



# EMBRACING LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY:

## The Role of Teacher Leaders in Building Seattle's Pipeline of International Schools

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## SUMMARY

Globalization of the economy, increasingly diverse and interconnected populations, and rapid technological change are posing new challenges to individuals and societies alike. The challenge of preparing all students with their diverse needs requires effective district and school leadership to engineer new approaches that engage students cognitively and emotionally in order for them to master high-level content and develop problem-solving skills.

Students enter high school with different cultural and economic backgrounds, aspirations, and levels of preparation, as well as a range of academic and social strengths. Schools that leverage students' language and cultural assets and recognize their innate capacity to master challenging content and high-level skills outperform traditional schools, which tend to isolate and underserve language-minority students. To address their needs, educators must envision new ways of schooling that amplify authentic student voice and ensure equal opportunities and supports for their success in a global society.



## INTRODUCTION

Schools and districts across the country face common challenges in educating the growing number of students with diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds to high levels of achievement. The estimated 11.2 million English learners in the United States—21 percent of all school-age children—represent an enormous mix of cultures, race, economic status, and schooling experiences.<sup>1</sup> It is estimated that by 2030 half of all public school students will have non-English-speaking backgrounds.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, districts face rising demands for graduates with the skills to succeed in a globalized environment, where success increasingly requires the ability to communicate and connect on an international scale.

According to the Committee on Economic Development, U.S.-based multinational businesses need employees with knowledge of foreign languages and cultures to work effectively with employees and partners in other countries.<sup>3</sup> The demand for complex cognitive and communication skills has grown steadily. More jobs now require transferable skills, such as synthesizing complex information from multiple sources, applying knowledge to solve complex problems, and using advanced technologies emerging in the U.S. and abroad. However, American companies complain about the lack of available personnel with international skills. In a RAND Corporation survey of respondents from sixteen global corporations, a marketing manager noted that American students are “strong technically but shortchanged in cross-cultural experience and linguistically deprived.”<sup>4</sup>

American education must change. The majority of language-minority students do not fare well in many of the nation's traditional high schools, where the focus is on English learners' achievement at basic proficiency levels coupled with a singular focus on language acquisition

through English-only or English as a Second Language (ESL) programs. Too many English language learners (ELLs) land in remedial-type basic skills courses lasting a year or more and replacing credit-bearing academic course work. Further, they receive minimal access to mainstream content and opportunities to use language productively as part of content-area learning.<sup>5</sup>

In addition, the majority of ELLs are from low-income families, which may limit their access to high-quality school-based opportunities to learn and improve their linguistic and academic performance.<sup>6</sup> The results of the 2009 NAEP High School Transcript Study showed that 63 percent of ELLs who graduated from high school received a below-standard curriculum, compared to one-quarter of non-ELL graduates.<sup>7</sup> Many English learners become discouraged and disengaged, and drop out of high school.<sup>8</sup>

Ensuring equity and excellence must be paramount. New school designs are needed that put students at the center of the learning process and recognize their inherent drive to learn, their capability to engage in rigorous and meaningful work, and their need to be valued and taken seriously.<sup>9</sup> Networks of schools that have embraced cultural and linguistic diversity are producing far better outcomes than traditional schools, which have historically underserved students from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Districts are beginning to recognize the need to scale effective designs to support English learners. They need extensive opportunities to use language and literacy in attaining deeper learning competencies: mastery of academic content, creative and critical thinking, collaboration, communication, and self-reflection. Clearly, the economic advantage will go to those students with the skills and knowledge that allow them to learn and then apply what they learn to solve real-world problems.

The good news is that there is growing evidence that most students, and particularly English learners, benefit

from learning environments that are student centered, are organized to encourage students to work collaboratively to solve authentic problems, and integrate language development and content learning.<sup>10</sup> Learning subject matter and work skills involves using language to structure understanding and core knowledge, to connect concepts with other understandings, and to practice multiple literacy skills within meaningful content-rich activities.

New challenges require new solutions and transformative leadership to improve education across all levels—classroom, school, and district. Principals and teacher leaders must examine what students need to learn and the structures and environments that are most conducive for language-minority students. Important questions must be answered: How can the nation afford to continue using educational models that focus on deficits rather than selecting proven approaches that focus on students' assets and their innate capacity to master challenging content and high-level skills?<sup>11</sup> What is it about the school environment that discourages engagement in productive learning? How can leaders and teachers create and sustain learning environments that support and validate learners' pursuit of challenging learning goals, while carefully scaffolding instruction to address their language and literacy development?

This brief examines how Seattle Public Schools (SPS) is redesigning their secondary schools as part of a districtwide effort to focus on international education and global competency. The report features information gathered from personal visits to middle and high schools recently converted to international schools, including the role of teacher leaders in transforming schools into multicultural, global learning communities. It also addresses the role of federal grant making to support the redesign of high schools and provides policy recommendations for state and district actions.

