

## Meeting AYP in a High-Need School: A Formative Experiment

**A schoolwide approach to content literacy instruction is an effective way for raising achievement.**

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Having just presented the components of our schoolwide literacy plan, as well as the outcomes of our work, at an after-school staff meeting, a science teacher asked, “Is it possible?” Her school had been identified by the state as chronically underperforming and in program improvement. She continued, “Can we really impact the reading skills of our students? It’s my dream, but I’m losing faith.” Her statements echo the hopes of many secondary teachers who want to support students’ learning but are not exactly sure how to accomplish this.

Faculties in secondary schools across the country are working hard to address the current literacy skills of their students, engage teenagers in new literacies, prepare young adults for the world of work and college, and meet state and federal accountability demands. Despite teachers who work really hard and try to develop their students’ reading, writing, and thinking, these schools are not places in which students achieve. To address this, researchers often recommend the use of content literacy strategies (e.g., Vacca & Vacca, 2008), which should provide students with the skills necessary to read and write across the curriculum. However, as O’Brien, Stewart, and Moje (1995) pointed out, many secondary school teachers are resistive to content literacy strategies and simply do not use them. There are probably a number of reasons for this, but the fact remains that students in many schools have difficulty accessing the texts required of them. As a result, students do not learn, and schools fall into program improvement.

On the other hand, there are a number of secondary schools that have beat the odds and made impressive progress in integrating reading and writing into their daily operation such that students do achieve (e.g., Langer, 2001; Schoenbach, Braunger, Greenleaf, & Litman, 2003). There are any number of examples that demonstrate the power of content literacy instruction in helping students learn but very few systematic analyses of the ways in which failing schools change over time to meet the needs of their students. This study focuses on one such school as the faculty and administration

attempted to meet state accountability targets and ensure that their students were successful.

## Western High School

Western High School (pseudonym) educates over 2,000 students, 60% of whom qualify for free lunch. Western is somewhat unique in that it is geographically isolated from any major city, yet it educates a diverse student population with over 40% of the students homeless and living in cars, tents, or on the street; 23% of them identified as having a disability; and 93% of them identified as Latino, African American, Asian/Pacific Islander, or Native Peoples. In the nearby town, people talk negatively about the school's population because it is known for its violence, illicit drug use, gang activity, pregnancy rates, and other indicators of urban stress. In 2002, only 12% of the Western students scored proficient or advanced on the state assessment in reading. As a result, the school was in program improvement level 5, the highest level, when we began our work. The graduation rate for Western during that year was 67%.

For the two years before our visit, Western focused on creating small learning communities (SLCs) in specific career pathways (business, tourism, health, etc). This initiative was brought to the school by the district as a result of federal grant support. The principal reported spending nearly every professional development minute on this initiative "debating about who goes where." Yet, as a history teacher told us after the meeting, "We've spent the last two years rearranging the Titanic deck chairs." Western had career academies in place, but this effort in and of itself had not resulted in improved student achievement. Prior to our visit, teachers were told that the school faced state sanctions, including an imposed curriculum and regular classroom monitoring.

Unlike our previous work with neighborhood schools, visiting Western required a six-to-seven hour commute. This posed a unique opportunity to test our ideas about the establishment of a schoolwide literacy plan based on the local capacity building necessary for long-term change.

## Our Formative Experiment

Given that we would be involved in ongoing professional development, coaching, and technical assistance designed to improve student achievement and that we would naturally make midcourse corrections in our recommendations with this school, the most appropriate methodology for this study was a formative experiment (Reinking & Bradley, 2007).

Formative experiments have been used to study engagement in reading of beginning English language learners (Ivey & Broaddus, 2007), the use of computers to affect reading and writing (Reinking & Pickle, 1993), vocabulary learning (Baumann, Ware, & Edwards, 2007), and the effectiveness of cognitive strategy instruction for Latina/o readers (Jiménez, 1997). Western High School provided a unique opportunity to document and study a whole school change as teachers attempted to increase student achievement.

