EXPLORING ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE (ESL) PRACTICES IN SUBURBAN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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by
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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to identify and document suburban ESL practices as they relate to ELL achievement in three high-performing suburban public school districts in Massachusetts. The researcher followed a qualitative design for the multi-case study and primarily gathered data through interviews with Assistant Superintendents, ELL coordinators, focus groups with teachers and the review of ELL documentation. Twenty-three participants across the three high performing suburban school districts were interviewed. The study initially yielded two sets of findings. The first set of findings was resonant with SEI best practices, the literature and second language acquisition theory. The second set of findings went beyond SEI best practices, the literature and second language acquisition theory; therefore, honing three key findings: (1) high performing suburban public school districts that are meeting the needs of ELLs maintain a systemic culture of success for all students that is communicated vertically from administration to teachers. (2) high performing suburban public school districts that are meeting the needs of ELLs employ ample, highly qualified ESL staff. (3) high performing suburban public school districts that are meeting the needs of ELLs are engaging in extended school activities to promote ELL achievement and to engage families of ELLs. The key findings could potentially have implications on the micro and macro levels. On a micro level, the findings could serve as an ESL program framework for other suburban public schools that are also experiencing an influx in ELLs. On a macro level, the findings have the potential to inform SEI and ESL policy.

Key Words: Acculturation, ESL, ELL, ESL practices, Suburban public schools, Academic language
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Chapter I: Introduction

Statement of the Problem

Currently, immigrants are moving to suburban communities at a rapid pace and in large numbers. Historically, immigrants have settled in urban areas, but since the 1990s over 16 million immigrants have made their way to American suburbs (Ensle, Jones, Marquez, Shodavaram & Weaver, 2009). As of 2013, 56% of the nation’s immigrants were residing in suburban municipalities (Svajllenka & Wilson, 2014). These immigrants bring their children, who are often English language learners (ELLs), to suburban public school districts. Suburban schools have traditionally been homogeneous in class, race, language, and culture, but now educational leaders and teachers are challenged by the linguistic and cultural needs of a rapidly growing number of newcomers with limited English proficiency. Although teachers have attempted to adjust their pedagogical practices to meet the needs of this growing population, ELL academic achievement remains low in suburban school systems (Bridglall & Han, 2009; de Cohen & Clewell, 2007; Field, 2008; Drame & Xu, 2008).

Low academic achievement and English as a Second Language (ESL) program problems also exist for ELLs attending urban schools; however, the challenges for ELLs in suburban schools are compounded (Ayscue, in press; Bridglall & Han, 2009; de Cohen & Clewell, 2007; Diem, Holme & Welton, 2013; Ensle et al., 2009; Field, 2008). Challenges are significant for ELLs attending suburban schools because of the lack of resources, trained teachers and educational leaders, non-native language support and isolation of ELLs in separate educational settings (Ayscue, in press; Bridglall & Han, 2009; de Cohen & Clewell, 2007; Ensle et al., 2009; Field, 2008). In order to understand how ESL practices relate to achievement among suburban
ELLS, this qualitative multi-case study will examine three high achieving suburban public school districts that have been successful in meeting the needs of ELLs.

Research that has been conducted on the impact of immigrant suburbanization reveals that suburban immigration has had a profound impact on public schools (Ayscue, in press; Diem, Welton, Frankenberg & Jellison Holme, 2016). Communities that previously had not been responsible for educating ELLs in the past have had to implement programs to assist ELLs in their acculturation to a new society and in the growth of their English language proficiency (Diem et al., 2016; Bridgllall & Han, 2009; Ensle et al., 2009; Pryor, 2001). Teachers and administrators are often faced with the emotional, social and linguistic needs of immigrant children in their classrooms (Drame & Xu, 2008; Pryor, 2001). Suburban educators are not always equipped to deal with the challenges facing ELLs because they lack the experience as well as linguistic and cultural competency training (Diem et al., 2016; de Cohen & Clewell, 2007; Field, 2008; Pryor 2001). Nevertheless, federal and state legislation requires schools to provide an equal education for all students and ensure that ELLs are achieving academically (Ayscue, in press; Boals, Cook & Lundberg, 2011).

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this study is to identify and document suburban ESL practices as they relate to ELL achievement in three high achieving suburban public school districts in Massachusetts. The study will attempt to uncover strategies, allocations of resources and overall systemic ESL practices in these high achieving districts since these practices may be applicable and useful for other suburban schools that are also experiencing a growth in their ELL population.
Research Questions

Three research questions will determine the best methodology for this study as well as the structure for the collection, analysis, and presentation of data.

1. How do teachers and district administrators across three high achieving suburban school districts perceive the challenges to effectively meeting the needs of a growing ELL population?

2. How are teachers and district administrators across these high achieving suburban school districts currently meeting the needs of their growing ELL population, as perceived by these educators?

3. How do teachers and district administrators across these high achieving suburban school districts believe they could better foster and support the academic achievement of ELL students?

Significance

Understanding ELL achievement is extremely important to current educational leaders and policy makers because ELLs are the largest growing student population in the United States (de Cohen & Clewell, 2007; Field, 2008; Goldenberg, 2008). Historically, immigrants have settled in urban centers, but currently the immigration settlement trend has shifted to suburbia (Frey, 2011; Ensle et al., 2009). In fact Ensle et al. (2009) asserted that immigrants are as likely to live in the suburbs as their American-born counterparts. Therefore, since the suburbs are now home to many of the nation’s ELLs, examining how ESL practices relate to achievement for ELLs residing in suburbia could help inform other suburban school districts how to more effectively assist their ELL populations by contributing to pedagogy and policy.
Diem et al. (2016) stated that research addressing suburban ELLs will shed light on teaching and leadership practices. Drago-Severson (2009) recognized that change must occur in the educational system to support the growing diversity of the student population. She also stated that there is a “direct link” between supporting learning and promoting student achievement (Drago-Severson, 2009, p. 7). Further, in the context of a suburban setting, it is essential to build both developmental and instructional capacities that improve an educator’s ability to provide effective instruction (Drago-Severson, 2009).

Understanding the relationship between suburban school districts’ systemic ESL practices and their ELLs’ academic achievement will contribute to educators’ preparedness to assist and in serve culturally and linguistically diverse suburban students. Researchers have uncovered inadequacies in current preparation programs for educators who serve multicultural and diverse student populations (Brown, 2004; Carpenter, 2013; Kea, Oh & Trent, 2008; Ladson-Billings, 1995, 1999; McDonald, 2005; Siwatu, 2011; Wynne, 2001). Since 2011, Massachusetts has been scrutinized by the U.S. Department of Justice for not properly training educators to effectively instruct ELLs (Maxwell, 2012). Although the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) has completely revamped public school ESL education under the Rethinking Equity in Teaching English Language Learners (RETELL) initiative, urban district teachers and administrators have been given precedence for training over suburban educators (Massachusetts DESE, 2013). The Massachusetts DESE’s plan to provide ESL training to urban teachers and administrators first and in greater numbers further reinforces the need to gather research on suburban ELL achievement in relation to ESL practices, since scholars assert that education methods need to be adapted to meet the needs of culturally
and linguistically diverse students (Aycue, in press; Diem et al., 2016; Ensle et al., 2009; Siwatu, 2011).

Research relating ESL practices to ELL achievement in suburban communities can propel ESL education forward. By determining the relationship between suburban ESL practices and ELL achievement, causal factors may be uncovered, providing a basis for systemic change.

**Definition of Terms**

*Acculturation* - Acculturation, refers to ELLs' adapting to a new society while maintaining his or her own ethnic and cultural identity (Conchas, Oseguera and Vigil, 2012).

*ELL* - English language learner refers to a student whose native or first language is one other than English.

*ESL* - English as a second language is the subject or content area that aims to increase a student's English language proficiency in the language domains of reading, writing, speaking and listening.

*ESL practices* - For the purpose of this study, ESL practices not only encompass the subject area of ESL, but also practices within the school district to support or serve ELLs and their families, including, but not limited to teacher training, curriculum, community and parental involvement, assessment, equitable access, pedagogy and instructional practices for ELLs, and allocation of financial resources.

*Suburban public schools* - For the purpose of this study, suburban public schools are schools in school districts outside of cities and urban settings that historically lacked diversity in race, class and culture.
**Academic language** - Academic language refers to the language needed in order for a student to understand information specific to a content area (Boals et al., 2011).

**Theoretical Framework**

The Burke-Litwin model of organizational performance and change is the theoretical lens that is employed to inform the development of the interview research questions as well as to review and make sense of the data collected in this study. Although several organizational models address the functional aspects of an organization, the Burke-Litwin model is being employed because it addresses an organization’s response and change to the external environment and its impact on the performance of the organization (Burke, 2013). Further the model attends to how the external environment informs the inner workings of the organization. The Burke-Litwin model is based on an open-systems principle, addressing the input and output performances of an organization. The model distinguishes transformational and transactional factors as part of organizational change. Changes in transformational factors, such as environment, mission and strategy, leadership and culture will result in transformational change, which is revolutionary and sweeping change that requires significantly new behavior from organizational members and leaders (Burke & Litwin, 1992). On the other hand, changes in transactional factors, such as structure, management, systems, work climate, motivation, task requirements, individual performance, and individual needs will result in transactional change, which is evolutionary, selective change concerning the day-to-day operations of an organization (Burke & Litwin, 1992). Nevertheless, whether transformational or transactional change, change affects the organization as a whole.

The Burke-Litwin model of organizational performance and change is composed of twelve organizational variables that Burke and Litwin (1992) considered to be the most
important. These variables include external environment, leadership, management practices, work unit climate, motivation, individual and organizational performance, organization culture, systems policies and procedures, individual needs and values, mission and strategy, structure and task requirements and individual skills. Ultimately, if there is change in any one variable of the model, all of the additional variables within the organizational construct are affected (Burke, 2013). Therefore, the organization must adapt to any change if it is to maintain stability and success. The overall model is depicted in Figure 1

![Burke-Litwin's Organizational and Performance Change Model](image)

*Figure 1.* A model of Burke-Litwin’s Organizational and Performance Change Model. (Burke, 2013, p. 214).

Although the model appears complex, Burke and Litwin (1992) felt it necessary to provide a visual representation of the model in order to simplify organizational phenomena. The
arrows going in two directions reveal the open systems principle, depicting how change in one “box” impacts others, thus revealing an overall causal model (Burke & Litwin, 1992). Although Burke (2013) claimed that a three dimensional hologram would more accurately represent the interaction of the organizational variables, Figure 1 shows that the external environment has a greater weight than any other variable on organizational change. In addition, the model depicts the transformational variables (the upper half of the model) as being weighted more heavily than transactional variables (the lower half of the model) in causing organizational change.

Burke and Litwin (1992) offered a specific definition for each of the variables highlighted in the model. External environment refers to any outside condition that influences the performance of an organization. Mission and strategy is what management and employees believe is the central purpose of the organization. Leadership encompasses the senior personnel who provide organizational direction and who serve as role models for all those within the organization. Culture refers to the collection of “overt and covert” rules, values and principles that are enduring and guide organizational behavior (Burke & Litwin, 1992, p. 592). Structure is how people are arranged in specific areas and levels of responsibility. Management refers to how management uses employees and material resources to carry out the organization’s mission. Systems are the standardized policies “manifested” in the organization’s reward system, appraisal, goals, budget and human resource allocation (Burke & Litwin, 1992, p. 592). Climate refers to the expectations that organization members have that affect their relations with their boss, colleagues and others within the organization. Task requirements and individual skills are those skills and abilities that are required of those within the organization to accomplish assigned tasks. Individual needs and values are the personal psychological factors that provide desire for individual action, also referring to the extent to which one’s needs are met by one’s job.
Motivation is the behavioral tendency of individuals to move towards goals, aligning individual needs to an organization’s values. Finally, individual and organizational performance is the outcome or result measured by the indices of achievement (Burke & Litwin, 1992; Burke, 2011).

Although the Burke-Litwin model of organizational change and performance assists in understanding reality in relation to organizational change, Burke and Litwin (1992) cautioned that models do not always depict exact reality. Earlier organizational models provide support for the validity of the Burke-Litwin model; however, Burke and Litwin (1992) contended that their model uniquely hypothesizes the causes of organizational change through its top-down, transformational-transactional factors.

**Historical trajectory of the Burke-Litwin model.** Understanding its historical underpinnings gives credence to the Burke-Litwin model (1992). The model was derived from Litwin’s earlier research that addressed how different styles of leadership could impact organizational climates (Litwin & Stringer, 1968). Later, Litwin, Humphrey and Wilson (1978) determined that additional variables, including norms, culture, policies and procedures could also impact an organization’s climate, which eventually led to the emergence of the Burke-Litwin (1992) model.

The Burke-Litwin model came to fruition during the 1980s when Burke and Litwin (1992) collaborated in consulting with major organizations such as Citibank and British Airways. The construction of the 12 variables within the model was influenced by preceding scholarship, including Weisbord (1976), Porras (1987), and Tichy (1983). Weisbord (1976) was an expert on organizational development in the healthcare and medical industry and concluded that the healthcare system is comprised of three systems: task, governance and personal identity. Weisbord (1976) began a theoretical discussion, claiming that the lack of linkages between the
three identified systems within the healthcare industry contributed to the organizations’ difficulties. Similarly, Porras (1987) claimed that an organizational workplace is comprised of four interrelated subsystems: organizing arrangements, social factors, technology, and physical setting. Porras (1987) concluded that the four subsystems influence individual behavior and since individual behavior in turn impacts organizational performance, then individual behavior and organizational performance are dependent variables. Tichy (1983) surmised that environmental pressures impact the technical, political and cultural systems of an organization. The Burke-Litwin (1992) model goes beyond the previous scholarship by taking into account the total system of the organization to include the key variables of mission, strategy and culture at the group and local level.

As noted previously, each variable in the Burke-Litwin model represents both transformational and transactional factors within the organization. The transformational-transactional dimensions of the Burke-Litwin model are based upon previous leadership theory, especially Zalenik (1977) and Burns (1978). Zalenik (1977) differentiated leaders and managers and claimed that organizations need both in order to thrive. He claimed that leaders are motivated by vision and passion while managers seek order and quick resolution (Zalenik, 1977). In essence, the leader is more transformational, while the manager is more transactional. Conversely, Burns (1978) defined the concept of transformational leadership. His definition involved the intertwined relationship between leaders and followers, stating that both leaders and followers help to motivate each other and advance the system forward (Burns, 1978). Although Burns (1978) focused his research on political leaders, he helped to establish the ideas of transformational and transactional leadership present in organizational theory, including the Burke-Litwin model (1992). Burns (1978) claimed that transactional leaders typically maintain
the existing culture of an organization, while transformational leaders seek to transform the
culture of the organization. Hence, Burns (1978) impacted the placement of the leadership
variable at the top of Burke and Litwin’s model of organizational performance and change.

Since the Burke-Litwin model emphasizes the external environment of an organization as
having the most critical impact on organizational change, it is paramount to understand previous
models that describe the linkage between the external environment and the organization. For
instance, Katz and Kahn (1978) introduced the open system model, in which input and output
rely on one another and there is a connection between an organization and its external
environment. Prescott (1986) also demonstrated how significantly external environment
influences strategy and performance within an organization. Katz and Kahn’s (1978) notion of
an organization as an open system led to the open system layout of the Burke-Litwin model, in
which all the variables impact one another.

**Justification for employing the Burke-Litwin Model as a framework.** Although the
influx of ELLs to suburban public schools has been occurring at a rapid pace over the past two
decades, educating diverse linguistic and multi-cultural students is rather a new phenomenon in
suburban public schools. This influx is an environmental impact, which according to Burke
(2013) is the most critical factor in impacting organizational change. Further, Burke (2011)
claimed that the criticality of an organization’s external environment cannot be overestimated.
The Burke-Litwin model of organizational performance and change is an appropriate lens for
framing a study addressing ESL practices within suburban public schools because the model
essentially claims that in order for an organization to survive and remain successful, the
organization must adapt to change. For suburban public schools to be successful in educating
and promoting academic achievement among all of their students, including linguistically and
culturally diverse learners such as ELLs, then their ESL practices must adapt to meet the needs of this demographic shift among the student body. Therefore, examining the three high performing suburban public school districts through a Burke and Litwin (1992) organizational performance and change model lens will allow data to be uncovered addressing how school systems’ systemic ESL practices have successfully adapted to promote achievement and learning among ELLs.

Understanding the theoretical underpinnings of the model further provides validity and evidence to support its use as a framework for a qualitative multi-case study of suburban public school districts. For example, Burke and Litwin (1992) theorized that in large-scale organizational change, simple communication of the change is not sufficient for effective change. Instead, change must be planned and aligned with strategy and leader behavior (Burke & Litwin, 1992). This qualitative study examining ESL practices within suburban schools focuses on change dynamics within the total culture of the larger system and how the leadership and overall strategies align with the culture shift to adapt to the external change of the influx of ELLs to the system.

**How the Burke-Litwin Model informed the study.** The intent of this qualitative multi-case study addressing ESL practices in suburban public schools is to uncover how districts have adapted to the demographic change and have met challenges that have arisen. The intent is to utilize the Burke-Litwin model as a framework to inform the methodology as well as a lens for viewing the findings. The 12 key variables of the Burke-Litwin model will serve as a framework to view systemic suburban ESL practices.

Since Burke (2013) claimed that the top half of the model and the variables within it (external environment, mission and strategy, leadership, organization culture, and individual and
organizational performance) will require the most significant change because they have the most direct interaction with the external environment, then it is essential for this research to focus on these variables. Through qualitative interviews and focus groups with administrators and teachers, the researcher examined how the organization, the suburban school system, has adapted to the influx of ELLs to their schools. For example, educational leaders were asked how strategies within the school system have changed as a result of the increase of ELLs while teachers were asked how their individual practices and pedagogy have adapted to meet the needs of ELLs. Components of the Burke-Litwin model were used to frame ESL instruction in inclusive settings where ELLs are held to the same academic standards as their native English-speaking peers. The Burke-Litwin model as a framework provided the researcher a tool for both data collection and data analysis. Data collection focused on the transformational variables of organizational change that have the greatest impact on the success of the organization as a whole. Data analysis drew themes from across the 12 variables within the Burke-Litwin model.

Summary

Boals, Cook and Lundberg (2011) contended that in order to close the achievement gap there needs to be a better universal understanding among educators of what it means to be an ELL and what it means to assist non native English speaking students in achieving academic and language proficiency. In conjunction, schools must recognize the timely process it takes for students to fully acquire English in all domains of language including reading, writing, speaking and listening (Boals, Cook & Lundberg, 2011). Ardasheva, Kinny, and Tretter (2012) insisted that it is increasingly becoming more urgent to close the achievement gap among ELLs because their achievement will soon represent American student achievement as a whole: it is projected that by 2050 ELLs will constitute 40 percent of the total American public school population.
The best chance for educators to reach the ELL population and help them realize their potential is for all educators, administrators and teachers, to have a working knowledge of best ESL practices and to understand how the school system as an organization must adapt to the linguistic and cultural demographic shift. Framing a study with the Burke-Litwin model will allow the research to address the organizational change variables within a suburban public school district as an organization.
Chapter II: Literature Review

This literature review presents several strands of literature related to the study of this research topic. The first section includes research that addresses the demographic changes in several suburbs across the United States. The second section presents the impact on suburban public schools of educating and acculturating the growing body of ELL students. The third section examines ELL achievement and language acquisition in American schools. The fourth section presents education policies for English language learners. Finally, the last section of the literature review presents a detailed look at the challenges to serving ELLs in suburban public schools including: teacher training, native language support, disproportionate referral to special education services, and cultural competency.

Changes in Demographics in Suburbia

The immigrant population in the United States is over the 30 million mark and since the early 1990s, the American suburb has become a place where immigrants of all ethnic backgrounds come to live (Ensle et al., 2009; Diem, et al., 2016; DeRenzies, Singer & Welton, 2009; Paral, 2000; Perkins. 2000; Pryor, 2001; Winders, 2012). Historically, immigrants moved directly to urban centers, but currently the trend has shifted and immigrants are bypassing the cities for the suburbs (Ensle et al., 2009). Although in the past suburbia represented a place where White middle class citizens resided, Conrads (2009) contended that the increasing diversity in suburbia is a direct result of the increase in immigration to those communities. Clearly, some American suburbs are home to just as many immigrants as U.S. born residents (Conrads, 2009). While some suburban communities have had difficulties meeting the needs of newly arrived immigrants, others have welcomed the influx, especially the stimulation it brings to the local economy (Garcia, 2009). Nevertheless, the consensus among researchers is that
American suburbs need to prepare on a grand scale to accommodate their immigrant residents because the trend is profound (Ensle et al., 2009; Diem et al., 2016; DeRenzies et al., 2009; Paral, 2000; Perkins, 2000; Pryor, 2001; Winders, 2012).

The trend of large numbers of immigrants settling in suburban America is sudden and occurring rapidly. Garcia (2009) recognized that the scope, size and rapidity of immigration to the suburbs is a new phenomenon. Garcia (2009) examined the motivation behind the trend of large numbers of Mexican immigrants’ movement away from traditional urban settings to nontraditional, rural settings and hypothesized that the influx is due to two key factors: immigrants seeking a better life and immigrants following the American migration patterns of suburbanization. In many of the communities reviewed in the literature, where there is an increase in the immigrant population, there is also an increase in jobs available to foreign-born workers (Cocheo, 2004; DeRenzies et al., 2009; Garcia, 2009; Paral, 2000). For example, substantial immigration to the suburbs of Gwinnett County, Georgia coincided with the 1996 Olympic Games held in Atlanta (DeRenzies et al., 2009). The Olympic Games brought a plethora of construction projects that attracted Latino immigrants. Although many immigrant workers indeed fill service and manufacturing jobs, it would be an error not to recognize that many are also climbing the economic ladder (Cocheo, 2004). Whether immigrants fill service and manufacturing jobs or obtain high-level positions as business owners or doctors, their economic growth propels them to life in the suburbs. Seemingly, economic growth and suburban life go hand and hand for immigrants. According to DeRenzies et al. (2009), with economic growth attracting immigrants, suburbia can prepare itself for increasing diversity among its citizens.
It has been documented that 51% of Hispanic immigrants coming to the United States are moving directly to suburban and rural areas (Grice, Lichter, Parisi, & Taquino, 2010). With the influx of immigrants to the suburbs, demographic changes will have a major impact on local government and institutions such as public schools (Ayscue, in press; Diem et al., 2016; Diem et al. 2013; Paral, 2000; Pryor, 2001; Winders, 2012). Traditionally, local municipalities have attempted to meet the linguistic and cultural needs of immigrant populations; however, the rapid influx to areas that have never had large populations of immigrants has been difficult, particularly for public schools (Ayscue, in press; Diem et al. 2016; Siwatu, 2011).

**Immigrant Suburbanization’s Impact on Public Schools**

Suburban public school districts are struggling to meet the growing needs of the immigrant population, particularly due to linguistic and cultural differences from their native English speaking peers (Ayscue; 2016; de Cohen & Clewell, 2007; Conchas et al., 2012; Diem et al., 2016; Ensle, et al., 2009; Field, 2008; Pryor, 2001). With the growing influx of immigrants to suburban areas, public schools have seen a rapid rise in their ELL population, those students with limited English language proficiency (Ensle et al., 2009). The ELL population in the United States is the fastest growing student group from grades K-12 (de Cohen & Clewell, 2007; Field, 2008). ELLs account for 10 percent of the student population with 80 percent speaking Spanish and the remaining 20 percent speaking one of some 400 other native languages and dialects (Field, 2008). Diem et al. (2013) contended that over the past 20 years, ethnic diversity in the suburbs has grown by 82%. Some suburbs of states that have been non-traditional places for immigration have seen an extraordinary growth in their ELL populations. Further, states such as Alabama, Indiana, Kentucky, Nebraska, North Carolina, South Carolina and Tennessee have seen a 300 percent growth in their ELLs enrolled in public schools (Field, 2008).
According to Perkins (2000), the millennial wave of immigrants is younger than groups that have come to the United States in the past; therefore, they have more school-aged children, which has significant implications for the American public schools. Schools are often finding it difficult to meet the educational, social and emotional needs of immigrant children (Conchas et al., 2012; Field, 2008; Pryor, 2001). The difficulty is due to many factors including limited resources and lack of trained teachers and support staff (de Cohen & Clewell, 2007; Diem et al., 2016; Field, 2008; Siwatu, 2011; Pryor, 2001). Even though schools are having difficulty, they are still expected to assist ELLs in their acculturation to a new society, with their competency in the English language and with overall academic achievement (Ayscue, in press; Boals et al., 2011).