## SEATTLE INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION

In 2000 Seattle Public Schools (SPS) opened the first of a growing network of international schools. John Stanford International School (JSIS), serving students in grades K–5, focused on creating a nurturing culture that would support students in learning English and world languages.<sup>12</sup> The school offers a dual-language immersion setting that focuses not only on helping ELLs to acquire English, but also on requiring students to learn a second language by studying academic content in two languages. All students learn a target language—Spanish or Japanese—in some of the core content areas such as math and science. In this way, students with home languages in Spanish or Japanese can maintain their heritage language while learning English, and vice versa for native English speakers.<sup>13</sup> In addition, teachers have developed innovative methods to engage students in learning language and subject matter through extended inquiry processes that highlight global issues and perspectives. Technology is used as a core element of challenging projects that provide students with a way to discover more about themselves and the world.<sup>14</sup>

JSIS has been recognized nationally for strong academic results for English language learners and native English speakers. Its outstanding performance has galvanized the district to create processes whereby existing schools can convert into international schools.<sup>15</sup> Over a ten-year period, fourth- and fifth-grade proficiency rates increased by more than 30 percentage points, to 91 percent in reading, 87 percent in writing, and 94 percent in science—significantly outperforming district and state averages.<sup>16</sup> Other schools followed suit. Beacon Hill International School and Concord International School, serving high concentrations of English language learners and low-income students, adopted the dual-immersion model. ELLs in these



schools also made significant gains in proficiency on state achievement tests in reading, writing, and science.<sup>17</sup>

Building on this proven model, Karen Kodama, the founding principal of JSIS, assumed district leadership in 2007 for the design and expansion of a network of international schools that would

- provide for the pipeline of students moving into the upper grades with dual-language skills;
- emphasize global competency and preparing students for an interconnected world economy; and
- offer a culture of support for English learners throughout the grade spans.<sup>18</sup>

Working closely with a coalition of educators, universities, community leaders, and families, Kodama surveyed the business community to identify the competencies graduates would need to succeed regionally and globally. Respondents emphasized that area graduates would need to be conversant in at least one language in addition to his or her native language and be capable of interacting effectively with the world community. Kodama noted, “Business leaders also stressed that graduates must be equipped with the ability to leverage their problem-solving skills, global competence, and out-of-the-box thinking as tools for competitive advantage.”<sup>19</sup>

Moreover, state and local leaders had begun to recognize the growing disparities between their economic vision for innovation and long-term global competitiveness and the production of an adequately educated and prepared workforce.<sup>20</sup> Although Seattle and the surrounding King County region boast a high-tech, knowledge-intensive economy, the Puget Sound region relies on imported talent from other states and nations. It is home to one of the best-educated adult populations in the country—56 percent of adults in Seattle and 47 percent of adults in surrounding King County have a bachelor’s degree. In stark contrast, only one in four King County residents who graduate from the area high schools holds a bachelor’s degree or higher.

Investing in international education as a birthright of Seattle residents made sense to Kodama and the coalition working with her; this coalition later formed International School Principals and the International Education Advisory Board (IEAB). The region serves as one of the largest U.S. refugee resettlement portals. More than 160 different languages are spoken there, presenting a strategic asset for the region with its expanding global connections and commerce.<sup>21</sup> Bringing international schools to areas serving high concentrations of ELLs and low-income students became a priority. After examining an array of options, such as International Baccalaureate (IB) schools, bilingual schools, and dual-immersion magnet schools, the coalition created a distinct model for international education within SPS.

