Leading with Learning: Project Description

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1. What is **Leading with Learning?**

Funded by the U.S. Department of Education’s Investing in Innovation (i3) program and private sector funding partners, *Leading with Learning* is an innovative model that addresses professional learning and systemic support for improving educational outcomes for English learner (EL) students and students from low socio-economic backgrounds. The project enacts the vision set forth in California’s new English Language Arts/English Language Development (CA ELA/ELD) Framework for K-12 Public Schools, particularly in its strong emphasis on educational equity for EL students and all culturally and linguistically diverse students.

The goal of our project is to develop a *scalable and replicable model* of EL-focused blended professional learning and systemic approaches to school and district improvement that can be used across our two partner school districts in the grant – Fresno Unified and Sacramento City Unified - and, ultimately, statewide and nationally. The project includes a rigorous external evaluation, which will be shared with the U.S. Department of Education and our district and funding partners vested in this grant, but it will also inform the California Department of Education on statewide implementation supports for the new CA ELA/ELD Framework. Our broader dissemination plan will inform the national dialogue on critical issues related to equity and access for EL students.

2. What are we trying to accomplish in schools and districts?

*Leading with Learning* is a multi-strand model that includes intensive blended professional learning for teachers, instructional coaches, and principals, and thought-partnering work with district leadership teams. It builds the capacity of district staff to achieve impact early and sustain and scale the work once the project has ended. Our ultimate goal is to raise student achievement and ensure that all EL and other culturally diverse and low income students graduate from high school ready for college, careers, and meaningful interaction in civic life. To accomplish this, professional learning and school and district systems work focuses on strengthening teaching and leading implementation in four key areas:

- Fostering collaborative academic conversations, abundant writing, and interactive reading around complex texts and intellectually rich content
- Engaging in discussions about the language in complex texts and building language awareness
- Observing students closely to provide planned and just-in-time scaffolding
- Creating positive and culturally responsive learning environments

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1. The CA ELA/ELD Framework is the California State Board of Education’s adopted policy - and robust resource guide - for implementing the Common Core State Standards for ELA/Literacy and ELD Standards across the disciplines in all Transitional Kindergarten though 12th grade public school classrooms. The principal investigator for Leading with Learning, Dr. Pamela Spycher, was a lead author of the CA ELA/ELD Framework and California’s new ELD Standards.
With the four focus areas outlined above and their related pedagogical shifts in mind, teachers, coaches, and principals work together to intentionally promote the following daily tasks in all classrooms:

- Students engaging in extended conversations about texts worthy of reading and content and questions worthy of discussing
- Students discussing the language of complex texts, connecting language to meaning, and building awareness of how language works in different disciplines
- Students writing texts that reflect discussions about the deeper meanings in texts and content learning and about the language of texts
- Students developing global competence through investigating the world, developing an understanding of multiple perspectives, developing an appreciation for cultural and linguistic diversity, and becoming advocates for themselves and others

3. Who is involved?

With its multi-strand approach, Leading with Learning includes teachers and leaders at all levels of the school district in two large California school districts with large populations of EL students, culturally diverse students, and students from low income backgrounds: Fresno Unified School District (FUSD) and Sacramento City Unified School District (SCUSD). About 40% of FUSD’s 73,000 students (30,000 students) speak English as an additional language, and 85% of the district’s students (62,000 students) qualify for free and reduced lunch. About 34% of SCUSD’s 46,000 students (16,000 students) speak English as an additional language, and 64% (30,000 students) qualify for free and reduced lunch. These high need districts were selected to partner with WestEd in this grant because of their readiness for and commitment to ensuring educational equity for all students, with a particular focus on the needs of EL students. The participants in the 3-year grant include the following groups of stakeholders.

- **Elementary school students (all TK-6th grade students)** in ten elementary schools in two California school districts: Fresno Unified and Sacramento City Unified

- **Teachers, coaches, and principals** in the ten elementary schools (school-wide professional learning: all staff participate)

- **District-wide instructional coaches** serving multiple schools across the district (spreading the professional learning to other high need schools from the start)

- **District content experts** co-facilitating the blended professional learning and preparing to scale and sustain the Leading with Learning model district-wide

- **District leadership teams** establishing a vision for educating ELs, along with an action plan to carry out the vision (including scaling and sustaining the model) and engaging the voices of all stakeholders (including parents and students) in the improvement process
4. What takes place?

Leading with Learning is a three-year process, with the first two years consisting of intensive learning, and the second and third year focused on ensuring the district has the capacity to sustain and scale the model once the project has ended. The outline below captures our strands of collaborative work with multiple stakeholders. (See our “Leading with Learning: Cycles of Learning Concept” handout for a visual representation of the model.)