Even before teaching ELLs English, public schools and educators are often met with the task of working to acculturate, or to adapt, children with emotionally traumatized backgrounds to a new society (Conchas et al., 2012). In a qualitative study, Pryor (2001) took a critical research perspective when she attempted to give voice to an underserved group through interviews with immigrant families and children attending schools in a small suburban public school district in Michigan. Pryor’s (2001) study revealed that many of the Yugoslavian and Arab ELL students came to American schools from war torn countries and from refugee situations. Although Pryor’s (2001) study revealed that ELLs are optimistic about their future in America and in American schools, the trauma associated with war and refugee situations requires much attention from public school staff and administrators.

Not all ELLs come to American schools from war torn countries or from refugee backgrounds; however, even American born ELL students often need help adjusting and acculturating to a new environment in order to be successful in the classroom. Conchas et al.
(2012) examined the relationship between acculturation and school success for ELLs. Conchas et al. (2012) observed data from three time periods, 1974, 1988 and 2004 to measure the influence that successful acculturation, adapting to a new society while maintaining one's own ethnic and cultural identity, has on academic success. The data from both urban and suburban communities revealed that an acculturation process that allowed for strong support of the native culture while assimilating to a new one contributed to good academic outcomes for ELLs (Conchas et al., 2012). Knowing that acculturation is so important for ELLs, makes it imperative for American schools that are educating ELLs to have acculturation plans in place.

Beyond acculturation, which can be a difficult process for schools to foster, establishing effective ESL programs to instruct immigrant children and ELLs in English can be costly and often times inadequate (Pryor, 2001). The ESL program model used in a public school district typically corresponds with the number of ELLs that the school district enrolls. For example, a suburban community with a low population of ELLs would most likely not include bilingual education, but would instead instruct ELLs using a pullout approach, taking a student out of the mainstream classroom to teach an English curriculum, which can be a harmful practice because it is isolating and causes discontinuity in the daily schedule (Ayscue, in press; de Cohen & Clewell, 2007; Bridglall & Han, 2009; Field, 2008). With the influx of immigrants, suburban schools struggle to establish more effective ESL practices (Ayscue, in press; Bridglall & Han, 2009; de Cohen & Clewell, 2007; Diem et al., 2016; Ensle et al. 2009, Field, 2008).

In a large national quantitative study, Bridglall and Han (2009) examined the correlation between ESL programs and ELLs’ academic “trajectories” from kindergarten through Grade 5 (p. 445). The findings reveal that there is indeed a relationship between the ESL support an ELL student receives and his or her academic success. Bridglall and Han (2009) asserted that ESL
services and providing translators for families significantly improves the math scores of ELLs, and at times ELLs surpass their native English-speaking peers. Bridglall and Han’s (2009) data reinforces the importance of strong ESL programs and practices within public education.

**ELL Achievement and Language Acquisition**

Boals et al. (2011) contended that educating ELLs and ensuring their success has proven a difficult task despite the implementation of ESL programs in public schools. Compared to native English speaking peers, ELLs consistently have lower academic achievement (Ardasheva et al., 2011; Drame & Xu, 2008). In 2005, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reported that 46% of fourth grade ELLs scored below basic in mathematics compared to 18% of native English speaking peers (as cited in Boals et al., 2011).

Boals et al. (2011) contended that in order to close the achievement gap, there needs to be more universal understanding among educators of what it means to be limited English proficient (LEP). Along with this understanding, schools must recognize the time required for students to fully acquire English in all domains of language including reading, writing, speaking and listening (Boals et al., 2011; Cummins, 1980). Ardasheva et al. (2012) insisted that it is increasingly becoming more urgent to close the achievement gap among ELLs since their achievement will soon represent American achievement as a whole.

Ardasheva et al. (2012) illustrated the importance of becoming fully competent in English in order to achieve all around academic success. Since little research focused on the academic achievement of Former Limited English Proficient (FLEP) students, Ardasheva et al. (2012) conducted a multi-level analysis of current ELLs and former ELLs. The results consistently showed that FLEP students outperformed current ELLs across reading and mathematics (Ardasheva et al., 2012). The data reflecting that FLEP students outperform ELLs
and succeed at grade level curriculum proves Cummins’ (1980) hypothesis that once ELLs acquire proficiency in academic language they will no longer experience academic disadvantages.

According to major second language acquisition theorists, acquiring academic language is critical to becoming academically successful in school (Cummins, 1980, 2003; Krashen, 1996). Academic language refers to the language needed in order for a student to understand information specific to a content area (Boals et al., 2011). For example, the academic language of science would include vocabulary such as *hypothesis, observation, and experiment*. Also, the academic language of science often uses the passive voice; therefore, for students to fully comprehend the elements of a science lesson, he or she would have to know the specific vocabulary and grammar structures of its academic language (Boals et al., 2011). ELLs tend to acquire social language, otherwise known as Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) in one to three years; however, it often takes ELLs five to seven years or longer to acquire academic language skills, otherwise known as Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency Skills (CALPS) (Cummins, 1980, 2003). Many schools support ELLs in ESL instructional programs for only three years despite the evidence that academic language contributes to the overall success of ELLs (Bridgall & Han, 2009). Research indicates that three years of ESL support may not be enough for ELLs to acquire adequate academic language (Cummins, 1980, 1981, 2005, 2012).

As a result of current research, scholars have begun to focus on the acquisition of academic language for ELLs (Ardasheva et al., 2012; Boals et al., 2011; de Cohen & Clewell, 2007). Although the focus for ELLs is on academic language, some ESL programs are not often structured to support academic language acquisition. Researchers repeatedly stress the
effectiveness of bilingual programs and the use of the native language to acquire a second
language, yet some ESL programs, especially those in suburban and low incidence schools, do
not use native language instructional support to promote academic language growth among ELLs
(de Cohen & Clewell, 2007; Bridglall & Han, 2009). Therefore, the lack of academic language
growth impedes academic achievement among ELLs.

Since it is clear that academic language proficiency leads to academic success in all areas
for ELLs, it is imperative that schools have effective tools to assess ELLs’ language proficiency
levels. Historically, assessing ELLs’ proficiency levels across content areas has not always been
effective (Boals et al., 2011). For example, in Massachusetts, English language proficiency
levels before 2013 were assessed using the Massachusetts English Proficiency Assessment
(MEPA) and the Massachusetts English Language Assessment-Oral (MELA-O) (Massachusetts
DESE, 2013). The MEPA/MELA-O measured progress in areas of English language arts only,
but did not measure the academic language of mathematics, science, and social studies
(Massachusetts DESE, 2013). As a result of this incomplete measure of academic English
language proficiency, Massachusetts along with more than 30 other states in the United States
have begun using World Class Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA) because it allows
schools to measure both social and academic English language proficiency across content areas
(Maxwell, 2012). Effectively assessing English language proficiency allows schools to
determine proper ESL instructional programs for ELLs.

**Legislation Surrounding ESL in Public Schools**

ESL instructional approaches and practices undoubtedly impact ELL achievement, but on
a larger scale state and federal legislation has worked at times both to the benefit of and the
detriment of ELLs (Ayscue, in press). Equitable education for ELLs first became a Civil Rights
issue in 1974 with the landmark *Lau vs. Nichols* case, in this case, 1,800 Chinese students claimed that instruction solely in the English language prevented them from achieving academic success. The Supreme Court ruled on the basis of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, concluding that an equitable education must be provided to non-native English speakers. Following the Supreme Court’s decision, the Equal Educational Opportunity Act of 1975 was passed, mandating schools to overcome the “language barrier” in the education of non-native English speakers (Field, 2008, p. 25). The Equal Educational Opportunity Act makes it clear to public schools that they must institute effective ESL programs and practices for ELLs, promoting an equitable education; otherwise the schools are violating ELLs’ civil rights.

The Equal Educational Opportunity Act is intended to provide ELLs equal academic opportunities, and No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in 2002 required demonstrated proficiency among ELLs (de Cohen & Clewell, 2007; Field, 2008). NCLB states that an ELL should advance about one level of English proficiency per year until he or she is exited from ESL programs and has achieved full English proficiency. For example, states like Massachusetts, using the WIDA scale, a six-tiered scale to determine English language proficiency will typically exit ELLs when they reach a proficiency level of 5 (Massachusetts DESE, 2013). NCLB also calls for the monitoring of ELLs for at least two years after being exited from an ESL program. Ayscue (in press) claimed that although the intent of NCLB was to close the achievement gap for all races and cultures, it restricted the way schools respond to the demographic changes by focusing attention on standardized testing. The Equal Educational Opportunity Act requires an equitable education for ELLs while NCLB requires demonstrated proficiency.

Although the federal government has a profound impact on education for ELLs, state governments have also effected legislation that impacts education for non-native English
speakers. In Massachusetts, as a result of the passing of Question 2 in 2001, under Governor Mitt Romney, public schools essentially moved away from a bilingual instructional model for educating ELLs to an English language only model (Maxwell, 2012). Although Massachusetts’s general law allows for clarification in students’ native languages, bilingual instruction has essentially been eliminated (Maxwell, 2012). Perhaps a monolingual approach to educating ELLs has not been effective, since most scholars agree that a bilingual approach with a reliance on the native language is the most effective means of acquiring a second language (Cummins, 1980, 1981, 2005; Krashen, 1982, 1996). Nevertheless, Massachusetts has come under fire by the federal government for not properly “schooling” ELLs (Maxwell, 2012, p. 1). As a result, in 2013, Massachusetts implemented the Rethinking Equity for English Language Learners (RETELL), requiring intense training for all general classroom and content teachers in sheltered English instructional approaches for ELLs and joined the WIDA consortium in order to more effectively assess ELLs’ academic language proficiency (Maxwell, 2012).

Challenges for English Language Learners in Suburban Schools

Although federal legislation such as The Equal Educational Opportunity Act of 1975 and NCLB (2002) mandate that schools must make education accessible for ELLs and that all students must achieve academic success, suburban schools responsible for educating ELLs are challenged in meeting these requirements (Ayscue, in press; Bridglall & Han, 2009; de Cohen & Clewell, 2007; Diem et al., 2013; Ensle et al., 2009; Field, 2008; Pryor, 2001). According to Field (2008), ELLs living in rural and suburban areas are at higher risk for low academic achievement and dropping out of school.

The increase in linguistically and culturally diverse populations and ELLs in the suburbs has dramatically changed the way suburban public schools operate (Ayscue, in press). Some
suburban schools may not have had an ESL program in the past, but have instituted programs to meet the needs of the growing immigrant population and their children (Pryor, 2001). Paral (2000) estimated that over 20 percent of all suburban children are either immigrants or children of immigrants and fall into the category of English language learners requiring appropriate English instruction in schools. Although suburban schools are attempting to keep up with the growing demand for ESL instruction, they are falling short in some areas (Ayscue, in press; de Cohen & Clewell, 2007; Diem et al., 2016; Diem et al., 2013; Ensle et al., 2009; Field, 2008).

ELLs seldom spend enough time with properly trained ESL instructors because often one educator teaches all ELL students in an entire school district (Ayscue, in press; Siwatu, 2011; Field, 2008). Families of ELL students often have difficulty communicating with schools and teachers (Pryor, 2001). ELLs are both over- and under-identified as needing special education services (Hemmer & Linn, 2011). ELLs also at times feel insecure attempting to adapt to an environment where multiculturalism is not visible in either schools or textbooks (Ayalon, 2003). Although ELLs face some of these same challenges in urban schools, the problems in suburban communities widens since according to Ayscue (in press), many suburbs are only in the beginning stages of implementing programs to support their growing diverse populations.

In suburban schools, it is common for ELL students to receive 30 to 45 minutes of ESL instruction or less from a qualified ESL instructor per school day (Field, 2008). ELL students spend the majority of time in mainstream classrooms, learning from teachers who may or may not have training in ESL approaches and methods (de Cohen & Clewell, 2007). Field (2008) claimed that ELL students in suburbia spend “most of the time” with teachers who are not qualified to teach them (p. 3). While some of the lack of qualified ESL professionals in suburbia is due to suburban schools adjusting to demographic changes, funding and allocation of budget
elsewhere is often the major cause. Field (2008) contended that limited funding creates challenges; however, some suburban communities are recognizing that mainstream classroom teachers need to receive training in ESL practices through professional development courses. Educators will only see real improvement when all those involved with the education of ELLs acquire the knowledge and strategies to effectively do so (Ayscue, in press; de Cohen & Clewell, 2007; Field, 2008; Siwatu, 2011).

**Teachers of ELLs.** In order to effectively service diverse populations of students such as ELLs, teachers must be trained in pedagogical approaches that foster cultural competency and equate social justice in schools with student achievement (Theoharis, 2007; Brown, 2004, Cambron-McCabe et al., 2007; McDonald; 2005; Siwatu, 2011). Cambron-McCabe et al. (2007) contended that teacher preparation programs must have three goals in order to promote equity and social justice in schools: raising academic achievement of all students, preparing students to live in society, and assigning students to inclusive classrooms that engage in rich academic curriculum and discourse. Brown (2004) added to Cambron-McCabe et al.’s (2008) tenets for social justice in educator preparation programs when she asserts, enriching curriculum for all students and promoting efficacy in evaluating students as goals for attaining cultural competency. Currently, instilling cultural competency in suburban educators is an urgent task, especially due to the fact that schools are now responsible for educating a large number of immigrant children (Ayscue, in press; Riehl, 2000).

Ayscue (in press) claimed that along with cultural competency training, having a more culturally and linguistically diverse teaching staff could have a positive impact on ELLs’ academic outcomes. About 85 percent of suburban teachers are White (Frankenberg, 2013). Not only do culturally and linguistically diverse teachers and administrators serve as role models for
ELLs, but culturally diverse students taught by culturally diverse teachers tend to achieve at higher academic levels, have fewer behavior problems, lower drop out rates and fewer absences from school (Lucas & Villegas, 2011).

Younce (2011) examined middle school language arts teacher attitudes toward ELLs and the inclusion of ELLs in mainstream classrooms, arguing that teacher attitudes contribute to ELL achievement. According to Younce (2011) the fact that the ELL population is growing, coupled with the fact that NCLB holds ELLs to the same accountability as native English speaking peers to pass standardized tests, creates challenges for classroom teachers. Younce’s (2011) findings supported the need for more educational programs for teachers to address the increasing demand to teach ELLs in inclusive classrooms. Another implication was the need for added support from administrators of teachers responsible for the education of ELLs. Finally, results from the study implied that students need additional time to acquire English prior to entering a mainstream classroom, pass content classes and meet expectations on standardized tests (Younce, 2011).

While these results might imply the need for additional ESL support, having ELLs essentially segregated from mainstream classrooms until they are proficient in English violates their civil rights. Ayscue (in press) contended that pullout, segregated instruction can have unintended consequences for ELLs such as them having difficulty reintegrating to general instruction later in the day. State and federal laws call for equal education rights and for public schools to make instructional provisions in educating ELLs, yet research shows that this is not always occurring.

Ensle et al. (2009) investigated the personal beliefs of teachers, especially those in suburban schools. Although their overall findings indicated positive teacher feelings toward ELLs and diversity within the classroom, some data indicated a lack of second language acquisition training among teachers. Some teachers from two suburban high schools commented
that parents should attempt to speak English and students should not use any language other than English in the classroom (Ensle et al., 2009). Comments negating the use of ELLs’ native language, revealed a gap in understanding second language acquisition and the key role that native language plays in acquiring English (Cummins, 1980, 1981, 2005). Discrepancies in teachers’ knowledge about ESL pedagogy and practice indeed supported the claim that not all teachers are prepared to instruct ELLs (Ayscue, in press; Diem et al., 2016; Siwatu, 2011; Field, 2008).

In suburban districts, ESL teachers often must instruct the district’s entire ELL student population from grades K-12 (Field, 2008). ESL teachers are unable to keep up with the curriculum for all grade levels and the learning levels of such varying ages of children. Gaylord & Passuite (2008) reported that one ESL teacher in the suburbs of Syracuse, New York had a rigorous schedule, supporting ELLs in six mainstream classrooms each day and bringing ELL students back to her ESL room for English instruction later in the school day. Even if a teacher is qualified to teach ELLs, putting unrealistic demands on him or her may lead to students not receiving enough ESL instruction or feeling that the ESL teacher is not readily available for additional assistance. Field (2008) asserted that as the number of ELLs in suburbia increase, the demands placed on the suburban ESL teacher will also increase.

**Native language supports.** In Massachusetts and other states, qualified professionals now assess ELLs’ English language proficiency using the WIDA Access Placement Test (W-APT) and WIDA Assessing Comprehension and Communication in English State-to-State (ACCESS) tests (Maxwell, 2012). Although at times school systems are required by law to hire interpreters to administer assessments in an ELL’s native language, suburban teachers and administrators do not always have access to or the financial means to get translators. Lack of
assessment in the native language means that evaluators may not obtain a complete picture of the students’ academic needs (Field, 2008). Thus, without proper assessment, students may not benefit from proper instruction.

The absence of interpreters not only affects students’ assessment, it also affects the home – school connection. Parents cannot effectively communicate with teachers if there is a language barrier. According to Paral (2000), additional factors may contribute to there being a problem with home – school communication. Some parents may come from a culture where it is not commonplace for parents to interact with school administrators. Parents may also not fully understand the inner workings of the American school system and may not realize that ELL students are entitled to certain services to assist them in their language acquisition. Schools often do not provide already overtaxed teachers with the tools to help connect with parents (Field, 2008; Gaylord & Passuite, 2008). Because of the lack of funding and services in suburbia, teachers often go far beyond the realm of the classroom acting as liaison, interpreter, and advocate.

**Over and under identification of ELLs for special education services.** Still another complicated issue facing ELLs in the suburban classroom is the over- and under-identification of special education needs and learning disabilities. Hemmer and Linn (2011) examined the problem of “overrepresentation” of ELLs in special education programs (p. 70). ELLs are 27% more likely to be placed in special education programs during elementary grades and even more likely to be placed in them during secondary years (Drame & Xu, 2008). The implications of ELLs in special education programs are that their educational needs are not being met even though their academic difficulties could be due to language rather than disabilities (Hemmer & Linn, 2011). Hemmer and Linn (2011) also cited additional studies that have found
underrepresentation of ELLs in special education programs. In a quantitative parabolic study using risk ratio, Hemmer and Linn (2011) analyzed the patterns of ELLs in special education programs in 31 school districts in southern, Texas and collected data over a six-year period from 2004 until 2010. They calculated the relative risk ratio to compare the number of ELL students who are identified as requiring special education services with those ELLs who are not. Ultimately, Hemmer and Linn (2011) concluded that while the relative risk ratio of ELLs in special education programs has decreased from 2.26 to 1.35 over six years, the data still revealed an overrepresentation of ELLs in special education programs. A disproportionate number of ELLs being identified as requiring special education services is relevant to suburban school districts, although broader studies should be conducted to examine suburban ESL populations across the country to determine whether this phenomenon exists nationally and could indicate a cause of low ELL achievement.

**Acculturation.** Still another challenge for students in suburban schools is a feeling of being an outsider or “other” in a historically homogeneous, White, middle-class environment. Even if the learning environment often has little or no representation of multiculturalism, students must simultaneously acquire a new language and assimilate to a new culture (Conchas et al., 2012). According to Ayalon (2003), the suburban experience is missing even from multicultural texts; therefore, even if teachers chose multicultural texts to use in a lesson, students may not relate. Ayalon (2003) asserted that textbooks should address the issues of suburban communities from a multi-cultural perspective. Students feel a lack of acceptance when it appears that no one recognizes and respects their home cultures. Since suburban classrooms have been homogeneous for most of their history, creating a more culturally friendly environment will take time (Ayalon, 2003).
As suburban schools’ practices begin to evolve to meet the needs of their English language learner students, ELLs will be more successful (Ayscue, in press). According to Perkins (2000), it takes three generations to assimilate to a new culture. Perhaps it will also take suburbia time to adapt to their new demographic population; however, there is a sense of urgency to meet the current needs of ELLs and to close the achievement gap in public schools. Even if they have been in the United States for a relatively short time, ELLs are held to the same standards as their native English speaking peers and must pass standardized tests. School administrators need to require more professional development courses in ESL instruction, advocate for their students, and put funding towards successful language programs and services to bridge the gap between school and home (Ayscue, in press; Diem et al., 2016; Field, 2008; Siwatu, 2011).

**Summary and Implications**

This review of literature associated with the problem of practice, low academic achievement among ELLs in suburban communities in relation to ESL practice, examines the issues involving and impacting suburban ELLs’ academic achievement. Educators are faced with the challenges of simultaneously assisting students with the acculturation process and with the acquisition of English. These seem insurmountable tasks to some educators. Pryor (2001), anecdotally recounted an incident when one educator of ELLs was so overwhelmed with the needs of ELLs in a small school, that she shouted, “God help us” to voice her frustration (p. 275). Although federal and state mandates have provided a framework for equal education and proficiency standards for ELLs, challenges, especially in suburban schools still face ELLs, their families, and educators (Ayscue, in press; Conchas et al., 2012; de Cohen & Clewell, 2007; Diem et al., 2016; Ensle et al., 2009; Field, 2008). Since there is a measurable gap in research
regarding suburban ESL practices in relation to ELL achievement, it is critical to conduct further study in order to understand and develop effective ESL programs in suburban and rural public school districts (Diem et al., 2016).

This qualitative research included a multi-case study of suburban communities using interviews with educators, administrators, and those involved with the academic instruction of ELLs to understand the relationship between ESL practices and academic achievement among ELLs in suburban districts. Plakhotnik and Rocco (2009) contended that the importance of any study is to demonstrate “linkages,” meaning that the study must relate to the larger theoretical ideas in a particular field (p. 121). Scholars and educators of immigrant children and ELLs must continue to interrogate how schools can provide the best opportunities for ELLs to succeed in American classrooms. With the growth of immigration so heavily concentrated in suburban areas, this interrogation takes on a greater sense of urgency.
Chapter III: Research Design

The purpose of this qualitative multi-case study was to understand how ESL practices relate to the achievement of ELLs in suburban public schools in Massachusetts. The central research question when examining ESL practices addressed the perceptions of teachers and district administrators across three high achieving suburban public school districts regarding the needs and challenges of effectively assisting a growing ELL population. The methodology included a multi-case approach rather than a single case study because the researcher was able to examine commonalities across cases that may demonstrate broader themes, which could benefit other suburban public school districts in assisting ELLs. Commonalities would not have emerged by reviewing a single case.