Formative experiments allow for inquiry and investigation using both qualitative and quantitative traditions. Formative experiments focus on what it takes to achieve a pedagogical goal as well as the factors that inhibit or enhance the effectiveness of the intervention. Our study borrows from the procedures as outlined by Reinking and Watkins (1998) in our attempt to develop, refine, and confirm an intervention designed to increase student achievement in an underperforming school. These six procedures are as follows:

1. Identify and justify a valued pedagogical goal.
2. Specify an instructional intervention and provide a rationale for why it might potentially be effective.
3. Collect data to determine which factors in the educational environment enhance or inhibit the specified intervention's effectiveness.
4. Use data to modify the intervention to achieve the pedagogical goal more efficiently and effectively.
5. Consider what positive or negative effects the intervention is producing beyond those associated with the pedagogical goal.

6. Consider the extent to which the educational environment has changed as a result of the intervention.

We will discuss each of these processes in turn.

### ***Process 1: Identify and Justify Goals***

As a condition of our longer term involvement in the school, the school elected a building-level literacy leadership team (LLT). Given that the school had over 130 teachers and 41 support staff, we needed a group that could function as a communication route. We recommended that the school elect this group of people to ensure that there was a balance of perspectives and ideas about the work ahead. Consistent with Taylor and Collins's (2003) and Cobb's (2005) recommendations, we understood that literacy leadership had to come from the school and that members of this elected body could serve as change agents and ambassadors for literacy instruction.

During our first session with the LLT, we explained the components of the formative experiment and the plan for our collective work. In response, one of the members said, "We've had a lot of consultants with a lot of answers, but they didn't work." Acknowledging this, we discussed the development of their schoolwide literacy plan and reminded them that we did not have a plan to impose upon the school.

The conversation then moved to the first component of the formative experiment: a pedagogical goal. The members of the LLT were clear: They had one goal, which was to meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). As an English teacher said, "It's not lofty, but when you hit that mark, you get a lot of freedom. And that's what we need, a little freedom." We argued that meeting AYP was not a pedagogical goal and urged them to consider the idea that making AYP was a by-product of meeting their own goals. This conversation lasted nearly two hours, and we were regularly reminded of the reality faced by teachers working in failing schools: They begin to define success not in terms of student progress but rather in terms of performance on state tests.

Through a process of give and take in which we discussed and debated pedagogical goals, we realized that we all agreed that student achievement

was important, and we acknowledged that students at Western did not yet have habits that they could deploy automatically while reading and writing. As such, most students were unable to complete many classroom assignments and performed poorly on the state achievement tests. By the end of our first meeting, we had agreed on a pedagogical goal, namely that students would develop literacy habits that they could take with them from class to class, and eventually to college.

That afternoon, the LLT presented the goal to the rest of the faculty at their regular staff meeting while we observed. They answered questions skillfully and guided their colleagues in a conversation similar to the one we had during the day. They acknowledged the importance of "gaining freedom" as well as the value of thinking beyond state tests. They also noted that their work on small learning communities was not in vain but that they now needed to turn their attention "from structure to instruction." The chairperson of the LLT, a peer coach staff developer, then made a motion that the school approve the proposed pedagogical goal. In an anonymous paper vote, 82% of the teachers approved the goal. In announcing the decision, the principal commented, "We've really come together on this. I can't remember a vote with more agreement. We're on our way to freedom."

### ***Process 2: Specify an Intervention and Provide a Rationale***

The day following the staff meeting, we met with the LLT. The agenda for the day was the development of an instructional intervention that could be taken schoolwide. Armed with every content literacy or "strategy" book the group could find, we set out to determine the ways in which teachers would engage students in reading, writing, speaking, and listening across content areas. In introducing this session, we acknowledged "there might be 50 ways to leave a lover, but there are at least 100 ways to engage in literacy learning." We discussed the fractured nature of most high schools and the fact that students experienced different instructional routines in every class.

