without anyone taking accountability for addressing gaps in these students' language development, these students advance through school despite their limited growth.

Blaming the Victim. Finally, two district leaders (12%) shared that, in some cases, students' off-task behaviors as they reach higher grade levels may lead teachers to fault the students for their lack of academic progress— in effect, “blaming the victim.” One of these leaders, as discussed as part of the EL leadership domain *staff capacity to support ELS*, shared that their district has invested in many resources for newcomers, but that the approach toward LTELs at times has been to apply excuses such as “*Well they just don't try. Well the family has so many problems. They're too mobile*” (Interviewee 16, District H). The second leader echoed this sentiment:

By the time [students] are truly LTELs, they are well into middle and high school where other behaviors start to come in which make it almost easy to blame the victim: 'Well if you applied yourself, if you took these classes seriously...' (Interviewee 9, District E)

Barriers Related to Student- or Family-Related Factors

Just as the literature described a variety of factors affecting ELs outside of the school system that may serve as additional academic barriers for them as they progress

through school and enter high school as LTELs (Capps et al., 2005; Olsen, 2014), 12 individuals (76%, including seven district leaders and five school leaders) identified barriers for LTELs related to student- or family-related factors. Specifically, these barriers included leaders' perceptions of LTELs' attitudes and beliefs about school and themselves ($n=7$); students' strong social English but lack of strong academic English ($n=7$); that in some instances LTELs are duly-identified as eligible for special education (SPED) in addition to EL services ($n=6$); that there may be home or lifestyle factors affecting LTELs' progress ($n=3$); and other barriers mentioned by one individual each, including that LTELs may have developed "fossilized errors," or errors in English that have developed over time and are hard to change by the time they reach high school, that some LTELs have poor attendance, and that some LTELs waive the ACCESS test, resulting in their continual classification as an EL student. I review these areas below.

Perceptions of LTELs' Attitudes and Beliefs About School and Themselves.

Seven leaders (41%) believed that by the time LTELs reach high school, the students may have negative attitudes and perceptions of school and themselves. As a result, leaders perceived that for some students, these feelings could give rise to behavioral concerns in the classroom. For example, six leaders described how LTELs may feel "disengaged," "frustrated," or "discouraged." As one of these leaders explained:

When I think [...about]our LTELs and their dispositions, there is a lot of frustration there, and that shows up in different ways. It could be a disengaged student who is not doing the work...or the disengaged student who is going to pop up and speak loudly and not follow directions because they're done. There's not one standard behavior there. (Interviewee 4, District B)

Of these leaders, three specifically noted that LTELs may be discouraged or “*appear unmotivated*” due to experiences in school that have not been positive or affirming. They reflected on the following:

They're having trouble mastering skills that lead to academic success. Many of them can appear unmotivated because school hasn't worked for them and so by the time they get to the high school level, they're discouraged. (Interviewee 13, District F)

[Some LTELs] have not found school to be a positive place for them. They haven't felt successful...[They may have] feelings of embarrassment and shame that they're not able to do the work but it's covered up by bravado or distracting behavior in the classroom. (Interviewee 9, District E)

Of the seven leaders discussing their perceptions of LTELs’ attitudes and beliefs, three leaders believed that LTELs do not necessarily view themselves as EL students, and that this label for them may be, in effect, stigmatizing. These leaders perceived resistance from LTELs who may compare themselves to ELs who have arrived to the U.S. more recently, and who may not be as fluent with informal, conversational English. Thus, LTELs appear to distance themselves from other ELs, with more than one leader sharing that LTELs have asked their EL teachers why they still are required to take an EL class. Three leaders explained the following:

[LTELs] don't always see themselves as ELs because their social language is OK. It's good. (Interviewee 12, District F)

What I've heard a lot from students...[is that] they feel different because they have been labeled as an EL...One of the questions when they're frustrated that we get is, 'Why do I still have to take this class?' ...To them it feels like...they've learned English; [they feel like] they don't need it anymore]...They can use all types of informal English with their friends. But then when you talk about more formalized, standardized English language, it's...not as developed as at least we'd like it to be, to move them along. (Interviewee 4, District B)

LTEs ...are very American in their ability to speak and understand and interact, but they have limited literacy skills. So many of them are really challenging the teachers a lot because they're saying things like, 'Why I'm in this class? I'm not even EL' ...They look at the students who are more recently arrived, and...there's definitely this dissonance inside them because they're like 'That's not me.' (Interviewee 9, District E)

Finally, two leaders discussed how LTEs in high school may have internalized a sense of failure. One district leader expressed that, *"I think they're very much internalizing the whole message of, 'I'm a big screw-up'"* (Interviewee 9, District E), while another school leader perceived that LTEs may view themselves as *"just an English language learner"* (Interviewee 4, District B). Finally, two district leaders believed that LTEs may not have a strong sense of where they are headed academically or for a future career, with one of these district leaders believing that *"they don't really have a firm plan or vision for the future"* and may not see themselves pursuing college options (Interviewee 9, District E).

Academic Language Skills and Social Language Skills. In addition to – and related to – EL students' perceptions of themselves, seven individuals (41%) highlighted the fact that for many LTEs, their social English language skills are strong but that they are lacking critical components of their academic English language development. Thus, these students may not receive the additional language supports they might otherwise benefit from their general education teachers. Two of these leaders explained the following:

[LTEs] can use all types of informal English with their friends. But then when you talk about more formalized, standardized English language, it's

not quite there. It's not as developed as at least we'd like it to be, to move them along. (Interviewee 4, District B)

I think sometimes it's really easy for our English language learners to blend in and teachers see them in a classroom and their social English is really, really good...They've been here for a long time and so it looks like they can communicate and can do all these different things, but yet there's still some barriers with that academic language that they just don't get or master and then that's reflected in some of their ACCESS scores. (Interviewee 8, District D)

Recall that researchers have also found that strong oral proficiency skills may mean that teachers cannot distinguish between their LTEL students and native English-speaking students (Menken, 2013). The leaders in this study echoed this as well, sharing that despite LTELs' fluency in speaking with teachers and friends, their gaps in certain academic English skills are preventing them from reaching full proficiency.

Dual-Identification as EL and SPED. Next, six leaders (35%) explained that part of the challenge for some LTELs is that they may be duly-identified as both EL students and special education (SPED) students, *or* that there may be a need for SPED services but they haven't been identified as such. In one case, a district leader explained that duly-identified students have posed scheduling concerns when it comes to finding time for these students to receive both EL and SPED services. Two leaders discussing their duly-identified LTEL and SPED students shared:

Sometimes there is a need for special education, but they're not always identified that way. (Interviewee 8, District D)

What we're seeing is that many of our LTELs...many of those students also have special education needs...There's typically been this inability to effectively meet the needs of the students from an EL lens, special ed lens, and core lens. (Interviewee 14, District G)

Home or Lifestyle Factors. Three leaders (18%) believed that factors related to students' life at home may contribute to continuation in EL services. For example, one school leader shared that students may know others who have not obtained a high school diploma, and wondered if this could play a role in the students' trajectories. Another shared that some students may be working long hours outside of school and that this could affect their success in school. As these leaders stated:

They've seen others who haven't had a high school diploma and they still see success with that too. So I wonder sometimes how that might play into how kids are successful. And we see that across the board- I wouldn't say that's just true for ELs. (Interviewee 8, District D)

I met with a number of our ELs and...they said- 'Many of us are working jobs to send money back to Mexico. Lots of hours.' One of the kids was working 50 hours a week. He said, 'When I'm coming here and I'm sleeping in class, or I'm not getting my work done, it's not that I don't care about school, but I care about family and sending money back more.' ... This kid's trying to help his family. (Interviewee 13, District F)

Additional Barriers. Three additional barriers were noted by one district leader each (18%). First, one district leader described a challenge for LTELs as “*fossilized errors,*” or English errors that individuals developed early on that have become regular parts of their language use. This leader shared how EL teachers have expressed the following challenge:

The primary challenge that comes up in conversation...with teachers is they're seeing fossilized errors with our LTELs...primarily grammatical but also...vocabulary [that] wasn't addressed early on...And so now it's become this pattern in their reading, speaking, writing, that the teachers are having a really hard time...correcting it. And so we're just seeing it continue to play out over and over again. (Interviewee 5, District C)

In the second language acquisition literature, Valdés (1992) refers to fossilization as the use of non-native-like features that persist in an individual's second language, particularly in writing, even when individuals have otherwise reached high levels of language proficiency. Some examples of ways in which language can fossilize include the use of the ending *-ed* for all past verbs, regular and irregular alike (e.g., *drinked*, *hitted*), as well as, in some cases, vocabulary (e.g., the misuse of the word "*pot*" for duck, as the Spanish word is *pato*). Possible causes of fossilization are vast, but include one's social context or socio-psychological factors such as one's identity with the culture or language with which one is interacting (Tarone, 2013). In addition, such non-native-like features can persist even after years of direct language instruction (Valdés, 1992). Research has found that this can occur in children learning a new language as well as adults, contrary to initial understandings of fossilization (Tarone, 2013).

Given this understanding of fossilization, it is worth noting that Interviewee 5 cites part of the reason for the observed fossilized errors among LTELs is the result of not have these areas "*addressed early on*," and so now "*teachers are having a really hard time...correcting it*." Yet, grammar inconsistencies may not be areas that some students view or value to have as part of their own speech patterns or identity, thus potentially limiting their interest in "correcting" such fossilizations.

Another district leader explained that in some cases, students have very low attendance rates, and teachers have shared that it has been challenging to develop relationships with students when they have very limited time in school. The third district leader, meanwhile, explained that some students and parents opt to waive the ACCESS

assessment and access to EL services due to the perception that EL services are “*like special education services*” and that their child will miss out on opportunities in the general education classroom (Interviewee 9). This leader attributed much of this to miscommunication between the district and EL students’ families about what their EL services are and how they can benefit their students, and stated that the Somali community in particular is affected by this miscommunication. As she explained:

Lots of times, if people waive the test, they also waive the services...What I've seen a lot with the Somali community in particular, you know they've gotten a lot of information from each other and a lot of misinformation about what EL services really are. And that's on me. That's actually on my to-do list, is to provide better information that's understandable to them about what the services really are and what it looks like. To them, they think it's like special education services. And they also worry that their child will not be in mainstream classes...So they really don't understand that and they're very, very frightened that their child will miss out on a high quality education and be labeled and stuck in a program. There's so much miscommunication there. (Interviewee 9, District E)

This interviewee’s statement reflects Johnson's (2017) report that in Minnesota, “many EL families have stories of how deficit thinking has created a stigma for their ELs due to their last name, skin color, or accent” (p. 40). Thus, it could be the case that for parents who want their children to fully participate in the U.S. public education system, labels such as “English learner” may serve as a sign of “otherness” that parents want to avoid for their children. However, as a result, students who opt-out of EL testing and services may be missing out on legally-mandated EL services available to help students’ language development. This also means that these students will continue in the system as EL students unless they officially demonstrate their proficiency by testing out.

RQ3 Key Finding and Summary

Key Finding 3. The majority of leaders indicated that LTELs are not receiving the instruction they need in their general education classrooms. Just under half of all leaders reported that there was not enough PD to support general education teachers' work with ELs or that they are challenged as leaders in providing adequate PD.

Summary. In this section, I explored the factors that district and school leaders reported as barriers to LTELs' progress in school and in their efforts to attain English language proficiency. While leaders described factors across all five EL leadership domains, as well as student- and family-related factors, interviewees most commonly spoke to challenges related to *EL staffing and programming* and *staff capacity to support ELs*. In particular, these leaders expressed that ELs are not receiving the instruction they need in their general education classrooms and that, relatedly, that there was not enough PD to support general education teachers' work with ELs or that they are challenged as leaders in providing adequate PD. This finding supports much of the existing literature on the barriers to ELs' progress in school, which also cites insufficient teacher preparation to work with ELs (Good, Masewicz, & Vogel, 2010; Calderón, Slavin & Sánchez, 2011; Samson & Lesaux, 2015).

One factor that arose in this study that was not commonly found in the EL literature was the lack of school leaders' own preparation to work with ELs. Without specific preparation to work with these students, school leaders may not view schoolwide improvement efforts, curricula development, or family engagement strategies through the lens of their EL students and families. Several interviewees in this study also highlighted

systemic challenges such as the lack of a districtwide vision or high expectations for ELs, as well as a lack of schoolwide or districtwide accountability for EL students, each of which demonstrate a lack of prioritization for ELs' learning needs. In the section that follows, I seek to move beyond these barriers to understand the actions and programs that district and school leaders discussed as part of their efforts to support LTELs in their schools and districts.

RQ4: How do education leaders report supporting LTELs' academic and English language development?

In addition to discussing what education leaders perceived as barriers for their ELs in attaining English language proficiency, I explored what the ways in which school and district leader described supporting LTELs' academic and English language development in high school. Through this research question, I sought to add to an identified gap in the leadership literature, given that, as reported in Chapter 2, "the role that leaders do or could play in the learning of EL students has been relatively absent from research conversations on English learners" (Elfers and Stritikus, 2014, p. 307).

Elfers et al. (2013) define "systems of support" as a "set of intentional and differentiated efforts focused on the continuous improvement of teacher and student learning" (p. 170). The five systems of support they identified for teachers included opportunities for classroom-focused professional learning related to ELs; specialized EL-related staff support within, or connected to, general education teachers' classrooms; availability and appropriateness of instructional materials and other resources for ELs; a collective focus on EL learning needs; and school and district leadership actions.

Elfers et al.'s (2013) research specifically focused on how leaders support *classroom teachers* in their work with ELs. In this section, I expand Elfers et al.'s (2013) concept of a “system of supports” to include both the actions and conditions (districtwide and schoolwide) that leaders identify as important components of supporting students’ success; namely, in this study, the success of their LTEL high school students. My findings for this research question were shaped by interviewees’ statements related to how district and school leaders reported the following: supporting ELs in their school or district; supporting both general education teachers and EL teachers to teach EL students; building their own professional knowledge about ELs; designing their EL service model; using data to determine EL services and programming; and working together with other leaders and teacher to support ELs. As with my analysis of RQ3, to interpret the data, I utilized the literature-based conceptual framework for the five EL leadership domains I presented in Chapter 2 (see Figure 2).

All 17 leaders in this study discussed the ways in which their school or district’s *EL staffing and programming* has supported their EL students, with nearly all leaders describing their *structures to support EL learning and inclusion* (94%, $n=16$) and *staff capacity to support ELs* (88%, $n=15$). In addition, slightly over half of the interviewees described supports related to *vision and expectations for ELs* (47%, $n=8$), followed by *accountability for EL progress* (35%, $n=6$). I present these findings in the sections that follow, organized by EL leadership domain.

Vision and Expectations for ELs

In this study, eight education leaders (47%, including four district leaders and four school leaders) spoke about the ways in which their school or district creates a system of support for their EL students as part of the first EL leadership domain, *vision and expectations for ELs*. Specifically, leaders described either a district-level vision for ELs ($n=4$) or one held by the school leader for these students ($n=4$), which I explain below.