The study was qualitative in nature as the purpose of the study was exploratory (Creswell, 2013). Since the current immigration trend within the United States reveals suburban migration and an influx of ELLs to suburban public schools, exploring systemic ESL practices within high achieving suburban school districts is necessary as it may assist in the education and acculturation of linguistically and culturally diverse students in other suburban public schools. The researcher addressed the research from a constructivist perspective. Constructivist hermeneutics or interpretation defines knowledge as being dependent upon the individuals involved with the research process, making meaning from a particular standpoint (Mertens, 2010). The researcher constructed meaning gleaned from the interviews with the Assistant Superintendent, the ESL Coordinator and focus groups with teachers across grade levels in the school districts that addressed ESL educational practices, policies, strategies and allocations of resources in the suburban public schools.
The researcher selected a multi-case study and deemed it to be the most appropriate methodological approach for examining ESL practices in three high performing suburban public school districts because case study research aims to study a “bounded system” that will assist the researcher in understanding other cases (Bassey, 1999; Creswell, 2012; Gerring, 2004; Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995; Yin, 1994). Yin (2014) claimed that the case study method investigates a contemporary phenomenon within a real life context. In this case, the contemporary phenomenon is the incorporation of ESL practices within suburban educational institutions to support the dramatic increase of ELLs in suburban classrooms. Since the literature reveals an achievement gap for ELLs attending suburban schools, a multi-case study examining ESL practices within the bounded systems of three high achieving suburban public school districts will contribute to uncovering inadequacies and best practices, which could inform other schools, in particular, suburban public schools as they try to better support the academic achievement of their ELL population. Bassey (1999) asserted that case studies are a “step to action” and that their insights may be directly interpreted and put to use (p. 23). Further, Stake (1995) claimed that case study is an examination of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within specific circumstances. Although case study research is not sampling research, Stake (1995) claimed that the researcher should maximize what he or she can learn as it may be representative of other cases. Several schools or districts could be studied to examine suburban ESL practices in relation to ELLs’ academic achievement; however, Creswell (2013) cautioned the researcher that the more cases that are included, the less in-depth the study may be. Therefore, this multi-case study, focusing on ESL practices took place in three high achieving suburban public school districts in Massachusetts.
Philosophical Underpinnings and Overview

Perhaps the definition that best exemplifies why the multi-case study was an appropriate approach for examining ESL practices in relation to ELL achievement in suburban schools is Gerring’s (2004) depiction of it as “an intensive study of a single unit for the purpose of understanding a larger class of similar units” (p. 249). In order to justify and substantiate the use of case study to examine the aforementioned problem of practice, it is essential to explore the theoretical underpinnings of case study methodology.

Bassey (1999), Creswell (2013), Baxter and Jack (2008), and Feagin, Orum and Sjoberg (1991) are qualitative research scholars in their own right; however, they collectively concurred that the major theoretical underpinnings of case study can be attributed to the works of Stake (1995), Yin (1994) and Merriam (1998). Additionally, Baxter and Jack (2008) contended that the two key approaches to guiding case study methodology are Yin’s (2003) and Stake’s (1995), which both seek to reveal the essence of the phenomenon. Bassey (1999) even went as far as to deem Yin (1994) as the leading “exponent” in the social sciences of case study within the United States (p. 26).

Stake (1995), Yin (1994, 2003) and Merriam (1998) concurred that the researcher approaches case study from a constructivist perspective, that is, the researcher uses case study to make meaning and garner knowledge about the related phenomena. Stake (1995) wrote, “No aspect of knowledge is purely of the external world, devoid of human construction” (p. 100). Further, Merriam (1998) asserted that case study seeks to understand the process and uniqueness of a phenomenon that would otherwise not be known. The strength of case study is that it allows the researcher to investigate complex social units, consisting of multiple variables of potential importance in understanding or constructing meaning from the phenomenon (Merriam, 1998).
Although scholars agree that case study as a methodology primarily takes on a constructivist approach within a “bounded system,” they also apply their nuances to that definition (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995; Yin, 1994). Merriam (1998) defined case study as being particularistic, descriptive and heuristic. Particularistic, in that case studies focus on particular situations, events or programs. Descriptive means that the end product of case study includes a rich, “thick” description of the phenomenon under study. Heuristic means that case studies illuminate the reader’s understanding of the phenomenon (Merriam, 1998, p. 29). Merriam (1998) argued that Stake (1995) and Yin (1994) have differing views regarding case study in that Yin (1994) focused on the research process, Stake (1995) focused on pinpointing the unit of study, and Merriam (1998) focused on the end product.

As defined by Yin (1994, 2003), Stake (1995) and Merriam (1998), case study research differs from other qualitative methodological approaches because it involves in-depth understanding of a single case to explore a problem using the case as an illustration. Unique to the case study is that it can involve both quantitative and qualitative approaches. The defining features of case study include: identifying a specific case, having an in-depth understanding of the case with multiple sources of data, developing a sound description of the case, presenting data in a theoretical model, and ending with conclusions formed by the researcher. Another unique facet of case study methodology of case study is that purposeful sampling may apply and analysis can either be holistic or embedded (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2003). The challenges and drawbacks of case study relate to the decisions that the researcher must make. The researcher must decide on the scope of the case study, whether the study will be of a single case or multiple cases, and must establish a rationale for purposeful sampling.
Rationale for Employing a Multi-Case Study

Yin (1994) and Bromley (1986) determined that it is appropriate for the researcher to employ case study when addressing “how” and “why” questions. Bromley (1986) wrote that case study “gets as close to the subject of interest as it possibly can” (p. 32). Further, case study is the appropriate methodology when the case has clear, identifiable boundaries. Merriam (1998) urged the researcher to question whether the case has a finite number of people that could be interviewed or observed. If not, it is not bounded and thus, is not appropriate for a case study approach.

Researchers must identify the best case to study, which may be an individual, several individuals, a program, an event, or an activity (Creswell, 2013). Yin (2003) and Merriam (1998) both suggested purposeful sampling when identifying a case, which is sampling that will allow the researcher to glean insight from a sample where the most can be learned. Creswell (2013) prefers to employ purposeful sampling to select cases that reveal different perspectives of the problem.

In terms of this qualitative case study of high performing suburban public school districts for ELLs, participants from such districts revealed great insight into ESL practices and suburban school systems’ adaptations to meet ELLs' academic, socio-cultural and linguistic needs. By identifying suburban schools that have been successful in adapting to the systemic change of the demographic shift, other schools, legislators and policy makers could potentially understand the best approaches for assisting ELLs in settings that have not historically been responsible for educating linguistically and culturally diverse students. The in-depth understanding of best practices in educating ELLs in suburbia that a multi-case study provides is critical in the current educational climate in which diversity abounds in suburban schools.
Role of the Researcher

The role of the researcher in case study can be likened to that of a conductor of a symphony. The researcher guides and organizes the case study much like the conductor guides and organizes the musicians in a symphony. The researcher must have continuous interaction with the case and the voices of the participants must be heard just as the conductor has continuous interaction with the musicians who play music for the audience. Both Yin (2003) and Stake (1995) concurred that the researcher in case study must be well trained since qualitative case study calls for constant interaction between the researcher and the phenomena. Stake (1995) surmised that most qualitative researchers are relativists. Relativists believe that the value of interpretation varies. Just as the conductor, musicians and audience interpret the musical production in unique ways, each researcher contributes uniquely to the study of a case and each reader derives unique meaning (Stake, 1995). Overall, the researcher has the obligation to provide high-quality input for readers, provide opportunities for vicarious experiences, include accounts, provide adequate raw data, describe the methods of the case, and provide reactions to the data (Stake, 1995).

For this qualitative multi-case study, I as the researcher examined my positionality as an ESL teacher and coordinator in a suburban school district and uncovered biases that are present. However, my training and knowledge in ESL pedagogy, laws, policy and legislation allowed me continuous interaction with the phenomena. Further, I like the conductor, organized a high quality case study by gathering the data, synthesizing the data, and presenting reactions to the data so that readers can derive their own meaning about educating ELLs in suburban American schools.
Participants

Creswell (2013), Yin (2003) and Merriam (1998) suggested purposeful sampling when identifying a case, sampling that will allow the researcher to gain the most insight. Suburban schools are struggling to meet the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse students (Ayscue, in press; Bridglall & Han, 2009; de Cohen & Clewell, 2007; Field, 2008; Drame & Xu, 2008). Therefore, the researcher conducted a multi-case study within the bounded settings of three suburban public school districts that according to the Massachusetts DESE (2015-2016) have had a rapid increase in ELLs over the past years, have revealed high ELL achievement scores on annual state standardized testing and have received successful evaluations of their English language education (ELE) programs during Coordinated Program Reviews (CPR) conducted by the Massachusetts DESE.

For this study, the three high performing suburban public school districts were initially identified through a review of data available on the Massachusetts DESE website. Twenty suburban school districts south of Boston were examined to uncover high ELL achievement based on state standardized tests, high performance and compliance with the ELE program based on the Massachusetts CPR. The majority of the 20 districts reviewed exhibited failing scores on standardized tests and low performing ELE programs. However, three suburban districts revealed passing standardized test scores for ELLs and high performing ELE programs based on 18 criteria during the CPR. The 18 criteria that the districts’ ELE programs were assessed on during the Massachusetts DESE CPR, included: annual assessment for ELLs, MCAS scores, initial identification of ELLs, waiver procedures for ELLs, ESL program placement and structure, ESL program exit and readiness, ELL parent involvement, declining entry into ESL program, ESL instructional grouping, ELL parent notification, equal access to academic
programs and services for ELLs, equal access to non academic programs and services, ELL follow up support, ESL teacher and core content teacher licensure requirements, ESL professional development requirements, equitable facilities for ELLs, ESL district program evaluation and ELL records and files. Of these high performing suburban districts, three districts were selected based on socio-economic status: one lower, one median, and one high. District socio-economic status was determined according to the reported percentage of low-income students attending schools within the district (Massachusetts DESE, 2015-2016).

Community socio-economic status was considered as a factor so that data would not be skewed in regards to community affluence or lack thereof. In addition, ELLs in two of the three districts were linguistically representative of the second most dominant language, Portuguese, among over ninety thousand ELLs statewide (Massachusetts DESE, 2015-2016).

**Protection of Human Subjects**

During the research endeavor, the researcher must protect those people participating in the study. Protection includes not exploiting participants, ensuring that their jobs and reputations are not compromised as a result of participating in the study as well as not revealing information that could be embarrassing to them. All participants were asked to provide written consent prior to interviews and focus groups. Participants also had many opportunities to question and ask for clarification through in-person interactions and through e-mails with the researcher. The entire research process was submitted to Northeastern’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the study did not begin until approval was granted.

**Obtaining IRB Approval**

Prior to collecting data, the researcher submitted a Doctoral Thesis Proposal (DTP) and an “Application for Approval for Use of Human Participation in Research” to Northeastern
University’s IRB. In addition to proposal submission, the researcher included a participant consent form (see Appendix F) and three interview protocols for the intended interview and focus group participants (see Appendices K, L and M). See Appendix N to review a copy of the researcher’s IRB application.

**Sampling Procedures**

The participants of the study included key members of the school systems who have been directly involved with implementing and carrying out ESL practices within the organizations. The participants included administrators, the assistant superintendent who is responsible for overseeing the ESL program in the district, the ELL coordinator who is responsible for implementing ESL instruction to ELLs district wide and teachers of ELLs, either classroom or core content teachers who are responsible for delivering academic instruction to ELLs at various grade levels for at least three academic years. Participant recruitment followed these steps:

1. An initial email (see Appendix A) was sent to the superintendent of the identified high achieving suburban public school districts. The email briefly described that the case study was to examine ESL practices in suburban public schools and requested permission to conduct qualitative interviews with teaching staff and to examine documentation that applied to ESL practices and ELL achievement. The email also requested a letter from the superintendent, stating that the doctoral study can be conducted.

2. Once permission was granted, the researcher then sent a targeted, recruitment email (see Appendix B) to the assistant superintendent and ELL coordinators requesting their participation in the study and assistance in identifying two teachers from each academic level to participate in the focus groups.
3. Once administration identified teachers who met the criteria to participate in the study, a targeted, recruitment email (see Appendix C) was sent to invite them to participate in the study.

4. The researcher then sent a personalized email to all of the administrators and teachers who showed interest in participating in the study. The email included a consent form and interview questions (see Appendices D, E, F, G, H and I) and asked to arrange an initial meeting. The researcher offered to answer any additional questions and informed the teachers and administrators that a light snack would be offered during the times of on-site after school focus groups.

Research Sites

The research sites selected for this study were three suburban public school districts located in southeastern suburbs of Boston, Massachusetts in the United States, which have exhibited high ELL performance on state standardized tests and good evaluations during a CPR conducted by the Massachusetts DESE.

Table 1

High Achieving Suburban Public School Districts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Suburban District</th>
<th># of students</th>
<th>% of ELLs</th>
<th>% low income</th>
<th>ELL CPI scores on MCAS</th>
<th>CPR by DESE of ELE program</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>District # 1</td>
<td>&gt;3,500</td>
<td>&lt;3</td>
<td>&gt;24</td>
<td>&gt;71</td>
<td>&lt; 5 corrective actions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District # 2</td>
<td>&gt;3,500</td>
<td>&lt;5</td>
<td>&gt;18</td>
<td>&gt;73</td>
<td>&lt; 3 corrective actions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District # 3</td>
<td>&lt;3,500</td>
<td>&lt;3</td>
<td>&lt;10</td>
<td>&gt;84</td>
<td>&lt;5 corrective actions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: ELL = English language learner; CPI = Comprehensive proficiency indicator; MCAS = Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System; CPR = Coordinated program review; DESE = Department of Elementary and Secondary Education; ELE = English language education. Data from Massachusetts DESE, 2015-2016.
As shown in Table 1, according to the Massachusetts DESE (2015-2016), District #1 has a total enrollment of slightly more than 3,500 students with a CPI (comprehensive proficiency indicator) of greater than 71% for ELLs on MCAS, fewer than five corrective actions for the ELE program during the DESE CPR and a greater than 24% low-income student population. District #2 has a total enrollment of slightly less than 3,500 students with a CPI of greater than 73% for ELLs on MCAS, fewer than three corrective actions for the ELE program during the DESE CPR and a greater than 18% low-income student population. District #3 has slightly less than 3,500 students with a CPI of greater than 84% for ELLs on MCAS, fewer than 5 corrective actions for the ELE program during the DESE CPR and a less than 10% low-income student population.

**Data Collection**

Upon securing approval from the IRB at Northeastern University, the researcher, as Stake (1995) urged, had a definition of the case, a list of research questions, identification of helpers, data sources, allocation of time, expenses and intended reporting. The first phase of the data collection process was interviewing key stakeholders within the suburban public schools through individual interviews and focus groups. These stakeholders included three groups: administrators, the assistant superintendent, the ELL coordinator, and classroom and core content teachers at various grade levels. These interviews and focus groups took place in the individual school districts. The researcher conducted the interviews with administrators and ELL coordinators at the central offices and ELL coordinator’s offices and sought a central location to conduct focus groups with teachers from each of the three academic levels: elementary, middle and high school. If teachers were unable to meet at a central location, then the researcher went to their respective schools.
The researcher drew on four sources of data across the three high achieving school districts including, but not limited to: ELL documents and records, interviews with either the assistant superintendent, interviews with the ESL coordinators and focus groups with teachers.

Table 2

Sources of Data Within the High Achieving Suburban School Districts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Suburban District</th>
<th>Interviews</th>
<th>Focus Groups</th>
<th>ESL Document Review</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>District # 1</td>
<td>Assistant Superintendent</td>
<td>3 elementary teachers, 1 middle school teachers, 2 high school teachers</td>
<td>MCAS scores</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ELD Director</td>
<td></td>
<td>WIDA ACCESS Scores</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Home Language Surveys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Reports Cards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Any documentation teachers bring to focus groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District # 2</td>
<td>Assistant Superintendent</td>
<td>1 elementary teachers, 2 middle school teachers, 2 high school teachers</td>
<td>MCAS scores</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ELL Coordinator</td>
<td></td>
<td>WIDA ACCESS Scores</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Home Language Surveys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Reports Cards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Any documentation teachers bring to focus groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District # 3</td>
<td>Assistant Superintendent</td>
<td>2 elementary teachers, 3 middle school teachers, 1 high school teachers</td>
<td>MCAS scores</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ELL Facilitator</td>
<td></td>
<td>WIDA ACCESS Scores</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Home Language Surveys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Reports Cards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Any documentation teachers bring to focus groups</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: ESL= English as a second language; ELL=English language learner; WIDA ACCESS = World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment Assessing Comprehension and Communication in English State-to-State; MCAS = Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System*

Interviewing is a primary source of data in this multi-case study. Although there are different types of interviews, Merriam (1998) asserted that the key to getting good data from interviewing is in asking good questions. The interviews during this case study were semi-structured, a mix of more or less structured questions (Merriam, 1998). The first round of interviews were conducted with administrators, the assistant superintendents who are responsible for overseeing the district’s ESL program and ELL coordinators who are responsible for
implementing ESL instruction for ELLs district wide. In both instances, participants chose pseudonyms to protect identity. The participants and the researcher had an introduction and the subsequent interviews took roughly 45 to 60 minutes. The questions were open ended in order to elicit in-depth information from the participants. The researcher asked the assistant superintendent questions such as how are ELLs supported in the district, what challenges have been faced in educating a growing number of ELL students and how financial resources are allocated (see Appendix G). The researcher asked the ELL coordinator similar questions, included additional questions addressing collaboration with core content teachers and ESL pedagogical practices (see Appendix H). During the interview process and upon gaining participant permission, the researcher audio recorded the interviews using two digital devices, one as a primary source and one as a back up. The interviews were sent to a transcription service and everything that was said during the interviews was transcribed (Bassey, 1999).

The first phase of data collection included focus groups with teachers of ELLs. The researcher conducted focus groups with classroom and content area teachers across the various grade levels: elementary, middle and high school. The researcher requested a central location for the focus groups, but if teachers were unable to meet at the central location, the researcher conducted two focus groups in the respective schools. Again, participants chose pseudonyms to protect identity. The participants and the researcher first had an introduction and the subsequent focus groups took roughly 45 to 60 minutes. The researcher asked open-ended questions such as how ELLs’ linguistic and academic needs are supported in the classroom and what professional development surrounding ESL practices have teachers received (see Appendix I). The researcher provided a light snack during the focus group sessions that occurred during after school hours. Again, the researcher audio recorded the focus group sessions using two digital
devices, one as a primary source and one as a back up. The interviews were followed by transcription of everything that was said (Bassey, 1999). All transcriptions were conducted through rev.com, a transcription service.

Merriam (1998) declared that by combining interviewing, observation and document analysis, the researcher will be provided with a holistic interpretation of the phenomenon being investigated. During the second phase of data collection, the researcher conducted an ELL document review. The researcher transferred data from documents to the research computer, ensuring that each data source is properly labeled (Bassey, 1999). Documents that were reviewed during this case study included ELL scores on MCAS, ELL scores on WIDA ACCESS (the annual assessment for ELLs), Home Language Surveys, ELL report cards, ELL cumulative folders. In order to protect subjects, student files were kept anonymous and all data was stored on the researcher's personal computer, which is password protected and guarded by security features. All physical documents pertaining to the case will be stored in a locked file cabinet that can only be accessed by the researcher.

During the third phase of data collection, the researcher emailed interview transcriptions and summaries of the interviews and focus groups to participants so they were able to check and validate the researcher's interpretations. The researcher requested feedback from the participants. If necessary, the researcher clarified any concerns in writing or by setting up a follow up in-person meeting. In addition, during the data collection process, the researcher maintained a reflective journal so that she could reflect on procedural steps and maintain transparency.
Data Analysis

Stake (1995) claimed that data analysis is a skill that comes with experience. Furthermore, Stake (1995) asserted that data analysis is a matter of giving meaning to impressions and should be analyzed for frequencies or contingencies (Stake, 1995). Stake (1995) believed that there are two strategies for analyzing data: through direct interpretation and through aggregation of instances, such as through the repetition of phenomena. The search for meaning is often a search for patterns or themes and qualitative coding is usually used in analyses (Stake, 1995).

Miles, Huberman and Saldaña (2013) defined coding as a “data condensation” that allows the researcher to engage in deeper reflection because the researcher can assemble chunks of data that relate to one another and condense them into analyzable units (p. 73). Upon completing and transcribing the data during this case study examining ESL practices across three public school districts, step one of the data analysis process involved the researcher reading the transcripts thoroughly prior to assigning codes. The researcher examined what administrators, ELL coordinators and teachers in the individual school districts were reporting about ESL practices within their respective districts. During this first phase of analysis, the researcher identified key quotes that best exemplified what the participants in the districts were trying to convey.

Saldaña (2009) explained the cycles of coding, particularly first cycle coding methods, which are typically first assigned to data chunks. Step two of the data analysis process involved the researcher conducting first cycle coding of the data.

**First cycle coding.** Although there are several first cycle coding approaches in data analysis, the researcher employed descriptive and in vivo coding when examining data across the three high achieving suburban public school districts. Descriptive coding summarizes topics of
qualitative data in a word or phrase (Saldaña, 2009). Descriptive coding was primarily used to code field notes and documents since Saldaña strongly recommends in vivo coding for small group interviews. Both Chenail (1995) and Miles et al. (2013) agreed that in vivo coding, like descriptive coding is widely used for qualitative research. Saldaña (2009) claimed that in vivo coding during first cycle coding is particularly useful for small-scale studies. Since this was a qualitative small-scale study of three school districts, both descriptive and in vivo codes were applicable.

For the first cycle of coding, codes consisted of words and/or short phrases and came from the participant’s own words, documents, and field notes. According to Miles and Huberman (1994,) in vivo coding honors the participant’s voice, which made it a relevant approach since interviews and focus groups encompassed teachers’ and administrators’ unique, individual experiences in the education of suburban ELLs. When employing in vivo coding in data analysis, the researcher will use quotation marks in order to distinguish in vivo codes from descriptive codes (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Coding the data was an iterative process where the researcher first assigned codes to the individual school districts’ interview transcripts and documentation. The researcher first independently examined what administrators, ELL coordinators and teachers were reporting regarding ESL practices, policies, strategies and resources within District #1 and assigned codes to that data. Then, the researcher consecutively repeated this first cycle of coding process for District #2 and District #3’s data.

**Second cycle coding.** According to Saldaña (2009), the goal of second cycle coding is to reorganize and develop a sense of categorical summaries of first cycle codes. The researcher employed pattern coding during the second cycle of coding. Pattern codes are inferential codes
that identify themes, explanation constructs, and relationships (Miles et al., 2013). Miles et al. (2013) claimed that pattern codes are somewhat meta-codes because they synthesize a great deal of material from first cycle codes and make meaning of it. Pattern coding was appropriate for a study examining ESL practices in three school districts since there were large amounts of data across the districts. For this study, pattern codes allowed the researcher to observe patterns and themes across the districts, exploring ESL practices and relating them to ELL achievement.

The second cycle of coding in this study involved two phases. The first phase included the researcher searching for patterns and themes within the individual school districts to distinguish patterns among documentation and what administrators, ELL coordinators and teachers were reporting in District #1, District #2 and District #3. Miles et al. (2013) suggested that the researcher engage in “merciless” cross-checking prior to naming a pattern (p. 87). The researcher then mapped the pattern codes within the individual school districts so that the interrelations among codes could be seen. In this multi-case study, the first phase of pattern coding within the individual school districts was essential because it laid the groundwork for revealing common themes and patterns across the three districts through cross-case analysis (Miles et al., 2013).

**Cross case analysis.** Because this study included multiple cases, the researcher engaged in cross-case synthesis, which is in this study was essentially the second phase of pattern coding, examining the results of each individual case and then observing the patterns across cases (Yin, 2013). Step three of the data analysis process involved the researcher searching for patterns and connections across the data strands. In total, the data strands included codes derived from twelve sources of data: documentation, administrator interviews, ELL coordinator interviews, and focus groups with teachers across District #1, District #2 and District #3. According to Miles et al.
(2013), the purpose of cross case analysis is to increase generalizability, which allows for more powerful explanations. During this process, the researcher looked for commonalities and patterns between the three high achieving suburban public school districts. Through thematic analysis, the researcher identified what the three districts were doing similarly and differently regarding ESL practices, policies, strategies, and resources. Step four of the data analysis process involved the researcher creating a table of overarching themes among District #1, District #2 and District #3. Once patterns and themes emerged among the cases, the researcher considered them in relation to the theoretical framework, the Burke-Litwin model of organizational change and performance as well as to the literature to determine if the findings deviated or aligned with the theoretical model and the literature.