- **Teachers’ Course:**
  - Intensive summer institutes for teachers, coaches, and principals with professional learning days scheduled during the school year (10 face-to-face days across two years)
  - Follow up coaching at the school site level (provided by district coaches)
  - Required “focused application tasks” between sessions (to support the implementation new pedagogical practices)
  - Online learning and resources (discussion space, readings, videos of classroom practice)

- **Coaches’ Course:**
  - Face-to-face and online professional learning sessions (4 face-to-face days and 10 online sessions each year)
  - Follow up face-to-face and virtual coaching for coaches
  - Required “focused application tasks” between sessions (to build the capacity of coaches to coach teachers of ELs)
  - Online learning and resources (discussion space, readings, coaching tools, resources coaches can use in coaching and professional learning sessions with teachers)

- **Principal Cohort:**
  - Face-to-face meetings across the year (3 full day meetings each year)
  - Site visits to each school to observe and discuss implementation (coaching for leading implementation)
  - Required “focused application tasks” between sessions (to support the monitoring of implementation and measuring impact)
  - Online space to share resources and engage in discussions

- **District Co-Facilitators:**
  - Preparation training to prepare for co-facilitation of all teachers’ course sessions and coaching (summer institute plus multiple sessions throughout the year)
  - Co-construction of key course content to ensure alignment with district initiatives and teachers’ prior learning
  - Required co-facilitation of all sessions (focused on building capacity to sustain and extend the work once the grant has ended)
  - On-going coaching support (face-to-face and virtual)

- **District Leadership Teams:**
  - Collaborative work sessions focused on developing an EL-focused systems approach to school and district improvement (6 meetings minimum)
  - On-going coaching support for key district leaders
5. What are some initial results?

Currently, we are in the middle of our first year of implementation in our two partner districts. Our current evidence includes survey data from professional learning sessions, notes from school visits, artifacts of student learning (writing, projects), and conversations with participants in the project. Below, we’ve provided some comments from the voices of teachers, coaches, and leaders in our partner districts.

Sample survey feedback from a recent Teachers’ Course session (January 6, 2016):

• I learned a lot about new writing strategies and am excited about trying them with my students.
• I am taking away a lot from the presentation. Many strategies that I learned throughout the training will be tried in the classroom.
• The sentence unpacking activity and scaffolding of the argument/opinion writing in science were excellent. Thank you!
• Fantastic partners! Extremely well thought-out best professional learning ever!!

Sample reflections from teachers on implementing the new pedagogical practices they learn in the Teachers’ Course.

FUSD 4th grade teacher (January 16, 2016)
“The students were highly engaged and loved participating. With scaffolds and recasting they collaboratively produced a biography on the life of Junipero Serra. It was also clear that they understood the basic components of biography as evidenced by the writing. Students love rigorous tasks if they are scaffolded and can be done through collaboration and interaction.”

FUSD 1st grade teacher (January 16, 2016):
“First graders CAN engage and be successful with complex text and CAN develop skills necessary for complex talk if they are taught, given practice opportunities [and] even if they are not fluent readers.”

Sample reflections from the Coaches’ Course on implementing the coaching tools:

SCUSD Coach and Co-facilitator (Oct. 29, 2015):
“I have used the grade level team meeting tool with all the teachers I have been working with. I have provided it as a tool for the teachers to use in guiding their past and present meetings. It has been very useful in helping us establish a collective vision for our meeting agenda. It also has helped hold everyone accountable to accomplish something before we meet again. I am not just using it with my i3 schools, but all my sites.”

SCUSD Coach and Co-facilitator (Nov. 20, 2015)
“I am reflecting on the Collaborative Inquiry Tool. I had an opportunity to walk a site with multiple TSAs (coaches), which was very informative for me. After we walked out of each room, we calibrated what we had seen. The process stretched my learning in my expectations of teacher learning and implementation as well as provided me with ways I might be able to provide ‘next steps’ for teachers. For example, we noticed that there was evidence of teaching of one of the keystone pedagogies, but not the other. As a result, I was able to offer more support to those
teachers during our coaching. Not surprisingly, the teachers were eager to accept the extra support.”

SCUSD Coach and Co-facilitator (Nov. 20, 2015)
“I had the opportunity to use the Collaborative Inquiry Tool with my Kindergarten AC (Accountable Community) team. AC members identified what their classrooms look and sound like in a positively and culturally responsive classroom. I observed multiple lessons in all rooms and captured salient data on the teacher ‘look fors.’ Based on teacher actions and student actions, teachers identified their next steps for coaching support. Since my initial learning with this tool felt successful I plan to use the Collaborative Inquiry tool with other sites.”

Comment from district leader and Leading with Learning co-facilitator (March 9, 2016):
“Partnering with WestEd on the i3 grant has been a giant step forward for everyone involved from our district. Working alongside WestEd, district staff have explored best instructional practices and how to effectively share them with teachers. Teachers report satisfaction in the classroom—widespread student engagement and English learner students who have exceeded their expectations. But the rubber meets the road when we see what the students have produced. Now, with instruction that is sensitive to their language needs, English learners have the same opportunity to learn, and as importantly, demonstrate their learning, as their native English-speaking peers” - Vanessa Girard, Director of Multilingual Literacy, Sacramento Unified School District

6. How do I find out more?

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