District-Level Vision for ELs. Four district leaders (24%) described the positive vision that their district brings to the work of supporting ELs, with three leaders noting the guidance and direction of their superintendent or assistant superintendent. For example, one leader explained that the assistant superintendent has specifically asked for research on the district's teachers that are "*beating the odds*" with their students and how that work can serve as a model across the district (Interviewee 12, District F). A second leader explained that the EL department has "*incredible support*" from their superintendent and the executive director of teaching and learning, who "*see EL as a priority*" (Interviewee 5, District C). This support has enabled the district to add funding for an additional FTE (full-time equivalency) EL staff member, which the leader explained as follows:

We have incredible support from our executive director of teaching and learning and our superintendent. They see ELs as a priority for us. It's a population that we want to serve well. And so we asked for it and it was put in place as a budget requirement for the secondary school to budget for it. (Interviewee 5, District C)

Similarly, another district leader credited a growing districtwide focus on equity to the leadership of the superintendent and assistant superintendent. This individual noted

that district leadership has been inclusive of all school principals and assistant principals (APs) in this work, and that this has also resulted in “*a shift in how we all operate at the district level too*” (Interviewee 14, District G). For example, when asked who or what led to the district’s shift, this leader replied:

I think our leadership. So our superintendent, our assistant superintendent has been – she is my supervisor – she's been instrumental in making this happen and bringing all of us to the table to make these decisions together. I think the way that they have involved the school leadership with principals and APs has been instrumental in that too. So we're all having the same kinds of conversations, not just this one school or this one school or this one department. So it's been a great shift and it's very much been supported by our superintendent. (Interviewee 14, District G)

In addition, one district leader explained that for her, a focus on equity has been “*one of my top priorities,*” which started with using asset-oriented language to help build a common vision for ELs (Interviewee 16, District H). For example, this leader has worked to help others use the term “multilingual learner” rather than “English learner,” which she explained as follows:

I would talk about ‘multilingual learners.’ I try to not use the term ‘English learners’ because it's deficit-focused. So that's something that I brought [to the district] in terms of, these are bilingual students; it's an asset, it isn't a problem. This is something to celebrate. So I think that was new for the district. (Interviewee 16, District H)

School Leaders’ Vision for ELs. Four school leaders (24%) described their goals and leadership approaches (or those of their school leader) for their students, noting their emphasis on equity and student empowerment. For example, two of these leaders highlighted their focus on equity, one of whom discussed using a “*lens of equity*” as part of the school’s instructional leadership team when examining school operations, student

learning, and school policies that impact students' achievement and well-being (Interviewee 2, District A). The second leader credited their district's work as "*pushing our building forward*" by taking a careful look at EL students' access to upper-level classes to ensure that enrollment in those courses reflects the student population (Interviewee 6, District C). In addition, this leader explained that they were working on a schoolwide approach to using more academic language in school spaces by helping students to think about the way they use language in different ways in different spaces, which they explained is "aligned with a lot of the work, in terms of speaking, that the EL department is doing." This leader explained their focus on equity as follows:

*I lead from an equity – but even a racial equity – mindset in everything I do. So students...receiving EL services, one of the core pieces to the work districtwide, but specifically in terms of my role as the building principal, is to ensure that they have access...It might have to do with the way we design our master schedule. It might have to do with the way that our budget is allocated. So all those things have to be considered through the many different equity lenses that we hold, and EL is one of them.
(Interviewee 6, District C)*

Meanwhile, a third school leader described one of her goal's as a principal as empowering students and helping them to "*feel accomplished,*" which is in contrast to many EL approaches that the leader cited as deficit-based. The leader explained that she helped to convey this vision to teachers by asking teachers to "*see their class through a lens of compassion and respect*" (Interviewee 13, District F). Finally, an assistant principal explained that part of the reason for the diverse language and cultural programming available at the school was due to the school leader's "*vision to be able to have students see themselves in the school, and see their culture in the school and see*

their language and culture validated” (Interviewee 4, District B). Examples of such diverse programming included a heritage Spanish course and a dual immersion Spanish program.

In these ways, four district leaders all cited ways in which the district’s leadership, particularly from the superintendent or assistant superintendents, has demonstrated that ELs are a priority. Each of these leaders gave specific examples of how the district’s vision has led to positive changes in the district for ELs, including research into which teachers are “beating the odds” with their EL students, increasing the budget to support additional an additional EL staff member, and moving toward a districtwide focus on equity, including using more asset-based language when discussing ELs. Meanwhile, the four school leaders discussed ways in which their views on equity, student empowerment, and representation can serve important roles in building a system of supports for the ELs at their schools.

Staff Capacity to Support ELs

Although components of the second EL leadership domain were identified by nearly all leaders as contributing to barriers for LTELs in their academic development or English language development, most leaders (88%, $n=15$) also identified aspects of this domain that have supported their LTELs in positive ways (including nine district leaders and six school leaders). These interviewees noted the professional development that their teachers receive related to ELs ($n=14$), their strong EL staff ($n=10$), their preparation or PD as school leaders ($n=6$), the positive connections formed with teachers or students

($n=5$), and the opportunity to shadow EL students to learn more about their daily school experiences ($n=2$). I review these areas below.

Teacher Professional Development. First, 14 leaders (82%) described aspects of the professional development (PD) offered to teachers to support their work with ELs. This included more traditional forms of PD for their general education teachers about EL instruction ($n=9$), forms of EL job-embedded PD for general education teachers over the course of the year ($n=6$), PD for teachers engaged in co-teaching ($n=6$), and PD specifically for their EL teachers ($n=2$).

Traditional Forms of PD for Teachers. Most commonly, when discussing PD available to staff, leaders described the school- or districtwide training opportunities available to all high school teachers (53%, $n=9$). In two districts, both the district and school leaders described districtwide EL training in which all teachers were required to participate in. For example, both leaders interviewed in District C noted that teachers participated in a full day of EL training as part of their workshop week, as well as either a full or half day during the school year to continue to build on the components covered in the fall. Even though the district leader acknowledged that the workshop model has its disadvantages (as discussed as part of RQ3), she stated that the district has nonetheless seen their teachers make progress:

We have seen significant growth. Teachers have a much greater understanding of proficiency levels. They're asking better questions of us as a staff about what they could be doing. (Interviewee 5, District C)

Meanwhile, the two leaders interviewed in District D shared that all teachers in the district have participated in training related to the Sheltered Instruction Observation

Protocol (SIOP), and that this training is offered each year to teachers who are new to the district. The district leader stated that she is a “*strong advocate*” of SIOP as a way for teachers to differentiate their instruction for students, and that it is “*truly best practice for teachers*” (Interviewee 7).

Other leaders mentioned a variety of other forms of PD that were not necessarily required of teachers school- or districtwide, or that were offered as part of other teacher training sessions (rather than PD focused exclusively on ELs). For example, leaders in two districts described “breakout sessions” that teachers had the option of participating in to learn about how to differentiate their instruction for EL students:

We give breakout sessions where teachers can go and learn about differentiating for EL learners...You can sign up and take some documents that kids maybe failed on, and dissect them through an EL lens. A lot of the work we've done is to talk about teachers leading with vocabulary, like identifying key vocabulary terms before they're doing the lesson so that that's not the stumbling block. So I see more teachers doing that. So I think we're working hard here, but we can always do more. (Interviewee 13, District F)

Our secondary priority...is really focused on using formative assessments to inform instruction. So we're woven into that. And with our PD days, we actually have breakout sessions with ESL teachers to talk about what this looks like for English learners in your classroom. (Interviewee 14, District G)

Other leaders shared forms of PD such as having the EL lead present EL strategies to staff as part of the school’s PD ($n=1$), a principal-led workshop for teachers on poverty and cultural differences among students ($n=1$), and an optional summer workshop available to teachers to learn about incorporating more peer interactions, oral language development, and writing into teachers’ lessons (although this may have been

more geared to elementary teachers, as the interviewee noted that “*high school [teachers] tend to be the least interested*” in the workshop) (n=1).

Job-Embedded PD for General Education Teachers. In addition to traditional forms of PD, six leaders (35%) shared that their general education teachers receive job-embedded training to work with ELs through either their instructional coaches (n=4) and/or their EL co-teachers (n=3). The leaders who discussed their instructional coaches described them in very positive terms, including that the coach at their school was “*really strong*” or “*very strong,*” and that coaches were able to make an impact because of their daily work in the school or classroom with general education teachers. This daily work with the coach helps to ensure that teachers are getting EL support “*on a very consistent basis*” (Interviewee 7, District D). One district’s school leader described the instructional coach as a “*rock star*” who is able to “*really move work with our ELs in this building*” (Interviewee 2, District A). Similarly, the district leader in District A expressed confidence in the EL-related work that the instruction coach was able to accomplish in the high school, stating that the coach was a prior EL teacher and served as an important school leader for EL-related work in the school, even if the principal could not. In addition, the leader described the coach as “*a second me and we think alike*” (Interviewee 1, District A). As this leader explained:

Our high school instructional coach was an EL teacher and then did instructional coaching. So even though the principal isn't able to put all of her focus into EL, the coach, she is a second me and we think alike. In the beginning we met a lot around how to move work. She is just really strong. (Interviewee 1, District A)

Three leaders also viewed their co-teaching partnerships (between a general education teacher and an EL teacher) as a valuable way for their teachers to learn about EL instructional practices in their daily work. One school leader explained that EL support that general education teachers receive is “*mostly through their co-teachers*” (Interviewee 4, District B), and a district leader explained that the best partnerships are those in which the general education teacher, once the EL teacher leaves the classroom, “*continues to teach that way throughout the day*” (Interviewee 12, District F).

PD for Teachers Engaged in Co-Teaching. Next, six leaders (35%) discussed the importance of offering PD to teachers who are co-teaching in the classroom. In District A, the district leader shared that co-teachers participate in 20–30 hours of curriculum planning time together in the summer, in addition to time throughout the year for them to co-plan. Other leaders noted that they realized how important it was to offer co-teaching PD after they observed that teachers were not always clear on the expectations of them in the classroom. In particular, these leaders found that the training was necessary to remind teachers about the importance of co-planning, co-instruction, and co-responsibility for all students in the classroom. For example, two leaders explained their co-teaching PD as follows:

I think what we have to keep reminding them is that...[co-teaching] is not just a second person in the classroom, it's one person working on content and one person supporting the language so you get the outcomes you want. And sometimes that's not always understood. Once we reinstated our training two or three years ago, we said 'Ok, we're doing this, this is our expectation: They're all your students.' (Interviewee 12, District F)

Some of the issues that I saw when I first came [to the school] were just a lack of understanding of what co-teaching looks like. And this has

happened at other schools that I've worked at, where the mainstream teacher considers themselves the teacher and the co-teacher is the helper...I think that's changed because of conversations that we have had, PD that we've had. We've been very intentional about having co-teaching workshops with those teachers. (Interviewee 4, District B)

PD for EL Teachers. Finally, two district leaders (12%) briefly mentioned PD offered for the EL teachers (aside from department meetings, for example). One leader explained that their EL teachers attend the MinneTESOL conference (known as the MELEd Conference and run by MinneTESEOL and MDE), which is a conference dedicated to expanding knowledge about EL education in Minnesota. Another district leader mentioned that the district holds its own PD for EL teachers to review data and instructional strategies.

In summary, the types of PD offered to teachers to support their work with ELs included more traditional forms of EL-related PD for general education teachers, EL job-embedded PD for general education teachers, PD for teachers engaged in co-teaching, and PD for EL teachers. While two districts spoke positively about being able to integrate districtwide EL PD for all teachers (Districts C and D), the leaders in other districts tended to emphasize the ways in which general education teachers were supported through job-embedded support from instructional coaches and co-teachers. This aligns with one of the primary PD challenges that arose for interviewees in that more limited “workshop models” for teachers related to EL instruction often were not able to sufficiently help teachers change their practice.

Strong EL Staff. In addition to teacher PD, ten leaders (59%) highlighted the strength of their EL staff as an important way in which their school or district was able to

serve their ELs. All of these leaders discussed their EL teachers, and one district leader explained that their bilingual education assistants (EAs) have been an asset to their work in supporting ELs.

The majority of these leaders described the strength or passion of their EL teachers ($n=8$), using terms such as “*strong*,” “*passionate*,” “*fabulous*,” or “*talented*.” These individuals described the many ways that their EL teachers work to create schedules for their students, advocate for their EL students, and work together as a team to support their students. One of these leaders also spoke to the low turnover within their EL team, which they stated has “*helped create cohesion and help keep moving things along. We're able to build on what we do from one year to the next year*” (Interviewee 5, District C). Some of these leaders described the strength of their EL team as follows:

We've got a really skillful staff here, really committed. They do a lot of work like creating schedules for the kids for the next year, or sitting down with the kids and figuring out, by their scores, where they should go. (Interviewee 13, District F)

The EL department...they all get along. They understand why they're here. They know their purpose. (Interviewee 10, District E)

Meanwhile, three leaders discussed the wide variety of experiences of their EL teachers, representing diversity in terms of years of experience as well as the teachers’ interests, strengths or bilingual abilities. In District B, for example, the school leader noted that while all the EL teachers go “*above and beyond*,” it has been beneficial to have veteran teachers with extensive experience at the school as well as new teachers who can “*bring new ideas*” (Interviewee 4). This leader expressed that the veteran teacher brings experience in scheduling and knows “*who’s who and what classes they’ll*

be taking and what supports they'll need through programming and scheduling." In District C, the district leader explained that one teacher came to EL instruction from a different professional background, one teacher brought a focus on grammar, another's strength was developing strong relationships with students and yet another who has been a part of the school for two decades. The leader stated that these experiences have facilitated stronger dialogue and solutions:

We have a variety of experiences and background on our team. ... When they come together, they're able to bring those pieces to the table, and I think the discourse makes it better because they don't all come in with the same idea about what they want to do or think should be done next. And so we have those challenging conversations, and eventually we are able to get to a better solution because they're coming with different ideas.
(Interviewee 5, District C)

School Leader Preparation. Next, six interviewees (35%) discussed EL training that school leaders have received (i.e., district leaders discussed trainings that school leaders have participated in, or school leaders described their own participation in such trainings). For example, the school leader in District D described participating in SIOP training along with the full district, as well as attending a one-day workshop on SLIFE students with the leader's spouse, who had worked as an EL teacher. A school leader shared that they were able to learn about the progress of their school's ELs at an annual data retreat, attended by the district's department leaders (e.g., math, literacy, EL, technology, etc.) as well as the administrative teams for the district's schools. As part of this retreat, the district's EL leader would provide information about how ELs are performing on the ACCESS assessment, which helps to inform decisions related to programming and staffing:

Our EL director will lead the conversation or lead the data walk around how are ELs performed on the ACCESS test. That will happen at a district level for us – admin team and instructional leadership team. And we also lead that data crosswalk at the beginning of the year with our whole faculty and staff so that they can see ‘this is where kids are.’ But from that data conversation, and when we immediately get the ACCESS scores, we begin to start programming then, and determining staffing. (Interviewee 2, District A)

Another leader shared that they had received “a little bit” of training related to ELs as part of their participation in training with National Institute for School Leadership’s (NISL) curriculum (Interviewee 6, District C). Three of the district leaders, meanwhile, noted that the principals have received some EL training as part of the training sessions that teachers receive on ELs as well. For example, one district leader explained, “I do PD in buildings for the whole building, including the principals” (Interviewee 1, District A).

Of these six leaders, two school leaders explained that they have learned much about ELs and how their own ELs are doing through their work on the job. For example, one school leader shared that they learn about their ELs from the EL department and from being in classrooms, while the other leader explained that they are becoming “more and more informed” through their work with the district’s EL leader, explaining the following:

I love the ability to collaborate and communicate with [the district’s EL leader]. I really lean on her leadership with the EL department and with our EL students because that’s part of her main job. So if I’m falling short of anything, it’s an expectation that she challenges something and pushes me forward. (Interviewee 6, District C)

Leaders' Connections to Teachers and Students. Another component of the system of supports described by leaders related to the relationships or connections they formed with teachers and students (29%, $n=5$). Four school leaders, for example, discussed connecting with students by seeking out students' voices to help understand their experiences in school; as one leader stated, "*I believe in student voice*" (Interviewee 6, District C). Two school leaders explained that they held focus groups with students at their school (one focus group was specific to ELs and the other leader described creating "representative" focus groups to hear from all students at the school). The conversations revealed that EL students did not always feel comfortable sharing their circumstances or jobs outside of school with their teachers, or that EL students believed that their teachers did not always interact with them in the same way or provide feedback in the same way that they did to their native English-speaking peers. One of these leaders described their experiences with a student focus group as follows:

This summer, I met with a number of our EL learners...they were here for summer school and I said, 'Tell me how we can do a better job of supporting you.' (Interviewee 13, District F)

Meanwhile, another leader discussed the positive connections she observed teachers – particularly EL teachers – forming with their students. This leader described how she has seen teachers take the time to ask students how they are doing before class starts, or to ask them about their family. Where she has observed positive relationships, this leader explained that "*there's a passion there. There's warmth there. There are high expectations as well as 'I'm going to care for you'*" (Interviewee 10, District E).

Another form of positive connections at the school-level included the relationships formed between the school leaders and the teachers at the school ($n=2$).

While one leader remarked that *“I know all the EL teachers here and they know me, I’ve been to their PLC”* (Interviewee 13, District F), another described their intentional efforts to cultivate positive relationships:

I try to have a really positive and open relationship with our EL teachers so that as they have struggles or face things, that they know they can come ask me. I’m not always going to have the answer but we’ll find it together with that. (Interviewee 8, District E)

Shadowing EL Students. A final way in which two district leaders (12%) described efforts to build staff capacity to support ELs included engaging in district-level initiatives to “shadow” their EL students. “Shadowing” is the practice of experiencing school through the eyes of a student by joining them for their courses and observing the ways in which students use oral academic language during their day (Soto-Hinman, 2011). This practice serves to help the observer “become sensitive to the academic oral language development needs of ELLs and begin to change instructional practices by embedding more ‘academic talk’ into their instructional design” (Soto-Hinman, 2011, p. 21). One district leader explained that by shadowing their EL students, for example, they learned that the majority of their students’ classroom time (85%) is led by the teacher speaking and that students have limited opportunity to interact with their classmates, which has led to a focus on increasing the time that students are speaking in the classroom. Another district leader shared that their EL team needs to know *“what is happening with our students during the school day when they’re not with us,”* and was

working to arrange a time to shadow EL secondary students to better understand this (Interviewee 14, District G).

