

ELPA Excellence Award Evaluation Synthesis Report   
  
Lessons Learned from 2016-2017 Awardees: Districts  
  
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Table of Contents

Introduction #3

Study Methodology

Factors Contributing to the Effectiveness of Awardees’ ELD Programs # 4

Fiscal Resources

Collaborative Leadership

Teacher Learning

Research Based ELD Program

Systemic Processes and Procedures

Conclusion #5

**Introduction**

In 2014, Colorado legislators re-enacted the English Language Proficiency Act (ELPA). ELPA funds Colorado districts to provide supports and services to English learners (ELs). As part of the re-enacted legislation, funding was earmarked to identify and award high performing local education providers (LEPs) with evidence-based English language development (ELD) programs and a demonstrated record of effectiveness. Specifically, high performing districts and charter schools were identified based on ELs’ English language and academic performance on three equally-weighted criteria:

* ***Linguistic growth*** of ELs in program, measured by growth on the WIDA ACCESS for ELLs assessment;
* ***Academic growth*** of ELs in program, measured by growth on Colorado’s CMAS English language arts (ELA) and math assessments; and
* ***Academic achievement*** of ELs who have exited the ELD program, specifically the percent scoring in the top two CMAS ELA and math performance levels.

In 2016-2017, these legislated criteria were used to identify 10 districts and 10 charter schools for ELPA Excellence Awards. (See Table 1 below for district awardees; for charter school awardees please visit: [ELPA Excellence Award](https://www.cde.state.co.us/cde_english/elpaexcellenceaward).)

*Table 1. 2016-2017 ELPA Excellence Award Districts*

| **Organization (Local Education Providers)** |
| --- |
| Academy School District 20 |
| Cherry Creek School District 5 |
| Cheyenne Mountain School District |
| Denver Public Schools |
| East Grand School District 2 |
| Fountain-Fort Carson School District 8 |
| Harrison School District 2 |
| Lewis-Palmer School District 38 |
| Littleton Public Schools |
| Steamboat Springs School District RE-2 |

Legislation also required the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) to conduct an evaluation to identify the factors contributing to the success of the awardees and disseminate the effective practices implemented by the awardees. This report summarizes the practices and procedures common to the awarded districts and highlights their exemplary practices. A companion report delineates the findings for the awarded charter schools (see [2016-2017 ELPA Charter Evaluation Report](http://www.cde.state.co.us/fedprograms/elpa-charter-evaluation-16-17)).

**Study Methodology**

CDE collected information from the 2016-2017 ELPA Excellence Award districts using Colorado’s Implementation Reflection Rubric. Awardees self-identified their strengths in support of the ELD program in the following areas: systemic processes, collaborative leadership, ongoing evaluation of ELD programs, human resources, fiscal resources, teacher/learning, research-based ELD programs, family/community partnerships, and organizational culture. Items within each section of the self-reflection rubric were aggregated to analyze trends across districts. The rubric contains a rating scale for sub-indicators which can be used calculate an index score on each construct or category. The common practices identified as areas of strength were then synthesized and reports from awardees were used to analyze the components within each area that were rated highest among the districts. A few areas of strength were common across ELPA Excellence Awardees and have been summarized in this report.

**Factors Contributing to the Effectiveness of District ELPA Excellence Award ELD Programs**

# Fiscal Resources

All 10 districts reported using a number of funding streams to support their ELD programs, drawing from Per Pupil Revenue (PPR), ELPA allocations, and supplemental federal grants, in order to meet the specific linguistic, social-emotional, and academic needs of those students. Six districts reported that they evaluate their financial formulas annually, and modify as needed, to ensure quality ELD programs. Districts regularly analyzed factors such as staffing ratios and the number and percentage of ELs to ensure appropriate resources were in place to support successful ELD program implementation across schools. Careful analysis of how best to use financial resources to support ELs was key to the overall success of district programs. The districts’ use of funds in support of ELs demonstrates prioritization of ELD supports and services.

# Collaborative Leadership

Both self-reflection rubric questions related to collaborative leadership elicited high ratings. All awarded districts included both district and school stakeholders in decision-making about ELD programming. Decision-making includes collaboration at both the district-level (e.g., superintendent, directors, ELD specialists) and the school-level (e.g., principals, teachers). A number of districts also reported regular collaboration between ELD instructional staff and general education teachers. Collaboration frequently occurs through structures such as professional learning communities (PLCs) or data teams, which provide opportunities to analyze data, make informed decisions based on trends and results, and communicate regarding student progress.