**Trustworthiness**

Merriam (1998) contended that validity, reliability and ethics are major concerns when analyzing case study data. The first step upon receiving IRB approval was for the researcher to comply with its guidelines regarding the protection of human subjects. The researcher did this by first asking participants to choose pseudonyms to ensure anonymity. From an ethical standpoint, the researcher created comfortable, safe environments during the interview process so that the participants developed rapport with the researcher and felt free to express themselves in a non-critical, non-threatening environment. For instance, the researcher conducted separate interviews with assistant superintendents, ELL coordinators and teachers involved in the education of ELLs so that subordinates did not feel constrained by having administrators present. During the interview process, the researcher was cognizant of power imbalances and cultural and linguistic differences that could influence interactions during the data collection process.
Several additional steps were employed during the data collection and data analysis to ensure trustworthiness. Creswell (2013) suggested the researcher use multiple sources of data to ensure a comprehensive understanding of participants’ perspectives and experiences. Throughout the study, participants were able to present their perspectives in a variety of ways, including in-person interviews, focus groups and through email correspondence. Further, member checking occurred during the data collection phase of the study when participants were presented with transcripts and researcher summaries. The participants were asked to provide feedback to the researcher's perceptions. Any feedback was included in future drafts in order to authenticate participants' perceptions. The researcher provided significant detail about the participants and enlisted an external reviewer in the evaluation of the researcher's findings and conclusions. The external reviewer served to challenge ideas that may need further elaboration and consideration.

To further ensure trustworthiness of the study, the researcher examined her potential biases. The researcher's interest in the topic surrounding ESL practices in suburban public school districts stems from her role as an ESL teacher and coordinator in a suburban public school district that has over the past decade experienced an increase in its ELL population. As an ESL teacher and resident of a suburban community, the researcher has witnessed the marginalization of culturally and linguistically diverse students in historically predominantly White suburban communities. Although from a social justice perspective, the researcher is compelled to be sympathetic toward ELLs in suburban schools, she intended to adopt an organizational perspective to expand her knowledge about educating ELLs in suburban public schools and perhaps gain insight into areas that she had not yet uncovered.
Summary

Case study has proven useful for studying educational innovations, for evaluating educational programs and for informing policy; therefore, a multi-case study examining ESL practices and how they relate to ELL achievement in suburban schools has the potential to revamp ESL practices in suburban public schools so they better meet the needs of the growing ELL population. Educational research is important for expanding knowledge within the field and for improving professional practice (Bassey, 1999; Merriam, 1998). Since there is currently a gap in literature and research examining ESL practices in suburban public schools, the knowledge in the field is minimal and thus, should be expanded upon through a multi-case study methodological approach.
Chapter IV: Report of the Research Findings

The purpose of this qualitative multi-case study was to examine and document how ESL practices relate to high ELL achievement in three identified suburban public schools in Massachusetts. The researcher examined documents and documented the perceptions of teachers and district administrators across these three high achieving suburban public school districts south of Boston regarding the needs and challenges of effectively assisting a growing ELL population. This chapter is divided into two main sections: (1) a summary of the findings in each high achieving public school district; and (2) a review of emergent themes, based on the researcher’s document review, and interviews with Assistant Superintendents, ELL Coordinators and teachers across the three school districts as they relate to the research questions.

School District #1

The first public school examined in this study will be referred to as District #1. District #1 is a public school district located in a lower socio-economic suburban community, south of Boston. According to the Massachusetts DESE (2015-2016), District #1 has been successful in promoting academic achievement for ELLs in part due to ELLs’ passing scores on state mandated tests, in mathematics, English language arts and science and also due to the positive ESL program review conducted by the DESE. District #1 administrators report a “considerable” growth of the ELL student population over the past fifteen academic years, growing from roughly five ELL students in the year 2000 to approximately 80 ELL students in 2016-2017. District #1 administrators and teachers refer to its ESL program as the ELD (English Language Development) Department and also report an expansion of the department that coincided with the influx of ELLs to the school district; in the year 2000, District #1 employed one ESL teacher and in 2016-2017, the district employs six ESL teachers.
There are a total of seven schools serving the students of District #1. According to administrators, the district follows Massachusetts DESE’s bifurcated model, with an independent ELD curriculum implemented by ESL teachers and SEI model where core content courses are instructed by educators who have received training in sheltered English practice and pedagogy. ELL students receive ESL instruction in a pullout model in accordance to the state mandated hours of instruction to support the ELLs’ English language proficiency level. For example, the lower the proficiency level, the higher the minutes or hours the ESL instructional support is.

Most recently, District #1 hired the ELD coordinator who oversees the ELD department, and who in turn is overseen by the district’s Assistant Superintendent. In the drafting of the districts’ last strategic plan, a “hub” or magnet school was considered for ELL students at the elementary level so that there could be dedicated resources for that school. However, according to the Assistant Superintendent, the district decided against the magnet school because ELLs should receive “access, equity and opportunity in their neighborhood schools”. Although the elementary magnet school was opposed, the Assistant Superintendent acknowledged that two of the elementary schools have a higher naturally occurring ELL enrollment due to geographical locations. In a subsequent interview, the ELD coordinator clarified that of the six ELD teachers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic</th>
<th># of ELL Students</th>
<th># of ESL Teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>District #1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>5-8</td>
<td>1 teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>6 teachers and ELD department head</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: ELL = English language learner; ESL = English as a Second Language; ELD = English Language Development. Data from Interview with District #1 Assistant Superintendent.*
within the district, four of the teachers are at the elementary schools and two of the teachers are at the middle senior high school level. She also clarified that the dominant native languages of ELL students in District #1 are Portuguese, Jamaican Patois and Spanish.

**Assistant Superintendent.** Matilda “Tilly” is a white, female, native English speaker who has been an educator for sixteen years. Prior to her role as the district Assistant Superintendent, Tilly was an Advanced Placement English teacher for secondary students, grades nine through twelve. She has received the state mandated SEI Endorsement certification for administrators and is currently in the final phases of a doctoral studies program. Tilly thoughtfully answered all of the interview questions and was eager to provide ample information addressing ESL practices within District #1.

From the onset of the interview, Tilly emphasized the district’s commitment to promoting a systemic culture or mindset to ensure the academic achievement of all students, including ELLs. District administrators are using Putnam’s (2016) book, *Our Kids: The American Dream in Crisis* to promote its strategic plan. Putnam (2016) suggests that in order to be successful in educating “our kids”, educators must address students’ physical, social, emotional and mental well-being. Discussions surrounding Putnam’s (2016) vision and the Superintendent’s strategic mission to support all students led to district discussions about supporting ELLs. Further, using Putnam’s (2016) book as a model for implementing the district’s strategic plan, assisted District #1 in including all of the stakeholders in promoting, equity, accessibility and achievement for ELLs. Tilly reported that conversations about the education of ELLs must be extended to include teachers, leaders, families and community members if all stakeholders are to understand that the district’s priority is teaching and learning. She claimed:
We are broadening the conversation so that colleagues across the district understand the scope of our work, the purpose and intent of our work, who ELLs are as students, as children, as learners. We work really hard to communicate this.

According the Assistant Superintendent, curriculum continuity and embedding ELD curriculum systemically within the district is also a central focus of district administrators. The district uses *National Geographic* ELD curriculum materials and the district provides these curriculum materials, including texts and manipulatives to each school building so that ESL teachers do not have to share resources. The district has a Curriculum Council that meets bi-weekly to discuss curriculum and initiatives such as promoting literacy across subjects and grade levels. The ELD coordinator is part of the Curriculum Council and according to Tilly, “now has a voice at the table.” The ELD coordinator and ESL teachers are developing model curriculum units in accordance to the Massachusetts DESE models where there is differentiation according to ELL proficiency level.

The Assistant Superintendent devoted a great deal of time discussing the training and professional development of teachers. According to Tilly, roughly 55% of educators have received the state mandated SEI Endorsement training and certification. Because it was often difficult for teachers to get in to SEI courses in other institutions, District #1 has offered SEI Endorsement training in-house, taught by the ELD coordinator, for the past three years during both the fall and spring semesters. Tilly ensures that there is at least one SEI trained teacher at each grade level and in many cases, the entire grade level of teachers are trained. Along with SEI Endorsement training, the district offers in-house summer training to meet state licensure requirements that require educators to receive 15 PDPs (professional development points) in the areas of SEI and ESL. These in-house summer courses are offered free of charge to district
educators. The district also collaborates with other districts to leverage resources for ESL professional development as well as utilizes grant monies from foundations such as Education Foundation for technology resources for ELD teachers.

In addition to SEI and ESL training, Tilly highlighted the districts’ commitment to promoting cultural competency systemically. Tilly indicated that for multi-lingual and multi-cultural populations such as ELLs and for all students, that choosing literacy materials that are representative of diverse cultures is important. In additional to culturally proficient literacy materials, District #1 dedicates one week per year when all stakeholders engage in activities to promote respect and tolerance. Another example of promoting systemic cultural competency is in the esthetic cultural representations in each school building. In the entryway of the seven school buildings, flags are displayed from every ELL students’ family’s home countries.

Not only is promoting cultural competency among educators important to district administrators, but supporting families of ELLs in the community is also a focus. Tilly claimed that the “third pillar” of the ELD program is creating community partnerships. She claimed that the district is starting to look toward creating community resource centers. She remarked, “Having people who understand how to support our ELLs is critical to how the centers come together.” She claimed that because some ELLs may have experienced trauma, perhaps coming to the United States from war-torn countries or refugee situations, providing a resource center for families and access to counselors might help.

Over the years, there has been an evolution in how resources are allocated for ELLs and ELD in District #1. Seemingly this budgetary evolution mirrors the growth of ELLs in the district. Initially, the ELD department budget was under student services, the same office that oversees special education, guidance, service delivery and clinical services. However, about a
year and a half ago the Assistant Superintendent moved the budget to the office of curriculum and instruction and began thinking about school-allocation instead of a district “pool of funds”. The evolution continued to meet the needs at each individual school. Tilly explains:

Not every school needs the same. What we’ve done for the budget process moving into next year is taken the money out of the office of curriculum and instruction budget. The ELD coordinator did a very thorough needs’ assessment at each school. There’s now a school ELD line item in each school.

Tilly claimed that “equal isn’t always equitable,” which is the reason the ELD budget has been allocated per school. The needs’ assessment revealed that schools needed instructional materials, hardware, software, accessories such as headphones and microphones as well as adapters for Chromebooks. District #1’s allocation decisions relied on the decision making of the team. Tilly claims that there are ongoing discussions with administration, the director of finance and the ELD coordinator about the ELD budget and how it will be sustained.

As evidenced by the Massachusetts DESE (2015-1016) data revealing passing standardized test scores for ELLs, District #1 has been successful meeting the academic needs of ELLs. Tilly claimed that there are two specific practices that are working well within the district. She suggested that giving the ELD coordinator “a voice at the table” with administrators to discuss district curriculum and contribute to budget allocation decisions has been a strength. Tilly also suggested that what is working well in District #1 is giving ELL students access to highly qualified teachers. For example, at the high school level, students have daily access to the ELD teacher, who has her own independent classroom that she does not share. ELL students can go to her classroom in the morning and get materials that they might need such as word-word
translators or graphic organizers to be successful in their other classes. Accessibility to teachers is also evidenced by the district’s increase in the employment of ELD teachers.

Although the Assistant Superintendent claimed that more is being done right in regards to ESL education and practices in the district, she acknowledged challenges. One of the greatest challenges for the district has been “carving out meeting” time where SEI teachers and ELD teachers can meet and collaborate particularly at the high school level. She also acknowledged that there is a need to hire support staff, paraprofessionals specific to ESL education. Tilly acknowledged that there are challenges; however, she continued to be positive about moving forward to confront these challenges. Tilly professed, “It’s going to be a little harder for us at secondary. That is something that we are attentive to as we continue the conversation.”

The ELD coordinator. “Marie” is a white, female native English speaker who has been an educator for sixteen years. She holds a higher education C.A.G.S (Certificate of Advanced Graduate Study) and is a licensed Massachusetts educator, grades Kindergarten through twelve. Marie teaches ELL students for 40% of her work week and the other 60% of her time is devoted to overseeing the ELD program, other ELD teachers and collaborating with administrators in regards to the district’s ELD program. Marie echoed much of the information that the Assistant Superintendent provided; however, Marie was able to add additional information, particularly in regards to family and community engagement and the challenges that persist in educating ELLs in suburban public schools.

Marie specifically talked about how the district’s strategic mission promoted success and respect for “all” students. Marie attributed the success of the ELD program and the implementation of the districts’ strategic mission of success for all students to strong administrative support. She claimed that the ELD program is supported from the Superintendent
down, which is evidenced by the districts’ hiring of four additional ESL teachers over the course of the past two academic years to support the influx of ELLs to the district.

Marie discussed the benefits of her having a voice in the construction and maintenance of the ELD program, its curriculum and the allocation of resources. Marie also identified the allocations of resources and her involvement in making allocation decisions as a major factor contributing to ELL achievement. She stated, “the support, the allocations of resources, I think is a huge thing.” Like the Assistant Superintendent, Marie claimed that financial resources are used for buying curriculum and resource materials and professional development; however, Marie added that resources are also used for field trips and parent and family events.

Marie spent the most time devoted to discussing parent and family involvement and the ways the district engages and reaches the families of ELLs. Marie has a vested interest in getting to know the families of ELLs and “their stories.” She claimed that the district attempts to foster relationships between teachers, schools and families by setting up parent meetings with the schools before school, after school or during lunch. Marie claimed that another way of engaging families that has been even more successful is through family “meet ups.” According to Marie, family meet ups are ways to connect the families with what is going on in the school district and within the greater community. Marie provided one example last spring when families of ELLs met up at the middle school play on a Saturday afternoon. Marie hoped that engaging families through meet ups might make them feel more a part of the district and the community and may lead them to attending more district-wide events.

Another way that resources are allocated to engage families of ELLs and to promote cross grade level interaction and learning among ELLs are field trips. A recent field trip to a historic site was for ELL students grade four through twelve. Marie claimed that cross grade
field trips are a great way to promote interaction among ELL students at different grade levels and also it’s a way to get families involved in the community.

Resources are also allocated for PD (professional development) and the training of teachers. Marie reported that District #1 is fortunate to have highly qualified teachers who care about the successes of ELL students and who feel “responsible” for ELL achievement. As the ELD coordinator, Marie has taught in-house PD to offer the state mandated SEI Endorsement course to teachers within the district. Marie claimed the SEI course has brought awareness to teachers, but they want and need more training. ELD teachers have engaged in PD through a book study of Zweirs (2013) *Building academic language: Essential practices for content classrooms, grades 5-12*. Marie claimed that the book study helped ELD teachers to focus on how Common Core has impacted teaching and learning for ELLs. The study lead to ELD teachers engaging in discourse surrounding best practices and instructional approaches to support ELL achievement.

Marie has worked with other local suburban districts to form a network in order to leverage PD opportunities in the areas of ESL and SEI. The network has brought in representatives from the Massachusetts DESE to offer PD and is supported by district administrators. Marie stated:

> We’re kind of isolated in this suburban location so we started a network. It has been supported by the curriculum directors for us to attend. We get together four times per year and it is a way for us to get PD. That’s been kind of helpful just to have the collaboration piece.

Marie claimed that what was working well in the district in relation to ESL practices and ELL achievement is strong administrative support, support of families of ELLs, highly qualified
and dedicated teachers, extensive, in-house professional development and the allocation of resources to support the ELD program. She claimed that the evidence that allows her to know the program model and ESL practices are working are the observations of ELL students’ acquisition of English over time and by the data on the progress that ELLs are making, including WIDA ACCESS (World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment Assessing Comprehension and Communication in English) scores.

Marie concurred with the Assistant Superintendent that collaboration between ELD teachers and content teachers is a challenge due to time and scheduling constraints; however, Marie offered additional insight into the challenges that the district faces in servicing and promoting achievement for ELLs. One challenge for Marie has been with the infancy of the ELD program to support the relatively new phenomena of educating a larger population of ELLs in a suburban public school district. She claimed:

I think, it is just, it’s such a new program. It feels like such a new program, and it is getting the infrastructure of the program, looking at some of the vertical parts. I feel like we’re just starting to build the program so I think that that’s a big challenge.

**Focus group with teachers.** Six teachers representing each academic level in the district participated in the focus group for this district. “Carolyn” is a female, special education teacher at the high school who has been teaching for twenty-one years. “Charlie” is a male, eighth grade social studies teacher who has been an educator for six years. “Elena” is a female, Kindergarten teacher who has been teaching for twenty-four years. “Chaseka” is a female, fifth grade teacher who has been teaching for twenty-nine years. “Elizabeth” is a female, third grade teacher who has been teaching for five years. “Mary” is a female, fourth grade teacher who has been an educator for seventeen years. All of the teachers identified as White, native English speakers.
Additionally, all of the teachers reported having received the state mandated SEI Endorsement training.

The group began with a discussion addressing the demographic shift that has occurred over the past several years. All of the teachers reported an influx of ELLs to the district and Charlie claimed that the influx has been evident, particularly within the last year. Elena also noted that she has observed much more focus on the ELL student population and surmised that more students are being identified as ELL. She remarked, “There’s been such a focus on ELLs that they are being identified as ELL, whereas in the past, they may not have been.” Carolyn claimed that the two main cultural groups represented among ELLs in District #1 are Brazilian and Jamaican, speaking Portuguese and Patois respectively.

Participants all said that the teachers in District #1 are dedicated to promoting achievement among all students. Chaseka stated, “we don’t let them fail.” Three of the teachers claimed that ELL students were succeeding prior to state mandated training because the sentiment among District #1 teachers is one of motivation and success. Another teacher went on to say that she was not at all “surprised” that District #1 was regarded as a high performing ELL district.

Teachers claimed that the ELD program model has vastly changed over the course of the past few years. According to Elena, in years past, there was a magnet school where bilingual ELL students would attend one elementary school to receive ESL support services. Elena was “completely” opposed to the magnet model because the district was removing ELLs from their neighborhood schools. Her greatest concern with the magnet model was with parent understanding. She explained:
My concern at the time was that you had parents who had limited English themselves or were somewhat forced, or felt coerced into moving their children, even though they really didn’t fully understand that they had the option of not moving their child.

Although the district no longer maintains a magnet model for ELLs at the elementary level, teachers did report a naturally higher population at one of the elementary schools. The ESL/ELD support model is mostly pullout. At the high school it is both a pullout and co-teaching model. Teachers also reported having small class sizes. The Kindergarten teacher had thirteen students and the other elementary teachers had eighteen students.

Much of the conversation addressing ESL/ELD practices in District #1 involved two main areas of focus, pedagogy and challenges. Teachers claimed that they had substantial knowledge of differentiation and SEI strategies in order to promote achievement for ELLs. Teachers claimed that most of the SEI strategies are good for all students, not just ELLs, but what they are often implementing that is unique is the reliance on students’ native languages, particularly when they are newcomers with little English. Teachers reported using technology to translate for newcomer students, but also used community parent volunteers to assist newcomer students in making the transition to the American classroom and in acquiring some initial English proficiency. In addition to the bilingual speaking parent volunteers, a guidance counselor in one of the elementary buildings speaks Portuguese, which has served as a resource to Portuguese speaking newcomer ELLs. Elena recalled how integral the guidance counselor’s role was in facilitating acculturation, quelling anxiety and promoting achievement for ELLs. Teachers reported translation as a resource; however, Carolyn the high school teacher called for more interpretation and translation in order to promote greater parent involvement.

Further, Elena, a teacher with more than twenty years of experience has witnessed a shift both
linguistically and culturally. She claimed that in years past there would be greater pressure put on immigrant groups, but now schools are “more welcoming and accommodating” to different cultural groups. Additionally, she claimed that the “schools are trying to integrate, language and culture into their teaching”

Along with pedagogy, teachers reported the ELD coordinator as a contributing factor to the program’s and ELLs’ success. Teachers claimed that the ELD coordinator is accessible as well as responsive to issues involving meeting the needs of ELLs. Other teachers in the group echoed Chaseka and referred to Marie, the ELD coordinator as “great”. Although teachers overwhelmingly regard the ELD coordinator as an asset, they also called for more collaboration time with her and other ESL teachers in the future.

During the focus group, teachers cited several challenges with meeting the needs of greater numbers of ELLs and promoting achievement among these students. One challenging area that monopolized much of the conversation regarding the district’s current model was scheduling. All of the elementary teachers showed frustration with the pullout model. They acknowledged the need for extensive pullout services for newcomer ELL students with little to no English, but they expressed concern with the amount of time higher English proficient students are being pulled out of the general education class for ESL instruction. Teachers claimed that they miss a great deal of content and when they return from ESL support class, they are behind. Teachers were aware that pullout services for ELLs are mandated by the state in relation to a student’s English language proficiency level, but they still concurred that it was a problem. In addition to pullout support services, Elena claimed that there is a disconnect between the ESL curriculum and what is going on in the general classroom.
The most discussed challenge for ELLs was scheduling; however, additional challenges were noted. Carolyn commented on a lack of motivation as a key challenge in promoting academic language among ELLs at the high school level. In addition, Carolyn claimed that the current rigorous curriculum at the high school level puts great expectations on non-native English speakers. Collectively, teachers unanimously agreed that the lack of time in order to collaborate with the ELD coordinator and ESL teachers was a significant challenge.

All of the teachers interviewed had received state mandated SEI training and agreed that it had been useful. The SEI training has been offered in district, free of charge. In conjunction with the state mandated training, teachers have engaged in other district provided ESL and SEI PD trainings offered throughout the year and during the summer. Charlie claimed that the PD trainings have made him “better” and “gave him more awareness as a teacher.” The overall sentiment was that professional development was necessary in assisting educators in meeting the needs of ELLs. However, Elena expressed a desire that state mandated training be more specific to suburban public schools, since the needs of urban teachers are different from those in suburban areas. In regards to the state mandated training, Elena remarked:

I don’t know that the regulations need to apply everywhere the same. For some reason, everybody in the state of Massachusetts became under the same umbrella. So if this is the rule over here, it’s the rule everywhere.

During the latter half of the focus group, teachers discussed their future aspirations for the district’s ELD program in order to continue promoting English language proficiency. They requested additional “built-in” collaboration time with the ELD coordinator, ESL teachers and general education teachers. Two of the teachers wanted more co-teaching opportunities in SEI
classrooms. Two other teachers wanted more extended school opportunities for ELL students. Collectively, they all desired less pullout support for ELLs and a more inclusive push-in model.

**Document review.** Several ELL files were reviewed for the District #1 document review. The district color codes the ELE (English Language Education) files yellow so that they can be distinguished from ELLs’ cumulative folders. They are filed with students’ cumulative files within school records so that they are readily available to all educators who work with ELLs. The ELE program files include: a copy of a home language survey, parent notification forms and letters, opt-out letters, initial ELL screening assessments such as W-APT, ELD progress reports, which are updated throughout the year for each grading period, standardized WIDA ACCESS scores, FEL (Former English Learner) monitoring forms for each grading period, end of year team ESL service decisions, and translations per parent request. The ELD coordinator reported that translations are done in two ways: progress reports and any special education documents are professionally translated and other documents are electronically translated using computer translation applications. Separate from the district ELE files, district ESL teachers maintain files that contain ELL work samples, assessments, parent communications, which assist in monitoring students’ progress.