During the first hour of the meeting, we collectively established the criteria we would use to

select components of the schoolwide instructional intervention, namely that each

- Had a solid evidence base
- Could be used across content areas
- Had high utility in college or adult life

While many instructional routines and instructional interventions would meet our criteria, the LLT selected four that would be the focus of ongoing professional development for the first year of work. These are detailed in the following sections.

**Cornell Note-Taking.** The first instructional routine suggested by the LLT centered on note-taking. As one of the committee members noted, “You struck a cord with me. I see all of the different systems we require students to use at this school. I’d be so confused if I had to change methods every hour or so.” In reviewing the evidence on note-taking, LLT members were impressed with Cornell style notes (Pauk, 1974). Using Cornell notes, students take notes and complete the tasks on the right side of the page. The left side provides them with a guide and the key points. These key points will help students quickly find information, locate references, and study for exams. Students can also use this column to add their own notes, drawings, and ideas. As Faber, Morris, and Lieberman (2000) found, the Cornell note-taking system increases comprehension and achievement. The committee recommendation was that Cornell notes be used for all note-taking activities.

**Think-Alouds.** Following the conversation on “external storage functions” during which note-taking was agreed upon, members of the LLT noted that comprehension was an issue for most students at Western and that previous efforts to address comprehension (such as test practice and homework packets) had not significantly impacted student achievement. The literacy peer coach reported that very few students performed poorly on assessments of phonics or phonemic awareness and that most were reasonable fluent readers. We explored the evidence based on think-alouds, read-alouds, and shared readings (e.g., Wilhelm, 2001) and discussed the ways in which content teachers could use this instructional intervention with students. We

noted that thinking aloud while reading might serve a number of purposes, including the development of general comprehension skills as well as discipline specific thinking (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008). We shared a piece of text and considered how scientists, historians, art critics, and literary critics might view this

same piece of text. The committee recommended that every teacher conduct a think-aloud with a piece of text, broadly defined, every day in every class.

**Writing to Learn.** Researchers have argued that writing is thinking (Dean, 2006), yet members of the LLT reported that students at Western did very little writing. For much of the conversation about writing, the LLT focused on the role of the English teachers. The two English teachers on the committee pushed back, saying that writing had to be a requirement in all classes. The debate about writing continued among members of the LLT without a decision. Following the lunch break, we asked members of the team to summarize in writing the arguments presented thus far for and against writing as a schoolwide initiative. We asked them to talk with a partner from a different content area about what they had written. During the debriefing session, we clarified that writing to learn was not process writing and that teachers were not expected to grade the papers for spelling, grammar, or mechanics. Instead, they could use their students’ writing as a way to check for understanding and to plan instruction. The LLT did eventually reach consensus about writing to learn and recommended that students write to learn every day in every class.

**Dedicated Reading Time.** The final component of the plan was dedicated reading time. The current school schedule at the time of our visit provided an optional time for reading that could alternatively be used as a study hall or homework center. Members of the

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LLT reported that the majority of teachers allowed students to read, do their homework, or talk quietly during this time. In acknowledging the importance of reading volume (Cunningham & Stanovich, 2003), the committee members decided that students should “just read” for 20 minutes

of every school day (Ivey & Broaddus, 2001).

These four instructional routines were identified by the literacy leadership team from a host of possible ways for engaging secondary students in content literacy work. Given the block schedule at Western, teachers participated weekly in a 60-minute professional development session during their preparation periods. Historically, these sessions focused on small learning communities, test preparation, guidance and counseling, and the like. The LLT requested that at least three of the four meetings per month be dedicated to the literacy plan.