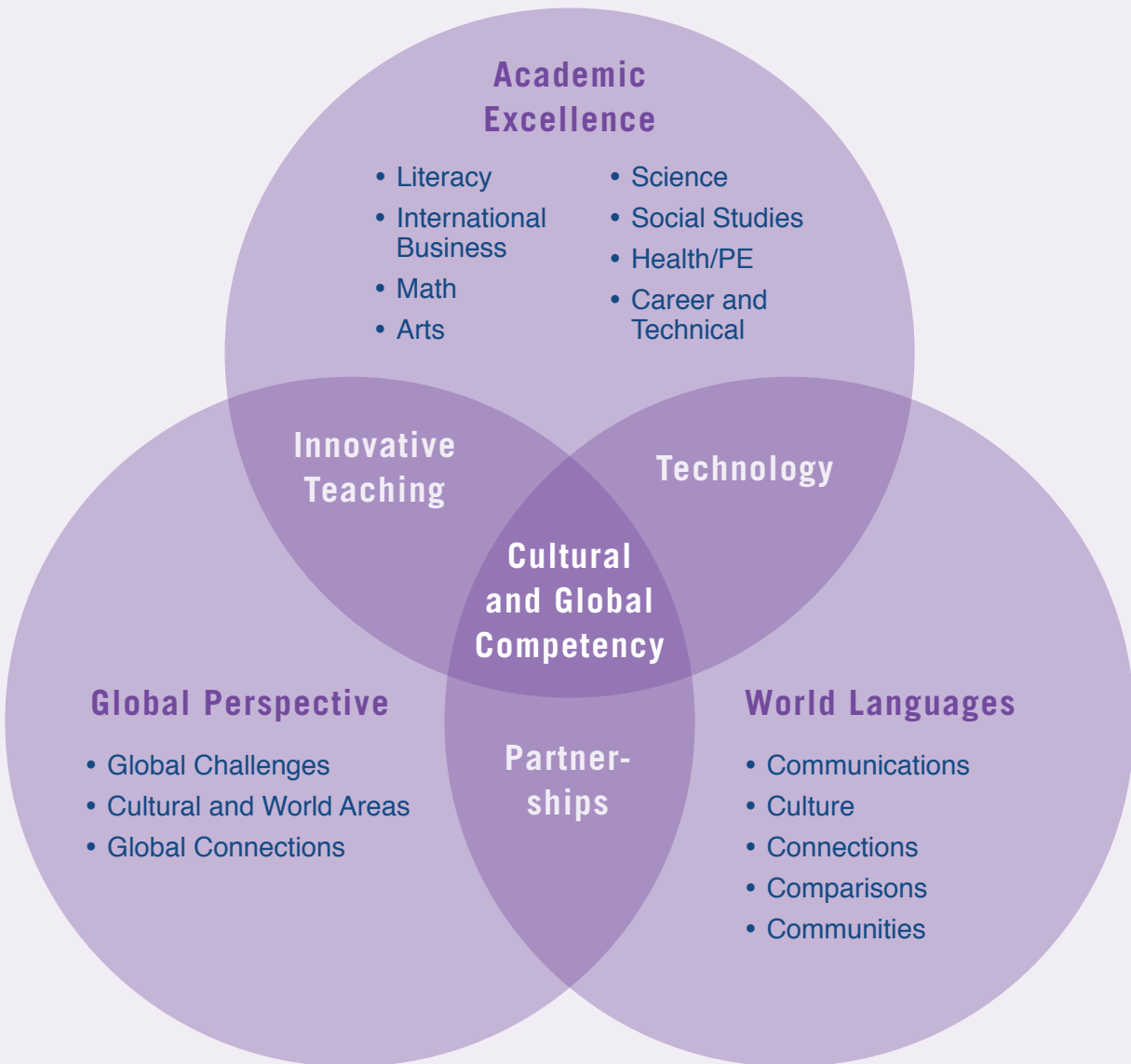
The international schools focus on developing students’ twenty-first-century knowledge, skills, and dispositions through inquiry-based learning—the concept of learning by doing, which connects knowledge to its application.<sup>22</sup> The design provides students with extensive opportunities to integrate language development as part of a disciplinary study of global systems and issues. Seattle’s international

education places a premium on cultural competency and deeper learning, which build on the assets that students bring to the learning process. International schools develop students’ proficiency in world languages, their ability to engage in collaborative applied problem solving, and self-reflection on their own learning and the status of their understanding and perspectives.

A recent report by the National Research Council (NRC) cites extensive research showing that attaining high-level cognitive outcomes is essential in an interconnected global environment.<sup>23</sup> The NRC report states, “We define deeper learning not as a product but as processing—both within individual minds and through social interactions in a community—and 21st century competencies as the learning outcomes of this processing in the form of transferable knowledge and skills that result.”<sup>24</sup> English language learners, in particular, do best when they have opportunities to acquire language and new knowledge in collaboration with their peers and then to apply what they have learned in authentic real-world situations or problems. In addition, the NRC found that the development of transferable twenty-first-century skills is more likely if the learner has productive beliefs about his or her ability to learn and about the value of learning.

This is the core of Seattle’s international school design. Students’ languages and cultural assets are celebrated and leveraged as an entry point to becoming lifelong learners with an understanding of their own race and identity as well as the culture and identity of others. These schools promote students’ sense of competence, the value of education, and a sense of belonging. School leaders and staff promote students’ confidence in their ability to learn and succeed by providing them with choices, making the curriculum and instruction relevant to adolescent experiences and long-term goals, and involving them in a web of social relationships that supports their learning.