**Summary of District #1 Findings**

District #1 administrators and teachers reported a systemic culture of promoting success among all students, which in regards to ELL students, includes promoting cultural competency and expertise in SEI pedagogy. According to both the Assistant Superintendent and the ELD coordinator, the ELD coordinator is an important “voice” in district decisions, such as with allocations of ELD resources, ESL curriculum and overall with the maintenance of the ELD program. Teachers echoed the ELD coordinator’s commitment to the ELD program and the
achievement of ELL students. However, all educators reported the need for more collaboration between the ELD coordinator, ESL teachers and general education teachers. Family engagement is a key focus of District #1, which occurs in several non-traditional ways, including family “meet-ups”, field trips and before and after school meetings. Further, teachers reported utilizing students’ and family’s native languages to foster communication and promote English language acquisition, which was evidenced by a document review that reveals translations in home languages. Professional development has been offered in-district, free of charge. In the future, educators hope to continue accessibility to PD that is specific to district needs.

**School District #2**

The second high performing ELL school district examined in the study will be referred to as District #2. District #2 is located in a median socio-economic, suburban community south of Boston. According to Massachusetts DESE (2015-2016) data, District #2’s ELL program has been successful in promoting academic proficiency among ELLs since ELLs are exhibiting passing scores on state standardized tests in conjunction with Districts #2 receiving a positive DESE review of its ESL program. District administrators report that the district has had a very large increase of ELL students over the past decade, which has leveled off over the past two academic years. The district currently services 170 ELL students and employs seven ESL teachers and ELL coordinator. The Assistant Superintendent reported that nearly all of District #2’s teachers and administrators have received the state mandated SEI training.
Table 4

*Growth of ELLs and ESL Department from 2001-2016 District #2*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic Year</th>
<th>District #1 # of ELL Students</th>
<th># of ESL Teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>District #1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>6 teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>7 teachers and an ELL Coordinator</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: ELL = English language learner; ESL = English as a Second Language. Data from Interviews with District #2 Assistant Superintendent.*

District #2 is comprised of seven schools: one high school, one middle school and five elementary schools. Portuguese is the dominant home language but Haitian Creole, Spanish and Russian are also spoken in several homes throughout the district. At the middle and high school level, District #2 follows a bifurcated model where ELL students are instructed by SEI trained teachers in core content classes and receive ESL pullout instruction where the number of hours of ESL instruction is based on students’ English language proficiency level. At the elementary level, District #2 employs a magnet school model, which is an ESL program model distinction that differs from the other districts examined in this study. The magnet school is geared toward the education of ELLs with large ESL classrooms, the district ESL coordinator housed in the building and the majority of ESL elementary teachers also housed in the building. District transportation is provided for elementary ELLs to the magnet school regardless of their residency location in the community; however, if a family waives the right for the student to attend the magnet, the ELL student is placed on an SEI track in their neighborhood school, which means their classroom teacher has received SEI training, but they do not receive ESL support. The district appoints an ELL liaison in all the non-magnet elementary schools to monitor ELL
progress and to communicate with families of ELLs. Within the past five years, the district appointed an ELL coordinator to oversee the ESL program.

**Assistant Superintendent.** “Jon” is a white male native English speaker who has been an educator for 20 years. Before his role as Assistant Superintendent, Jon was a high school science teacher and conducted a scientific study for his PhD program. Jon has received various SEI and ESL trainings and was eager to share information about ESL practices in the district. Jon answered all of the interview questions, highlighting his perspective on what is working effectively in the district, what the challenges have been and what the future goals are.

Jon began the interview by detailing the program model of a systemic SEI approach with ESL pullout instruction and the magnet school at the elementary level. It was evident that Jon believes strongly in the magnet school model and that it is the best way to leverage district resources. He stated:

> It works out for us having the magnet model at the elementary level. If we didn’t have that model and we were trying to provide instruction we’d have to…I mean we could have to add at least eight ESL teachers.

Jon also communicated a vertical systemic culture that persists from administration to teachers as one that “embraces” ESL education and is committed to making sure that all ELLs in the district succeed. For the past decade, teachers have been asked to engage in numerous trainings for SEI and ESL and they have “embraced” doing so as Jon declared, “because it is the right thing to do.” Jon also discussed the strong administrative support for ESL education within the district. Administrators recognized the need to appoint an ELL coordinator to oversee the program and to provide the tools that teachers need to be successful in educating ELLs. Jon acknowledged that administration is committed to ESL curriculum development that aligns with WIDA standards.
and although it has been difficult, he claimed that the district will continue getting everything aligned and meet expectations in order to give “kids the best education they could possibly have.” Along with curricula alignment to promote achievement for ELLs, one of the district goals in the near future will be to hire an ELL teacher for the preschool level because Jon believed that beginning ESL support at the primary level would have a long-term, impactful outcome on the success of ELLs.

Jon claimed that District #2 teachers have engaged in copious professional development and training in SEI and ESL practice and pedagogy. He reported that nearly all of the district’s teachers have received the state mandated SEI Endorsement that requires educators to complete a state approved SEI courses that consists of eleven to twelve classes and is equivalent in time commitment to a three credit graduate level course. In regards to SEI trained teachers, Jon stated, “We don’t have any gaps in that regard.” However, District #2 goes beyond the state guidelines for SEI training and offers in-house, free of charge professional development. Jon recounted a time when the district flew in instructors from Wisconsin to provide professional development training on the WIDA model and how to align curriculum with the WIDA standards.

This year’s district-wide PD is focused on trauma, the effects of trauma on kids and how to create trauma sensitive schools. Jon claimed that this is particularly impactful for ELLs. He stated:

If you have ELLs, there’s a good chance in transitioning to this country, there could be some underlying trauma associated with the move, with the change, with additional stressors at school. A lot of things people learn about dealing and supporting kids that
are affected by trauma also apply to supporting all kids facing challenges. I think that directly impacts their ability to support ELL students in the classroom. Jon attributed much of the districts’ success in educating ELLs to hiring good teachers who are willing to embrace educating diverse learners and the training that goes into knowing how to effectively teach culturally and linguistically diverse students.

In addition to professional development, substantial district funds and Title III funds, federal funds granted to districts with higher ELL student populations, are allocated to extended school opportunities for ELL students. District #2 runs camps over winter and spring breaks and runs a five-week learning camp program over the summer. Over 200 hundred students participate, including ELLs and two to three ESL teachers make up the instructional staff. This program allows students to take classes and receive instruction, which according to Jon helps to close the achievement gap and prevent regression. Testing data revealed that the extended school program has proven results. In addition to camps and the summer program, funds are also allocated to support a high school ESL summer program instructed by the high school ESL teacher where students go on field trips and other events, which keeps them connected with their ESL teacher throughout the summer months. At one of the elementary schools, an ESL teacher runs an after school program on Tuesdays and Thursdays. The district funds after school transportation on Tuesdays and Thursdays so that students are able to attend enrichment, tutoring or any after school program on those days.

The Assistant Superintendent reported that the district does some things to engage parents and families of ELLs. One event that is successfully attended is a world culture ELL dinner where families bring dishes to represent their traditions and cultures. The dinner is always well
attended, “always packed” by both ELL teachers and families. However, Jon acknowledged that the district could probably do more in regards to reaching ELL parents and families.

Jon reported that several aspects of the ESL program are working well, including: hiring good teachers, providing “wraparound” services focused on extended school day and school year services for ELLs, training teachers, funding for ELL programs, maintaining a responsive culture, and finally, the district adapting to change. Jon surmised:

There’s been an effort to be responsive. When issues arise people tend to try to change the system, modify the system, improve the system as opposed to hanging on to whatever might or might not have been effective in the past. We are not change averse.

Although Jon acknowledged that faculty at times becomes frustrated with the amount of change that is occurring within the system, the reality is that the “world is changing and so everything is changing”. He claimed that it is his and the district’s goal to not just keep up with change, but to “stay ahead of it.”

Jon was forthcoming reporting the challenges and difficulties that the district has had in educating the growing number of ELLs. He reported that scheduling ESL support is difficult particularly at the high school level. He also reported that although the district currently employs seven ESL teachers that having enough teachers to meet the DESE’s hourly requirements of ESL instruction based on students’ English language proficiency level has been difficult. Still another challenge is with the “intersection” between the special education department and ESL department. For example, special education testing in an ELL’s native language has been challenging, but Jon claimed that he continues pushing for it and that the special education department is becoming more responsive. The last challenge that Jon reported was with the ESL and vertical curriculum design. He stated that he is not sure what exactly it should look like yet
and how the different English proficiency levels will be integrated into the core content areas, but he is committed to “keep plugging away at it.”

**ELL coordinator.** “Jo” is a white, female bilingual Portuguese speaker who has been an educator for seventeen years. She is licensed in English as a Second Language and is a state approved SEI instructor. She also has previously served on the board of MATSOL (Massachusetts Association of Teachers of Speakers of Other Languages). Prior to her role as ELL coordinator in District #2, Jo was an ELL coordinator in another suburban district with a lower incidence of ELLs. Presently, she has multiple roles that she fulfills as ELL coordinator, including: overseeing and collaborating with six other ESL instructors, working with complex cases such as with newcomers with little to no English, delivering professional development to district educators, monitoring students who have opted out of receiving ESL support services, examining data on ELL’s proficiency levels, working with the district’s RTI (Response to Intervention) teams, and translating for many of the district’s ELL parents and families who are native Portuguese speakers.

The interview with Jo took place in her office, which is located at the elementary magnet school. The office serves a dual purpose, first to instruct small groups of ELLs and second to house files and serve as an administrative area. Jo concurred with the Assistant Superintendent that the overall culture in regards to the ESL program in District #2 is one that promotes achievement for ELLs. She acknowledged that strong administrative support and good teachers are what contribute most to the district’s success with ELLs. The administrative team decided that with the growing ELL population, an ELL coordinator needed to be appointed to help maintain and implement an ESL program. Jo claimed that much of her time is devoted to working with ESL and core content teachers of ELLs, checking in and ensuring that ELLs are
receiving the mandated number of service hours and that effective SEI pedagogical practices are being carried out. Jo recounted a recent time when she observed a teacher reading to students, including ELL students, a book about a rabbit burrowing into the ground. She stepped in and relied on her expertise to help co-teach the lesson using a SEI strategy, “the 7-steps of vocabulary” to help ELL students understand what it meant for the rabbit to burrow.

Although it was clear that Jo relies on her expertise in SEI practices to promote achievement among ELLs, she expressed some dissention with the ESL program model in the district. She understood that the magnet model helped the district in regards to financial resources, but questioned whether the magnet school model is the best model at the elementary level because students were not receiving ESL instruction unless they left their neighborhood school to attend the magnet school. She claimed, “if they want to stay in their home school, they should be getting support right?” She claimed that because a number of ELLs do stay in their neighborhood schools, there are a number who opt out from receiving ESL support services; therefore, Jo spends time frequently checking in with opt-out ELLs who are receiving content instruction from SEI trained teachers, but not ESL support services from ESL teachers.

Jo concurred with the Assistant Superintendent that developing curriculum is the “hardest thing.” She claimed that the difficulty lies is developing curriculum that is differentiated for all of the English language proficiency levels of ELLs. Jo provided an example of writing curriculum for third graders who are at a higher English proficiency and then the following year, the third grade class may have several ELLs who are at lower or intermediate English proficiencies. She stated, “This is what we come up against, unless you’re going to teach from a textbook and who wants to teach like that way? I don’t like it.”
Jo is a state approved SEI instructor; therefore, she is able to offer the state mandated SEI Endorsement course in the district, free of charge to educators. In conjunction with the SEI Endorsement course, she offers a district-wide professional development class that provides teachers with 15 PDPs (professional development points) that are required by the state in order to renew teacher certification. Along with providing professional development, Jo offers pedagogical support and creates district goals for ELLs based on performance data. Jo recounted how ESL teachers determined that this academic year, an ESL department goal was to increase writing proficiency for ELLs because the scores were lowest in the language domain of writing on last year’s WIDA ACCESS exam.

Jo spoke to her role as an interpreter to many families of ELLs whose native language is Portuguese. Jo not only understands the language, but she claimed that she also understands the culture because she had lived in Brazil in her younger years for more than a decade. Brazilian Portuguese is the most dominant culture and language among ELLs in District #2. Jo claimed that the district World Culture night is a huge success because it is well attended. However, she claimed that the most significant ELL parent and family connection is her ability to speak the language and know the culture of families. She stated, “A significant area that’s really helped is that I speak Portuguese fluently.”

As the ELL coordinator, Jo claimed that the Assistant Superintendent is the primary person overseeing how district and Title III funds are being allocated, but she is able to make suggestions as to how funds should be used. For example, in the future, Jo planned on suggesting that a portion of Title III funds be used to support evening parent and family English classes. She acknowledged that the most effective use of district and Title III funds has been the
extended summer learning program for ELLs because it prevents an academic gap and in some cases promotes achievement.

Aside from the ELL coordinator questioning the program model in regards to the elementary magnet school, she suggested that District #2 is doing many things very well in regards to the ESL program. The first aspect of the program that Jo thought was working well was experienced, high quality ESL teachers providing ample instruction to ELLs. She declared:

They’re (teachers) good. They’re experienced. They have been teaching for years. I’ll tell you. They’re boom, boom, boom. They just amaze me. They’re really good. We work well to give ELLs the hours.

Jo was only able to highlight one area of improvement and one challenge in regards to District #2’s ESL program and that was with collaboration. She suggested that it has been challenging to promote collaboration between ESL teachers, classroom and core content teachers in part due to scheduling constraints. She went on to say, “They do a wonderful job, but I don’t think the ESL teachers have enough time to reach out to other teachers.”

**Focus group with teachers.** The District #2 focus group included five teachers from the elementary, middle and high school levels. All of the teachers identified as Caucasian, female, native English speakers. “Susie” is a second grade teacher who has been an educator for twenty-six years and has received the state mandated SEI Endorsement training. She has also received several other professional development trainings in the areas of ESL and SEI. In conjunction with her role as a classroom teacher, Susie serves as the ELL liaison to ELL families and teachers within her respective elementary school building. “Lynne” is a seventh grade special education teacher who has been an educator for thirty-two years in District #2. She has received the state mandated SEI Endorsement course and has also attended several professional
development workshops addressing special education and English language learners. “Brooke” is a middle school reading teacher to seventh and eighth grade students. She has been an educator for twenty-two years and has received the state mandated SEI Endorsement training as well as has participated in several other trainings in the areas of ESL and SEI. “Patricia” is a high school Biology teacher who instructs students in grades nine through twelve. Patricia has been an educator for fifteen years and has successfully taken and passed the SEI MTEL (Massachusetts Test for Educator Licensure) as well as has received several professional development trainings in the areas of ESL and SEI. “Lauren” is a high school reading teacher who instructs students, grades nine through twelve. Lauren has taken and taught ELL professional development courses and has passed the SEI MTEL.

All of the teachers reported an influx of ELLs to their classrooms; however, Lynne, who has been a special education educator in the district for three decades, remarked that District #2 has had a long history of educating bilingual students. According to most of the teachers, what has changed is the diversity of the cultures and languages being served within the district as well as the varying levels of English proficiency. Lynne went on to say that most immigrant families of ELLs come to the community for job opportunities. Brooke also noted that many ELL students come to school having associated trauma that may be connected to political or civil unrest in their home countries.

During the focus group, all of the teachers spent ample time presenting and discussing pedagogical practices being employed to engage ELLs and to promote achievement. Although some teachers claimed that they were always using SEI strategies because, “it’s good teaching” that is good for all students, most of them recognized that professional development training and the state mandated SEI Endorsement “brought ELLs to the forefront”. Lynne stated:
I use those strategies, the scaffolding, the fill-in the blanks, the sentence structures. Then taking the course, it was like, “I really need to focus more on this. It made me a little more aware that I would have to introduce the work, go in and teach it more directly than I was.

Further, Lynne claimed that strategies and curriculum change from year to year based on the needs of the ELL students. Patricia, the high school Biology teacher provided several specific examples of utilizing ESL and SEI strategies in her classroom such as with vocabulary development, the use of diagrams and graphic organizers, reduction of readings without reduction of rigor, and using the multiple English proficiency levels to tailor instruction. Brooke, the middle school reading teacher uses strategies to promote higher order thinking among ELLs such as connecting, predicting, summarizing and synthesizing. Susie, the second grade teacher claimed that as a result of training, she is more patient and more aware of the practices and strategies that she is employing in her lessons. Along with building vocabulary, using visuals, repeating back, and partnering, Susie frequently checks for understanding among her ELLs. She remarked, “I learned to have frequent check-ins, making sure that they know it’s ok to ask.”

Along with specific pedagogical practices, the teachers discussed the importance of building on ELL students’ backgrounds and utilizing their native languages to make connections. Brooke, the middle school reading teacher relies heavily on students’ native languages to promote reading proficiency in English, especially among newcomers with little English. As a result of training, Brooke noted that her practice has changed to incorporate use of native languages. She makes weekly trips to the local library and works with a librarian who wants to “give back” because she herself was an ELL who came to the United States during her
adolescent years. By listening to students read in their native languages, Brooke is able to tell what their reading fluency is. Lauren, the high school reading teacher also often uses students’ native languages to promote English reading proficiency. Patricia, the high school Biology teacher relies on ELL students’ native languages to make connections and explain dense scientific academic vocabulary. She claimed, “with those particular students, I am trying to look for connections between their own languages and their new vocabulary terms.”

District #2 teachers cited several areas of the ESL program and within the district at large that are working well in promoting ELL achievement. Foremost, the teachers recognized an overall drive among teachers to see students succeed. Brooke reiterated Lynne’s sentiment that the success of the ESL program can be attributed to dedicated teachers. Along with dedicated general education teachers, most teachers agreed that dedicated, collaborative experienced ESL teachers also contribute to ELL success.

Three of the five teachers claimed that strong administrative support and communication works well in District #2 in regards to the ESL program and ELL achievement. Patricia noted that as a content teacher, it has been important for her to receive some “guidance and support”. Susie felt that the administration is really trying and has never gotten the impression from “top administration” that they did not want the influx of ELLs to District #2 schools. Instead, she has felt that they want to “figure out” what works. One direct example of administrator support for teachers bridging the home-school connection is that teachers are provided with a list of translators who teachers can call on directly if they need to communicate with ELL families. The district pays for translation services. Patricia relayed that administrators have made it possible for District #2 teachers to engage in ESL and SEI cost free professional development.
opportunities. She stated, “A lot of the content teachers that had ELL students were able to have training for free, which always helps.”

According to two of the teachers, another area that is working well within the district is the extended school opportunities provided to ELL students. Susie teaches extra ESL curriculum two days per week after school and claimed that it’s not only great for ELLs, “it’s great for teachers too”. Along with after school opportunities, teachers claimed that ELL students get the opportunity to attend academic camps.

Although District #2 has marked success, educating ELLs, teachers cited challenges. Both Lynne and Susie reported determining whether a student is in need of special education services or whether academic difficulties are a result of limited English proficiency as a challenge. Lynne recalled a time when an ELL could not achieve a qualifying score on the WIDA ACCESS test to be able to transition out even after receiving ESL support for several years. Eventually, it was determined that the student had a language-based disability. Lynne remarked, “It is very difficult to make the determination when it is language and when it is a disability.”

Two teachers felt as though state and federal mandates requiring ELLs to pass standardized tests when they have yet to reach English proficiency as a significant challenge. In regards to standardized testing and Common Core, Lynn stated, “I think it’s grossly unfair to them (ELLs).” Additionally, Patricia whose high school students must take and pass the MCAS in order to graduate claimed that it was often “overwhelming” for ELLs to take these exams when they have yet to reach a higher level of English proficiency. Teachers claimed that unrealistic expectations such as expecting ELLs to pass standardized tests before they have reached higher levels of English proficiency leads to increases in students’ anxiety levels.
Teachers also found that time and scheduling lessons, courses and ESL support for ELLs as a challenge within the district. Susie discussed how difficult it is to schedule ESL services for several proficiency levels in one classroom. Lynne also commented how difficult is to schedule services and plan lessons for multiple English proficiency levels since the state mandates that the number of hours of ESL support services should correlate with students’ proficiency levels.

Individual teachers cited other challenging areas in regards to promoting ELL achievement. Lynne cited parent communication as challenging due to language and cultural differences. She provided the example of ELL parents not always advocating for their children because in their home cultures it is not customary for parents to advocate at school. Patricia claimed that promoting English proficiency in reading and writing at the middle and high school levels as a challenge. Both Lynne and Brooke cited the lack of bilingual materials and resources as a difficulty in promoting ELL achievement.

Upon recognizing the challenges and successes in educating ELLs in District #2, teachers called for various practices in order to maintain and improve upon the district’s success in the future. Abundantly, teachers wanted additional professional development opportunities in ESL and SEI. In addition to more professional development, most teachers thought the district should hire additional ESL support staff. Both Susie and Brooke cited needing more multicultural texts and materials in the district to assist with ELL students’ acquisition of English. Susie said, “Maybe more multi-cultural books in the native language. When students make the connections in text, they light up.” Brooke claimed that it would be a good idea to have an ELL library where there are books readily available in students’ native languages.

**Document review.** For the District #2 document review, seven sample ELL files were reviewed in the ELL coordinator’s office. District # 2 keeps two sets of ELE (English Language
Education) files for ELLs: one file remains in the ELL coordinator’s office and one file remains with ELLs’ cumulative files in their respective schools. The ELE program files are color coded as blue so they are easily recognizable. On the inside of each ELE file, a photograph of the ELL student was stapled to the front cover. On top of the file was a district created checklist to maintain proper filing to track progress and pertinent information for ELLs. The files included: home language surveys, WIDA model screening scores, WIDA ACCESS scores, MCAS scores, parent notification letters and WIDA can-do descriptors, which allow general education teachers to understand what ELLs “can-do” at their current English language proficiency levels. Several of the documents included in the files were translated into the students’ home languages. It was also noted that of the seven files reviewed, five of the ELL students had markedly high WIDA ACCESS scores, ranging in the four to five out of a possible six in all the domains of language: reading, writing, speaking and listening.

Summary of District #2 Findings

According to District #2’s Assistant Superintendent, the district is not a “change averse” system, which has resulted in administrators and teachers “embracing” the influx of ELLs to the district. District #2 was the only district in the multi-case study to implement a magnet school model at the elementary level. Although there was some dissention about the model, a vertical systemic culture of success was communicated by the Assistant Superintendent, the ELL coordinator and the teachers. Vertical refers to the top-down mindset that was reported by all of the district staff, one reflective of strong administrative support. The Assistant Superintendent claimed that administration has never said “no” to anything that the ESL department has requested. In tandem, the ELL coordinator acknowledged the strong administrative support that allows for her contributions to ESL program decisions. The participants reported highly
qualified teachers as a contributing factor to the district’s success since they have extensive knowledge of SEI practice and pedagogy. Although the ELL coordinator and teachers reported employing SEI pedagogical strategies to promote ELL achievement, they also recognized that ELLs are struggling to achieve in the language domain of writing, particularly at the high school level. Administration and teachers communicated having access to free, in-district professional development in the areas of ESL and SEI.

Although the Assistant Superintendent conveyed a need to expand on efforts to engage parents and families of ELLs, an underlying home-school connection was espoused during interviews with the ELL coordinator and teachers. District #2 educators are not only relying on ELLs’ native languages to promote English language proficiency among ELLs, but they are also using home language to connect with parents and families as evidence by the ELL coordinator’s continuous translations as a Portuguese speaker and in the document review with several translated documents including parent notifications. District #2 provides extensive extended school day opportunities to facilitate ELL achievement. Educators reported challenges in meeting the needs of ELLs, including: scheduling and collaboration between general education teachers and ESL teachers, the “intersection” between special education and ESL, curriculum, and unrealistic demands put on ELLs by state and federal mandates. Overall, educators agreed that in the future what could contribute to District #2’s success would be to hire additional ESL support staff for all levels including Pre-K.