Given our commute to the school, we could not be the primary providers of weekly professional development. Instead, the literacy peer coach would have to coordinate the sessions, and members of the LLT would engage their colleagues. We developed a schedule of topics for the remainder of the school year, and members of the LLT signed up to lead the sessions. As part of the plan, teachers would be compensated for observing one another teach during their prep periods. These peer observations were voluntary, and teachers could be paid once per month for peer observations. The literacy coach would also conduct feedback sessions aligned with the literacy plan, and we established a classroom observation and coaching schedule for times that one of us would be on campus. The LLT understood that job-embedded training, teacher-led professional development, and collegial conversations about teaching and learning, as well as coaching and feedback, were required if these school-wide instructional routines were going to become

permanent features of the school (Joyce & Showers, 2002).

### ***Process 3: Collect Data***

Our data collection system included results on annual state achievement tests as well as a number of common formative assessments given by the school to gauge success and theoretically used to plan instruction. On each visit, we interviewed the literacy peer coach and principal. These interviews were conducted separately and were used to inform our staff development sessions as well as our interactions with faculty. The interviews always focused on a few questions, including the following:

- What’s working better this month?
- Who do we need to recognize for their contributions?
- What are you seeing that needs to be addressed to ensure that the literacy plan is implemented?

These interviews ranged from the shortest being 12 minutes to the longest lasting 93 minutes, with an average of 38 minutes. Information from the interviews was integrated immediately into our work with the school, often resulting in changes to our professional development plan or focus of classroom observations. Interviews were recorded and summarized on the commute home.

In addition, we conducted classroom observations and feedback sessions monthly for the two and a half years of this study. For each trip to Western, at least two of us were on campus. The total number of person days of data collection was 86. These were in addition to the days we were on campus for administrator meetings, staff development sessions, or the annual faculty retreat. On each of these days, each of us conducted at least 12 classroom observations (3 per 90-minute block period); the total number of classroom observations was 1,161. Using a constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), we reviewed and discussed our classroom field notes during the commute home from the school. We also summarized our notes and e-mailed them to the principal and peer coach, inviting them to comment. We did not discuss any specific teacher but noted trends in

instructional routines and made recommendations for the use of professional development time.

### **Process 4: Use Data**

The first two days of our engagement with Western left us and the LLT excited about the possibilities and eager to get to work. Our plan included weekly professional development on specific components of a schoolwide literacy intervention as well as regular coaching and feedback for teachers. The week following our visit, at their first professional development session, members of the LLT presented their plan to the faculty. They repeated the content four times so that every teacher had an opportunity to participate. This structure was familiar to the faculty as this is how they regularly engaged in professional development.

In an e-mail to us following this session, the peer coach stated, “All I can say is amazing. Nobody, not even the electives teachers, complained. They are with us and feel like we’re finally doing something real.” For the next several weeks, the preparation period sessions were implemented as we had planned during our two-day team meeting. The following month, we visited Western again to participate in professional development sessions and to observe classrooms. There was clear evidence of the professional development plan as teachers experimented with think-alouds, Cornell notes, and writing-to-learn prompts.

This continued, with teachers attending weekly sessions and our visiting monthly for several months. Teachers were generally positive about the feedback we provided and often asked questions about our recommendations. By the fourth month, however, we noticed that the classroom implementation wasn’t progressing. Teachers were going through the motions of the literacy intervention, but we often felt like we were watching a literacy commercial and not like the instructional routine was embedded into the lesson. For example, during an observation of a science teacher, the field notes say, “Students *are* taking notes in Cornell form, but they’re copying information from an overhead projector that is in Cornell format.” In another observation that day, we noted, “The teacher is thinking aloud, but it’s just a collection of personal stories. He’s not labeling the cogni-

tive strategies he’s using nor is he doing much other than making personal connections with the text.”