In summary, leaders in this study cited a variety of ways in which they believed that the staff capacity at the school was able to support their LTELs. While most leaders described some of the ways in which their teachers participated in EL-related PD through their district or school, they emphasized the importance of job-embedded PD opportunities (through instructional coaches and co-teachers). Leaders were also spoke highly of their EL teachers, who they believed were talented, committed to their students, and brought a range of background experiences and knowledge to their work. To a lesser extent, interviewees also cited some of the ways that school leaders were able to participate in EL-related PD, the positive connections formed with teachers and students, and the shadowing opportunities that district staff have been able to participate in to better understand EL students' school experiences.

Structures to Support EL Learning and Inclusion

As discussed in Chapter 2, the third leadership domain is characterized by building a collaborative school culture, developing positive relationships with families and the community, maintaining a safe and orderly environment for student learning, and ensuring that resources are aligned with the school's vision (Leithwood, 2012). In this section, I explored the organizational factors that leaders in this study described as part of their work to support LTELs at the high school level.

As part of this study, nearly all leaders (94%, $n=16$) described practices within this domain that are in place or that they have enacted that serve to support their LTELs'

progress in school (including nine district leaders and seven school leaders). In particular, these leaders described the various forms of collaborations that take place to discuss their students' needs ($n=13$); and connections with families and the wider community ($n=4$). I review these areas below.

Collaborations. In discussions with interviewees, they shared a range of ways in which district leaders, school leaders, and teachers work together to meet the needs of their LTELs (76%, $n=13$). This included collaborations between the district EL leader and the school leader ($n=13$), meetings between the district EL leader and EL teachers ($n=6$), and teacher collaborations ($n=5$).

District-School Leadership Collaborations. One school and district leadership action identified in the work of Elfers and Stritikus (2014) that supported teachers' work with EL students was blending district and school-level efforts through "strong two-way communication between school and district leaders" (p. 319). This study revealed a similar finding, with the majority of interviewees (76%, $n=13$) discussing the ways in which the district EL leader and the school leader collaborated to support LTELs at the high school level. Broadly, five leaders explained that the district EL leader was helpful to the school leader or served as a "good resource," or that the pair worked well together. For example, the two leaders in District D each discussed the positive ways in which they work well with one another:

In our team, we're working together. [The school leader] understands the program as a teacher, she understands programming as an administrator, and I feel that's why we marry well together, because we've both had those roles, we've both been trained. Understanding student needs at a variety of levels, I feel that it's helpful- I bring in that knowledge of [who is]

coming into her building [and] how are they transitioning in, from having that district-level view as well. (Interviewee 7, District C)

I use [the district EL leader] as a resource. Having someone at the district level that you know as a colleague that I can go to and ask questions and sit down with, I feel really good about that...I completely trust her. And so I know that the conversations that we have, frustrations or celebrations or whatever, we can just be very open and honest about it. (Interviewee 8, District D)

Interestingly, in District D, both the district office and the secondary school are housed within the same building. When asked if they believed this configuration helped to facilitate their collaboration in any way, the school leader responded that it has, “because I can just run down [to the district EL leader’s] office and say, ‘OK I have a question real quick about this kid’” (Interviewee 8, District D).

As far as the topics that interviewees noted were part of their leadership meetings with one another, some shared that they discussed a range of EL topics or that the topics tend to be “building based” or on a “case-by-case” basis (Interviewee 1, District A). Most commonly, however, interviewees explained that they met with their fellow school or district leader to review students’ scheduling or programming needs, at times reviewing this information for specific students as well ($n=6$). For example, the two leaders in District C each referenced their joint collaboration in this regard, with the school leader noting that the district leader’s input was especially valuable because they were able to reiterate the importance of ensuring access to upper-level coursework and programming for ELs:

The principal and I and the APs, we meet frequently on a variety of topics specific EL...[including] what our programming looks like, what our plan looks like for the grade levels, how are we scheduling students. The

decision around scheduling and teacher assignments is ultimately the decision of the building principal, but there is a strong consultation relationship there. (Interviewee 5, District C)

We have our district EL coordinator who is a part of our master scheduling...We talk a lot on the phone, she's at every master schedule meeting, and she comes with that [EL] lens, which is really helpful, because often we get in the way of setting up access [to upper-level courses] just by things that we don't consider. And that's one of the things that I know, if you're truly about equity, you have to have people at the table who have a perspective that you may not. (Interviewee 6, District C)

District and school leaders also shared that they meet to discuss staffing ($n=5$), including jointly discussing co-teaching assignments, collaborating on the hiring team when bringing in new EL staff, and reviewing funding available for EL staffing. For example, a district leader shared that they have worked together with the school leader to discuss co-teaching opportunities “*so that we're able to make that new companionship in the classroom successful...I feel that's where [the school leader] and I have done a really nice job of working together to get the right people so that it's the right fit*” (Interviewee 8, District D).

Meanwhile, two district leaders shared that while final staffing decisions were the responsibility of the school leader, they valued the opportunity to serve on the hiring team. One of these leaders, for example, explained that they required a demonstration of EL teaching as part of their contribution to the hiring process, as this allowed the team to see how the teacher is addressing “*academic language or when they're really hitting certain skills.*” (Interviewee 1, District A).

In addition to discussions related to staffing, district and school leaders discussed collaborating to review student data ($n=3$), to meet with teachers ($n=1$), conduct

walkthroughs ($n=1$), or to discuss PD goals ($n=1$). Reviewing data included examining student outcomes at the end of the school year, by course, to determine how to proceed with their EL delivery models for the upcoming school year, and reviewing ACCESS outcomes by domain. A school leader discussed meeting with the district EL leader and EL teachers if concerns arise around particular students who are not making progress on the ACCESS assessment, while a district leader shared that they join the school leader on walkthroughs and then “*sit down and talk about what are the strengths and gaps around the ELD lessons*” (Interviewee 1, District A). In addition, one school leader described meeting with the district EL leader to discuss how to align the building’s instructional goals with the particular goals of the EL department.

District-School EL Collaborations. Next, six leaders (35%) discussed collaborative meetings between the district EL leader and the district’s EL teachers, which primarily involved reviewing students’ scores and schedules. One district leader in particular noted that their district’s EL team is able to meet quarterly to review EL programming, which the leader attributes to district leadership prioritizing EL needs. As this leader explained:

The way that we've been able to do that is by having the district support of this huge investment in saying that you're going to have these...quarterly full team meetings. I mean that's a dozen subs and a full day out of the building for our teaching staff and just dedicating that time is a huge investment. (Interviewee 5, District C)

Teacher Collaborations. Five leaders (29%) described structures that facilitated various teacher collaborations in their schools and districts to support LTELs. For example, three leaders shared that EL teachers were a part of PLCs with content-area

teachers (in Districts A and C), with one individual elaborating to explain that this is especially beneficial when EL teachers feel confident enough to advocate for their ELs and share how content lessons could be strengthened to meet the needs of EL students (although not all teachers empowered to do so). One of these leaders also noted that EL teachers are in PLCs for the EL teachers as well. In addition to the PLCs, a second structure in place to support teacher collaborations in two districts is the intentional effort to build in time for co-teachers to plan together before the school year. The two leaders in District A explained that the district EL leader has prioritized this time by providing time, funding, and substitute teachers to allow teachers to participate in these co-planning sessions (also described as part of teachers' PD) during the summer as well as during the school year, with the district leader sharing:

In the summer they have 20, 30 curriculum writing hours to be together as a team and then through the year I usually start with 4 full days or 8 half-days; they can tell me how they want to figure that out. And then I pull subs and let them co-plan. (Interviewee 1, District A)

Connecting with Families and the Community. Four leaders (24%) noted ways in which they have been able to connect with their students' families or the greater community. For example, one school leader explained that in contrast to their experience at the elementary level, as a leader at the high school level, they have become more active in establishing community partnerships to support students' opportunities to obtain internships or participate in mentorship programs. Specific to ELs, this same leader also shared that the school's assistant principal had been active in visiting other school

districts to learn about other EL program models and what was working well for students.

This leader explained:

What we did most of last year, and my assistant principal was involved in most of that, we went and researched different school districts to look at some of the best practices or what we felt like were best practices and what they were doing. And so we looked at some of the programs that they have and some of the resources that they were using...We looked at push-in models...we'll probably move to some sort of...model like that. (Interviewee 17, District H).

Within this same district, the district leader also explained that the district initiated a student ambassador program for bilingual high school students to organize various presentations to the community about their respective cultures. Funded through a grant, the interviewee shared that one of the primary benefits of this has been for the community to learn more about the diverse cultures that have been a part of the area for years but that may feel foreign because of cultural “*silos*” (Interviewee 16, District H).

For example:

We've organized presentations to the community which have gone really well...and people are really hungry for that. So we presented to the school board. You know it's amazing how in these small communities are [in] these silos. The Latino community has been here probably longer than most white...communities have been, because of the migratory nature of agricultural work...but people don't know that. They feel like these are newcomers and they are not. (Interviewee 16, District H)

In addition to ways in which districts have worked to reach out to the community, one district leader discussed how they have connected with families through either parent focus groups. This leader who noted that the district has been conducting parent focus groups (led by an outside consultant) explained that the district sought to determine how to “*create better family engagement strategies for our families so that they feel more*

welcome in schools or more involved in schools” (Interviewee 12, District F). In addition to conducting parent focus groups, the district is interested in surveying families with students who have been in the program *“for a long time”* in order to *“figure out how to help make a better home-school connection.”*

Thus, the majority of leaders in this study described practices within this third EL leadership domain regarding the structures in place to support collaborations and connections across individuals at the district and school levels, as well as with families and the community. In particular, this study identified a variety of ways in which the district EL leader and the school leader collaborated to support LTELs at the high school level, including discussions related to programming and scheduling, staffing, student data, the alignment of EL goals and building-wide instructional goals, and the joint collaboration to conduct walkthroughs of EL teachers. To a lesser extent, leaders discussed structures in place to support ways for teachers to collaborate with one another, although some noted that EL teachers were a part of PLCs with other teachers in the building, and one district noted intentional efforts to build in time during the school year for co-teachers to plan together (mentioned by both the district and school leader), suggesting that this may be an important area to build additional collaborative structures and processes.

EL Staffing and Programming

All 17 leaders in this study described practices within this EL leadership domain of *EL staffing and programming* (including nine district leaders and eight school leaders). In particular, these leaders described the program models and courses the schools use to

serve ELs ($n=17$); how leaders and teachers monitor the progress of their ELs ($n=13$); ways in which leaders engage in the teaching and learning of their schools ($n=8$); and the work of staffing their schools to support ELs ($n=8$). I review these areas below.

EL Program Models and Courses. All interviewees in this study discussed components of their EL program models and available courses (100%, $n=17$). This included discussions related to serving ELs in the general education classroom ($n=17$), primarily – but not exclusively – through co-teaching; serving ELs through EL courses ($n=12$); and offering heritage language courses ($n=2$). No leaders described programming designed for specifically for LTELs.¹³

Serving ELs in the General Education Classroom. All leaders described the ways in which their schools and districts deliver instruction to their high school EL students in the general education classroom (100%, $n=17$). Of the eight districts included as part of this study, leaders from six districts ($n=13$) explained that they are able to do so through co-teaching, while the leaders in the remaining two districts ($n=4$) shared that they did not currently offer co-teaching as part of the general education courses ELs participated in.

Co-teaching in particular emerged as an important area of focus for many interviewees, who explained how they designed their co-teaching model, what they observed as factors in successful co-teaching partnerships, challenges they experienced in implementing co-teaching, and positive student outcomes resulting from the co-teaching

¹³ Some interviewees also described programming specific to ELs who are considered newcomers or SLIFE. For the purposes of my analysis and my focus on LTELs, I chose not include those discussions related to those programming areas.

model. Five district leaders in particular discussed why their district have moved toward co-teaching models, including that this allowed students to be in a classroom with their peers; that “kids have a right to be in their classrooms” (Interviewee 12, District F); that this is a way to help ELs produce higher levels of academic language; that this was a way to offer a well-rounded education to a growing population of students; and that this was a way to offer general education teachers job-embedded PD. As some of these leaders shared:

We have this statement that we made when we really started systematizing co-teaching, that kids have a right to be in their classrooms...And then the engagement piece – I think that's why we started doing co-teaching much sooner in the secondary schools, because the long-term students, putting them with newcomers was not appropriate. Having them all by themselves just didn't make them feel successful. (Interviewee 12, District F)

The reason why we want to co-teach in mainstream is because we want all of our students to be able to produce higher levels of academic language. (Interviewee 1, District A)

One of our big goals behind co-teaching is that it's a relationship that is job-embedded professional development for the mainstream teacher. I believe all of our ELs would do better if their mainstream teachers knew more instructional strategies and how to highlight language and structures to help students with their development, but most of them didn't get it and won't get it...So really what we've found at the high school is most effective is the co-teaching relationship because it's 'just in time learning' – What are we doing tomorrow in this science lesson, right? (Interviewee 9, District E)

Interviewees also discussed how they approached the design of their co-teaching models, including how it was determined which courses would be co-taught and which teachers would be co-teaching. In particular, eight leaders described how the courses were selected for co-teaching based on students' needs and academic performance, with

some leaders elaborating to explain their needs in different content areas. Of the five leaders who noted the specific subject areas where they offered co-teaching courses, most shared that they did so in social studies ($n=4$), followed by science ($n=3$), math ($n=1$) and ELA ($n=1$). For example, one leader shared that the co-teaching priority was “*literacy*,” which led them to focus on social studies and ELA because these content areas were “*banded together*” (Interviewee 1, District A). These leaders spoke about lower student scores in these areas and the ways in which literacy was able to be embedded in these subjects. For example, as two leaders explained:

When they come into 9th grade, right now we are co-teaching in physical science [for a] couple of reasons: because of grades in science and also because of the literacy that can be embedded into the class, because we still have to help them with their growth on their academic language on the ACCESS. So if you're a long term learner, you will get that. (Interviewee 12, District F)

Social studies and science are two areas where most of our ELs are struggling. That has to do with a lot of things. For science I think there's a big vocabulary piece; it's just difficult to acquire science [vocabulary]. And for social studies, it's background knowledge...So we have those co-taught classes. (Interviewee 4, District B)

In addition to determining courses based on student needs and academic performance, some leaders also shared that courses were determined, at least in part, based on staffing considerations ($n=6$). For example, five leaders accounted for teachers’ interest in participating in a co-teaching collaboration, dynamics between the co-teaching pair, or the teachers’ area of expertise. One district leader explained reviewing teachers’ personalities is an important component of determining the co-teaching arrangements, explaining that “*the right English language teacher with the right content teacher, that*

also can be a dynamic that you have to consider and look at” (Interviewee 7, District D). In District E, when asked how general education teachers become involved in co-teaching, the district leader shared that they *“look for people who are open and interested,”* but sometimes simply need to say, *“We need somebody in social studies”* (Interviewee 9). Meanwhile, the district leader in District A shared that their approach might be to first determine the grade-level or the content area (in this case, the leader identified 11th grade social studies), and then go to the teachers to ask, *“Who in our 11th grade would most be willing to have a partnership with an EL teacher?”* (Interviewee 1).