In Harrison School District (HSD), for example, ELD and general education teachers collaboratively write an EL plan that outlines the ELD services to be provided and documents goals, instructional strategies, progress monitoring, and assessment data for each student.

All districts reported that leadership teams often disaggregate and analyze academic and linguistic growth and achievement data to inform decisions concerning the ELD program. Data is disaggregated for all content areas, by both grade-span and school, enabling districts to make informed decisions regarding ELD programming, such as staffing needs, availability of resources, and areas of focus for the instructional program.

In Denver Public Schools (DPS), for example, the English language acquisition team collaborates not only with the general education team, but also with special education, gifted and talented, early childhood, and family and community engagement teams and network partners, to ensure that both students and staff receive appropriate supports. DPS’s English language acquisition team also collaborates with the accountability, research, and evaluation team to analyze data and review demographic and enrollment trends, as well as student achievement, growth, and graduation rates.

Using data and soliciting input from multiple stakeholders contributed to collaborative leadership within the districts and supported collective decision-making around ELD programs.

# Teaching and Learning

Most districts reported that professional learning needs are identified in collaboration with school staff, and frequently based on student data or staff needs. Three districts surveyed school and district stakeholders, and six analyzed disaggregated qualitative and quantitative data, to determine and design professional learning opportunities. Most districts reported that all instructional staff, including non-ESL, are encouraged or expected to participate in high-quality, targeted, and job-embedded professional development (PD) in support of ELs in both content and ELD programming.

Littleton Public Schools (LPS) integrates job-embedded professional learning opportunities into monthly ELD staff meetings. The consistent introduction and use of strategies during these meetings better enable staff to apply them in the classroom. LPS also provides school-specific trainings and coaching based on data analysis and teacher reflections.

Fountain-Fort Carson (FFC) School District fosters collaboration between ELD, content, and grade-level teachers by having ELD teachers train general education teachers each semester. Trainings can be tailored to individual skill sets and have included topics such as effective co-teaching models, cultural integration within core programming, vocabulary building, and connecting language to the Colorado Academic Standards (CAS).

# Research-Based ELD Programs

Overall, ELPA Excellence Award districts supported their schools in implementing research-based ELD program models that reflected their EL populations. All reported that district and school stakeholders collaboratively develop the ELD program, based on relevant research; most indicated their ELD programs reflect their ELs’ specific linguistic, social-emotional, and academic needs. Additionally, all but one district had consistent processes to monitor ELD program implementation. District personnel regularly collect data and feedback from school staff to measure fidelity of implementation and target areas for improvement. Many districts have strong processes in place for systematic and continuous use of data, to assess implementation of their chosen research-based models, and be able to adjust, modify, and improve.

## Other Notable Trends

# Systemic Processes and Procedures

ELPA Award districts have strong ELD plans or processes in place. Seven districts communicate their ELD plans to all offices, departments, and schools, with explicit expectations that practices will be aligned across the district. Five of those districts report that they support all schools in implementing ELD services in their plans. Award districts value and uphold the importance of the ELD plan, which empowers their staff to prioritize its implementation.

Another strength that emerged across rubrics was how ELPA Award districts monitor and ensure implementation of ELD procedures. Many regularly collect data to measure their progress toward implementing ELD strategies to meet specific targets and used the data consistently to focus on areas needing improvement. District and school stakeholders, including leadership teams, regularly collect feedback on ELD program delivery in the schools, continuously evaluate this feedback, and adjust implementation of the plan accordingly.

# Conclusion

A number of factors contributed to the success of the ELPA Excellence Award districts. Fiscal resources were thoughtfully planned and adjusted to support ELs in attaining English proficiency. Collaborative decision-making, stakeholder involvement, and data were tools leadership used to deliver effective ELD programming. Professional learning was fundamental to district success, carefully selected through data analysis and matched to the needs of schools and their teachers. Implementing research-based ELD programs through systemic and consistent district-wide practices, including strong ELD plans, emerged as essential to high EL performance.