# SEATTLE PUBLIC SCHOOLS INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION



21st Century Survival Skills (Wagner 2008, 2010): Critical Thinking and Problem Solving \* Collaboration and Leadership \* Agility and Adaptability \* Initiative and Entrepreneurialism \* Communication \* Information Access and Analysis \* Curiosity and Imagination

## PROMOTING WORLD LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY

In addition, attaining proficiency in a world language other than English is a major goal for both English learners and native English speakers. Multiple studies show the benefits of bilingualism for ELLs and native speakers. Language-immersion programs improve attention, reasoning, memory, understanding of language structures and meaning, and achievement on tests of multiple subject areas.<sup>25</sup>

SPS adopted a competency-based approach to providing credit for world languages endorsed by the Washington State Board of Education in 2010.<sup>26</sup> Recognizing the value that highly competitive colleges place on three to four years of world language study at the high school level, the state designed a policy to provide an avenue for students to earn recognition and credit for world language knowledge and skills that students had acquired outside of the classroom.<sup>27</sup> Previously, many of these students were placed in first- or second-year language classes even though they were already fluent in the spoken language. Now any student can earn world language credit by achieving proficiency on the Standards-based Assessment and Measurement of Proficiency, or STAMP. This option was included in the design of international education to motivate ELLs to develop their abilities to read and write in their heritage language and to provide more time for accumulating the credit needed for high school graduation and college admission.

In addition, the Washington State Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction World Languages Program is developing online resources that will help students advance reading and writing skills in their native language in order to gain recognition of their skills by earning world language credits. LinguaFolio Online is a portfolio assessment tool that allows students to collect



evidence demonstrating their communication abilities and documents intercultural experiences and reflections that enhance language learning and cultural understanding.<sup>28</sup>

In 2012, the Seattle School Board adopted Policy 2177, establishing international education to prepare K–12 students for a global community and economy. The plan outlines core components of an international education, including the following:

- teaching world languages in an immersion setting with the goal that students leave high school with proficiency in two languages;
- integrating global perspectives in all content areas with a focus on promoting equity and justice through service and social change efforts; and
- developing cultural and global competency to understand and act on issues of global significance.

Other shared attributes of these schools included partnerships with parents, different ethnic and international communities, businesses, and higher education; vibrant professional learning communities focused on innovative teaching; and the effective use of technology. As of 2013, the network includes eight schools in three regions of the city—four elementary schools, two middle schools, and two high schools that provide IB programs. Four schools will be added by School Year (SY) 2015–16, completing three K–12 pathways through international schools in different regions of the city.

## COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

Policy 2177 also calls for rigorous instruction aligned to Washington State’s content standards—the internationally benchmarked Common Core State Standards in English language arts and mathematics, which integrate uses of academic language and literacy into social studies, science, and technical subjects. For example, secondary-level students are expected to “propel conversations by posing and responding to questions that probe reasoning and evidence ... and promote divergent and creative perspectives.”<sup>29</sup> The understanding and sophisticated uses of language for academic purposes have wide applicability in shaping global perspectives and encouraging responsible citizenship. These standards are highly compatible with the international schools’ mission of developing students’ language proficiency and higher-order thinking skills through authentic content learning and inquiry-based activities. Teachers need strong content knowledge and pedagogical skills to create language-rich environments to leverage students’ cultural assets and support their emerging language competencies.<sup>30</sup>

Both novice and experienced teachers require sustained and intensive support to develop innovative approaches to teaching and assessing twenty-first-century global competencies within their subject areas. (For more information, see the Alliance publication “The Role of Language and Literacy in College- and Career-Ready Standards: Rethinking Policy and Practice in Support of English Language Learners.”)

## VISITS TO DENNY INTERNATIONAL MIDDLE SCHOOL AND CHIEF SEALTH INTERNATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL IN SEATTLE, WASHINGTON

To observe how the district and individual schools retooled professional learning and instructional practices to meet the ambitious goals of SPS international education, the author traveled to Seattle to visit two schools: Denny International Middle School (DIMS) and Chief Sealth International High School (CSIHS). Denny converted to an international school in 2009; Sealth converted in 2010. These schools are located on the same campus, which includes two recently renovated and expanded school buildings with glass walls and shared spaces. Located in the southwest section of Seattle, abutting the industrial sector surrounding the Port of Seattle on Elliot Bay, Denny Middle serves 846 students in grades 6–8; Chief Sealth High School serves 1,250 students in grades 9–12. More than 60 percent of the students are low income, and about one-third come from homes where a language other than English is spoken. Twenty-eight different languages are represented, with Spanish, Vietnamese, Somali, Cambodian, and Tagalog topping the list of the most common non-English languages spoken among international secondary students.