School District #3

The final public school district examined will be referred to as District #3. District #3 is located in a higher socio-economic suburban community south of Boston. Like the other two school districts under examination for this multi-case study, it is deemed as high performing for
ELLs due to high ELL academic achievement scores on state standardized tests and to the exemplary review of the ESL program that was conducted by the Massachusetts DESE. District #3 has had a substantial growth in the number of ELLs attending district schools. In 2011, 68 ELLs were dispersed among the elementary, middle and senior high schools and by 2016, 119 ELL students attended district schools. In order to meet the needs of the growing ELL population, the school simultaneously grew the ESL teaching staff. There are six teachers in the school district and one ELL coordinator who is referred to as the ELL facilitator. The linguistic and cultural landscape of District #3’s ELL population differs greatly from those of District #1 and District #2. The majority of District #3’s ELLs speak Chinese, either Cantonese or Mandarin followed by Hebrew, Arabic, Korean, Hindi, Telugu and Tamil.

Table 5

*Growth of ELLs and ESL Department from 2011-2016 District #3*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic Year District #1</th>
<th># of ELL Students</th>
<th># of ESL Teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>1 teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>6 teachers and an ELL Facilitator</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: ELL= English language learner; ESL=English as a Second Language. Data from Interviews with District #3 Assistant Superintendent and ELL Facilitator.*

District #3 has six schools: one high school, one middle school, three elementary schools and one preschool. The Assistant Superintendent reported that the English language proficiency levels of ELLs vary across grade levels, with lower proficient students attending elementary schools and the majority of the higher proficient students attending the middle and high schools. Like the two other districts under examination, the ESL program model is bifurcated with ESL instruction delivered in a pullout model and SEI instruction delivered in core content classes.
The Assistant Superintendent acknowledged that implementing the program model is easier at the elementary level because of the schedule flexibility and more difficult to implement at the middle and high school levels because of the rotating secondary school schedule. He claimed, “There is a little bit of a tricky coordination that we do at the middle school and the high school level.”

The initial interviews took place with the Assistant Superintendent and the ELL facilitator. The first meeting was with the ELL facilitator and took place in her office at one of the district elementary schools. The ELL facilitator’s office served a dual role as a small ESL classroom and ESL administrative office. The interview lasted 45-60 minutes and the ELL facilitator was cooperative, answering all of the interview questions. The interview with the ELL facilitator was followed by an interview with the Assistant Superintendent at the central offices occurring the same afternoon. Because the initial interviews were held after school, the researcher returned to the district at a later date in order to conduct a focus group with teachers. The interview with the Assistant Superintendent lasted about 60 minutes, at which time he engaged in answering all of the research questions.

Three weeks following the initial interviews with the Assistant Superintendent and ELL facilitator, the researcher returned to the district to conduct a focus group with teachers. Because schools released at different times during the afternoon hours, the focus group was conducted in two shifts. The first group consisted of participants from the elementary level and the second group consisted of middle and high school teachers.

**Assistant Superintendent.** “Jesse” is an African American, native English speaking male, who has been an educator for 20 years. Before Jesse was an Assistant Superintendent, he was a teacher and has taken ESL courses as well as has received the SEI Endorsement for
administrators. Jesse has completed his doctorate of education degree and was supportive of this research endeavor, answering all of the interview questions thoroughly.

Throughout the interview, Jesse communicated District #3’s pervasive culture of high achievement and high expectations. Although he admits that ELLs have not always been a focus, they have become a focus due in part to forced state mandates as well as the continuous growth of the ELL population. Jesse is very pleased with this change and is a vocal advocate for ELLs in the district. He stated, “There was a time for change and I think the ELL population needs to have a voice in the next strategic action plan. I’d love to see that. I’d love to see those kids get a voice.”

Jesse communicated the importance of educators understanding cultural proficiency and understanding ELLs, their cultural backgrounds and the pressures that a traditional American educational model places upon them. He acknowledged that education is changing and cited Wagner’s (2014) book, The Global Achievement Gap as having an influence on his mindset as an educator. Further, Jesse stated that students coming from different countries other than the United States could teach Americans a lot about what is working in their home countries. Additionally, one of Jesse’s missions was to implement an early elementary world language program, beginning in grade 1. He claimed that it will not be enough for 21st century students to speak a second language, but they must be literate, proficient writers and critical thinkers in that language. He stated, “I believe that speaking a foreign language is not going to get you a job. Writing and being proficient and being able to critically think in a foreign language is going to make you employable.” Jesse often advocates for ELLs. He “fights” to increase the budget line in order to grow the staff and implement programs to assist them. Every year, Jesse approaches the Superintendent and school committee to request an increase in the ESL budget line. Jesse
claimed that he has been a “champion” for ELLs, but sometimes believes that a person other than him needs to “stand up and say that ELLs need support.”

Jesse discussed the importance of the ELL facilitator in making curricula decisions and informing administrators about ELL population growth and what is needed to support ELLs. He claimed that he and the ELL facilitator share the same type of “passion and perspective” for ELLs and the ESL program. Further, Jesse claimed that they continually ask, “What can we do more?”

According to Jesse, the ESL budget is allocated for resource materials, increasing staff, and offering professional development, free of charge to district teachers. Jesse spoke in depth about the importance of resource materials that assist in evaluation and early identification of ELLs. He stated, “We have a very robust, what I call an internal evaluation on common assessments we use for students. For instance, we use iReady and now we are currently piloting what’s called the STAR.” Jesse claimed that evaluation resources are essential because they allow educators to quickly determine a student’s strengths and weaknesses. The data provided by the evaluation resources often begin an investigatory process that according to Jesse “is a place to identify students who qualify for ELL services.”

Although Jesse remarked that teachers often struggle to identify with ELLs, he claimed that state mandates and changing of teacher certification requirements have brought ELLs to the forefront, “ELLs are now players.” In addition, he claimed that teachers are now “serious” about training and professional development that assists in their educating ELLs. Jesse claimed that PD is something that District #3 does “exceptionally well.” District #3 offers the state required SEI Endorsement course taught in-house by a trained SEI instructor and another 15 PDP ESL and SEI course. Professional Development courses are offered during the school year, during the
summer and are all offered free of charge to educators. In addition to in-house professional
development being offered free of charge, every educator receives $350 annually to use if they
attend outside professional development training.

Along with a range of PD offerings, Jesse highlighted other areas in regards to the ESL
program that are working well in District #3. First, Jesse claimed that the district has the
financial capacity to make adjustments to address “students coming in, transitioning in and out of
our ESL service program.” In part due to the work with the ELL facilitator such as making sure
that compliance reports are completed and keeping track of the ELL population, Jesse reported
that the district has a “pulse” on where ESL and ELL policy is going.” Therefore, allowing the
district to “get ahead of the curve”.

Jesse discussed the strengths of the ESL program; however, he also noted challenges that
the district has experienced in educating the growing ELL population. First, scheduling is often
a challenge particularly at the middle and senior high school levels. Another challenge has been
the teaching staff having difficulty identifying with the culturally and linguistically diverse ELL
student population. Still another difficulty according to the Assistant Superintendent is time
constraint, particularly due to the fact that in suburban districts such as District #3, administrators
are often wearing many hats. He claimed. “I just don’t have the time.” In addition to
identifying some challenges in regards to the ESL program, Jesse contended that the district
would need to hire more staff.

**ELL facilitator.** “Nelda” is a white, female native English speaker who has been an
educator for thirty years. She is licensed in English as a Second Language, has received the state
mandated SEI Endorsement training, and is a member of MATSOL. Nelda currently oversees
the ESL program in District #3 and she is overseen directly by the Assistant Superintendent.
Along with her administrative duties, Nelda instructs ELL students for a portion of the school day in the elementary school where her main office is located, grades Kindergarten through five. Nelda was informative during the interview and presented research with spread sheets and graphs that depicted the growth of ELLs in the district over the past years as well as demographic information, including the dominant languages and cultures of ELLs attending District #3 schools.

From the beginning of the interview Nelda echoed the Assistant Superintendent’s view that District #3 has extremely high standards and expectations for all students, including ELLs. Nelda claimed that ELLs engage in “rigorous instruction and achieve success.” Nelda described the ESL program model with both ESL pullout instruction and SEI instruction in content classes. While she was describing the program, she noted that an area of focus within the district has been with writing instruction and that ESL instruction is often provided to higher English proficient ELLs “during the writers workshop.” Along with the six ESL teachers in the district, Nelda reported that two literacy specialists in the district hold dual certification in ESL. District #3’s ELLs have access to both literacy specialists and math specialists as well. Although the district does not have a magnet school at the elementary level, Nelda claimed that the ELL population “fluctuates” year to year and most often there is a higher concentration of ELLs in one elementary school building.

Nelda reported that she wears many hats in the district as ELL facilitator. She claimed that along with teaching, she makes district decisions in regards to the ESL program and allocation of budget, offers professional development to district teachers, maintains contact with parents and families of ELLs and collaborates with teachers and district administrators. Nelda makes decisions regarding curriculum used to grow ELLs’ language proficiency and she devoted
a great deal of time discussing the various online and reading curriculums that the district employs. At the early elementary level, Nelda uses both Fundations and Telian to promote phonemic awareness and early literacy skills among ELLs. Some additional online reading curriculum tools that the district uses are ReadingA-Z.com and Razkids.com.

Nelda reported that the majority of District #3 teachers have received the SEI state mandated training and as a result are meeting the needs of individual children. Nelda claimed that the success of the program is attributed to the well-trained teachers. She claimed. “It’s the staff. It truly is. They understand best practices. Truly, we work as a team and I think that’s a huge piece.” Nelda relayed that administration supports her ability to collaborate with teachers. She remarked:

The principal really believes in giving some collaboration time. If you want to look at data, we have ‘data days’ where we sit and talk about kids and we analyze. We did that at the beginning of the year. I talk about the ACCESS results, we look at MCAS, we’re looking at iReady.

Nelda discussed her efforts to engage parents and families of ELLs. She claimed that she engages families in a variety of ways. In both the fall and spring, Nelda hosts parent and family coffee hours. At the fall coffee hours, she introduces herself and the ESL program, she explains how children were identified as ELLs, she explains what their ESL instruction will look like and provides “helpful hints” for ways that parents and families can help ELL students at home. At the spring coffee hours, Nelda discusses what families can do over the summer to help ELLs. Nelda also makes it a practice early in the year to call parents and families of ELLs to introduce herself and to get a feel whether anyone speaks English at home and whether translation is needed to keep families connected. Throughout the school year, Nelda sends emails to parents
and families of ELLs inviting them to various events at school. In addition to the many activities that Nelda invites parents to throughout the year, she also hosts a multicultural night that is well attended and in Nelda’s words “wonderful”.

Nelda reported that she assists in making allocation decisions for the ESL district budget. She claimed that the budget is used to support staff, professional development and for purchasing online and textbook curriculum materials. In addition, Nelda stated that they really want to make “meaningful” uses of funds. One summer, Nelda utilized funds to support summer tutoring for ELLs.

Nelda continually reported that the program model in District #3 is working as evidenced by ELLs’ annual WIDA ACCESS scores and other data sources.’ She claimed, “they’re (ELLs) improving as a majority.” Although Nelda felt that overall the ESL program model is working in District #3, she identified challenges. She claimed that scheduling ESL support services as problematic. She remarked, “Overall, it’s the scheduling piece. We really want to meet with the children during optimal times.” She also claimed that grouping ELLs has been difficult. In the past, ESL teachers were able to group ELLs in specific classrooms to make scheduling easier, but since SEI training, ELLs are dispersed in a multitude of classrooms. Finally, Nelda hoped that in the future, the district would be able to hire additional ESL staff. She stated, “It’s the amount of service staff, we still need more”.

**Focus group with teachers.** The District #3 focus group was comprised of six teachers, two elementary teachers, three middle school teachers and one high school teacher. “Jen” is a female, fourth grade elementary teacher who has been working as an educator in the district for ten years. “Charlotte” is a female, third grade teacher who has been working as a teacher in the district for eight years. “Joseph” is a male, middle school English teacher who has been an
educator for ten years. “Meredith” is a female, special education teacher in the middle school and has been a teacher in the district for nine years. “Jean” is a female, sixth grade English teacher who has been teaching in the district for three years. “Lisa” is a female, high school English teacher who has been an educator for seventeen years. All of the teachers in the focus group identified as white, native English speakers. All of the educators received the state mandated SEI Endorsement certification either through training or by passing the state SEI MTEL exam.

All of the educators reported an influx of ELLs to the district over the past years, but what has changed significantly, is the level of English proficiency among students. Meredith claimed that she has observed “an increase in students with little or no English proficiency join the district as compared to years prior.” Further, Joseph claimed that the increase of lower English proficient students has put demands on the staff and system. He stated:

The total number of ELL students has not necessarily been the biggest issue; rather it’s the number of Level 1 and 2 ELL students that start every year. Level 1 and 2 ELL students require a tremendous amount of resources in terms of staff to get them up to speed.

In addition to a rising number of lower English proficient ELLs, Jen and Charlotte also noted an increase in the number of bilingual students and parents who do not speak English as their first language.

Initially, there was debate in the group in regards to how SEI pedagogy differs from overall “good teaching” to reach all students. However, once the teachers discussed pedagogical strategies, such as those Meredith referred to including, model partnerships, explicit vocabulary instruction, use of objects and manipulatives, videos and technology, and sentence frames, the
teachers came to a consensus that the distinction between good teaching for all students and SEI strategies is the use of the native language and culture to facilitate learning and access to content. Joseph claimed that students use iPads to translate. Lisa goes a step further as a high school English teacher and provides native language texts to supplement English texts. Charlotte, an elementary teacher recalled a time when a student recognized a photo of a food, common to her native culture, hanging on the wall, which made her feel more comfortable and supported. Also Charlotte claimed that as a result of the increase in ELL and bilingual, and bi-cultural students in her class, she is more apt to use SEI strategies for whole class instruction. Joseph claimed that the demographic shift has resulted in teachers looking at their lessons and curriculum “through an ELL lens.”

The teachers acknowledged that there is an overall sentiment of inclusiveness and achievement in the district. Further, teachers reported that there is an underlying mission of wanting all students to succeed both in the district and within the greater community. Jen asserted that there is a high level of “professionalism” and teachers take their responsibility “pretty seriously”. Meredith claimed that District #3’s feeling of inclusiveness is a reflection of the culture of the greater community. She claimed that the local community’s website discusses understanding of the community’s faiths and cultures.

Teachers also claimed that dedicated ESL teachers are at the crux of ELL and district success. Jen claimed that the classroom and content teachers work with the ESL teacher as a “team.” Jean remarked that she was “fortunate to work with a fabulous ELL teacher who comes into the classroom three times per week.” Although most teachers have successfully adapted to the demographic shift of more ELLs in their classrooms, Joseph stated that high school teachers have had the most difficulty adapting.
Along with high school teachers having difficulty adapting their pedagogy to meet the needs of linguistically and culturally diverse student groups, teachers noted other challenges in promoting academic achievement and language proficiency among ELLs. Nearly all of the teachers reported not having enough ESL support staff as a challenge. The teachers discussed three additional challenges in promoting achievement among ELLs, including: state mandates and testing for ELLs, difficulty identifying special education needs for ELLs and difficulty promoting writing proficiency among ELLs. Jen, Charlotte and Lisa concluded that the state and federal mandates impacting ELLs and teachers of ELLs have been unrealistic. Jen and Charlotte claimed that ELLs have to take ACCESS and MCAS and during those times, the ESL teacher is unavailable to offer ESL support because she is administering tests. Charlotte stated, “she can’t do both.” Jen discussed the difficulty identifying special education needs for ELLs and the length of time it takes to identify and service special education needs. Finally, Lisa asserted that the greatest “gap” or challenge for ELLs is usually in the language domain of writing. Jen further claimed that ELLs always need extra support with writing and that it is the most “difficult area.”

All of the teachers claimed that they had received the state mandated SEI Endorsement. Joseph claimed that over the past decade there had not been a great deal of professional development in the areas of SEI and ESL within the district, but now the district is offering in-house SEI Endorsement courses and other specific courses. Joseph stated that ELL PD has “picked up markedly,” but still more focus needs to be placed on professional development opportunities. Both Charlotte and Jen claimed that the state mandated SEI course should have been more differentiated to meet the needs of suburban public school districts. Although the professional development was offered in district, the instructor was a teacher from an urban
public school. Lisa claimed that the newer ESL PD being offered in the district to fulfill the state requirements has been useful, flexible and in variety. She claimed:

This course provided an overview of WIDA and strategies for teachers who work with students at all levels. Our assignments asked us to create lessons with some of these strategies for our students. It was great practice and eye opening. The best part of the class was sharing best practices with colleagues.

All of the teachers requested more PD opportunities within the district in the future. Charlotte would like to have specific courses offered such as one focused on serving various cultural groups.

In addition to more professional development opportunities, teachers made several suggestions to promote achievement for ELLs. From a state and federal policy perspective, teachers called for less testing and perhaps implementing progress monitoring for ELLs. Jen also called for a state framework for identification of ELLs with special needs. At the district level, all teachers requested hiring additional ESL support staff. Teachers also requested more collaboration and planning time with ESL teachers. Meredith claimed that hiring additional ESL teachers would “allow for an ELL specialist to co-teach with academic teachers and provide inclusion support for all academic areas.”

**Document review.** For the District #3 document review, five sample ELL files were reviewed. The ELE program files contained checklists to ensure that files were maintained. The checklist included state required documentation, such as home language surveys, parent notification letters, WIDA ACCESS scores, MCAS scores, and progress reports. Many of the parent notification letters and progress reports were translated into native languages for parent and family review. A distinction of District #3’s program files was the many assessment scores
that the files also contained, including iReady assessment scores and Benchmark reading assessment scores. Each ELE program file also contained writing samples from the beginning of the year and the end of the school year to demonstrate growth.

**Summary of District #3 Findings**

District #3 is committed to “staying ahead” of the curve and educating all students, including ELLs. The Assistant Superintendent is a strong advocate for ELLs and works closely with the ELL facilitator to ensure that ELLs have a “voice.” The ELL facilitator contributes to curricula and ESL program decisions. The ELL facilitator and teachers claimed that District #3 has extremely high standards and expectations for all students to succeed in school and within the greater community. All District #3 educators reported an influx in ELLs with a recent shift in languages as well as English proficiency levels. Administrators and teachers agreed that District #3 offers professional development to support teachers’ in facilitating effective practices for ELLs. The ELL facilitator and teachers shared several effective pedagogical practices, highlighting the use of ELLs’ native languages to promote English language and content acquisition as well as to engage families of ELLs. Teachers agreed that the ELL facilitator acts as a “bridge” for ELL families and provides a historical perspective on students, which contributes to teachers working with them. The district engages families in various ways, including bi-annual coffee hours hosted by the ELL facilitator. The district allocates funds for materials and extended school opportunities such as summer tutoring. Administrators and teachers reported several challenges in meeting the needs of ELLs: scheduling, instruction at the secondary level, promoting proficiency in writing for ELLs, fulfilling state mandate requirements, and distinguishing between special education and ELL needs. Unanimously,
District #3 educators called for more ESL support staff in the future and specified professional development.

**Emergent Themes**

A detailed summary of the methodological approach employed for this study was presented in Chapter Three. The researcher utilized a multi-case study methodological approach to examine three high performing ELL suburban public school districts in southeastern, Massachusetts, interviewing key stakeholders including three groups: Assistant Superintendents, ELL coordinators, and classroom and core content teachers at various grade levels as well as an examination of ELL documentation. The researcher first assigned codes to District #1’s interview transcripts and documentation and then consecutively repeated this first cycle of coding process for District #2 and District #3. The second cycle of coding in this study involved two phases. The first phase included the researcher searching for patterns and themes within the individual school districts followed by “merciless” cross-checking prior to naming a pattern (Miles et al., 2013, p. 87). Then, using an Excel spreadsheet, the researcher mapped the pattern codes within the individual school districts so that the interrelations among codes could be seen. Upon mapping pattern codes within the individual school districts, the researcher engaged in cross-case synthesis, examining the results of each individual case and then observing the patterns across cases (Yin, 2013).

During this thematic analysis process, the researcher looked for patterns between the three high achieving suburban public school districts. Table seven displays overarching themes across District #1, District #2 and District #3 in accordance to the research questions. In the subsequent presentation of themes, representative data collected during interviews is used as evidence of consensus among participants across the three school districts.
Table 6

*Themes According to Research Questions*

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<th>How do teachers and district administrators across three high achieving suburban school districts perceive the challenges to effectively meeting the needs of a growing ELL population?</th>
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<th>How do teachers and district administrators across these high achieving suburban school districts believe they could better foster and support the academic achievement of ELL students?</th>
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<td>Theme 13 Increase ESL support staff</td>
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*Note:* ESL=English as a Second Language; Data from Interviews and document review across three high performing suburban ELL districts.

**Research Question 1:** How do teachers and district administrators across three high achieving suburban school districts perceive the challenges to effectively meeting the needs of a growing ELL population?

**Theme 1: Collaboration and scheduling time.** During interviews and focus groups, participants were asked how they perceive the challenges that have been experienced in meeting the needs and promoting academic achievement for ELLs. “Collaboration” was a key perception in some facet across all three districts. District #1 Assistant Superintendent reported “carving out meeting” time between general education teachers and ELD (ESL) teachers as a challenge particularly at the high school level. Marie, District #1 ELD coordinator concurred that...
collaboration with ELD teachers and general education teachers as a challenge due to scheduling constraints. During the focus group, District #1 teachers called for additional “built-in” collaboration time between ELD teachers and general education teachers in the future. District #2’s ELL coordinator reported that collaboration between ESL teachers, classroom and core content teachers has been difficult due to ESL teachers not having enough time to “reach out” to general education teachers. District #2 teachers felt as though collaboration time between ESL teachers and general education teachers should be more prevalent, occurring with more frequency like IEP meetings for special education students. District #3 had differing views concerning collaboration. While District #3 ELL facilitator claimed that one elementary principal supports her ability to collaborate with general education teachers through provided collaboration time, District #3 teachers called for more co-planning and co-teaching opportunities between ESL teachers and general education teachers.

District #1 ELD coordinator acknowledged scheduling constraints as a challenge and attributed it to the infancy of the program. District #1 teachers spent significant time during the focus group discussing scheduling as a challenge. The challenge was mostly evident at the elementary level in District #1 because teachers felt that ELLs were being pulled-out of their general education classes too frequently and for extended periods of time. One teacher Chaseka claimed:

They’re pulled out; they’re pulled out too much, in our opinion. The amount of time the kids are pulled out is extraordinary. We’re doing a write around in class, one of the SEI strategies that we learned, but they (ELLs) were absent for two out of the three days that we worked on that, so it’s pointless. I did it for them and they were not there.
District #2 Assistant Superintendent claimed that scheduling ESL support services is difficult, particularly at the high school level. According to District #2 Assistant Superintendent, scheduling is also difficult because ESL teachers are trying to meet the state mandated number of hours of service in accordance to ELLs’ English language proficiency levels. District #3 ELL coordinator cited scheduling constraints, while District #3 teachers concurred with the Assistant Superintendent, discussing how difficult it is to schedule ESL services for several proficiency levels in one classroom. District #3 Assistant Superintendent also reported scheduling difficulties at the high school level due to the rotating daily schedule. District #3 ELL facilitator echoed the Assistant Superintendent’s claim that scheduling has been a challenge. She stated, “overall, it’s the scheduling piece, we really want to meet with children during optimal times.”