Of note is that three leaders, when discussing co-teaching arrangements based on staffing considerations, also highlighted how they were able to create co-teaching partnerships by being intentional about hiring staff who would be open and willing to co-teach. These leaders explained that co-teaching may have already been built into the schedule for a new hire, in which case asking prospective hires about how they felt about co-teaching was part of the interview. For example, in an effort to be intentional about moving toward co-teaching, one district leader stated that *“part of the hiring process was [asking], ‘How do you feel about co-teaching?’”* (Interviewee 1, District A)

Given the many factors taken into consideration when creating co-teaching pairs between content teachers and EL teachers, I asked interviewees what they believed were critical factors in creating the most successful partnerships. Six leaders provided examples of successful co-teaching teams or shared that, in general, the partnerships have worked well in their school or district. Four of these leaders described the strong skills of their content-area teachers or EL teachers, or both, with two of these leaders explaining

that ultimately the partnership is a success when the content-area teacher changes their instructional approach to meet the needs of ELs throughout all of their courses, not only in the class that is being co-taught. As they shared:

At the secondary level, the best partnerships are where the classroom teacher, once the EL teacher leaves to go do something else, continues to teach that way throughout the day. (Interviewee 12, District F)

The most successful ones are when— and teachers have shared this — working with the ESL teachers just completely changed the way that they think about approaching lesson planning... Visuals are up, sentence frames are up. There is a content and language objective. (Interviewee 14, District G)

In this vein, one school leader emphasized the role that the EL teacher has had in helping the U.S. history teacher embed EL strategies into the content and to be very intentional about building *all* students' vocabulary, and that they have worked together to determine new vocabulary assessment approaches. The leader continued to share that EL teacher has been a "*significant part*" of the content teacher's growth, as she is "*outspoken, she's courageous, [and] she will challenge the status quo*" (Interviewee 2, District A).

Meanwhile, other leaders cited teacher buy-in as an important factor in creating successful partnerships ($n=2$). One district leader explained this as allowing teacher to have the "*voice and choice*" to participate in co-teaching (Interviewee 1, District A). One way the district was able to expand teacher interest was through one of the school's strongest co-teaching pairs in which the content teacher is the department lead. Due to this teacher's positive experience, he was "*able to say to his classroom partners and department, 'Oh my gosh, my kids are doing so much better. [The EL teacher] has such*

great ideas.” Another district leader shared that the high school was able to move forward with co-teaching by opening up the opportunity to teachers and going with the “*path of least resistance*” (Interviewee 14, District G).

While many leaders described the success in in which they were able to structure their co-teaching pairs, interviewees also described challenges they have encountered in working with a co-teaching model ($n=6$). For example, some leaders explained that they had run into the challenge of ensuring that both the content teacher and the EL teacher held the same expectations for what their roles would be in the classroom and that, in particular, the EL teacher should not take on the role of a classroom para-professional ($n=4$). Two of these leaders explained that this mentality has started to change once co-teachers were able to participate in training. Another school leader – the individual who credited one of the school’s most successful co-teaching pairs to the courage and knowledge of the EL teacher – also shared that where co-teaching pairs were not as strong were where EL teachers have been more withdrawn in the general education classroom, and that coaching hasn’t been able to make much of an impact in improving this. The leader described some of these EL teachers as follows:

They're a little bit more withdrawn, a little bit more timid. And we haven't, no matter coaching, been able to move them enough to take the risk to really challenge the thinking of the [content] teacher. So that's why I say, co-teaching, it works in some places and some places it's just 'ok.'

Meanwhile, other co-teaching challenges included finding time for co-teachers to plan together ($n=2$) and the fact that having two teachers in the same classroom was an expensive model ($n=1$). For example, one district leader explained that co-teaching is

“challenging to sustain because you need the common planning time” (Interviewee 9, District E), while another said that *“co-planning is really a struggle,”* especially when an EL teacher is working with multiple content-area teachers (Interviewee 14, District G). The school leader who noted the cost of co-teaching acknowledged that *“I don't have enough funding to put an EL co-teacher in every [class]”* and explained that *“maybe down the road”* they would be able to use more data, in collaboration with the district EL leader, to make a case for additional EL funding at the high school (Interviewee 13, District F).

Despite the co-teaching challenges, four leaders also cited positive student outcomes that they have observed as a result of their co-teaching model for LTELs. For example, two leaders noted that being in a co-taught class takes away the stigma of being in a separate EL class, because sometimes they *“don't even know they're in an EL class”* (Interviewee 12, District F). That is, even though the co-taught class applies toward the mandatory number of EL service hours that EL students must receive, the EL students may not be aware of this because they are in a core course they are required to participate in anyway. The second district leader who noted this explained that when the co-teaching pair works together to both plan and deliver the lesson, students do not necessarily know that one teacher is an EL teacher- *“they just know there are two teachers in the class and the teachers help all kinds of students”* (Interviewee 9, District E). Other positive outcomes identified by interviewees include better grades ($n=2$) and more oral language production by ELs ($n=1$), both outcomes of which were supported by teachers looking at data. For example, two leaders explained:

We know from our data that students who are in co-taught classes – EL students – get higher grades and are more successful in their series of classes than those who aren't. (Interviewee 9, District E)

[Content teachers] work to co-plan some opportunities with their ESL teacher, and then to see the 'after data' of how much their students are talking and interacting with one another is extremely powerful. So I think results with student performance is really the biggest thing that content teachers are really impressed by. (Interviewee 14, District G).

On the whole, my findings revealed that co-teaching was an important delivery model in which district and school leaders believed they were best able to meet their LTELs' needs within their existing school structures. These leaders tended to describe this approach as a way to help students remain in classrooms with their native-English-speaking peers, thereby improving student outcomes. Teams of co-teachers were typically paired based on students' needs in certain content areas, as well as teachers' personalities and interest in co-teaching. Leaders explained that such pairings tended to be most successful when each teacher was already a teacher strong in their craft, when the content-area teacher committed to using the EL strategies throughout the rest of their courses, and when the EL teacher was able to understand their students well and work with the content-teacher to explain how to embed the additional language support into the classroom. For some, however, balancing teacher dynamics posed a challenge for the co-teaching model, as well as the challenge of building in co-planning time for teachers and the expense of having two teachers in a single classroom. Nonetheless, positive student outcomes that leaders identified from co-teaching included more seamless instruction for EL students (who did not have to leave for an "EL class" or work with an "EL teacher,"

but rather had both of these components as part of their co-taught general education class), better performance outcomes, and more oral language production.

As noted, while the leaders in six districts discussed their co-teaching model as a way to support their high school LTELs, leaders in two districts explained that they did not use this approach ($n=4$). The district leader in District C explained that “*co-teaching is an incredibly expensive model*” (Interviewee 5). Thus, their district’s ELs were in general education classrooms with their native-English-speaking peers, but were supported by bilingual education assistants (EAs) in math and science, “*since that’s where our students tend to struggle the most*” (Interviewee 5, District C). Within the content classes, then, ELs were “clustered” together, or grouped together, so that the EA can work with as many ELs within a classroom as possible. Unlike co-taught classrooms, however, the EAs are not expected to co-plan or co-teach, but to work with small groups of ELs during independent work time. The district leader explained this as follows:

We want [EAs to work] in collaboration with the teachers but they're not lesson planning and they're not providing the modifications. It's more of a 'remind the teacher' that these are things that should be in place for students. And that they, during independent work time, will pull students for small groups based on common need. (Interviewee 5, District C)

In District H, meanwhile, the district and school leaders did not note additional support staff in the general education classroom. The school leader described being “*hesitant*” to move to this approach because the EL teacher often takes on the role of the “*helper*” (Interviewee 17). As this leader shared:

I've seen it be very ineffective and I haven't seen [the] effective side of it yet...My first year here we tried that and it was kind of one teacher being

more of a para and helper and the other being more of the teacher.”
(Interviewee 17, District H).

On the other hand, the district leader in District H explained that co-teaching was easier to implement at the elementary level rather than the secondary level because “*in secondary...you have to pay two teachers to teach one class, and with budgets and budget cuts and everything that's always hard*” (Interviewee 16). In addition, this leader cited “*more flexibility*” at the elementary level. Thus, the district leaders in both Districts C and H noted the cost of co-teaching as a barrier, though both leaders in District C shared how their district provided additional instructional support in the classroom to help support their ELs.

Serving ELs Through EL Courses. In addition to discussing ways in which ELs were supported in the general education classroom, 12 leaders (71%) also noted specific EL courses offered to their students. Of these leaders, nine discussed standalone English language development (ELD) or other courses designed for ELs, and eight leaders discussed serving ELs through sheltered content instruction.¹⁴

Most commonly, the standalone EL classes noted by leaders included ELD courses, which typically focused on language support. In District E, the district leader stated that while they offered EL classes for all proficiency levels, at “*Level 4/5, we start calling them academic English*” (Interviewee 9). In District C, ELs were grouped together by either Grades 9/10 or Grades 11/12, and then grouped by proficiency level

¹⁴ As noted in Chapter 2, sheltered instruction is usually delivered by content-area teachers who have training in EL instruction (Christian, 2006; Short et al., 2012). However, some sheltered classes may consist of both ELs and non-ELs, while others are solely for EL students (Stephens & Johnson, 2015).

into their ELD courses. Other EL-specific classes noted by interviewees included an EL study hall or study skills course ($n=3$) and an EL writing course ($n=2$). The purpose of the EL study hall, one school leader explained, was to offer EL students time during the day with an EL teacher if *“they have demonstrated that they have some proficiency and maybe they haven't passed the test yet but they still need some levels of academic support”* (Interviewee 7, District D). The two leaders in District F who shared that the high school had offered a form of an EL study skills course, however, both acknowledged that the course did not go well, with the district leader sharing that it likely did not go as hoped because of differing expectations of the purpose of the course:

The objectives were unclear...I think the EL teacher was under the impression that it would be to work on academic language and I think the kids were under the impression that it was about homework. (Interviewee 12, District F)

The two leaders who noted that their high school offered an EL writing course both explained that these courses addressed a *“specific area of need”* for their EL students (Interviewee 4, District B). The school leader in District B reflected that, after thinking about the students in this course, *“there were probably a lot of long-term English learners in that class”* (Interviewee 4). A district leader shared that when they examined the ACCESS domain outcomes for students who had *“been in the [EL] program for a long time,”* they found that these students were particularly low in writing (Interviewee 1, District A). In response, this leader continued,

The goal became, let's create a writing course to try and meet this very specific need, to see if we can bump up their skills in this area and send them on their way. (Interviewee 1, District A)

In addition to standalone EL courses or EL skills courses, leaders also noted a variety of sheltered EL courses ($n=8$). Courses noted by interviewees included sheltered English language arts, history, math, science, and social studies. The district leader in District E explained that their sheltered courses were led by content-licensed teachers who were trained in some capacity to work with ELs. The school leader in District D explained that while their school offered sheltered courses as a way to “*meet kids at the level that they’re at,*” this was an approach they anticipated “*moving away from*” (Interviewee 8):

We do offer shelter courses in content area still. That's something that we're going to move away from; we know we're going to have to take a look at some things a little bit differently moving forward. But we try to level our courses to try to meet kids at the level that they're at so that they can find success in classes that way. (Interviewee 8, District D)

Heritage Spanish Language Courses. Finally, two leaders (12%) noted that ELs were able to enroll in heritage Spanish language courses at the high school level. The district leader in District C explained that these courses are not limited to EL students, although enrollment primarily consists of EL students or former EL students with a home language of Spanish. The course is taught by Spanish teachers, and feedback from teachers has revealed that often, students may be “*embarrassed*” about the level of their Spanish literacy, even if their social Spanish is strong (Interviewee 5):

Teacher feedback is sometimes that kids get in there and they're reluctant to share with their peers where their Spanish literacy is actually at, and that they're a little bit embarrassed to acknowledge that they don't read and write in Spanish. But that's what we're finding for most of our students. So a lot of social and home conversational Spanish is staying with them. (Interviewee 5, District C)

A school leader, meanwhile, noted that the school has a variety of language and cultural programming in or to support the school leader's "*vision to be able to have students see themselves in the school, and see their culture in the school and see their language and culture validated*" (Interviewee 4, District B). Such programming included a heritage Spanish program, a dual immersion program, and a Latinx ethnic studies course. However, the school leader lamented that there were not enough seats in the class to be able to serve the many students who would benefit from the heritage language course.

To summarize, all interviewees in this study discussed components of their EL program models and available courses ($n=17$). Leaders in six districts shared that they are able to serve LTELs in the general education classroom through co-teaching, although this was not the case in two districts (one of which used EAs to support ELs who are "clustered" in the general education classroom). In addition to co-teaching, leaders noted a variety of other programming such as standalone ELD courses, sheltered courses, or EL writing courses designed to meet specific areas of need for their students, with two leaders also sharing that the high school offered heritage Spanish language courses. No leaders described programming designed for specifically for LTELs; rather, leaders emphasized the importance of including LTELs in classrooms with their native-English-speaking peers and the value of co-teachers in working with content teachers incorporate both academic language and content objectives into their lessons.

Monitoring ELs' Progress. The second main practice noted by leaders within the leadership domain *EL staffing and programming* related to how leaders use data to

understand and track their ELs' progress in school (76%, $n=13$). Four school leaders described either themselves or their EL department as data-driven, describing themselves as a “*data-driven leader*” (Interviewee 2, District A), stating that “*this year, we'll lead with the data*” (Interviewee 13, District F), or that “*I believe in data*” (Interviewee 10, District E).

The most common way that leaders described their data use was through the explicit use of data when making decisions in their schools and districts ($n=8$). For example, some leaders discussed using student outcome data to determine programming needs for the upcoming year. Leaders typically described basing these decisions on ACCESS scores, and one district leader mentioned looking at course outcomes as well, which led to discussions of potentially adding a co-teacher to a health class, where students appeared to struggle. A school leader described using data to addressing programming and staffing as follows:

When we immediately get the ACCESS scores, we begin to start programming and determining staffing...and [looking at] how do we build a master schedule to support our ELs in pull-out classes and to give them the supports that they need? But even how, we have a co-teaching model, and so, how we are pushing our EL teachers into particular content areas based upon several data points. Looking at ACCESS scores, looking to fails, looking at achievement overall. (Interviewee 2, District A)

Other ways in which leaders described using data included using formative assessments to inform instruction and working to schedule students appropriately based on their ACCESS scores. One unique way that a school leader discussed using data to improve outcomes for ELs was using data to help the EL team reduce the number of disciplinary referrals that EL students were receiving. The school leader presented a

spreadsheet that displayed the number of referrals that each EL teacher had given in the prior school year, which requires that the student leave the classroom to be seen by an administrator. One category of referrals, for example, was “technology misuse,” which is often used for students who *“don't come with their Chromebook charged”* (Interviewee 13, District F). In response, the school leader shared that they met with the district EL leader and asked for *“another one or two Chromebooks in the classroom for kids who don't have the tools they need. Let's not send them out [of the classroom].”* A district leader, meanwhile, described ways in which the district was conducting its own research to generate student data outside of the ACCESS assessment. For example, the district was embarking on research to examine which teachers in Grades 1–8 are “beating the odds” with their EL students, based on three years of data on the state’s Measures of Academic Progress (MAP). Specifically, the goal was to determine *“who are teachers that are beating the odds, what are they doing that's working for kids, how can we duplicate that across the system and how does co-teaching support that?”* (Interviewee 12, District F)

In addition to the explicit use of data to inform decisions, seven leaders described providing the necessary conditions for staff to use data effectively. This typically involved professional development sessions that devoted time to examining EL student data. The district and school leaders in District A, for example, both cited a year-end data retreat at which the district’s EL leader will *“lead the conversation or lead the data walk around how are ELs performed on the ACCESS test”* for all school leaders and their leadership teams (Interviewee 2, District A). In District D, the school leader shared the prior year was the first time that general education teachers were given structured time as

part of their staff development to examine their EL students' levels of language proficiency and to be able to ask EL teachers about strategies to use with their students. The leader stated that this time was a benefit to teachers, who often do not have time during their day to take such a detailed look at their students' data:

I think it was received really well, because as teachers, we don't always have time during our day to dig in and find out more. And so to give some dedicated time up front really gave them an opportunity to kind of set the framework in their classrooms and to be able to hit the ground running with information up front. (Interviewee 8, District D)

Next, six leaders described using multiple sources of data when examining their students' progress. In addition to using ACCESS test scores, interviewees reported using data from other assessments such as NWEA and the MCAs, formative assessments, a Grade 9 literacy diagnostic tool, other student outcomes such as the percentage of students earning credit toward graduation, and feedback from teachers about how the students are doing. Two school leaders also provided examples of how they collaborate directly with staff to interpret EL data. One school leader, as previously noted, discussed reviewing data on discipline referrals with EL teachers, while another school leader described attending a PLC and working with teachers to examine disaggregated data for their courses – including EL students but also other student subgroups such as SPED or race/ethnicity. As this leader explained:

I had been working with the 9th grade PLC...and what they weren't doing [was], they weren't looking at their data. So I made them bring their data. It's like 'Who are these kids? And who's being successful? Where and where aren't they being successful?' And then looking at their instruction and really asking them, 'Are you thinking about what you're doing?' (Interviewee 10, District E)

Thus, the majority of leaders in this study described at least some of the ways in which they or their schools were actively using data to monitor their EL students' progress regarding their English language development. This generally involved school leaders, together with their district EL leader, reviewing EL students' ACCESS scores and levels of proficiency to determine scheduling and programming needs. Other leaders discussed the importance of having scheduled time to review student data as part of professional development sessions, whether for leaders, general education staff, or teachers. Finally, only two leaders explicitly discussed ways in which they reviewed student data directly with their teachers, suggesting this may be an area for leaders to explore in their efforts to further support LTELs. This could also be integrated into existing PD structures, where not already, to further promote supportive conditions for all staff to understand and explore their student data.