Denny and Chief Sealth school leaders jointly plan programs to develop an international education curriculum that provides students a pathway to Chief Sealth's accredited International Baccalaureate Diploma program. Chief Sealth's world language program offers students classes in Spanish, Japanese, and Mandarin Chinese. The Confucius Institute of the State of Washington, located within the DIMS/CSIHS facility, is part of a worldwide program to strengthen Chinese language learning and cultural exchanges and provides regional training to Mandarin language teachers. It serves as a statewide institute established under an agreement by the Chinese Ministry of Education, SPS, and the University of Washington. Sealth also offers after-school Arabic classes in partnership with One World Now, an innovative program committed to providing critical language skills, leadership training, and study abroad opportunities to underserved youth.

Developing and sustaining talented, highly skilled leaders with the capacity to engage students and teachers in deep experiential and cooperative learning on issues of global significance was a priority for the district and building principals. SPS established expectations for all international school staff that included adherence to the core practices of international education along with full implementation of innovative teaching practices and strategies provided through professional development opportunities. The international school principals developed a protocol to observe teachers' pedagogical practices, such as the integration of global issues and the use of supportive technology. Teachers at international schools would be eligible for special endorsements in international education and language immersion after a successful year of teaching.

In addition, district and school leaders involve educators directly in building a shared vision and a supportive culture within the network of international schools. Rachel Evans, an English teacher at Denny, serves as a member of a strong cadre of teacher leaders who take active roles in transforming the professional learning culture of converted international schools.

In 2012, Evans played a significant role in designing and facilitating a symposium for 500 teachers in the international schools, led by Harvard professor Veronica Boix Mansilla, coauthor, with Asia Society Vice President Anthony Jackson, of *Educating for Global Competence: Preparing Our Youth to Engage the World*. This culminating report of the EdSTEPs Global Competence Task Force, commissioned by the Council on Chief State School Officers and Asia Society, defines global competence, provides a context for its relevance in education, and describes what it looks like in terms of the interactions between educators and learners. The report served as the focal point for lesson studies on the components of international education, such as integrating global themes across disciplines; priming student motivation by connecting topics to students' language and culture; and engaging learners in the exploration of essential questions and ideas.

Evans brings these aspects to life for her multinational eighth-grade English students. In a class observed by the author, she created a meaningful and engaging learning process for students to examine the relationship between language and power. Students read and summarized the writings of individuals such as Ngugi wa Thiong'o from Kenya, Neville Alexander from South Africa, and Joe Suina, a Native American from New Mexico, all of whom have written personal narratives about their fight to preserve their language and culture.

Student enthusiasm for examining the issue of language, culture, and social justice was palpable. Students talked with their peers about the authors' experiences of learning or losing language and the impact on their identities and life direction. Evans created a safe space for extended discourse and collaborative learning and facilitated peer-to-peer learning by listening attentively, modeling and providing feedback on language usage, and encouraging questioning and elaboration. Evans focuses her teaching skills on enabling students to think, reason, and communicate about powerful ideas relevant to their own lives and the world at large. Following a video of a young woman from Hawaii from the HBO series *Brave New Voices*, the students were asked to write a coherent, well-reasoned essay regarding the use of power to control the language, culture, and ideas of groups within societies.

Another teacher leader, Noah Zeichner, a National Board–certified teacher at Chief Sealth, serves in a hybrid teaching role that includes teaching social studies and working to advance the district's focus on globalization and international education. His leadership work is supported in part by MetLife Foundation through the Center for Teaching Quality. In an interview with the author, Zeichner explained how he defined his role in advancing the mission and vision of Chief Sealth, his work with colleagues to design expansive schoolwide projects that involve applying a global perspective to varied subject matter, and his involvement in the development of a virtual community of teacher leaders from SPS, Asia, and North America.<sup>31</sup>

His aim, he said, is “to ignite the collective consciousness of being an international school.”<sup>32</sup> To that end, Zeichner identifies and promotes policies and practices that foster a fresh vision of public education as a force for social justice within a democratic society. To achieve this goal, teachers require a supportive learning culture that combines applicable and appropriate instructional

“When I spoke the language that my grandmother and I sang and prayed in, I was punished with a dirty look or a whack with a ruler. In school I was taught that the way my grandmother spoke was not right. I learned that my people were not right. Unfortunately, I was taught to be ashamed of my language and my home. I was one of many indigenous people whose language and culture were stripped so we could assimilate into the dominant culture.”

Source: Joe Suina, “And Then I Went to School.”

tools and strategies along with continued training and collaboration around how best to implement them. In the spirit of innovation, Zeichner and his colleagues launched grade- and schoolwide interdisciplinary projects that would engage students and teachers in experiential and cooperative learning to support students' development of critical global competencies.<sup>33</sup>

This past year, 300 freshmen participated in an ambitious project on water ecology and sustainability. Classes engaged in field excursions and scientific investigations on

water quality in collaboration with classes in rural Kenya. In world history, students learned about the collapse of past societies, looking at environmental, economic, and social factors, and participated in a “Sustainability Conference” simulation as preparation for a writing

task. Groups of students recognized by their peers for outstanding projects earned tickets to We Day Seattle, which brings together 15,000 young people to celebrate the power of youth to create positive change in their local and global communities.