Theme 2: Intersection between special education and ESL. District #2 Assistant Superintendent cited challenges with the “intersection” between special education and ESL departments, namely an issue implementing native language special education tests for ELL students. District #2 teachers also found the intersection between special education and ESL challenging. The challenge that District #2 teachers cited was determining whether an ELL student is in need of special education services or whether his or her academic difficulties can be attributed to limited English proficiency. District #3 teachers also claimed that identifying ELLs with special education as a difficult, lengthy process. Jen claimed:

I think the biggest challenge is when there’s an ELL who also has special education concerns. That is the hugest thing for me. It takes too long; I think to identify that piece of it versus the ELL piece. I think the student is being done a disservice because it’s taking longer for them to be identified
Theme 3: ESL at the high school level. Districts reported various elements of educating ELLs at the high school level as challenging. Although different challenges arose, several educators referred to promoting achievement and language acquisition as more difficult at the “high school” level. District #1 Assistant Superintendent identified collaboration between ESL teachers and content teachers as challenging at the high school level. District #1 teachers reported a lack of motivation among high school ELLs. They also noted difficulty in high school ELLs accessing a rigorous curriculum and meeting the same standards as native English speaking peers. District #2 teachers reported that promoting reading and writing proficiency in English as a challenge at the high school level. District #3 Assistant Superintendent cited scheduling support services for ELLs as a significant challenge at the high school level due to the high school’s rotating schedule. Lastly, District #3’s teachers reported high school teachers as teachers who are less apt to adjust to the influx of ELLs to their classrooms. Joseph asserted:

I see this mostly as a problem at the high school level. It feels to me like middle school teachers see themselves more as teachers of students and they are more willing to adapt what they do to reach students; on the other hand, high school teachers see themselves more as teachers of content, and as a result, they seem less willing to alter what they are teaching or the way they are teaching just to reach a specific demographic of student.

Theme 4: Curriculum. In some cases curriculum was alluded to as a challenge and in others, educators overtly stated the challenge of vertically implementing systemic ESL curriculum. District #1 Assistant Superintendent reported facilitating curriculum continuity and embedding ELD (ESL) curriculum systemically as a major focus of district administrators. This can be evidenced by District #1’s implementation of a Curriculum Council, which the ELD coordinator is a part of. District #1 teachers claimed that there is a disconnect between ESL
Regarding the ESL curriculum, Elena claimed:

It had nothing to do with what we were doing in the classroom. It’s in complete isolation. That’s frustrating because when you have children who can’t speak the language, and you’re looking for help in helping them to be able to better manage the social language, which comes first, if it doesn’t dovetail with what you’re doing in the classroom, it probably is helpful, but it’s not great.

Further District #1 teachers claimed that high school students have difficulties meeting the demands of a common curriculum. District #2 Assistant Superintendent acknowledged that aligning ELL curriculum with WIDA standards in conjunction with vertical alignment of core content courses has been difficult. District #2 ELL coordinator reiterated the Assistant Superintendent’s claims that developing ESL curriculum is one of the “hardest things”, particularly due to developing curriculum that is differentiated for all of the English proficiency levels.

One specific curricula challenge was promoting writing proficiency in English for ELLs, which emerged as a challenge across two of the three districts. District #2 ELL coordinator created a district and department goal of promoting writing proficiency among ELLs since scores revealed that writing was the lowest domain of language for ELLs. She stated:

Right now, this year, we all decided that our goal was going to be to improve the writing scores, because they are always the lowest scores. We are seeing a big disparity. We wanted to hone in on how to instruct it. We’ve done a writing prompt at the beginning of the year and we’re examining student work to look at what we are going to teach.
District #2 teachers claimed that promoting writing proficiency among middle and high school students as challenging. Finally, District #3 teachers also claimed that overall, there is difficulty promoting writing proficiency among ELLs.

**Theme 5: State and federal mandates.** The last thematic challenge that emerged is not a challenge brought on by practices within the districts, but as a result of external forces, state and federal mandates. Educators cited that districts as well as ELL students are experiencing difficulties as a result of mandates. District #2 teachers reported that state and federal mandates requiring ELLs to pass standardized tests before they have reached higher levels of English proficiency as a challenge. Further, during the focus group, the high school Biology teacher in District #2, Patricia claimed that expecting high school students to pass standardized tests when they may have recently come to American schools increases ELLs’ anxiety levels. She stated:

> MCAS tests are, I think overwhelming for students who first enter into the country and cannot necessarily speak even English when they are coming in, and then to have to pass that. That’s often a big hurdle. Some students are just coming into 11th grade.

Finally, District #3 teachers cited meeting the requirements of state and federal mandates as a challenge for ELLs, especially the requirement of taking and passing standardized tests.

**Research Question 2: How are teachers and district administrators across these high achieving suburban school districts currently meeting the needs of their growing ELL population, as perceived by these educators?**

**Theme 6: Systemic mindset of success.** In regards to what the school districts were doing to successfully meet the needs of a growing ELL population, the initial theme that emerged involved a systemic mindset of success and achievement for all students. District #1’s Assistant Superintendent reported using Putnam’s (2016) book *Our Kids: The American Dream*
in Crisis to assist in implementing the district’s strategic plan to support all students. Tilly stated:

We try hard to learn as much as we can about all of our students. If we can’t support the physical, emotional and mental health of our students, it’s really hard for us to expect them to meet academic expectations. I think that’s really become the underpinning of the current administration in our district.

District #1’s ELD coordinator also reported a strategic mission as one that promotes success for all students and she compared the district’s mission to a previous suburban district where she had formerly worked. Marie stated:

I worked in another district town in the area and to work in both districts, it’s been night and day for me as far as respect and as far as support of the students as well. I think in District #1, there is a genuine desire to have all students succeed. They’re (ELLs) not referred to as “those kids” or “them”, so it’s not like that at all.

District #1’s teachers asserted that there has always been an overall mindset within the district and among teachers that students will succeed. Mary stated:

I think District #1 is an amazing community with a lot of highly motivated, talented teachers who want to do the right thing no matter what before all of this came down. In fact, some of the kids that might be identified as ELLs might not have had services early on.

District #2’s Assistant Superintendent communicated a vertical systemic culture that is committed to making sure that all students, including ELLs as evidenced by the numerous trainings that teachers have “embraced.” District #2 teachers also recognized an overall drive among teachers to see students succeed. Lynne remarked:
Because we’re professional and we want the kids to do well. It’s all about the kids and it’s always been about the kids. All the way back we’ve always had such good support and good that it’s worked, that’s why.

District #3 Assistant Superintendent attributed his “mindset” of success for all students to Wagner’s (2014) book *The Global Achievement Gap*. He declared:

What he (Wagner, 2014) shared with me is what made me influence my decisions as a teacher and continue to change my mindset as a teacher. It’s around getting to know your students, and more importantly, valuing what they bring to the table, but also teaching them skills to be successful in what I call a global economy and a global workforce.

District #3’s ELL facilitator reiterated that the district has extremely high standards and expectations of success for all students. Nelda claimed that ELLs engage in “rigorous instruction and achieve success.” Further, District #3 teachers acknowledged an overall sentiment of achievement and success for all students. Joseph claimed that even when teachers are not given the “proper tools”, everyone “cares about what they are doing and wants every kid to succeed, so quite often, they do.”

Some educators communicated that in order to instill a mindset of success in educating ELLs, there must be a simultaneous mindset of cultural competency and proficiency. District #1 Assistant Superintendent highlighted the district’s commitment to promoting cultural competency systemically. For example, several teachers of grades seven through twelve engaged in a full day of professional development geared toward the literature selections that students are reading. Tilly indicated that for multi-lingual and multi-cultural populations such as ELLs and for all students, that choosing literacy materials that are representative of diverse cultures is important. Tilly stated, “We are working really hard to also within some of our
curricula materials, identify resources where people featured in them look like the students.” District #1 dedicates one week per year when all stakeholders engage in activities to promote respect and tolerance. An example of District #1’s systemic cultural competency are flags displayed from every ELL students’ family’s home countries in the entry ways of the school buildings.

District #3’s Assistant Superintendent communicated a desire to promote cultural competency systemically. He communicated the importance of educators’ understanding ELL students’ cultural backgrounds and that often teachers have difficulty identifying with students who come from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. He claimed that students coming from different countries often have a lot of pressure placed upon them. According to Jesse, cultural proficiency would include ELL students teaching Americans about their home countries. He professed:

They already come from countries in areas that are very different to the United States. I think it’s about time that we just sit down for once as Americans, and I include all of us, sit down and say, “What worked in your country? What can we learn from them?”

Theme 7: Strong administrative support. Strong administrative support for the ESL program and teachers of ELLs was demonstrated across districts. District #1 ELD coordinator attributed much of the district’s success in educating ELLs to strong administrative support as evidenced by the hiring of ESL teachers, appointing an ELD coordinator and giving the ELD coordinator a voice in district decisions. Marie claimed, “I think the administrative support in respect for our students has been key to making things change.” District #2 Assistant Superintendent communicated strong administrative support for the ESL program since they
recognized a need to appoint an ELL coordinator as well as administration’s desire to support the needs of the teachers and students in order to promote ELL achievement. He claimed:

They (teachers) just need to know what they need to be successful. I can’t remember ever saying no to anything. We’ve (administrators) never really said no to the ELL department when they ask for things.

District #2’s ELL coordinator acknowledged the strong administrative support that contributes to the district’s success educating ELLs. She stated:

I think that top administration; the Superintendent and the Assistant Superintendent are very supportive. They look to see how they can best serve ELLs. We have a really good team of ESL teachers here. I think that has a lot to do with it because if you don’t have the administration’s support, you’re always fighting for every little inch.

District #2 teachers felt that administrators want to assist in meeting the needs of the growing ELL population. According to District #2 teachers, one way that administrators show their support of teachers is by providing them the freedom to obtain interpreters on their own as well as by offering free professional development opportunities. District #3 Assistant Superintendent conveyed his advocacy for the ESL program and ELL achievement by how hard he fights to increase the budget line to support the program. He claimed:

Every year, I have to go in front of the Superintendent and the school committee and ask for a budget increase that supports ELL students. I always pound the table, kick the chairs over and maybe they give me something.

One way that the administrators are supporting ESL programs and achievement of ELLs that was common across all three high performing districts was permitting the ELL coordinators to have a “voice” in district decision making. District #1 ELD coordinator has a place on the
Curriculum Council and conducted a needs assessment that informed budget decisions for the ELD program. District #1 Assistant Superintendent conveyed the importance of including the ELD coordinator in on important district decisions that impact ELLs. Tilly stated:

I’m not meeting with ELD teachers and trying to carry that message up. We’re meeting as a team, so we’ll get to a point where somebody will say, “All right, ELD coordinator, how do we approach this with ELLs? How can we break through some of the challenges we have with proficiency so that all students can have X experience?”

Marie, District #2 ELD coordinator confirmed the Assistant Superintendent’s assertion that she is directly involved with making budget allocation decisions, curricula decisions, and overall with maintaining the ELD program. She claimed that her involvement in administrative meetings has opened up people’s eyes to the needs of ELLs and the understanding of what the district needs to do in order to help ELLs succeed:

It seems like our students (ELLs) are part of almost every conversation that goes on across district. Now that I’m the department head, I go to a lot more meetings and our students are brought up constantly so that’s been a real awareness.

District #3 Assistant Superintendent regarded the ELL facilitator as someone who shares the same “passion and perspective” as he does when it comes to advocating for ELLs. According to Jesse, the District #3 ELL facilitator informs curricula and budget decisions for the ESL program.

**Theme 8: Quantity and quality ESL teachers.** All three high performing districts hired additional ESL teachers to coincide with the influx of the ELL population to the district. District #1 increased its ESL staff from one teacher in 2000 to six teachers and an ELD coordinator in 2016. District #2 increased its ESL staff from six teachers in 2001 to 7 teachers and an ELL
coordinator in 2016. District #3 increased its ESL staff from 1 teacher in 2011 to 6 teachers and an ELL facilitator in 2016. In addition to increasing ESL staff, teachers and administrators across the three districts reported that the ESL staff is knowledgeable, assisting with SEI practices as well as working with families to bridge, the home-school connection. District #1 teachers attributed much of the district’s success in educating ELLs to the accessibility and responsiveness of the ELD coordinator. Chaseka claimed:

She’s very responsive. She happens to be in my building a lot of times, so I feel like I have access to her all of the time. Anytime I’ve contacted her about anything, she gets right back to me.

Jo, District #2 ELL coordinator claimed that ELL achievement can be linked to the experienced, high quality ESL teaching staff. Jo claimed that ESL teachers’ success can be measured by the progress ELLs are making on annual WIDA ACCESS exams, “They are progressing well in ACCESS. That’s how we know.”

District #2 teachers concurred that quality ESL teachers make major contributions to ELLs’ success. Brooke described the middle school ESL teacher as “dedicated, kind, motherly and nurturing.” Patricia stated that the high school ESL teacher has been a great resource to her as someone who can offer strategies that may work for a specific ELL student. Lynne talked about the middle school ESL teacher as “wonderful” and someone who works very hard with ELLs. Lauren too regarded the high school ESL teacher as a dedicated teacher who even “works over the summer” with ELLs. Susie highlighted an ESL teacher action that has contributed to ELL success, early identification. Finally, Lynne noted that the ESL teachers have to develop “rapport” with ELLs more than any other teacher because it is important for ELLs to “feel that comfort and connection.” District #3 teachers echoed the sentiments of District #2 teachers
when describing the contributions of ESL teachers to the program’s success. Meredith claimed that teachers are lucky enough to have their ESL teacher because he is a “wonderful resource to help us meet the needs of the ELLs”. Charlotte claimed that the ESL teacher often acts as a “bridge” between the teacher, the school and ELL parents and families. The ESL teacher’s ability to act as a bridge is in Charlotte’s opinion due to the ESL teacher having the historical perspective of the student’s strengths and needs as well as a relationship with the family.

**Theme 9: Highly trained general education teachers.** Throughout the interviews, time and again, administrators and teachers demonstrated extensive knowledge of best practices including elements of the most proven pedagogical delivery system, the SIOP (Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol) model (Echevarria, Vogt & Short, 2004). All of the teachers interviewed had received the state mandated SEI Endorsement certification, either as a result of extensive training or passing of the state’s SEI MTEL. District #1 Assistant Superintendent openly discussed teacher practices that are occurring in the district. Tilly reported:

> We have a lot of conversations going on right now about inclusion practices, differentiation and what’s good instruction and then what is good instruction to support language development. We’ve got teachers working with content and language objectives. We’ve got teachers using sentence frames in their vocabulary instruction.

Marie, District #1 ELL coordinator reported that teachers engage in discourse surrounding best practices and instructional approaches, which assists in their honing their craft. Marie also claimed that District #1 teachers feel “responsible” for ELL achievement. During the focus group, District #1 teachers conveyed their extensive knowledge of SEI pedagogy. Some of the pedagogical strategies discussed during the focus group included: vocabulary development, visual supports, pairing ELLs with higher proficient students, understanding students’ cultural
backgrounds, reliance on native language, specific syntax instruction, and specific writing strategies.

District #2 Assistant Superintendent attributed much of the district’s success for ELLs to good teachers who are willing to embrace diverse learners. He claimed that even with all the time that has gone into training teachers in effective SEI instruction, they are still “lining up” to get more training. District #3 Assistant Superintendent claimed that teachers are “serious” about training and educating ELLs. District #3 ELL coordinator, Nelda spent ample time discussing ESL and SEI pedagogical practices and ESL strategies that are being employed in the district. She stated:

Teachers are well educated in understanding best practices and differentiating instruction, scaffolding instruction, through modeling, guided practice, using effective vocabulary strategies in providing instruction, collaborative conversations with student peers, small groups. Within the whole class there is an emphasis on visual representation. I think an emphasis on developing higher level thinking skills, sentence strips to help children participate in the oral discussions. Teachers emphasize using all the different domains through the speaking, listening, reading and writing - integrating those.

The state mandated SEI course as well as PD courses teach all of the aforementioned pedagogical strategies.

A commonality across the three high performing districts was how they ensured that all their general education teachers are highly trained in differentiation and best practices for instructing ELLs. All of the districts offer convenient, in-house professional development opportunities throughout the year, free of charge.
**Theme 10: Extended school learning opportunities.** When discussing allocations of resources as well as responding to the question asking participants to describe what the district is doing well in meeting the needs of ELLs, administrators and teachers revealed several examples of extended school opportunities that are occurring to engage and to promote achievement of ELLs. District #1 ELD coordinator discussed ELL field trips that promote cross grade level interaction among students. Marie stated, “It’s a nice way for younger students to just connect with older students and the older students really seem to like making connections with younger students.” District #2 teachers were so supportive of extended school opportunities for ELLs that they requested more of them in the future.

Perhaps the most comprehensive extended school program exists in District #2 in part due to the fact the District #2 was the only school district that received Title III funding to support ELL achievement. According to District #2 Assistant Superintendent, Title III funds are allocated to support field trips, a high school summer program, winter break and spring break camps, and a five-week summer camp program. The summer camp program employs ESL educators and provides transportation for students. The camp is well attended and data supports that it helps to close the gap that at times extends over the summer months. Jon even claimed that at times, data revealed that the summer camp promoted academic gains for ELLs. Jon reported:

We go ahead and we have pre and post testing in all of these kids. Those kids have an end of the year benchmark score and we have a beginning of the year benchmark score as well, so we can prove we have virtually no regression for anyone. A lot of the kids make gains over the summer.
District #2 allocates funds for afterschool transportation to assist ELLs in attending afterschool tutoring two days per week. Jon claimed that these extended “wraparound” programs for ELLs are a major contributor to the district’s and ELLs’ successes. District #2 ELL coordinator acknowledged that in her opinion, the most effective use of Title III funds is the extended school programs, particularly the summer school program. Jo stated:

We have a really long, good summer school. We have X teacher who runs the summer school and it really, really makes a difference. You know how sometimes ELLs come back to school and they have regressed. It’s wonderful when you can keep the learning going.

District #2 teachers confirmed administrators’ assertions that the extended school programs for ELLs are not only assisting students, but also teachers. Although District #3 does not currently receive Title III funding, ELL facilitator, Nelda reported that a portion of the ESL budget line is used to support summer tutoring for ELLs.

**Theme 11: Native language support.** All three districts reported utilizing ELLs’ native languages in some capacity whether it is to promote acquisition of English or to engage families of ELLS. District #1 teachers reported using technology and bilingual parent volunteers to assist newcomer ELL students in acculturating and acquiring English. Mary reported:

I had to use another parent, who happened to be lucky enough to be in my room, to translate the Mandarin because they didn’t understand anything. Yeah, another parent who was a scientist and happened to speak Mandarin as well, and then this child could speak a little, so he was a little bit of the bridge.

District #1 teachers also relied on a guidance counselor who is bilingual Portuguese speaking to assist with ELL students. Elena claimed:
The guidance counselor comes to our school and it is huge, especially in the beginning when the ELL students have no one who is speaking their language. Their faces just lit up when this woman came in. They’re so anxious at that age to come into this new environment and nobody speaks their language. It’s not easy.

District #2’s ELL coordinator acts much like District #1’s guidance counselor as an interpreter to students; however, Jo acts as an interpreter for parents and families as well as a bilingual Portuguese speaker since the dominant language among ELLs in District #2 is Portuguese. During the initial interview, Jo had to excuse herself more than once to go to the main office to translate for parents. District #2’s middle school and high school reading specialists rely on ELL students’ native languages to assist in growing their literacy in English. Brooke, the middle school reading specialist reported making weekly trips to the local library to find books in students’ native languages. Lauren, the high school reading specialist often uses students’ native languages to promote proficiency in reading and writing. She recalled:

I had to write in Portuguese. I had her just write, I said, “Just tell me about yourself in Portuguese” and I had her write it in Portuguese. We are working on literacy. I had her read a very short passage and I said write about it in Portuguese.

District #3 ELL facilitator, Nelda reported using native language translation to engage families of ELLs. She stated, “Then I follow up because sometimes they need it (the email) translated in their own language so that they read the email we send and encourage them to participate.”

District #3 high school English teacher reported using native language texts to supplement texts in English. Lisa claimed, “A student this year is reading a novel in class, but is using a Chinese version to supplement his needs.”
Theme 12: Unique parent and family engagement. As discussed in a previous theme, all of the three districts are engaging families of ELLs through translation and native language support. However, the school districts reported engaging parents and families of ELLs in other unique ways. District #1 reported engaging families through “meet ups”. According to Marie, “meet ups” are times beyond the school day when the ELD coordinator and teachers meet up with ELL students and their families at district wide events such as school plays, concerts, and presentations. Marie claimed that family meet ups are a way to foster relationships with families while at the same time helping them to become part of the greater school community.

District #2 Assistant Superintendent claimed that the district could probably invest more in engaging families of ELLs. However, one of the unique ways that they are currently engaging families are through school events such as World Culture Night. World Culture Night is a district night focused on showcasing cultures from around the world. Families of ELLs often bring food dishes authentic to their cultures. Both Jon and Jo claimed that World Culture Nights have been well attended.

District #3 engages families in unique ways as well. Along with hosting a multicultural night, the ELL coordinator Nelda, hosts coffee hours. The coffee hours are intended to inform parents and families about the ESL program and about what they can be doing at home to foster academic achievement and the promotion of literacy. In order to make ELL families feel connected to the greater school community, Nelda continually sends emails to ELL families inviting them to school events. She stated:

I send emails to parents, the ELL parents. There are always a lot of things going on like movie nights, and there are a lot of different programs that our ELL children and families are invited to at our schools.
Research Question 3: How do teachers and district administrators across these high achieving suburban school districts believe they could better foster and support the academic achievement of ELL students?

Theme 13: Increase ESL support staff. When asked what the educators, schools and districts could do better in the future to better support ELLs, the most prevalent response was to increase ESL teacher or support staff. According to most district participants, more support staff would provide more direct ESL support services for students, but it would also allow for more collaboration and co-planning time between ESL teachers and general education teachers. District #1 Assistant Superintendent claimed that there is a need to hire more support staff and paraprofessionals specifically to support the ELD program.

District #2 Assistant Superintendent contended that a primary district goal is to hire an ESL teacher for the preschool level since servicing ELLs at the primary level has the potential to have long-term results in promoting achievement for ELLs. District #2 teachers concurred that the district should hire additional ESL staff in the future. Patricia claimed that it would be nice to have even more staff so that collaboration is more prevalent like when teachers meet for IEP meetings; she thought it would be beneficial to do the same type of team meetings for ELL students. Lynne felt that in order to maintain a manageable student-to-teacher ratio, then additional ESL teachers would need to be hired.

District #3 Assistant Superintendent hoped to hire additional ESL staff in the future to meet the needs of the growing ELL population. He claimed, “We need more staff. The ELL population is certainly not going down anytime soon”. Most District #3 teachers felt that there is a need to hire additional ESL staff. Jen claimed that because there is only one ESL teacher in her building, she often feels “pulled” in many directions. Jean claimed that an “instructional assistant” in the classroom would be a “great asset” to ELLs. Joseph claimed that an ESL teacher going between two buildings, the middle and high school that are on different schedules
is “just not workable.” Lisa asserted that if the district wants to better support the academic achievement of ELLs, then the district should hire additional staff. Joseph recommended hiring an ELL teacher for both the middle and high school and instructional support staff in both buildings to assist the ESL teacher. Lisa envisioned the “ideal situation” as having an ESL teacher at each grade level. Both Joseph and Lisa asserted that more ESL support staff would result in more co-planning and co-teaching opportunities.