Engaging in EL Teaching and Learning. Eight leaders (47%) discussed the ways in which they engaged, broadly speaking, in EL teaching and learning, which primarily related to overseeing the EL instructional program ($n=6$) and observing classroom instruction ($n=3$).

Of the six leaders who discussed overseeing the EL instruction and services, two school leaders explained that this guidance primarily comes from the district's EL leader, in collaboration with the district's Teaching and Learning department or in collaboration with the school leader as well. Another two school leaders shared that the school's EL team is either "*pretty much autonomous*" (Interviewee 4, District B) because of their strong experience and training, or that they are "*pretty self-sufficient*" (Interviewee 10,

District E). In these cases, the leaders explained that the EL team or the EL lead at the school would share with the leader “*what their needs may be*” (Interviewee 10, District E) or use the school leader as a “*sounding board*” (Interviewee 4, District B). Another school leader, when asked who oversees EL instruction, shared that there are “*multiple parts to that,*” including the school leader as the administrative lead, the EL teachers as the curriculum and instruction leads (along with the district’s department overseeing curriculum), and the district’s EL leader (Interviewee 15, District G). Finally, another school leader shared that while they do not oversee the EL department directly (this is the responsibility of one of the assistant principals), they are the “*instructional leader within the building*” (Interviewee 17, District H). Consequently, with regard to ELs, they view their role as looking at “*data or looking at feedback from students or from our teachers, and making sure that we have supports that are in place to best serve students that are in our EL programs.*”

In addition to overseeing the EL instructional program, three leaders described conducting EL teacher observations or walkthroughs. For example, one leader explained that they partner on walkthroughs alongside the high school leader, after which they “*sit down and talk about what are the strengths and gaps around the ELD lessons*” (Interviewee 1, District A). A second district leader shared that the EL department has developed an EL observational tool for principals to use when observing EL teachers, which involved creating “*language objectives related to content*” as well as a rubric to assess the language objectives (Interviewee 9, District E). This individual stated that the observational tool’s focus on language was valuable for teachers who may find

approaches such as SIOP “*overwhelming*” and that SIOP tended to “*a lot about strategies and not that much about language.*” A school leader, meanwhile, described working with a particular EL teacher to better respond to a disengaged LTEL student by shifting how the teacher responded. The leader explained working with the teacher as follows:

There was an ESL teacher who was struggling with specific behaviors that were coming up. And when I think through it, one of the issues was with a long-term EL. And [the student’s] particular attitude towards school was disengaged...In observing, one of the one of the pieces that I realized was that the teacher was in a way being permissive of that behavior...And so, [I set] up times to go back into the classroom to support and make little shifts in how you respond to that behavior, just to make it a better learning environment, not just for that one student, but for everybody else who’s missing out on learning. (Interviewee 4, District B)

Intentional EL Staffing. Eight leaders (47%) described their attention to EL staffing as a component of their work in overseeing EL instruction and services; this includes leaders who discussed staffing-specific topics discussed previously, such as the district and school leaders jointly serving on hiring teams to bring on EL staff, and being strategic in bring on new staff who would be open to co-teaching.

In District A, the district leader described the importance of “*hiring really strong people*” in school leadership positions to help lead the work of ELs beyond the school leader, such as the instructional coach (Interviewee 2). In the same district, the school leader also stressed the importance of finding the right staff for the right positions, sharing that:

Human resources –who you hire, who you bring in to work with students– is a game changer. So absolutely, as the principal of the school, I am

going to be a tight gatekeeper of that that process. (Interviewee 2, District A)

A district leader who had shared that the superintendent and other district leaders “*see ELs as a priority*” stated that this enabled the high school to budget for additional funding for an EL staff member (Interviewee 5, District C). Finally, another district leader described efforts to hire staff that would best be able to support ELs, and said that “*I was able to hire one or two teachers who are bilingual Latino for the upcoming year*” (Interviewee 16, District H).

To summarize this section, all leaders in this study described *EL staffing and programming* practices or conditions that contributed to a system of supports for the LTELs in their school or district. This largely involved serving LTELs through co-teaching in their general education classrooms, although this was not the case for two districts. The majority of leaders in this study also described using data to monitor their EL students’ progress in their English language development, primarily through the review of EL students’ ACCESS scores and levels of proficiency to determine scheduling and programming needs. In addition, leaders discussed other practices such as the oversight of the EL instructional program, conducting EL teacher observations, and the importance of being intentional about the ways their schools hire EL staff.

Accountability for EL Progress

The final EL leadership domain includes practices related to individuals’ sense of accountability for their EL students. Six leaders in this study (35%) specifically discussed how their actions or school conditions helped to encourage all staff to view EL

instruction as staff members' collective responsibility. For example, three leaders cited a districtwide effort toward this end. One district leader explained that the district reinforced this messaging through co-teaching trainings, while another district leader explained that the district as being working hard to promote this expectation and that, while it has been hard, there is a sense that most teachers are “*really invested*” in learning about their EL students' language proficiency levels:

We've spent the last several years really trying to message around 'EL students belong to everyone, not the EL teacher.' We're still working on it. Some people have really taken ownership of that, and some people, it's still hard...But at this point, most of our teachers are really invested in understanding kids' proficiency levels. (Interviewee 5, District C)

Two school leaders similarly shared their belief that EL instruction cannot take place separate and apart from the instruction of all other students in the school building, with one leader affirming that “*Every kid that walks in our doors is 'our kids'*” (Interviewee 15, District G). Another school leader affirmed their stance that all teachers must be accountable for all of their students by asserting that they're “*not a believer*” in designating issues as an “*EL problem*” or a “*special ed problem,*” stating the following:

In schools, it's easy to just focus on the traditional student [and say], 'Well that's an EL problem. That's a special ed problem.' And oftentimes schools end up kind of morphing into that. And I'm not a believer in that. (Interviewee 13, District F)

Finally, one school leader shared an example of working hard with a particular high school teacher to integrate a word wall into their instruction to help build all students' academic vocabulary. While the teacher has demonstrated some resistance to this, the school leader has reiterated that *all* students, “*even your native English speakers, don't have the academic access that you think they have. Just because they show up in*

physics doesn't mean they have academic access” (Interviewee 10, District E). In this way, the school leader explained how they worked with staff to reinforce the message that each teacher need to find ways to help their ELs access their academic content.

RQ4 Key Finding and Summary

Key Finding 4. The majority of leaders reported that they are working to meet their high school LTELs’ needs by offering co-taught instruction in at least one core academic course. Other supports reported by the majority of leaders are that the district EL leader and school leader collaborate to meet students’ needs, and that the high school’s EL staff bring valuable talent, commitment, and diverse experiences to their instruction.

Summary. In this section, I presented my findings related to the system of supports in place that leaders identified in their schools and districts to support the success of their LTEL high school students, organized by the five EL leadership domains. All leaders in this study discussed the ways in which their school or district’s *EL staffing and programming* has supported their EL students, with most leaders discussing the rationale, design, and challenges associated with their co-teaching model of instruction for ELs. In addition, nearly all leaders described a variety of *structures to support EL learning and inclusion*. For example, many leaders discussed the ways in which the district EL leader and the school leader collaborated to support LTELs at the high school level, including discussions related to programming and scheduling, staffing, student data, the alignment of EL goals and building-wide instructional goals, and jointly conducting walkthroughs to observe the instruction of EL teachers.

Next, leaders shared district and school practices that support their *staff capacity to support ELs*. In particular, interviewees highlighted the importance of instructional coaches and EL co-teachers as forms of job-embedded professional development. In addition, leaders valued the talent and commitment of their EL staff, who they often described as bringing diverse experience, expertise, and areas of interest to their work. Finally, leaders also described supports related to *vision and expectations for ELs*, followed by *accountability for EL progress*. Many of these leaders explained that the district's leadership, particularly from the superintendent or assistant superintendents, has demonstrated that ELs are a priority through a variety of ways, such as moving toward a districtwide focus on equity, increasing the budget to support additional an additional EL staff member, including using more asset-based language when discussing ELs, and reinforcing the message that EL students are the responsibility of all staff.

Chapter 4 Summary

In this chapter, I presented my findings as organized by the four guiding research questions for my study. I developed my findings primarily from interview data, as well as student data from the Minnesota Department of Education. Where I used interview data, I provided illustrative quotations from interviewees in an effort to highlight leaders' own voices and experiences in their respective schools and districts. Taken together, these findings provide a deeper understanding of the ways in which school and district leaders define and support LTELs in a sample of Minnesota's high schools.

As addressed in my first research question, I learned that no districts had a formal definition for LTELs at the time of my interviews, although two district leaders had

developed research-based working definitions for LTELs. While there were often conversations among EL teams about these students, several leaders shared that they either had little to no familiarity with the term “LTEL.” Thus, some interviewees expressed that formally defining who would be considered an LTEL student would help raise awareness about this subgroup of ELs and would allow leaders to have a better understanding of these students and what their needs are.

In response to my second research question, when examining academic achievement outcomes on the state’s standardized assessment (the MCAs), the findings revealed that LTELs slightly underperform in science and math as compared to other ELs. However, no more than 7 percent of either LTELs or other ELs reach proficiency levels across the subject areas of reading, math, or science on the MCAs. Second, one-third of LTELs are eligible for SPED (33 percent), compared to 7 percent of other ELs in Minnesota. In addition, I found that although LTELs have higher levels of English proficiency than other ELs, over three-quarters of LTELs across all districts in the study fell into Levels 3 or 4 for their overall composite proficiency score on the ACCESS assessment (which is similar to statewide data). Finally, the data revealed that LTELs (as well as other ELs) demonstrate their highest levels of proficiency on the ACCESS assessment in the listening domain, whereas speaking tended to be the most challenging area for students. Of note is that the three districts in which leaders noted intentional efforts to create EL writing-focused courses also represented three of the four districts with the greatest number of LTELs performing at Levels 4–6 in the writing domain. In the reading domain, meanwhile, a substantial number of students fell within both the

lower and upper levels of the ACCESS assessment (both statewide and across districts in this study. While leaders' statements about their LTELs' listening and speaking skills largely aligned with the data, there were some inconsistencies as well, particularly when leaders discussed student outcomes in writing and reading.

My third research question revealed a wide range of factors that district and school leaders reported as barriers to LTELs' progress in school and in their progress toward English language proficiency. In particular, many leaders discussed challenges related to students' scheduling needs (due to the need to fit in both EL services and credits toward graduation), the concern that ELs are not receiving the instruction they need in their general education classrooms, and that, relatedly, that there was not enough PD to support general education teachers' work with ELs or that they are challenged as leaders in providing adequate PD. Among many additional barriers, interviewees cited the lack of school leaders' own preparation to work with ELs, the lack of a districtwide vision or high expectations for ELs, the lack of schoolwide or districtwide accountability for EL students, and the need for more EL-related staff members.

Finally, findings from my fourth research question revealed a variety of actions and conditions in place in schools and districts to support LTELs in Minnesota high schools. Most commonly, leaders shared that they are addressing LTELs' needs through co-taught instruction, and that these courses varied by district according to student needs and teacher interest in co-teaching. Co-teachers, as well as strong instructional coaches, were also noted as ways that leaders were able to offer general education teachers meaningful job-embedded professional development. In addition, many district EL

leaders and school leaders discussed collaborating to support LTELs at the high school level, particularly with regard to programming and scheduling, staffing, student data, the alignment of EL goals and building-wide instructional goals, and walkthroughs to observe EL teacher instruction. Finally, some leaders described how district leadership has prioritized EL learning by moving toward an explicit districtwide focus on equity and reinforcing the message that EL students are the responsibility of all staff.

Chapter 5: Analysis, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to explore how school and district leaders reported defining and supporting LTELs in a sample of Minnesota high schools. I undertook this work with the hope that this can provide education leaders and researchers with a more informed understanding of the state's LTEL population and the role that leaders can play in supporting their success. The four research questions guiding my study included:

1. How, if at all, do education leaders in Minnesota define who is considered an LTEL student?
2. How do LTELs compare to other ELs across demographic characteristics and measures of academic success, engagement, and English language proficiency?
3. What do education leaders identify as barriers for LTELs in attaining English language proficiency?
4. How do education leaders report supporting LTELs' academic and English language development?

To answer my research questions, I collected data by conducting one-on-one interviews with a sample of district and school leaders across eight school districts in Minnesota. I analyzed this data through a careful process of transcribing all recorded interviews, re-reading all interview transcripts, and coding all transcripts by research question according to primary themes and using the conceptual leadership framework presented in Chapter 2. I also reviewed and conducted a descriptive analysis of student

data from the Minnesota Department of Education, examining academic and language outcomes for LTELs, other ELs, and non-ELs (where applicable).

In this chapter, I first present my study's conclusions and a discussion of how my findings connect to the existing literature, including where my findings can offer insight into the role that education leaders can play in supporting LTELs' success in school. Finally, I present my recommendations for leaders at the state, district, and school level; education leadership preparation programs; and areas for future research.

Conclusions, Discussion, and Contributions to the Literature

Scholars such as Menken, Kleyn, and Chae (2012) write that until recently, LTELs have “largely remained invisible in research and practice nationally” (p. 122). I found this to be true among my study's schools and districts, and contend that leadership gaps have played a critical role in this invisibilization of high school LTELs. In particular, there appears to be a lack of state-level direction or guidance for district- and school-level leaders with regard to the identification and support of student subgroups such as LTELs. This, in turn, has led to a lack of information about LTELs across the state and a lack of information about recommendations that can support them.

Below, I share my analysis and how my findings support or contribute to the literature across the following areas, which largely align with my research questions: (a) Recognizing and defining LTELs as an EL student subgroup, (b) Examining LTEL student outcomes, (c) Addressing instructional gaps for LTELs in content-area instruction, and (d) Creating intentional and robust systems of support for LTELs.

Recognizing and Defining LTELs as an EL Student Subgroup

My first research question asked how education leaders in Minnesota define who is considered an LTEL student. My findings indicate that while all districts in my study lacked a formal definition for LTELs, the way in which leaders discussed defining LTELs reflected a wide range in levels of awareness about these students. For example, while district leaders often discussed ways in which they are starting to think about their work with LTELs, several school leaders were unaware of this EL student subgroup; in other words, for many leaders, LTELs remain invisible. As presented in Chapter 2, teachers may view LTELs' social English skills as comparable to their native English-speaking peers (Menken, 2013). As a result, the English skills that LTELs utilize on a daily basis may lead teachers to believe that they do not need the explicit language instruction that other ELs receive to support their work in the classroom (including vocabulary, decoding, and phonemic awareness) (Olvera, 2015).

In addition, some leaders in this study reported that LTELs themselves do not necessarily view themselves as ELs and may ask teachers questions such as *“Why I'm in this class? I'm not even EL”* (Interviewee 9, District E). Talmy (2004) similarly documented how LTELs or “generation 1.5” students in a Hawaiian high school distinguished themselves from newcomer ELs, who they referred to as “‘FOB’ – ‘fresh off the boat’ – a noxious label signifying a recently-arrived, monumentally uncool, non-English-speaking rube of mythical, and for some, hilarious proportions” (p. 150). Talmy also found that students resisted being placed in their school's ESL class, including two students who “resented their ESL placement and complained about it regularly; [their

teacher] responded more than once by ‘referring’ them to a counselor for punishment” (p. 157). In other words, while the school viewed EL students as one student subgroup by having ELs of all levels of proficiency in a single class, the LTELs sought to set themselves apart from other ELs and spoke up against being in the same course.