**Modification #1: Supporting the LLT.** In sharing this information with the LLT, a history teacher confessed that he had run out of information that he could share during the professional development sessions. In his words, “I don’t understand much more than the teachers, but I’m supposed to provide them training. I feel like the blind leading the blind.” Most of the members of the LLT agreed that they had reached the end of their comfort zone. We promised to collect video footage from our local schools that they could use during the sessions. We also wrote discussion guides to facilitate discussions about the videos. This modification worked for several months because it allowed teachers to directly observe examples of the instructional routines their school had selected. The discussion guides provided an opportunity for teachers to consider the ways in which the lesson worked for students as well as the ways in which the lesson could be improved. For example, in a video clip of a science teacher modeling her thinking, she revealed the following discussion prompts:

- What supports does the teacher provide for students during the modeling?
- What are the student’s responsibilities during modeling?

While we wanted to provide a teacher-to-teacher approach to professional development, we realized that the level of understanding was limited and that we needed to expand the knowledge base of the members of the LLT. We hypothesized that team members would ask to be replaced if they felt uncomfortable in their role. As such, we requested additional release days for the LLT to meet and work with us. The structure of these quarterly sessions focused on preparing for each of the weekly sessions that the team would lead. We regularly read articles together, talked about implications, and discussed the best way to deepen understanding with the faculty. We also previewed videos and provided members of the team with the backstory for each video such that they could share this information during the sessions.

During one of the sessions with the LLT, we realized we needed some video footage of a teacher modeling connections that were not personal but that were related to the world around us. We didn't have any such video footage with us, and the team really wanted to address this the following day during professional development. Amazingly, within an hour we had a student ready to film and a teacher ready to model his thinking. We stayed after school to edit the video footage with a group of students. The next day, when we showed the video, a teacher in first period cried. Concerned, we asked her about her reaction following the session. Tearing up again, she said, "He's one of us and he can do it. It's not just the people from San Diego. It's a local. I'm so proud of us."

While we needed to provide the LLT with materials they could use during their professional development sessions, filming a local teacher engaged in the work of the literacy plan proved to be a major breakthrough. Over the next several months, the literacy coach visited classrooms with student camera people and sent the footage to us. We edited the footage and sent them short videos that they could use in the professional development sessions. Our edits focused on the behaviors we hoped would become schoolwide, and it worked. The principal reported a culture shift as someone told her, "If Ms. Ramirez can do it, you better believe I can." Perhaps teachers needed to see their students and their colleagues engaged in content literacy work to believe it's possible.

**Modification #2: New Teacher Support.** Upon our return to Western after the summer break, we learned that the school had 36 new, first-year teachers, many of whom were out of the field and teaching on provisional permits. We were depressed when we considered the amount of training and support that had been provided to a group of teachers who would not start the school year with us. The principal, however, was excited. This was the smallest group of new teachers in years, and she attributed the decline in transfers to a sense of possibility that had been created by the work of the LLT. We asked her why she didn't tell us about the number of new teachers, and she was genuinely surprised. She said that there were large numbers of

new teachers every year and that it never occurred to her to talk about it; it just was.

As a result of the significant number of new teachers, despite the fact that there were fewer than in the past, we recommended a number of revisions to the professional development plan. The district induction plan was known to be paperwork heavy, and new teachers regularly complained about the demands of teaching, participating in professional development, attending new teacher meetings, and keeping up with the paperwork. Our revision created a site-based induction program in which the new teachers at Western would use their weekly preparation periods to observe other teachers, complete the required paperwork, talk with mentors, and be introduced to the schoolwide literacy intervention.

One of the authors took the primary role in the revision of the induction effort and spent time while on campus with the new teachers. Acknowledging the tension between their early career support needs and the priority for a schoolwide literacy intervention, the principal said, "We can't have them playing catch-up to the school, but we also want them to stay another year." New teachers received a modified version of the literacy intervention while being mentored into their careers. While this is not ideal and likely impacted student achievement overall, the long-term investment in reducing turnover seemed to outweigh the cost. Having said that, we recognize that most schools do not have the resources to create a site-based induction program and are forced to have new teachers participate in the district support program as well as the site-based initiatives. This demand seems to be exacerbated in urban schools that educate large numbers of students who live in poverty and might explain part of the achievement gap.