## OTHER NETWORKS OF INTERNATIONAL SCHOOLS SERVING ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

Although the author focused on Seattle Public Schools’ pipeline of international schools for this brief, other organizations have launched successful networks to increase English learners’ academic performance, graduation rates, and college and career readiness. Common features include the integration of language and content learning, collaborative project-based learning across the curriculum, the use of portfolios and exhibitions to assess deeper learning outcomes, the development of students’ bilingualism and global competence, interdisciplinary teacher teams with autonomy for curricular and instructional decisions, and coaching and professional development to increase teachers’ and leaders’ capacity.

Established in 2003, the Asia Society’s International Studies Schools Network (ISSN) created a national network of design-driven schools to prepare high school graduates for college and careers in a global age. Thirty-five ISSN schools in eight states serve a diverse student population, of which 82 percent are students of color, 67 percent are from low-income families, and 14 percent are English language learners. The ISSN model outperforms schools with similar demographics in about 66 percent

of such comparisons and produces graduation rates that exceed the graduation rate for students in urban school systems—roughly 89 percent versus 61 percent.<sup>34</sup>

Since 1985, the Internationals Network for Public Schools (Internationals) has supported seventeen international high schools in New York City, the California Bay Area, and Alexandria, Virginia, serving recently arrived English language learners from over 119 countries who speak more than ninety languages. The majority of these students come from low-income families, more than two-thirds have been separated from one or both parents during immigration to the United States, and up to 30 percent have had their formal education interrupted. Despite these challenges, Internationals graduate English learners at rates 20 percentage points higher than the district average; 80 percent go on to college.<sup>35</sup>

Internationals received a federal Investing in Innovation (i3) grant for Project RISE—Realizing Internationals Supports for English Language Learners, one of the highest-rated 2012 i3 grants. Project RISE focuses on improving educational outcomes for English learners in persistently low-performing schools with significant ELL populations. The goal is to replicate the key elements of the Internationals’ innovative instructional and professional development models through instructional leadership coaching for district and school leaders, specialists, and teachers.

The project culminated with schoolwide participation in World Water Week, organized by upper-class student leaders working with committees of about seventy-five students and community partners over a six-month period. Using digital tools such as Google Hangout, Google Docs, and Remind101.com, students took charge of orchestrating and publicizing the weeklong activities, including hands-on projects, twenty-five different workshops, and service-learning events to highlight global and local water issues. Next year, Zeichner and Chief Sealth's student leaders plan on using a broader range of technologies to collaborate with their global partners in producing digital documents and videos.

Zeichner also discussed the possibilities offered by new internet-based tools to connect teachers globally in advancing a student-centered profession and spreading pedagogical expertise across state and national boundaries. Research shows that social capital—the patterns of interaction among teachers and administrators focused on student learning—affects student achievement and school success. As documented in the 2009 *MetLife Survey of the American Teacher: Collaborating for Student Success*, 90 percent of teachers believe that they share responsibility for student achievement, that their success is linked to that of their colleagues, and that increased collaboration in schools would have a major positive effect on student achievement.<sup>36</sup> Yet the survey findings also showed that U.S. teachers spend an average of 93 percent of their workday in isolation from their colleagues.<sup>37</sup>

Teachers need more professional support when serving students from diverse backgrounds, including hard feedback on needed improvements to their instructional practice.<sup>38</sup> “We do know that teaching, now and in the future, will require teachers not only to sharpen their pedagogical practice and work collaboratively with their peers, but also to draw on understandings of adult

learning and organizational change needed to fuel twenty-first-century learning,” said Zeichner. According to the 2012 *MetLife Survey of the American Teacher: Challenges for School Leadership*, more than half of teachers surveyed are at least somewhat interested in teaching in the classroom part-time combined with other roles or responsibilities in their school or district.<sup>39</sup> Zeichner emphasized, “Teacher leaders must develop and practice the same global competencies that we aim to teach our students. Highly nuanced communication and collaboration skills are essential for teacher leaders as we provide constructive feedback to our colleagues while navigating challenging political climates and antiquated school leadership structures.”

Instilling core values and designing powerful learning experiences require an ecosystem conducive to the desired outcomes. In conjunction with efforts by Kodama and the building principals, the teacher leadership cadre mediated between the district and the school to translate policies, drive implementation, and offer frontline support across the network of schools.<sup>40</sup> Teacher leaders such as Evans and Zeichner act as a bridge between district and school leaders by personalizing their efforts in working with teachers in a variety of ways on a day-to-day basis. The international school principals provided room for teacher leaders to exercise leadership to foster improvement and innovation and cultivate shared accountability for the schools' mission.