Other leaders in this study shared through their interviews that individuals in their districts tended to focus on other EL student subgroups, particularly “newcomer” or “new-to-country” students. For example, the district leader in District F, shared the following:

We spend a lot of time thinking about our new-to-country kids, which is...a good thing, but they make up about 3% of our population...Actually we had some newer-to-country kids who were proficient on the ACCESS this year and a lot of LTELs weren't. (Interviewee 12, District F)

It could be the case that schools and districts must prioritize the most immediate student needs, and in the case of ELs, SLIFE students or newcomer ELs are typically most in need of developing basic English literacy skills (DeCapua et al., 2020). School and district leaders may view these needs as areas that can be addressed in clear, actionable ways, such as through designated courses focused on the building blocks of acquiring English language proficiency. LTELs, however, having already acquired foundational skills in academic English, require a deeper integration of literacy across their content-area classes, where they spend the majority of their day. Embedding such a focus on literacy throughout high school content courses may be more challenging for leaders and educators, as research has found that high school teachers are often not prepared to teach literacy strategies across content areas (Menken et al., 2012; Olsen, 2014).

Here, it is worth revisiting our critique of the LTEL label presented in Chapter 1. In what ways would a movement toward a formal definition for LTELs counteract the progress such a label would provide? Researchers such as Thompson (2015) and Menken, Kleyn and Chae (2012) assert that labels such as “LTEL” can serve to highlight students’ deficits rather than their abilities, or that the label inherently frames students as deficient. However, Menken and colleagues also argue that the term is “descriptive of the students’ inadequate experiences in school,” rather than students’ own shortcomings (p. 122). In the current study, two district leaders also cautioned that the LTEL term was “*deficit based*” (Interviewee 12, District F) or that it had a “*negative connotation*” (Interviewee 9, District E), though they acknowledged that they did not know what a more appropriate term would be.

However, until LTELs are formally recognized, many educators will be left unaware that many ELs in their schools have been receiving EL services throughout their time in school. As shared through interviews in this study, defining LTELs would serve put them on leaders’ “*radar*” (Interviewee 9, District E) and would help leaders link resources to specific areas of need. In fact, one study found that “simply increasing awareness about this student population among educators seems to positively impact educational outcomes for LTELs” (Menken et al., 2012, p. 136). Similarly, Lo (2014) summarized several of the benefits of educational labeling as a way to help students “acquire services and resources that would otherwise not be available for them,” as a way to facilitate a common understanding of and language around supporting certain groups

of students, and to bring about “better public understanding in regard to the students’ nature and needs” (p. 281).

My research indicated that currently, much of the focus on LTELs at the district- and school-level is driven by the district leader (often in collaboration with their EL teams). However, progress toward defining these students and bringing greater awareness about them to school leaders must be part of an intentional state-level effort to acknowledge LTELs as an EL student subgroup, and this information should then be shared with district school leaders as well.

Nationally and across Minnesota, there is growing awareness of the diversity among ELs, with formal definitions coming into use for other EL student subgroups only recently. For example, Minnesota formally defined the term “SLIFE” for *students with limited or interrupted formal education* in 2014 via state legislation known as the LEAPS Act (Minnesota Department of Education, 2018b). In addition to SLIFE, other EL student subgroups formally defined by the Minnesota Department of Education include Immigrant and Refugee Youth; Migratory Youth; and Recently Arrived English Learners (RAEL) (Minnesota Department of Education, 2018b). Yet, LTELs continue unrecognized as a formal EL student subgroup, which could be the result of several factors, including a lack of awareness about these students, a focus on other EL student subgroups, a lack of consensus in the literature about how to define LTELs, and the lack of state- or federal-level guidance.

Examining LTEL Student Outcomes

Without a definition for LTELs, many leaders explained that they had not disaggregated their student data to look specifically at outcomes for these students. This lack of data, in turn, serves as another way in which leadership gaps have further invisibilized LTELs. My second research question addressed this need by examining Minnesota's LTEL demographics, academic outcomes, and English language development.

Among the demographic variables examined, one area of note is that one-third of LTELs are eligible for SPED (33 percent), compared to 7 percent of other ELs in Minnesota (while 15 percent of non-ELs are eligible for SPED). Umansky and colleagues (2017) cite three factors contributing to the overrepresentation of ELs as a whole in special education as: “(a) assessments and identification procedures that fail to distinguish typical learning trajectories for students acquiring English from atypical non-language acquisition related development, (b) explicit or implicit bias against EL students, and (c) limited or delayed assessment of EL students for special education services” (p. 77). Moreover, other scholars have found that EL students with less native language support as they progressed through school were more likely to receive special education services (Rueda et al., 2002).

Artiles and colleagues (2005) have documented the overrepresentation of ELs in SPED at higher grade levels as compared to early elementary grades. Furthermore, they examined differences within the EL student subgroup and concluded that ELs “with limited L1 and L2 showed the highest rates of identification in the special education

categories examined”¹⁵ (p. 294). These authors speculated that one reason for such overrepresentation may be because “secondary settings offer less support for ELLs than elementary settings,” although their study did not explore causal factors. As noted in Chapter 2, LTELs are often demonstrate “low levels of academic language and literacy in the dominant language and in their home language” as a result of a lack of programming to support L1 language development (Menken et al., 2012, p. 451). Thus, there may be significant overlap between LTELs and the EL subgroup examined by Artiles and others (i.e., ELs with limited L1 and L2 proficiency). Additional research into the overrepresentation of LTELs in SPED (as compared to other ELs) warrants exploration, as suggested by both the current research findings and prior research.

Next, I found that LTELs are slightly underperforming in science and math as compared to other ELs on the state’s standardized assessment (the MCAs), although reading proficiency levels in reading are similar. This is notable given that LTELs, on the whole, are performing at higher levels of language proficiency on the ACCESS assessment (note, however, that no more than 7 percent of either LTELs or other ELs reach proficiency levels across the subject areas of reading, math, or science on the MCAs). To address academic achievement gaps in STEM, the National Academies of Sciences concluded that schools must shift to “recognizing the assets that ELs bring to the classroom and understanding that some deficits in student performance arise from lack of access and not from limited ability, language proficiency, or cultural differences”

¹⁵ Categories examined by Artiles and colleagues (2005) included differences by “disability, grade level, language proficiency, social class, and language support and special education programs” (p. 288).

(p. 2). Their report included seven comprehensive recommendations as they related to leaders, including: examining the placement of ELs in STEM courses, removing barriers for ELs to access rigorous STEM courses, equipping STEM teachers to effectively support the ELs in their content-area classes, examining STEM teacher qualifications, and the enactment of “norms of shared responsibility for success of ELs in STEM both within the central district office and within schools” (p. 5).

When examining LTELs’ overall composite proficiency score on the ACCESS assessment, I found that over three-quarters of LTELs statewide and across all districts in the study fell into Levels 3 or 4. As documented, some leaders in this study shared that their LTEL students’ ELP progress has “*plateaued*” or that LTELs are “*stuck*” at their ACCESS proficiency levels, unable to meet the requisite score to exit out of EL services. Research has similarly found that LTELs’ proficiency tends to plateau from middle to high school “and that this may be related to the academic tracking of ELs that occurs in these grades” (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2018, p. 31).

To further investigate this, I explored Minnesota’s LTEL data by the four ACCESS domains of *listening*, *reading*, *writing* and *speaking*. I found *listening* to be LTELs’ strongest area and *speaking* to be their most challenging. WIDA (2019) asserts that “receptive language skills (listening and reading) often develop faster than productive language skills (speaking and writing)” (p. 7), which may help to explain some of these differences in scores. Alternatively, it could be the case that *speaking* is not a skill that content-area teachers focus on developing in the same way that they might focus on *reading* or *writing*, which are typically integral to most classroom assignments.

Even opportunities for peer-to-peer interactions may not sufficiently address this need for more advanced levels of speaking. Finally, *speaking* may be an overlooked domain for LTELs given that, as leaders shared, their social oral language skills are usually well developed and it may appear that students do not need additional support in this area.

I also found that student outcomes with regard to LTELs' reading and writing skills, however, were not as clear as the listening and speaking domains. That is, while the reading domain had more students performing at Levels 4–6 across districts as compared to the writing domain, there were also many LTELs performing at Levels 1 and 2. On the one hand, similar to listening, reading is a receptive skill, indicating that this may be an area that students are able to develop more quickly. Reading is also a skill required across content areas, and thus LTELs would potentially have many opportunities to work on this throughout their school day and across subjects. On the other hand, reading skills on the MCAs may not align with what is required of their work in the classroom; for example, beyond asking students to read passages to identify key facts and details on the MCAs, students are also asked to compare or interpret information and demonstrate strategic thinking or an understanding of the text (Minnesota Department of Education, 2019c).

With regard to writing, the districts reflecting stronger LTEL writing scores (compared to other districts in the study) were also those in which leaders described intentional efforts to improve their students' writing skills. For example, some leaders noted a specific EL writing class, while others described being "*intentionally focused on writing*" (Interviewee 5, District C) or implementing a new writing curriculum at the

elementary level. Olsen (2014) asserts that a course for LTELs should incorporate daily writing and should teach students “how to approach expository writing, including persuasive academic writing, research/informational writing, summarizing, and argumentation” (p. 17).

However, until LTELs are formally defined, districts and school leaders will be unable to regularly examine specific data about how their LTELs are performing academically (on standardized tests as well as in their coursework) and across each of the language domains on the ACCESS assessment. Such data can empower leaders to move away from business-as-usual EL instructional models to identify areas to target support or resources for LTELs. This could include targeting a particular skill (e.g., writing) or a particular content area (e.g., science). For example, this leader explained how they would use data to inform their programming as follows:

*[Data would help to] pinpoint the areas where they're struggling the most – if it's writing, if it's reading comprehension, if it's auditory – so that we could redirect both any interventions that we're providing but also our general education programs to support students in different ways.
(Interviewee 15, District G)*

Thus, even in the absence of LTEL best practices, leaders would be able to understand their own LTELs’ areas of need and work to target them appropriately to be able to help students gain proficiency in needed areas such that they are able to demonstrate proficiency on the ACCESS assessment and exit EL services.

I conclude from these findings that LTELs represent distinct characteristics from other ELs, and that a failure to disaggregate EL student data by all student subgroups – including LTELs – can lead to the further invisibilization of ELs’ distinct needs. Such

data would empower district and school leaders to better address EL programming, hiring, and professional development needs.

Addressing Instructional Gaps for LTELs in Content-Area Instruction

My third research question explored what education leaders identified as barriers for LTELs in attaining English language proficiency. Several barriers included the lack of a districtwide vision or high expectations for ELs, a lack of schoolwide or districtwide accountability for EL students, and the lack of school leaders' own preparation to work with ELs. However, the majority of leaders in this study indicated that the primary barrier for LTELs is that they are not receiving the instruction they need in their general education classrooms, with several leaders reporting that there was not enough PD to support general education teachers' work with ELs or that they are challenged as leaders in providing adequate PD. In this section, I will explore both how leaders discussed these challenges as well as how they described working to address this, and how these areas connect to the existing literature.

A large-scale review of the research found that, among all school-related factors, school leaders are second only to classroom teachers (Leithwood et al., 2004) for having an impact on student achievement. Therefore, the instruction that high school LTELs – as well as all students – receive in the classroom with content-area teachers is a critical factor in their achievement. Yet, in this study, leaders stated that teachers were not clear on these best practices for ELs, with one district leader noting that such literacy training for teachers has long been absent in the field of education:

To me the answer for all ELs, but in particular LTELs, is [that] teachers all need to know how to integrate literacy instruction and language instruction into their content...At the secondary level, [literacy training has] been a vacuum for about as long as I've been in education. (Interviewee 9, District E)

Similarly, a qualitative study by Menken and colleagues (2012) found that “students and their teachers overwhelmingly identify literacy in English as the greatest challenge LTELL¹⁶ students face in school” (p. 133). Of note is that improving adolescent literacy as a whole has long been a national concern among educators and researchers, with some scholars citing low levels of adolescent literacy as a “crisis” (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2006). Jacobs (2008) writes that to address this challenge, “the importance of high-quality professional development in advancing both preservice and in-service teachers’ expertise in content-based literacy should not be underestimated” (p. 23). In addition, she calls for more clarity on the roles and expectations of how content-area teachers, literacy coaches, and reading specialists can work together to support literacy instruction in the classroom for *all* students. Thus, while literacy is a challenge for high schools nationally, these challenges highlight the particular difficulties that high school LTELs are confronted with in the classroom as they work to master increasingly complex content-based vocabulary.

One challenge that leaders identified in ensuring that general education teachers have the skills they need to serve the LTELs in their classroom is that district EL leaders are often not able to adequately integrate EL strategies into districtwide professional development (PD). In particular, leaders lamented that the PD they are able to offer is not

¹⁶ These authors use an alternate acronym, LTELL, for “long-term English language learners.”

ongoing, as it is typically offered as part of single-day workshops or breakout sessions. Existing research on effective PD for teachers echoes the importance of sustained, job-embedded instructional support. For example, one recent report that reviewed 35 rigorous studies that found a positive impact of teacher professional development identified seven common features of such effective PD, including that the PD has a specific content focus, incorporate active learning, support teacher collaboration, model effective practice, provide coaching and expert support, offer time for teachers to reflect, and be sustained (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). The report found that none of the effective programs reviewed offered PD in a single session; rather, “the programs typically spanned weeks, months, or even academic years, with ongoing engagement in learning by teachers” (p. 15).

Meanwhile, a case study that focused on how school and district leaders can support general education teachers to work with ELs found that one of the ways leaders did so was by offering high-quality EL PD. Topics related to helping teachers “understand cultural differences, the nature and stages of language acquisition, and strategies for working with second-language learners” (Elfers et al., 2013, p. 163). In addition to designing district- and school-specific EL training, the study found that the case study districts all utilized formal professional development packages such as SIOP and GLAD.¹⁷

¹⁷ SIOP refers to the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol, while GLAD refers to Guided Language Acquisition and Design.

My research study, however, found that only one district reported the districtwide use of SIOP as a PD model (District D), while one district leader reported that the district has “*tried to stay away from SIOP because teachers don't like it*” (Interviewee 16, District H) and another district leader shared that SIOP can be “*very overwhelming,*” with an insufficient focus on language (Interviewee 9, District E) (addressed in RQ4). Aside from the district using the SIOP approach, both the district and school leaders in only one other district described districtwide EL training that all teachers were required to participate in, including a full day of EL training at the beginning of the school year and one additional session during the either (either full or half day). The leader shared that while such training is not ideal, general education teachers are “*asking better questions of us as a staff about what they could be doing*” (Interviewee 5, District C). Thus, a critical step toward more widespread formal PD for general education teachers may be simply for leaders first establish districtwide expectations for EL instruction, and then work to ensure opportunities for teachers to learn how to use such approaches in their content-area classrooms.

A few leaders in this study also found that they were able to best support their general education teachers through EL instructional coaches. These leaders noted their coaches’ EL expertise and consistent work with their teachers, with one school leader stating the coach is able to “*really move work with our ELs in this building*” (Interviewee 2, District A). Knight (2007) defines instructional coaches (ICs) as “individuals who are full-time professional developers, on-site in schools. ICs work with teachers to help them incorporate research-based instructional practices” (p. 12). Elfers and colleagues (2013)

also found that general education teachers identified coaches as a form of valuable EL support, though this was more true at the elementary level. A recent meta-analysis of 60 studies examining the impact of coaching (not specific to EL) found that coaching had a large, positive effect on instruction and a smaller, though still positive, effect on student achievement (Kraft et al., 2018). The analysis found these impacts to be consistent across prekindergarten, elementary, middle, and high schools. However, according to a Brookings review, the role and licensure requirements of an IC vary widely across states (Quintero, 2019). In sum, while leaders in this study reported on the benefits of job-embedded PD through ICs, and the literature, though limited, offers some support for this, leaders moving forward with ICs should be mindful of establishing clear expectations and guidelines on the work of ICs in their schools.

More broadly, however, to address both the challenge of both providing adequate training to general education teachers *and* to meet the immediate needs of ELs in the general education classroom, the majority of leaders in this study reported that their schools and districts utilize a co-teaching model of instruction in which students are in a classroom with both a content-licensed teacher and an EL teacher. However, while three district leaders in this study identified positive outcomes from their co-teaching model such as better student grades or more speaking opportunities in the classroom, there is limited research on the impact of co-teaching on student outcomes (York-Barr et al., 2007). In addition, there are “few actual accounts of how co-teaching is implemented school-wide with English learners in mainstream classrooms” (Pappamihiel, 2012, p. 1).