The following year, the number of new teachers was reduced almost by half (to 19), and for the first time in recent history, veteran teachers from other schools requested transfers to Western. The site-based induction program continued with support from the administration as part of a grant-funded effort to reduce turnover.

**Modification #3: Student Behavior Concerns.** We were also forced to revise the literacy intervention almost from the start as a result of student behavior concerns.

During our first classroom observations, we observed significant numbers of students who were sleeping, talking with one another, leaving the class when they wanted to roam the halls, being disrespectful to teachers, sending text messages, answering their phones in class, and displaying a host of other problematic behaviors. When asked about this, one of the teachers told us, “That’s the way it is here. You just gotta put up with it to get by.”

When we asked the principal about this, she acknowledged the problem and said that the small learning communities were designed to address this. They had placed vice principals and counselors in each academy who were supposed to address behavioral issues. However, the principal said, “We’ve gone from bad to worse” over the past couple of years. We urged the principal to address this issue, and the following month she hired a full-time behavior specialist who provided professional development (once per month) to the teachers and coached the vice principals and counselors daily. In addition, the principal dedicated time at each after-school staff meeting to behavioral issues.

For example, a few months into our work with Western, we attended a staff meeting. The focus was on the student ID policy. The faculty decided, with leadership from the behavior specialist, that no one (faculty, student, administrator, or visitor) would be allowed on campus without a lanyard and ID. The faculty voted on this at the meeting and acknowledged that the change would cause a temporary absence problem and enforcement issue. A few months later, the faculty discussed a tardy policy in which they decided to lock the classroom doors when the bell rang and require students who were late to miss class, resulting in a truancy and the possible failure of the class. The overall success of this effort outweighed the cost of transferring focus from the literacy plan once a month.

### **Process 5: Consider Effects**

As teachers engaged in the implementation of the instructional routines selected for schoolwide implementation, new questions were raised. For example, after nearly nine months of work on Cornell note-taking, the teachers began talking about students’ lack of ability to summarize. In response, during a professional

development session, the literacy coach said, “Our students didn’t just forget how to summarize, we just didn’t notice before. The Cornell notes have forced us to notice a need our students have.” The following month’s session with the LLT focused on teaching summarizing, which led to a discussion about main ideas and details. The team

designed a number of professional development sessions on summarizing as a result of this revelation.

We are not sure that most teachers in secondary schools would accept the responsibility of teaching students to summarize. However, this need came from teachers who were looking at student work and realized that there was a gap. As a result, just a few months later, we observed a number of lessons in which content area teachers were focused on teaching, summarizing, and engaging students in conversations about how, why, and when to summarize.

The think-aloud component was the most difficult to institutionalize at Western. We hypothesized that this may be because modeling requires a change in teacher behavior whereas writing to learn, Cornell note-taking, and wide reading focus more on the use of time. Most teachers we observed did not really model, per se. Instead, they often explained how something worked or what the author was doing or what students might do to understand. Our regular feedback about this, over several months, caused tension in the teaching staff and some resentment among teachers. They wanted to do well and appreciated the feedback on the other components of the plan. However, during the first 15 months of this study when we talked about think-alouds, we would regularly be challenged or debated. As an example, in frustration, one of the teachers said, “Then you come into my class and do it.” We took this as an invitation and later the next day did model thinking while reading to her students.

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**In conversations we had with teachers and administrators, we regularly heard about their “success with wide reading.”**

Thankfully, we had support from the principal and LLT to maintain the focus on think-alouds. Over time, teachers began to incorporate this new behavior into their habits. One of the early naysayers was later interviewed

and she said, “My [think-aloud] time has the most student engagement. They can’t wait to hear what I think about what we’re reading.” Hopefully, there were no long-term negative feelings about the feedback we or the peer coach provided.