## SCALING EFFECTIVE PRACTICE

Kodama and other district leaders recognized that building educator capacity would be the core challenge of improving instruction for culturally and linguistically diverse students across classroom, district, and school levels. Responsive pedagogies—those that engage students deeply with content and teach them to apply it to new experiences through project- or problem-based methods—are more

## PISA IN SCHOOLS

More than 100 U.S. high schools in twenty-two states took part in a pilot study to compare their students' performance to countries that took part in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), administered by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).<sup>41</sup> The pilot—called OECD Test for Schools—measures students' abilities to apply their knowledge to solve real-world problems and also captures dimensions of learning environments that OECD policy studies show are linked to improved student achievement.<sup>42</sup>

Participating high schools receive their results along with examples of strategies, policies, and practices gleaned from PISA and other OECD research on successful education systems. For example, the OECD recommends that schools look at diversity as a resource rather than an obstacle to successful teaching and learning. Schools must consider changes in language teaching and school leadership to affirm students' social and cultural identity.

High-performing systems such as those in Singapore, South Korea, and Germany have markedly improved the performance of students from minority-language and ethnic populations by raising standards and investing in

teachers. They require schools to attend to evidence-based instruction and overcome entrenched biases against students belonging to ethnic minorities.<sup>43</sup> Andreas Schleicher, special adviser on education policy to the OECD's secretary-general and deputy director for education, said, "It is only through such benchmarking that countries can understand relative strengths and weaknesses of their education system and identify best practices and ways forward. The world is indifferent to tradition and past reputations, unforgiving of frailty and ignorant of custom or practice. Success will go to those individuals and countries which are swift to adapt, slow to complain, and open to change."<sup>44</sup>

Better educational performance is needed for all students in all schools, regardless of background. The pilot study revealed that the need to improve U.S. education is not solely restricted to students from low-income families. A large percentage of middle-class American fifteen-year-olds are "significantly" outperformed by their peers in twenty-four countries in math and fifteen countries in science. Moreover, the report identifies several U.S. high schools that are global leaders, including some that primarily serve low-income students.<sup>45</sup>

complex than the direct transmission of knowledge to students via textbooks and lectures.<sup>46</sup> These active learning practices, which are highly dependent on the knowledge and skills of teachers involved, have a more significant impact on student performance than other variables, including student background and prior achievement.<sup>47</sup> What will encourage secondary-level teachers to employ different contexts and instructional approaches to deeply

engage all students in acquiring language through extended discourse and experiential learning?

Even though decades of research illustrate the benefits of inquiry-based approaches that integrate literacy acquisition and deeper content learning, this knowledge base has not had a profound impact on secondary teaching in the United States. Teacher preparation and

professional development has failed to keep pace with the enormous changes in the linguistic diversity of the student population. Mainstream classroom teachers with growing numbers of language-minority students have had little or no preparation to teach these students well.<sup>48</sup>

Researchers report that the vast majority of teachers—over 70 percent—lack the training to be effective with ELLs.<sup>49</sup> The lack of training is not only evident in reviewing required preservice course work, but also in the sentiment among surveyed teachers who report that the number one gap in their preparation for teaching is instructing and assessing English learners.<sup>50</sup> As a result, outcomes for diverse learners vary greatly based on state and local ELL policies and their systems for educator development. For example, based on the U.S. Department of Education’s data file for SY 2010–11, states with the highest concentrations of English learners report graduation rates that range from 25 percent (Arizona) to 60 percent (California).<sup>51</sup>

Scaling school improvement is a major obstacle unless teachers have the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to embrace students’ linguistic and cultural assets, validate their pursuit of challenging learning goals, and carefully scaffold instruction to address their language and literacy development. In contrast, high-performing jurisdictions have successfully accelerated the teaching and assessment of inquiry and problem solving, particularly for the lowest-achieving students.<sup>52</sup> Significant improvement has resulted from changing how teachers think about teaching and their ability to succeed with diverse learners.

What would it take for Seattle to accelerate school improvement and redesign to match the rate of improvement taking place in other jurisdictions in the U.S. and around the globe? SPS joined Asia Society’s Global Cities Education Network (GCEN), which also includes Denver, Houston, Lexington (KY), and Toronto in North America and Hong Kong, Melbourne, Seoul, Shanghai,

and Singapore in the Asia Pacific region. The global network engages in in-depth inquiry to identify common challenges and internationally informed solutions.