Therefore, the findings from this study add an important contribution to the research on some of the ways in which leaders approach the design of their co-teaching instructional model as a positive step forward for their LTEL students, as well as some of the challenges they face in doing so. For example, leaders discussed their need to be strategic in deciding which courses would be co-taught, taking into account student needs, available staffing, and teachers' interest in co-teaching. Key challenges that leaders identified in implementing their co-teaching model included the cost of doing so, a lack of time for teachers to co-plan, and differing expectations of the teachers' role. However, leaders in this study also shared that their co-teaching teams were most successful when both the content teacher and EL teacher were clear about the expectations for them in the classroom (reinforced through PD specifically for co-teachers), where there was teacher buy-in, and where both teachers were skilled at their craft.

I conclude from my findings that having strong EL staff and designated EL courses alone will not adequately meet LTELs' learning needs. By the time LTELs are in high school, much (if not all) of their day is spent in mainstream classrooms, and so students depend on *all* of their teachers for targeted instruction in language and literacy. However, attention to general education teachers' skills and preparation is not enough. Both school and district leaders can work to better articulate their expectations for all staff members in supporting ELs, including their own role as leaders in learning about ELs and their distinct needs.

Creating Intentional and Robust Systems of Support for LTELs

Despite the significance of teacher instruction on student outcomes, the work of supporting LTELs should not be – and cannot be – the work of teachers alone. Therefore, my study explored the collective system of supports that leaders described for LTELs across five EL leadership domains (addressed in RQ4) in response to several of the key challenges they identified in meeting the needs of LTELs beyond the general education classroom (addressed in RQ3). I found that the practices implemented across these domains were intertwined and complex – that what leaders reported implementing in one area was often integral to the work of several other leadership domains. Thus, while I reported my findings as part of distinct domains, I recognize that practices in one area affected many schoolwide and districtwide learning conditions, relationships, and, outcomes. In addition, in some leadership domains, my findings supported the existing research; in others, my findings serve to build on and add to the existing knowledge base about how leaders can serve LTELs. I discuss these areas below.

Vision and Expectations for ELs. Some leaders in this study shared how their district leadership has communicated and demonstrated a commitment to supporting EL students. As one district leader stated: “*We have incredible support from our executive director of teaching and learning and our superintendent. They see ELs as a priority for us*” (Interviewee 5, District C). This echoes the positive EL leadership practices described by Elfers and Stritikus (2014), who state that leaders must prioritize EL instruction. Other leaders in this study described how their districts or schools have prioritized their ELs by supporting research into which teachers are “beating the odds”

with their EL students, increasing the secondary school budget to accommodate an additional EL staff, or leading from an equity mindset. Researchers such as Theoharis and O’Toole (2011) have similarly explored the role of school leadership for ELs through the lens of social justice leadership. In a case study of two school leaders who were able to improve their EL students’ achievement through distinct (yet purposeful) inclusive EL practices, the authors concluded that doing so:

...required leaders to possess the core beliefs, knowledge, and skills that enable them to create and disseminate an equity-oriented vision for educating ELLs from an inclusive philosophical standpoint. This vision drove the collaboratively planned and delivered inclusive services that, in the end, provided for ELL achievement—both advancing and improving social and academic achievement. (p. 680)

In these ways, my findings support the existing research demonstrating that a district- or school-level focus on equity must be central to the actions that leaders undertake across other leadership domains in their work with LTELs.

Staff Capacity to Support ELs. One important leadership practice, as identified in the research, is offering PD to all teachers to work with ELs (Elfers & Stritikus, 2014). While many leaders in this study noted at least some EL-related PD offered to build staff capacity within their schools and districts, some reported that the most impactful forms of PD came from job-embedded PD opportunities via instructional coaches and co-teachers (discussed above under “Addressing Instructional Gaps for LTELs in Content-Area Instruction” in this chapter).

My research, however, pushes beyond this to identify different forms of PD that district and school leaders discussed implementing to address their students’ needs. First,

leaders noted the importance of specific training for all teachers engaged in co-teaching, particularly related to the roles, expectations, and planning time required of both the content and EL teachers. Literature from the field of special education documents that for administrators to be able to have a successful co-teaching model, training is essential. For example, Murawski and Bernhardt (2015) explain that co-teaching “requires a paradigm shift – from teaching in silos to teaching in tandem” and that leaders cannot assume that all teachers “already know their roles or are experts in co-teaching and inclusive practices” (p. 31). In addition to PD for co-teachers, two leaders noted that they support PD specifically for their EL teachers, with one leader noting that their EL teachers attend a conference in their field. In contrast, many leaders described how EL teachers were the ones providing guidance to general education teachers during breakout sessions during districtwide or schoolwide PD. It is important that leaders ensure that EL teachers are also given opportunities to further develop their skills and strategies to support EL students, rather than solely serving to train content-area teachers.

Another strategy to build staff capacity to serve LTELs that emerged from the interviews in this study was creating opportunities for staff to “shadow” EL students. This strategy aims to build staff awareness about the extent to which ELs are developing their oral language skills in the classroom, in turn helping to reduce ELs’ invisibility in the classroom (Soto-Hinman, 2011). As the ACCESS data demonstrated, LTELs’ oral academic language skills are particularly low, relative to the other language domains, suggesting that this is an especially needed area of focus.

With regard to leaders' own EL training, this study found that several leaders noted a lack of their own school leadership preparation to work with ELs. Without specific preparation to work with ELs, school leaders may not view schoolwide improvement efforts, curricula development, or family engagement strategies through the lens of their EL students and families. Yet, some leaders in this study shared that the training they had received came from districtwide PD that included EL strategies, and one leader specifically noted participating in monthly sessions largely focused on racial equity, but that *"culture and language are a huge part of that"* (Interviewee 6, District C). This finding supports existing research that identified a lack of school leader preparation to support ELs as a factor limiting LTELs' success (Olsen, 2014), and extends the literature by identifying how leaders can engage in PD through and beyond their district. Findings from a recent study on school leadership in Minnesota also found that few school principals reported participating in PD specific to the needs of ELs beyond training in culturally responsive leadership practices (Jacobson-Sigüenza, 2019).

Finally, just as shadowing students can help leaders and staff better understand their students' opportunities for oral language development in the classroom, some leaders described how they have held formal or informal focus groups with students to connect with them and to understand their experiences. Kim and García (2014) argue that LTELs' "voices can inform the work of educators, policymakers, and researchers by offering a firsthand perspective on what happens in schools and their classrooms, and how these experiences affect the academic achievement of ELLs" (p. 301). Focus groups

to highlight students' voices can serve as a valuable way to not only build relationships with students but also to identify ways to improve LTELs' academic experiences.

Structures to Support EL Learning and Inclusion. One of the EL leadership practices identified by Elfers and Stritikus (2014) is strong communication between school and district leaders. Leaders in my study demonstrated not only how they communicated with one another, but also how they collaborated in a variety of ways to support the schooling experiences of their LTELs. As discussed in Chapter 4, leaders described collaborating to review students' programming and scheduling, staffing, student data, the alignment of EL goals and building-wide instructional goals, and the joint collaboration to conduct EL teacher observations. With regard to student data, leaders discussed a need for disaggregated EL data to better inform their decision-making; however, understanding the data, including what the ACCESS proficiency levels represent and how to respond, must be embedded into leaders' own PD as well as their collaborations with district leaders. Thus, findings from this study indicate that school and district leaders can go beyond simply *communicating* to engaging with peers to find ways to effectively work together to improve the high school's EL instructional program.

Another important collaborative structure identified by some leaders in this study was time built into the school year for co-teachers to plan together (although other leaders in this study identified finding co-planning time as a challenge). Murawski and Bernhardt's (2015) guide to administrators about co-teaching for SPED-eligible students in the general education classroom recommends that leaders be intentional about scheduling planning time for teachers through common planning periods or approaches.

Specifically, they suggest “having a substitute come in once a month, using banked time, organizing lunch meetings, and replacing lunch or recess duties with co-teaching planning time” (p. 32).

EL Staffing and Programming. As previously discussed in this chapter, the majority of leaders in this study described serving their LTELs through a co-teaching model. In addition, one district that did not have co-teachers utilized bilingual education assistants; this district, in fact, demonstrated the highest overall composite ACCESS scores for their LTEL students (District C), indicating that even if co-teaching is not an option for districts and schools, language support in the general education classroom can still serve to benefit LTELs. Of the districts utilizing a co-teaching model, several leaders clearly articulated their rationale for doing so. For example, one leader stated that the district made a statement “*when we really started systematizing co-teaching, [which was] that kids have a right to be in their classrooms*” (Interviewee 12, District F). In other words, leaders’ visions and expectations for their ELs can be more fully addressed by specifically articulating why certain instructional models were chosen for ELs’ everyday learning experiences.

Another way in which leaders worked to improve their EL instructional program included focusing on their hiring practices. Similarly, in their case study of school and district leadership, Elfers and Stritikus (2014) also identified that districts worked to support their teachers and students through “attention to hiring practices (including additional screening mechanisms)” (p. 336). These authors found that leaders should be intentional about bringing teachers on board who would be open to engaging in co-

teaching, who complement the existing EL team by contributing diverse areas of knowledge and experience, and who potentially are dual-certified in content-area instruction as well as EL education.

Accountability for ELs. Olsen (2010) asserts that “building the skills and addressing gaps of Long Term English Learners has to become the responsibility of the entire school (administrators, counselors, support services, and mainstream content teachers” (p. 32). Some leaders in this study acknowledged that it has been a challenge, in some ways, to move toward the mindset that ELs are the responsibility of *all* teachers in a school. Nonetheless, others explained how they demonstrated their commitment or their district’s commitment to reducing barriers between EL teachers’ and general education teachers’ accountability for EL students. For example, one district leader explained:

We've spent the last several years really trying to message around 'EL students belong to everyone, not the EL teacher.' We're still working on it. Some people have really taken ownership of that, and some people, it's still hard...But at this point, most of our teachers are really invested in understanding kids' proficiency levels. (Interviewee 5, District C)

Thus, while divisions between EL instruction and general education instruction persist across districts, leaders are finding ways to move toward a more unified message that addressing the needs of ELs must be a collective effort.

Summary. In sum, the majority of leaders reported meeting their LTELs’ needs through co-taught instruction in at least one core academic course. In addition, the majority of leaders reported that the district EL leader and school leader collaborate to meet students’ needs, and that the high school’s EL staff bring valuable talent, commitment, and diverse experiences to their instruction. I conclude from my findings

that while each district's system of supports is complex, co-taught instruction can serve as a way for many districts and schools to offer needed supports to LTELs in the general education classroom. In addition, although leaders rely heavily on the knowledge and experience of their EL staff, collaborations between school and district leaders can help to ensure that leaders are appropriately addressing and discussing factors affecting their LTELs, such as EL students' scheduling or programming needs, co-teaching assignments, hiring new EL staff, and the review of EL student data.

Implications for EL Leadership

On the whole, my study supports the EL leadership practices identified in studies presented by researchers such as Elfers and colleagues (2013), Elfers and Stritikus (2014), and Theoharis and O'Toole (2011). These studies contributed to the EL domains and practices I aligned with the conceptual leadership framework I presented in Chapter 2. My findings also expand on these practices and contribute to the literature by identifying additional practices across the domains that leaders can enact to support their LTELs. In Table 12, I present my summary of applied findings for an EL leadership framework, based on my original conceptual framework from Chapter 2. Applied findings from my study are included under "EL Leadership Practices Identified in This Study."

Table 12. Summary of Applied Findings for an EL Leadership Framework

OLF Leadership Domains and Practices	EL Leadership Domains and Practices Identified in the Literature	EL Leadership Practices Identified in this Study
Setting Directions		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build a shared vision 	<p>Vision and Equity for ELs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make EL instruction a priority, including a focus on instructional practices that serve diverse learners (Elfers & Stritikus, 2014) • Prioritize inclusive EL services (Theoharis & O’Toole) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrate a commitment to funding EL supports and research (e.g., funding research to examine which teachers are “beating the odds” with their ELs, funding additional EL staff)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify specific, shared short-term goals 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create high performance expectations 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicate the vision and goals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicate a compelling rationale for serving ELs (Elfers & Stritikus, 2014) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicate a commitment to leading from an equity mindset
Building Relationships and Developing People		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide support and demonstrate consideration for individual staff members 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take into account EL teachers when making instructional decisions (Elfers & Stritikus, 2014) 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stimulate growth in the professional capacities of staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer professional development to <i>all</i> teachers to work with ELs (Elfers & Stritikus, 2014) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer specific training to all teachers who will be co-teaching, particularly related to roles, expectations, and co-planning.
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that EL staff have access to PD to further their own EL instruction.
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create opportunities for staff to “shadow” ELs to understand the extent to which they are developing their academic oral language skills in the classroom.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Model the school’s values and practices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Model ways that instructional leaders can serve ELs (Elfers & Stritikus, 2014) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage in leadership PD to understand diverse EL student subgroups, the importance of

		embedding content and language in instruction, the proficiency levels and domains on the ACCESS assessment, and the needs and characteristics of leaders' own ELs.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build trusting relationships with and among staff, students and parents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer professional development for teachers to build community with and among students (Theoharis & O'Toole) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage in student focus groups to connect with students and to recognize and respond to students' voices and experiences in school.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish productive working relationships with teacher federation representatives 		
Developing the Organization	Structures to Support EL Learning and Inclusion	Structures to Support EL Learning and Inclusion Identified in This Study
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build collaborative cultures and distributing leadership 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a collegial community focused on EL-related issues (Elfers, Lucero, Stritikus, and Knapp, 2013) 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Structure the organization to facilitate collaboration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create opportunities for staff to work collaboratively (Elfers & Stritikus, 2014) • Engage in strong two-way communication between school and district leaders (Elfers & Stritikus, 2014) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When using a co-teaching instructional model, ensure co-planning time for content-area and EL teachers. • Participate in multiple forms of school-district collaborations related to EL learning, including scheduling and programming; staffing; and the review and use of EL student data.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build productive relationships with families and the community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a welcoming environment for EL families (Elfers & Stritikus, 2014) • Establish an ongoing system of communication with families with a home language other than English (Theoharis & O'Toole) 	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connect the school to the wider environment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leverage local resources to serve ELs (Elfers & Stritikus, 2014) 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain a safe and healthy environment 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allocate resources in support of the school's vision and goals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure access to appropriate instructional resources (Elfers, Lucero, Stritikus, and Knapp, 2013) 	
Improving the Instructional Program	EL Staffing and Programming	EL Staffing and Programming Approaches Identified in This Study
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff the instructional program 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adopt structural changes so the EL students receive all services within the general education classroom (Theoharis & O'Toole, 2011) • Hire teachers that have the capacity to work with ELs or invest in current teachers to do so (Elfers & Stritikus, 2014) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicate a clear plan and rationale for an EL instructional model, including how this model will meet diverse EL needs. • Hire EL teachers who are open to co-teaching and who have diverse skills, areas of expertise, and language backgrounds. • Seek teachers who are duly-certified in both their content area and EL instruction.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide instructional support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Directly engage in teaching and learning initiatives (Elfers & Stritikus, 2014) • Ensure general education teachers have specialized staff support from paraprofessionals and coaches (Elfers, Lucero, Stritikus, and Knapp, 2013) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Embed EL strategies related to language and literacy as part of all teacher observations and walkthroughs.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitor progress in student learning and school improvement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use data for instructional improvement (Elfers & Stritikus, 2014) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disaggregate EL student data by distinct EL subgroups to identify differing strengths and areas of need.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Buffer staff from distractions to their work 		

Securing Accountability	Accountability for EL Progress	Accountability for EL Progress Identified in This Study
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building staff members' sense of internal accountability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resolve fragmentation between general education teachers and EL teachers by focusing on high-quality instruction (Elfers & Stritikus, 2014) • Encourage staff responsibility to serve ELs (Elfers & Stritikus, 2014) • Change staff responsibilities so that all teachers are responsible to plan for EL students within their general curriculum and setting (Theoharis & O'Toole) • Accept responsibility for all students' development (Theoharis & O'Toole, 2011) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicate and reinforce the districtwide expectation that EL students are <i>all</i> teachers' students.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meeting the demands for external accountability 		

Recommendations

Based on my findings, I share the following recommendations for leaders at the state, district, and school level; for education leadership preparation programs; and for future research.

For State Leaders. As noted, California holds the only statewide definition for LTELs, which it established as part of state legislation (California S. 750, 2015).