The one major, negative effect this intervention produced came from the vice principals. Given that their day was mainly devoted to student discipline, they felt left out and neglected as the school turned its attention to literacy. Before this effort, they were the “keepers of information” and “had a lot of power” because teachers went to them for support and guidance. According to the peer coach, the work of the LLT shifted the balance of power away from the vice principals, and teachers spent less time with them and more time with literacy resource staff. As a result, the principal was forced to address back-stabbing comments from her vice principals, including questions about her ability to run the school and periodic reports to the superintendent’s office about how she spent her time.

### ***Process 6: Consider the Result of the Intervention***

The most obvious change in the school came just a few months into our work together—students regularly read during the reading period. In observation after observation of this time of day, we noticed students reading. We had a hard time finding a student who did not have a book and didn’t seem to be reading. Indicators of this change were all around us. Library use by students had increased. The number of students carrying books across campus increased. Referrals to the vice principals during this time of day decreased significantly. In conversations we had with

teachers and administrators, we regularly heard about their “success with wide reading.” We believe that this early success in the climate of the school for this portion of the day encouraged teachers to try other parts of the literacy intervention.

Over the course of the two years, our observation and interview data had shown a significant trend in the use of content literacy interventions. With extensive professional development and coaching, teachers were able to incorporate these four instructional routines into their habits. Students were able to predict some aspects of each of their classes and to develop habits that they could use across the school day. While these are positive trends, the school really wanted to earn their freedom from the accountability system.

As we noted, only 12% of the students at Western were proficient in reading on the state assessment. That number was virtually unchanged for the previous five years until the results of the first assessment following the development of the schoolwide literacy instruction intervention. Following just over six months of work, achievement increased to 21% proficient. This is nearly double the achievement of 2002 but still not enough to meet AYP.

Two years later, 47% of the students were proficient in reading, and the school met state and federal accountability targets. Following our two and a half years of work, Western students continued to progress, and 54% of them scored proficient on the state assessment. In addition, the graduation rate increased from 67% to 73%. While still depressing, more students at Western earned a diploma than had done so in the past. When asked about this during a classroom observation, one of the teachers said, “They’re more engaged now and they feel like they can succeed. They know what’s expected and how to pass a class.”

## **Schoolwide Approach Raises Achievement**

This study adds to the evidence that a schoolwide approach to content literacy instruction is an effective way for raising achievement. The four schoolwide approaches selected by the school-based LLT are not new, but they are effective. As Shanahan and Shanahan (2008) noted, discipline-specific literacy is

built on basic and intermediate (generic) literacy skills. Given the profile of the students at Western, it seemed reasonable to focus on intermediate and generic skills that could be integrated into all classes.

For many secondary schools, the problem is not the development of such a plan but rather the implementation of the plan. This formative experiment provides a glimpse into the workings of one high school over a two-and-a-half year period as the teachers worked to build students' literacy habits. In reality, the plan had to be changed a number of times to address the needs of the school. For example, evidence-based recommendations for professional development center on teacher-to-teacher implementation. While this was certainly the goal at Western, we quickly realized that the leadership team needed resources to effectively engage their peers in adult learning situations. We also had to modify the plan to account for student behavioral concerns and the number of new teachers starting at the school each year.

This study also points to the number of ways that schoolwide plans for improving student achievement can be sidetracked and sabotaged. Lack of support from the administrative team was a problem at Western; other schools will be forced to address similar or related challenges. Having said that, it is important to note the significant changes in achievement realized at Western as a result of purposeful integration of content literacy instruction. Interestingly, the changes extended beyond what can be measured by state tests. Students at Western read more and better than ever before. They engaged with their teachers at levels not previously witnessed. At the outset, the teachers at Western wanted freedom from state mandates, which they understood could only be attained by meeting AYP. Through hard work and personal change, this freedom was realized.

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