SPS also is part of the Road Map Consortium Race to the Top—District (RTT-D) grant, one of the nation’s sixteen grants awarded to the winners of the federal 2012 Race to the Top—District Phase I competition.<sup>53</sup> The purpose of this four-year, \$40 million grant is to increase equity through personalized support, enable and empower students to attain high-level content and twenty-first-century skills through rigorous inquiry-based course work, and improve teachers’ and principals’ practice and effectiveness.<sup>54</sup>

To meet these goals, the Road Map Consortium plans to identify effective policies and practices and scale what is working across the consortium districts. For example, consistent with the heightened focus on competency-based credit flexibility endorsed by the Washington State Board of Education, consortium member districts plan on implementing approaches to allow students to demonstrate student proficiency or competency in the state’s academic learning standards. Since 2011, the consortium districts have joined together to create a common system for students to earn competency-based



world language credits. By 2016, it is estimated that close to 900 English learners within the consortium region will earn recognition and credit for world language knowledge and skills that they acquire outside of school.<sup>55</sup>

## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Emerging research and practice from high-performing systems provide strong evidence that transforming secondary learning environments can significantly improve the outcomes of culturally and linguistically diverse students. Effective school designs do the following:

- establish shared priorities and expectations in regard to educating English language learners;
- cultivate a schoolwide focus on language development and conceptual understanding as part of rigorous course work aligned to college- and career-ready standards;
- increase the teaching and assessment of inquiry and problem solving focused on real-world experiences;
- develop educators who value diversity and incorporate tools for language development into meaningful content-rich activities;
- create ongoing opportunities for teachers to participate in collaborative and sustained professional development that encourages interdisciplinary strategies and learning; and
- use observation protocols that are part of a teacher evaluation system and assess a teacher's pedagogical skills in creating language-rich environments that leverage students' cultural assets and support their emerging language competencies.

Ensuring that English language learners receive an education that prepares them for a technologically advanced, global economy must be a priority for communities and states. Federal competitive grant

programs such as Investing in Innovation, Race to the Top, and the proposed new High School Redesign Initiative can be used to replicate and further examine the international school model. They can also provide support to jurisdictions to act on the following policy recommendations for states and districts.

### College and Career Readiness

- Provide ELLs with the opportunity to participate in rigorous deep learning alongside their non-ELL peers in order to reduce their linguistic isolation.
- Ensure access to college-ready academic opportunities, Advanced Placement, and dual-credit programs, which allows learners to gain secondary and post-secondary level credits and boosts their chances of college enrollment.

### Use of Data

- Increase the systems that enable schools to access and analyze data relevant to ELLs' performance and progress in language proficiency and content-area achievement.
- Build the assessment literacy of educators, at the state, district, and school levels, to use different forms of data (e.g., formative, diagnostic, early-warning indicators) to inform and guide classroom instruction and interventions.

### Support Systems

- Provide students with the necessary academic and social support, personalization in instruction and support, and interventions to address targeted ELL needs.
- Offer extended learning and credit recovery options in all high schools, as well as planning and support for college and career goals and links to college and career pathways.

- Maximize resources by coordinating and networking with other schools, including feeder schools; partnering with higher education, community-based organizations, and business; and engaging families and communities in the planning, development, and implementation of programs and supports for ELLs.
- Foster a culture of collegial collaboration in the pursuit of high-impact, evidence-based practices consistent with the extensive research on language development, effective instructional strategies, and assessment of ELLs. Substantial improvements are needed to ensure better preparation, coaching, and ongoing professional development for all teachers of ELLs.

## Teacher Effectiveness

- Strengthen teacher preparation and licensure—both university-based and alternative programs—by requiring substantial clinical experiences and K–12 partnerships to prepare teachers of ELLs and mainstream content-area teachers. Program design and credential requirements should specify requirements to ensure that teachers are competent in addressing both the content and the academic language needs of ELLs.
- Ensure that ELLs have equitable access to effective teaching by enforcing requirements that teachers must be fully certified to teach ELLs prior to entering the classroom as the teacher of record. States should establish requirements that content-area teachers working with ELLs possess the knowledge and skills to teach their content specialties to English learners.

## CONCLUSION

There is an urgent need to expand the quality of education for the growing number of young people who find themselves segregated in under-resourced schools and isolated by language and poverty. The U.S. Department of Education’s Equity and Excellence Commission writes, “The diversity of ELLs, with respect to their places of origin, socioeconomic status and language, presents unique opportunities for the United States. In an increasingly global economy, these young people could be our strategic advantage.”<sup>56</sup> The next stage of improvement efforts requires rethinking school designs and the systems for preparing and supporting teachers to ensure far more equitable opportunities for students to attain the competencies needed in a global society.

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The **Alliance for Excellent Education** is a Washington, DC–based national policy and advocacy organization that works to improve national and federal education policy so that all students can achieve at high academic levels and graduate from high school ready for success in college, work, and citizenship in the twenty-first century. [www.all4ed.org](http://www.all4ed.org)



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