Minnesota's state-level leaders could follow California's approach formally defining LTELs as a way to close the leadership gaps identified in recognizing the state's large LTEL student population. In some ways, Minnesota has already begun the important work of recognizing EL students' distinct needs, as demonstrated through the state's LEAPS Act (Minnesota Department of Education, 2020b), as discussed in Chapter 4. One component of this legislation was that districts report annually on the number of SLIFE students enrolled; this would be an important first step forward for leaders to actively "visibilize" their LTELs as well.

For District Leaders. Absent a statewide definition for LTELs in Minnesota, leaders responsible for their district's EL programming might consider first establishing a districtwide LTEL definition, informed by the existing research in this area. This definition should be clearly communicated to school leaders and used to provide disaggregated EL student data to school leaders and EL staff. Second, district leaders could think about how to ensure that school leaders are able to engage in PD to understand the needs and characteristics of diverse EL subgroups, the importance of embedding content and language in instruction, and the ELP levels and domains on the

ACCESS assessment. Finally, district leaders could seek ways to consistently collaborate with school leaders to review student schedules and school programming, hire EL staff, and partner with school leaders during teacher observations.

Engaging in this work also raises some important considerations for district leaders, including ongoing discussions on how to keep the “LTEL” student designation from taking on a deficit orientation among other leaders, teachers, and students. In addition, as noted, some district leaders shared that they are aware that general education teachers may already feel burdened by distinguishing between instruction for ELs and non-ELs. Therefore, leaders should continue to support professional development that will help teachers to integrate a focus on literacy into their content-area instruction as a critical practice for all students, while sharing why this is especially important for students such as LTELs.

For School Leaders. School leaders could think about how to design a clear model and rationale for the school’s EL instructional model. As part of this rationale, leaders should articulate how their model addresses diverse EL needs, including LTELs. Models and courses to consider to support LTELs include a co-teaching model (with courses and teaching assignments selected strategically and with input from the district’s EL leader), bilingual education assistants, or ELD courses focused on academic language. In addition, school leaders could partner with district leaders, as discussed, to leverage EL expertise in the district, build on their own knowledge of EL instruction and acquisition, and to improve LTELs’ outcomes.

For Education Leadership Preparation Programs. Programs that prepare the next generation of school leaders need to think through how to incorporate an explicit focus on how leaders can support ELs; for secondary school leaders in particular, this includes a focus on the needs and characteristics of LTELs. For example, preparation programs could extend beyond a focus on inclusion to address language acquisition, language assessments (especially ACCESS), how to support a schoolwide focus on academic language, and conducting teacher evaluations while observing for both content and language. Addressing key EL leadership practices across all five domains in this study would best ensure a robust system of supports for all ELs, but especially LTELs.

For Future Research. I provide three recommended areas for future LTEL research. First, the student achievement data presented in this study is from a single school year and from a single state. An area for future research would be to explore LTELs' language trajectories over their time to better understand the course of their language development, including these students' ELP levels as early as kindergarten and when they begin to "plateau" at Levels 3 and 4 on the ACCESS assessment. Second, LTEL research could expand to additional states, as currently much of the existing research is based in California and New York. Finally, more research on how schools can structure an effective EL co-teaching model would serve to benefit leaders as well as teachers, who are tasked with working within such a model. Research could offer greater insight into building successful co-teaching teams, structuring co-teaching training and support, the budgetary and financial implications of a co-teaching model, and the impact of co-teaching on LTEL student outcomes.

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Appendix A: IRB Approval / Designation as Not Human Research

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

Twin Cities Campus

Human Research Protection Program
Office of the Vice President for Research

D528 Mayo Memorial Building
420 Delaware Street S.E.
MMC 820
Minneapolis, MN 55455
Phone: 612-626-5654
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Email: irb@umn.edu
<http://www.research.umn.edu/subjects/>

NOT HUMAN RESEARCH

(Updated correspondence to original letter dated 5/18/18)

June 1, 2018

Kyla Wahlstrom

612-624-1890
wahls001@umn.edu

Dear Kyla Wahlstrom:

On 5/18/2018, the IRB reviewed the following submission:

Type of Review:	Initial Study
Title of Study:	School Leadership for Minnesota's Long-Term English Learners
Investigator:	Kyla Wahlstrom
IRB ID:	STUDY00003425
Sponsored Funding:	None
Grant ID:	None
Internal UMN Funding:	None
Fund Management Outside University:	None
IND, IDE, or HDE:	None
Documents Reviewed with this Submission:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HRP-580_Halloran_Submitted 04.28.18.docx, Category: IRB Protocol; • DistrictProtocol_Halloran_Submitted 04.28.18.docx, Category: Other; • PrincipalProtocol_Halloran_Submitted 04.28.18.docx, Category: Other; • Principal Informational Letter_Halloran_Submitted 04.28.18.doc, Category: Recruitment Materials; • District Recruitment Letter_Halloran_Submitted 04.28.18.doc, Category: Recruitment Materials; • Consent form for District_Halloran_Submitted 04.28.18.doc, Category: Consent Form;

Driven to DiscoverSM

	• Consent form for Principal_Halloran_Submitted 04.28.18.doc, Category: Consent Form;
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The IRB determined that the proposed activity does not meet the definition of human research as defined by DHHS and FDA regulations. The IRB has the understanding that this project will include people. The activities described in the submission are allowable per the IRB. A not human research determination simply means that additional IRB oversight is not required. Based on the protocol and the questions that are going to be asked of school leaders, the research does not constitute research with human subjects as the interviews of individuals focus on practice, policy, and procedures rather than about the person specifically.

To arrive at this determination, the IRB used “WORKSHEET: Human Research (HRP-310).” If you have any questions about this determination, please review that Worksheet in the [HRPP Toolkit Library](#) and contact the IRB office if needed. Based on the protocol and the questions that are going to be asked of school leaders and principals this research does not constitute research with human subjects as the interviews of individuals are focused on practices, policies and procedures rather than an individual’s opinion of themselves. Additionally, you will be analyzing student data that cannot be linked to a living individual.

Ongoing IRB review and approval for this activity is not required; however, this determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made and there are questions about whether IRB review is required, please submit a Modification to the IRB for a determination.

Sincerely,

Melissa Nowicki, CCRP, CIP

IRB Manager

We value feedback from the research community and would like to hear about your experience. The link below will take you to a brief survey that will take a minute or two to complete. The questions are basic, but your responses will help us better understand what we are doing well and areas that may require improvement. Thank you in advance for completing the survey.

Even if you have provided feedback in the past, we want and welcome your evaluation.

https://umn.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_5BiYrqPNMJRQSBn

Appendix B: Informed Consent – School Leader Interview

Purpose

You are invited to participate in a study about long-term English learners (LTELs) in a sample of school districts in Minnesota and the approaches being used to support their success. To assist with this study, I am speaking with school and district leaders to gain a better understanding about who LTELs are, your expectations for the school's work with these students, and what challenges you may be facing in supporting them. This interview is for my doctoral research at the University of Minnesota and will take approximately 1 hour.

Risks

There are no known risks of participating in this study.

Benefits

Your participation in this study will contribute to a better understanding of who long-term English learners are in your school, what their needs are, and how they can best be supported.

Confidentiality

I will not report any information that identifies you, your school, or your district. Responses to this data collection will be used for research purposes only. The report prepared for the study will summarize findings across the sample and will not associate responses with a specific individual, school, or district. Organizations that may inspect and copy your information include the Institutional Review Board (IRB), the committee that provides ethical and regulatory oversight of research at the University of Minnesota, and other representatives of this institution, including those that have responsibilities for monitoring or ensuring compliance.

Freedom to withdraw

Your participation in this interview is completely voluntary. You may pass on any question that is asked and you may withdraw from the study at any time.

More information

This research has been reviewed and approved by an Institutional Review Board within the Human Research Protections Program (HRPP) at the University of Minnesota. If you have any questions about this activity, you may contact me at hall1518@umn.edu. If you would like to share feedback privately with the HRPP about your research experience, you may call the Research Participants' Advocate Line at [612-625-1650](tel:612-625-1650) or go to <https://research.umn.edu/units/hrpp/research-participants/questions-concerns>. You are encouraged to contact the HRPP if:

- Your questions, concerns, or complaints are not being answered by the researcher.
- You cannot reach the researcher.
- You want to talk to someone besides the researcher.
- You have questions about your rights as a research participant.
- You want to get information or provide input about this research.

Informed consent

If you have understood the information above and voluntarily agree to participate, please sign below.

Name (please print): _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix C: School Leader Interview Protocol

I have turned on the recorder – can you confirm that you know our conversation is being recorded?

1. How long you have been in this role, and how do you, as a principal, support ELs at your school?
 - How, if at all, are you supported by the district in this work? How do you work with the district?
 - How do you work with EL teachers?
 - Who leads EL instruction and services at your school?
2. What services and programming are offered to ELs? How are services differentiated by student needs? (e.g., refugees vs. LTELs)? *(This could include bilingual programs, ESL classes, sheltered content classes, newcomer classes, individual tutors, bilingual aides, native language instruction, etc.).*
 - What information do you use to determine EL services and programming (are ACCESS scores used)? How are strategies selected?
 - How do you make hiring decisions? Course scheduling decisions?
 - To what extent do you think the approaches you described are appropriately addressing the **English language development** and the **academic achievement** of your LTEL students?
3. As you know, I'm interested in learning more about a group of students who are sometimes referred to as long-term English learners. Is this a term you are familiar with? Is a term that has been used at all in your district or school?
 - How useful do you think a definition for this group of students would be? How would a definition help you as a school leader? Do you have an example?
4. How would you describe your school's ELs and LTELs? (strengths, challenges, characteristics)
5. Based on your role and experience as the principal, what factors do you believe contribute to ELs becoming long-term ELs by the time they are in high school? Do you have any examples to help illustrate this?
6. As a principal, how do you support both your mainstream teachers and your EL teachers to teach EL students?

- To what extent do you think that the **teachers** in your school have the skills and knowledge needed to successfully teach the EL students? What are their strengths? In what areas do they need to improve?
7. As a principal, what challenges and constraints do you face in helping ELs achieve success in high school? How do you address these challenges?
 8. As a principal, to what extent do you think that **you** have the skills and knowledge needed to successfully lead EL students to achieve academically? Where do you turn for assistance on EL issues or to build your own professional knowledge in this area?
 9. What else do you need or want to know about the long-term ELs in your district to better meet their needs? What data would help?
 10. In closing, what do you think your school needs to do to improve performance of LTELs (e.g., funding, expertise, staff capacity support for EL students, etc.)? What types of resources are needed to make these changes?

Appendix D: Informed Consent – District Leader Interview

Purpose

You are invited to participate in a study about long-term English learners (LTELs) in a sample of school districts in Minnesota and the approaches being used to support their success. To assist with this study, I am speaking with school and district leaders to gain a better understanding about who LTELs are, your expectations for the district’s work with these students, and what challenges you may be facing in supporting them. This interview is for my doctoral research at the University of Minnesota and will take approximately 1 hour.

Risks

There are no known risks of participating in this study.

Benefits

Your participation in this study will contribute to a better understanding of who long-term English learners are in your district, what their needs are, and how they can best be supported.

Confidentiality

I will not report any information that identifies you or your district. Responses to this data collection will be used for research purposes only. The report prepared for the study will summarize findings across the sample and will not associate responses with a specific individual, school, or district. Organizations that may inspect and copy your information include the Institutional Review Board (IRB), the committee that provides ethical and regulatory oversight of research at the University of Minnesota, and other representatives of this institution, including those that have responsibilities for monitoring or ensuring compliance.

Freedom to withdraw

Your participation in this interview is completely voluntary. You may pass on any question that is asked and you may withdraw from the study at any time.

More information

This research has been reviewed and approved by an Institutional Review Board within the Human Research Protections Program (HRPP) at the University of Minnesota. If you have any questions about this activity, you may contact me at hall1518@umn.edu. If you would like to share feedback privately with the HRPP about your research experience, you may call the Research Participants’ Advocate Line at [612-625-1650](tel:612-625-1650) or go to <https://research.umn.edu/units/hrpp/research-participants/questions-concerns>. You are encouraged to contact the HRPP if:

- Your questions, concerns, or complaints are not being answered by the researcher.
- You cannot reach the researcher.
- You want to talk to someone besides the researcher.
- You have questions about your rights as a research participant.
- You want to get information or provide input about this research.

Informed consent

If you have understood the information above and voluntarily agree to participate, please sign below.

Name (please print): _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix E: District Leader Interview Protocol

I have turned on the recorder – can you please confirm that you know our conversation is being recorded?

1. Could you tell me how long you have been in this position, and what your main responsibilities are in this role?
2. As you know, I'm interested in learning more about long-term English learners. To what extent do you think that people in your district are aware of LTELs?
3. Does your district define which students are long-term ELs?

Probes:

- **If district does not have a definition:**
 - Do you know if there have been conversations around defining who is considered a long-term EL in your district? Could you tell me about this?
 - Is this something you think would be useful? Why or why not?
 - **If district has a definition:**
 - How did your district arrive at this definition?
 - Is there anyone responsible for monitoring and reporting LTEL information? Do you believe this is done systematically/districtwide?
 - Is this definition used to look more closely at LTEL data in any way?
 - Concerns about the term? Better term?
4. Could you tell me about how you understand and describe the LTELs in your district? How does the LTEL population differ from other ELs, if at all?
 5. Could you tell me about how LTELs are doing on the ACCESS test across the four domains of English language proficiency (reading, writing, speaking and listening)?

Probes:

- *What is most challenging for LTELs?*
 - *Is there a level within each of the four domains that the district's LTELs appear to be "stuck"? Do you have an example to illustrate this?*
6. Based on your role and experience, what factors do you believe contribute to ELs becoming long-term ELs by the time they are in high school? Do you have any examples to help illustrate this?
 7. How does district leadership support services and programming are offered to ELs at the HS level? Do LTELs currently receive any particular kinds of services in the district?
 - To what extent do you think the approaches you described are appropriately addressing the **English language development** and the **academic achievement** of your LTEL students?

- What information do you use to determine EL services and programming (are ACCESS scores used)? How are strategies selected?
 - How do you make hiring decisions? Course scheduling decisions?
8. What other kinds of services or programming do LTELs need? What would be the ideal set of practices or services to improve their academic experiences and outcomes?
 9. How does the district support principals to work with English learners? To what extent do you think that **high school principals** in your district have the skills and knowledge needed to successfully lead schools with LTELs?

Probes:

- *Does the district have a role in offering PD to administrations about ELs? Can you describe these opportunities? How effective are they? How do you know?*
10. Similarly, to what extent do you think that **high school teachers** in your district have the skills and knowledge needed to successfully teach LTELs? In what ways does the district ensure that high school ELs are taught by teachers who are knowledgeable about both content and EL instruction?

Probes:

- *Extent to which the teachers have the qualifications, (i.e., EL certification; experience working with EL students)?*
 - *Does the district have a role in offering PD for both mainstream teachers and EL teachers about EL instruction? Can you describe these opportunities? How effective are they? How do you know?*
11. As a district leader, what are the main challenges and constraints that you face in addressing the needs of LTEL students in high school? How do you address these challenges?
 12. What additional information or data do you need or want to know about the LTELs in your district to better meet their needs?
 13. What changes can be made or what actions do you think your district needs to take to improve the performance of long-term English learners in high school (e.g., greater awareness, funding, expertise, staff capacity support for EL students, etc.)?
 14. What types of resources are needed to make these changes?

Appendix F: Codebook Frequency Table

Code	Sources	References
RQ1	17	84
RQ1.01. Definition of LTEL	17	22
RQ1.02. Awareness	11	27
RQ1.03. Benefits of defining LTELs	13	31
RQ1.04. Concerns about defining LTELs	3	4
RQ2	13	78
RQ2.01. Composite	7	17
RQ2.02. Listening	8	9
RQ2.03. Reading	6	7
RQ2.04. Writing	8	14
RQ2.05. Speaking	11	22
RQ2.06. Testing concerns	7	9
RQ3	17	227
RQ3.01. Vision and expectations for ELs	9	28
RQ3.02. Staff capacity to work with ELs	15	68
RQ3.03. Structures to support EL learning	7	9
RQ3.04. EL staffing and programming	16	46
RQ3.05. Accountability for EL progress	9	17
RQ3.05. Student or family barriers	12	59
RQ4	17	364
RQ4.01. Vision and expectations for ELs	8	19
RQ4.02. Staff capacity to work with ELs	15	72
RQ4.03. Structures to support EL learning	16	64
RQ4.04. EL staffing and programming	17	366
RQ4.05. Accountability for EL progress	6	7