**Theme 14: Increase professional development opportunities.** As noted in the previous theme of “highly trained general education teachers,” teachers in all three districts have received convenient, free PD that is offered in-district. However, in almost all of the cases, teachers requested more professional development opportunities to continue staying current with pedagogical trends in order to meet ELL needs. Districts #2 Assistant Superintendent described teachers’ desire to obtain additional PD when he stated that they “are lined up” for more professional development training in the areas of ESL and SEI. District #1’s ELD coordinator claimed that although teachers have received the SEI training, they “want and need more.” Further, Marie claimed that PD and continuing to offer professional development opportunities for teachers will help teachers remain successful particularly if the PD is more in line with practices and not “just plugging holes.” District #1 teachers validated Marie’s claim requesting additional PD; however, they called for specific PD that would be tailored to suburban educators to address specific needs of suburban teachers.

In addition to District #2’s Assistant Superintendent validating teachers’ desire to receive more PD opportunities, District #2 teachers abundantly requested more targeted professional development in SEI and ESL. Brooke requested targeted professional development such as courses specific to teaching reading and writing to ELLs. Lynne requested more professional
development than what is required of the state. She thought the district should continue to “stay current with it, stay on top of it.” District #3 teachers also requested more specified PD in the future such as courses that are focused on serving various cultural groups.

Summary

Chapter four presented the data as collected and analyzed by the researcher of the three high performing ELL suburban public school districts according to the perspectives of district administrators and teachers. Each district was described in great detail followed by rich descriptions of each of the interviews and focus groups with district educators. In total, twenty-three educators were interviewed over the course of several meetings. Documents, ELE program files were reviewed as to support educator perspectives. Upon detailing the individual suburban school districts, emergent themes were articulated. Emergent themes were presented with quotes representing consensus across the three districts.

The themes were considered in relation to the research questions. The first research question addressed the perceptions of the challenges to effectively meeting the needs of a growing ELL population. Five overarching themes emerged first within the individual districts and then through cross case analysis of the three districts, including: collaboration and scheduling time, intersection between special education and ESL, ESL at the high school level, curriculum, and state and federal mandates. The second research question addressed the perceptions of educators regarding how the districts were currently meeting the needs of ELLs. Since the consensus was drawn among twenty-three educators, across three districts, several themes emerged uncovering ESL practices and allocations of resources, including: systemic mindset of success, strong administrative support, quantity and quality ESL teachers, highly trained general education teachers, extended school learning opportunities, native language
support, and unique parent and family engagement. The final research question addressed how teachers and district administrators across these high achieving suburban school districts believed they could better foster and support the academic achievement of ELL students in the future. A consensus among educators across the three districts subscribed to the themes, increase ESL support and increase professional development opportunities.
Chapter V: Discussion of the Research Findings

Chapter five will discuss the key findings of the study, exploring ESL practices in suburban public schools, in relation to the research questions. The researcher will draw conclusions based on the findings and explore implications for current ESL practices and policy as well as for future research in the field. The chapter will revisit the problem of practice and the research methodology. An analysis of the key findings will be presented followed by a discussion of the findings in relation to the literature and theoretical framework. Finally, the chapter will address the study’s limitations and will present the researcher’s personal reflection.

Revisiting the Problem of Practice

Historic immigration trends reflected a trend of newcomers moving to urban centers, but since 2009, more than 50% of immigrants in the United States reside in suburban areas (Shodavaram & Weaver, 2009). As a result of immigrant suburbanization, there has been an influx of ELLs attending suburban public schools (Ensle et al., 2009). Suburban public schools have long been institutions that have lacked in cultural and linguistic diversity; however, since the rapid linguistic diversification of the student population, suburban educators have attempted to adjust their practices to meet the needs of ELLs. Although there is a marked gap in research addressing ESL practices in suburban public schools, the existing research reveals that suburban schools are exhibiting difficulty meeting the needs of ELLs, since ELL academic achievement remains low (Bridglall & Han, 2009; de Cohen & Clewell, 2007; Ensle et al., 2009; Field, 2008).

Research claims that suburban schools are challenged in meeting the needs of ELLs due to the lack of resources, non-native language support and isolation of ELLs (Ayscue, in press; Bridglall & Han, 2009; de Cohen & Clewell, 2007; Ensle et al., 2009; Field, 2008). Further educators often lack the proper training to assist ELLs (Diem et al., 2016). Regardless of the
challenges, by law, suburban public schools must provide an equitable education to ELLs and promote academic achievement for all students (No Child Left Behind Act, 2001). Diem et al. (2016) contended that in order to develop effective ESL programs in suburban school districts, further research must be conducted.

This qualitative multi-case study examined three high achieving suburban public schools that have been successful in meeting the needs of ELLs. The study sought to identify and document systemic suburban ESL practices as they relate to ELL achievement in high performing districts so that other suburban public school districts could adopt identified useful practices to create a framework for promoting achievement and language acquisition for suburban ELLs.

**Review of Methodology**

The researcher developed a multi-case study to examine how ESL practices relate to achievement. The researcher addressed the research from a constructivist perspective, seeking to interpret and construct meaning from interviews with Assistant Superintendents, ELL coordinators and focus groups with teachers across the high performing suburban public school districts (Mertens, 2010). The researcher drew from multiple cases rather than a single case so that commonalities across cases could demonstrate broader themes.

Through open-ended inquiry with study participants, the researcher sought to answer three research questions:

1. How do teachers and district administrators across three high achieving suburban school districts perceive the challenges to effectively meeting the needs of a growing ELL population?
2. How are teachers and district administrators across these high achieving suburban school districts currently meeting the needs of their growing ELL population, as perceived by these educators?

3. How do teachers and district administrators across these high achieving suburban school districts believe they could better foster and support the academic achievement of ELL students?

In seeking participants for this study, the researcher employed purposeful sampling. Of 20 suburban public school districts reviewed that had an influx in ELLs over the past recent years, three districts were determined to be high performing for ELLs due to high ELL achievement scores on annual state standardized tests and a successful review of its ELE program during Coordinated Program Reviews conducted by the Massachusetts DESE. Further, administrators and teachers of ELLs were recruited to participate in interviews and focus groups.

Twenty-three educators participated in the study. The researcher conducted six one-on-one interviews with three Assistant Superintendents and three ELL coordinators. The researcher also conducted three focus groups with seventeen teachers across academic levels, elementary, middle and high school. The data generated from the study was compiled as a result of the interviews, focus groups and ELL document review. As Stake (1995) suggested, the researcher analyzed the data through an aggregation of instances, through repetition and a search for patterns and themes. Upon identifying major themes, the researcher sought to uncover deeper meaning and determine key findings.

**Discussion of the Major Findings**

Fourteen themes emerged from the synthesis of data from the interviews with Assistant Superintendents, ELL coordinators and focus groups with teachers. The researcher further
examined the themes in regards to the three guiding research questions that addressed: the challenges to effectively meeting the needs of ELLs, the current practices employed across the three high performing districts to meet the needs of ELLs, and the future aspirations of educators across the three high performing districts to better meet the needs of ELLs. The analysis produced two sets of findings: (1) those that are resonant with SEI best practices, the literature and second language acquisition theory and (2) those that go beyond SEI best practices, the literature and second language acquisition theory.

Table 7

Two Sets of Research Findings

Findings that are resonant with SEI best practices, the literature and second language acquisition theory

- Theme 1 Collaboration and scheduling Time
- Theme 2 Intersection between special education and ESL
- Theme 3 ESL at the high school level
- Theme 4 Curriculum
- Theme 5 State and Federal mandates
- Theme 9 Highly trained general education teachers
- Theme 11 Native language support
- Theme 14 Increase professional development opportunities

Findings that go beyond SEI best practices, the literature and second language acquisition theory

- Theme 6 Systemic mindset of success
- Theme 7 Strong administrative support
- Theme 8 Quantity and quality ESL teachers
- Theme 10 Extended school learning opportunities
- Theme 12 Unique parent and family engagement
- Theme 13 Increase ESL support staff

Note: ESL=English as a Second Language; Data from Interviews and document review across three high performing suburban ELL districts.

Since the findings that adhere to best practices, the literature and second language acquisition theory are well known to scholars and practitioners in the field, the researcher drew on the findings that go beyond best practices, the literature and second language acquisition
theory to hone three key findings:

- High performing suburban public school districts that are meeting the needs of ELLs maintain a systemic culture of success for all students that is communicated vertically from administration to teachers.
- High performing suburban public school districts that are meeting the needs of ELLs employ ample, highly qualified ESL staff.
- High performing suburban public school districts that are meeting the needs of ELLs are engaging in extended school activities to promote ELL achievement and to engage families of ELLs.

High performing suburban public school districts that are meeting the needs of ELLs maintain a systemic culture of success for all students that is communicated vertically from administration to teachers. The Assistant Superintendents were among the first educators to be interviewed in each suburban school district. From the onset of each interview, Assistant Superintendents communicated a culture of success for all students to succeed, including ELL students. Two of the three Assistant Superintendents cited texts, Putnam (2016) and Wagner (2014), as catalysts in promoting a mindset of achievement for all “kids.” Initially, the culture of success was felt at the upper leadership level, but as the researcher subsequently progressed to interview ELL coordinators and teachers, the culture of success penetrated vertically within districts and then across districts. The systemic culture of success could also be recognized in the document review within each district, as the files were meticulous with checklists for inventory and high scores across ELL assessments.

Comments from Assistant Superintendent’s interviews reflected a culture of success for all students across the districts. Examples include:
• We try hard to learn as much as we can about all of our students.

• I think it’s (promoting success) become the underpinning of the current administration in our district.

• It’s getting to know your students, and more importantly, valuing what they bring to the table, but also teaching them the skills they need to be successful.

Only when the researcher progressed to interviewing ELL coordinators and teachers did a systemic culture of success emerge. ELL coordinators and teachers echoed Assistant Superintendent’s sentiments regarding high expectations and achievement for all students, including ELLs. Example comments include:

• There is a genuine desire for all students to succeed.

• They’re (ELLs) are not referred to as “those kids” or “them.”

• We’re professional and we want the kids to do well.

• It’s all about the kids and it’s always been about the kids.

• All the way back, we have had such good support. The systemic culture of success for all students was communicated across districts. Embedding a culture of success for ELLs is not something that can be mandated by the state nor is it as tangible as SEI pedagogical practices. Instead, a culture of success is something that must be communicated systemically, vertically from top administration to teachers in the classroom who are involved with the daily educating of ELLs. Therefore, the question arose, how did administrators broadcast the mindset of success so that it penetrated throughout the district to become an overall culture in regards to ELLs. Administrators were able to communicate a systemic culture of success for all students by offering strong, consistent support for the districts’ ESL programs.
Strong administrator support reinforced a culture of success within the districts. Administrators supported ESL achievement by giving ESL coordinators decision-making power and through the allocation of funds for hiring ESL staff, supporting extended school learning for ELLs, supporting native language and offering in-house, convenient cost-free professional development opportunities to educators of ELLs. As educational leaders, administrators set the tone for a systemic culture of success for ELLs and reinforced the tone through their actions, which ultimately brought about a systemic culture of success for ELLs throughout the districts.

High performing suburban public school districts that are meeting the needs of ELLs employ ample, highly qualified ESL staff. All three high performing districts responded to the influx of ELLs to their schools by hiring additional ESL teachers and by employing an ELL coordinator to oversee and manage ESL programs. Even with the increase of ESL staff to coincide with the increase of ELL students, nearly all of the educators across the three districts communicated a desire to hire even more ESL staff in the future, including ESL teachers and instructional support assistants. Educator comments reflect a desire to continue to increase ESL staff:

- District #1 Assistant Superintendent claimed that there is a need to hire more support staff and paraprofessionals to support the ELD program.
- District #2 Assistant Superintendent conveyed that a district goal is to hire a preschool ESL teacher.
- District #2 teachers called for the hiring of additional ESL staff in the future to increase co-teaching and co-planning opportunities and to keep a manageable student to teacher ratio.
- District #3 Assistant Superintendent claimed that the district needed more staff to
support the growing ELL population.

- District #3 teachers called for the hiring of additional ESL staff to lessen the demands on the current ESL staff, to support general education teachers within the classroom, to provide ESL teachers to each grade level, and to offer more co-teaching and co-planning opportunities.

Administrators employed ESL teachers to meet the needs of ELLs in conjunction with continuing to recognize the need for more ESL teachers and support staff in the future. Teachers’ desire to increase ESL staff reinforced the commitment of success for all students across districts.

In conjunction with the quantity of ESL teachers, administrators and teachers concurred that suburban ESL teachers are highly qualified and committed to ELL success and achievement. In fact, most of the teachers across districts attributed much of the districts’ successes in educating ELLs to ESL teachers because they assist in implementing SEI pedagogy, act as a bridge to ELL families, and as a resource for all general educators who are educating ELLs in core content classes. Teacher comments reflect the quality of ESL teachers:

- She’s very responsive.
- I have access to her.
- She gets right back to me.
- The ESL teacher is dedicated, kind, motherly and nurturing.
- She can offer strategies for specific ELL students.
- She is wonderful and works very hard with ELLs.
- The ESL teacher is dedicated and even works over the summer.
- ESL teachers have to develop “rapport” even more than any other teacher.
• She is a wonderful resource to help us meet the needs of ELLs.
• She acts as a bridge to ELL parents and families.
• He has the historical perspective of ELLs’ strengths and needs.

The teacher commentary qualifies the quality of the suburban ESL teachers; however, ESL teacher quality is quantifiably measurable as well. WIDA ACCESS scores and MCAS scores revealed that the suburban ESL teachers have been successful in promoting English language proficiency and English language acquisition among ELLs in these suburban districts (Massachusetts DESE, 2015-2016).

**High performing suburban public school districts that are meeting the needs of ELLs are engaging in extended school activities to promote ELL achievement and to engage families of ELLs.** The high performing school districts are employing extended school learning opportunities for ELLs in order to promote achievement and engage families. All of the districts allocate financial resources to support extended school opportunities. It is important to note that the only district in the study to receive Title III funds, federal funds granted to districts with higher numbers of ELLs, was District #2. As a result District #2 had the most extensive extended school learning opportunities for ELLs. District #1 and District #3 relied solely on the districts’ ESL budget lines to fund extended school opportunities. Examples of extended school opportunities to promote ELL achievement include:

• Field trips across grade levels
• A high school summer program
• Winter and spring break learning camps
• Summer school camp for ELLs
• Afterschool transportation for ELLs
• Summer tutoring for ELLs
The benefits of extended learning opportunities for ELLs are quantifiable. District #2 Assistant Superintendent, Jon claimed that pre and post testing of ELLs who attend the summer learning program proved that the program prevents academic and language regression and at times, promotes academic gains.

Districts reported utilizing extended school experiences to engage families of ELLs. When considering the themes that emerged during data analysis, the researcher determined that aside from native language support, much of the “unique parent and family engagement” occurred as a result of extended school opportunities. Examples of extended school opportunities to engage families include:

• “meet ups” at school events with ELL families and school representatives
• coffee and tea hours hosted by the ESL facilitator
• World Culture Night

Although each district instituted extended school support for ELLs in different ways and to different degrees, ELLs were afforded the opportunities to further their English language acquisition and academic achievement beyond the traditional school day.

**Discussion of the Findings in Relation to the Theoretical Framework**

The Burke-Litwin model of organizational performance and change was the theoretical framework that was employed to make sense of the data for this qualitative multi-case study because the model addresses an organization’s response to change of the external environment, the impact on the performance of the organization and overall how the external environment informs the inner workings of the organization (Burke, 2013). Further, the Burke-Litwin model distinguishes between transformational and transactional change and is comprised of twelve
organizational variables, where each variable can impact one another, known as an open systems principle (Burke & Litwin, 1992). The model reveals that external environment is the organizational variable that has the greatest weight in impacting organizational change. Therefore, the Burke-Litwin model is a justifiable lens to view how the phenomenon of the influx of ELLs (external environment) has impacted the performance of suburban public school districts (organization) because the model states that in order for an organization to be successful, it must adapt to the change. The three key findings are viewed through the lens of the relational variables within the Burke-Litwin model.

When examining the historical trajectory of the Burke-Litwin model, Burns’s (1978) notion that transformational leaders seek to transform the culture of the organization led Burke and Litwin (1992) to weigh leadership as one of the most important organizational variables in impacting organizational change and performance. The other two most heavily weighted variables within the model are mission and strategy and organizational culture. These three most heavily weighted variables of the model succinctly align with the key research finding: high performing suburban public school districts that are meeting the needs of ELLs maintain a systemic culture of success for all students that is communicated vertically from administration to teachers.

Across the three school districts, Assistant Superintendents, or leaders, communicated a culture of success for all students. According to the Burke-Litwin model, due to the open systems principle, leadership directly impacts both mission and strategy and organizational culture (Burke & Litwin, 1992). The Assistant Superintendents were able to bring about transformational change, sweeping revolutionary change that requires significantly new behavior from organization members. As a result of this transformational change, teachers attended SEI
trainings and ultimately felt “responsible” for the achievement of their ELL students. The Assistant Superintendents promoted ELL coordinators’ role in district decision-making and allocated financial resources to assist with professional development for teachers and extended school opportunities for ELLs. The Burke-Litwin model assists in understanding the critical role of leaders, in this case Assistant Superintendents who oversee ESL education in suburban public schools because leaders essentially impact the organizational culture and mission, which in turn impacts every other variable within the organization. All groups interviewed, Assistant Superintendents, ELL coordinators and teachers conveyed a systemic culture of success for all students that was communicated by “top administration”. Burns (1978) claimed that transformational leaders seek to transform the culture of an organization. District #2 Assistant Superintendent, Jon stated, “we are not change averse.”

The second and third key findings: (2) high performing suburban public school districts that are meeting the needs of ELLs employ ample, highly qualified ESL staff and (3) high performing suburban public school districts that are meeting the needs of ELLs are engaging in extended school activities to promote ELL achievement and to engage families of ELLs both subscribe to what Burke and Litwin (1992) refer to as the management variable because the findings involve how management uses employees and resources to carry out the organization’s mission. Districts employing ample ESL teachers who are highly qualified to instruct ELLs and to promote achievement was a transactional change that assisted in carrying out the districts’ mission of success for all students. Engaging in extended school opportunities for ELLs is also a transactional change that subscribes to Burke-Litwin’s (1992) management variable because districts utilized financial resources, either through the ESL budget or Title III finds, to employ extended learning that impacted ELL achievement as evidenced through benchmark testing.
Burke (2011) claimed that the criticality of an organization’s external environment cannot be overestimated. The impact of the suburban districts’ external environment, the influx of ELLs, had a profound impact on every aspect of the organization. Ultimately, the final variable within the Burke-Litwin model, individual and organizational performance, is the most indicative of the organization’s success because the results are measured by indices of achievement. The indices of achievement for suburban public schools in regards to ELLs are their scores on MCAS and WIDA ACCESS, both indicating that the suburban districts have been successful promoting academic achievement and the acquisition of English. Further, findings resulting from interviews with Assistant Superintendents, ELL coordinators, teachers and document reviews revealed that the high performing suburban school districts were successful in meeting the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse ELL students because every variable, beginning with the Assistant Superintendents (leaders) within the organization adapted to the demographic shift. Ultimately, framing the qualitative multi-case study through a Burke-Litwin’s lens, affirmed the contention that transformational variables, in this case, Assistant Superintendents (leadership) and the systemic culture of success for ELL students (organizational culture) had the greatest impact on the success of the organization as a whole.

Discussion of the Findings in Relation to the Literature Review

The data analysis revealed two sets of findings, one set that was resonant with SEI best practices, the literature and second language acquisition theory and the second set of findings went beyond SEI best practices, the literature and second language acquisition theory. Because the first set of findings is known to scholars and practitioners in the field, the researcher detailed the second set of findings. Nonetheless, in relation to the literature, it is important to address both sets of findings since those that are resonant with the literature serve to reaffirm previous
research findings.

**Findings resonant with SEI best practices and the literature.** The first set of findings included the following themes: collaboration and scheduling, intersection between special education and ESL, ESL at the high school level Curriculum, state and federal mandates, highly trained general education teachers, native language support, and increase professional development opportunities. Several of these themes are resonant with the literature. The first finding that aligns with the literature is collaboration and scheduling. Scholars concur that employing an ESL pull-out instructional approach can be a harmful practice because it is isolating and causes discontinuity in the daily schedule (Ayscue, in press; de Cohen & Clewell, 2007; Bridglall & Han, 2009; Field). In addition, Ayscue (in press) contended that pull-out, segregated instruction can have unintended consequences for ELLs such as them having difficulty reintegrating to general instruction later in the day. The multi-case study revealed that suburban teachers felt that scheduling for ELLs posed a challenge because elementary teachers felt that ELLs were being pulled-out of their general education classes too frequently and for extended periods of time and as a result, missed general content curricula.

The intersection between special education and ESL theme was relevant to the literature review. Hemmer and Linn (2011) found that ELLs are often over- and under- identified as needing special education services. Suburban school educators reported having difficulty administering special education tests in the native language. Teachers cited differentiating special education needs from language needs as a challenge. Additionally, teachers claimed that the special education identification process for ELLs as lengthy, which ultimately is a disservice to ELL students.
Another theme that aligns with the literature review is state and federal mandates. Ayscue (in press) claimed that NCLB restricted the ways schools respond to demographic changes by focusing attention on standardized testing. Younce (2011) claimed that since NCLB holds ELLs to the same academic standards as native speakers to pass standardized tests, schools are challenged. Suburban district educators reported that ELLs are experiencing difficulties due to the demands of mandates. Teachers reported that state and federal mandates that require ELLs to pass standardized tests before they have reached higher levels of English proficiency as unrealistic, which ultimately can lead to higher anxiety levels among ELL students.

Highly trained general education teachers is a theme that resonates with the literature. Researchers contend that educators will only see real academic improvement for ELLs when educators acquire the knowledge and strategies to do so (Ayscue, in press; de Cohen & Clewell, 2007; Field, 2008; Siwatu, 2011). Further Ayscue (in press) and Riehl (2000) claimed that instilling cultural competency among suburban educators as an urgent task since they are currently responsible for educating large numbers of immigrant children. Findings of the multi-case study revealed that teachers across the three high performing districts were highly trained in SEI pedagogy and the SIOP model, the most effective instructional model for instructing ELLs (Echevarria, Vogt & Short, 2004). Both administrators and teachers reported being trained in and implementing SEI strategies and pedagogical practices. Further, several suburban educators reported using students’ native languages and cultures to facilitate learning and English language acquisition.

Native languages was an emergent theme of the multi-case study and was also a repetitive focus in the literature review. Conchas et al. (2012) found that an acculturation process that allowed for strong support of the native cultures of ELLs contributed to good
academic outcomes. Bridglall and Han (2009) asserted that providing translators for families, significantly improves math scores for ELLs. Second language scholars, Cummins (1980, 1981, 2005) and Krashen (1982, 1996) contend that a bilingual approach with a reliance on the native language as being most affective in acquiring a second language. All of the three high performing suburban districts used native language to support learning and to engage families. Two of the three districts reported using bilingual parents and bilingual staff to assist with ELLs, especially newcomers with little English. Two teachers reported using native language texts to support literacy in their classes. Finally, two of the three districts used native language to engage families of ELLs by translating emails and by having interpreters at parent meetings.

Findings beyond SEI best practices and the literature. The second set of findings included themes that went beyond SEI best practices, the literature and second language acquisition theory, which resulted in three key findings: (1) high performing suburban public school districts that are meeting the needs of ELLs maintain a systemic culture of success for all students that is communicated vertically from administration to teachers. (2) high performing suburban public school districts that are meeting the needs of ELLs employ ample, highly qualified ESL staff. (3) high performing suburban public school districts that are meeting the needs of ELLs are engaging in extended school activities to promote ELL achievement and to engage families of ELLs. Although the three findings do not directly align with the literature, there are several aspects of the literature that allude to explanatory factors, explaining why these key findings would contribute to the success for ELLs.

Researchers call for pedagogical approaches that foster cultural competency and equate social justice in schools with student achievement (Theoharis, 2007; Brown, 2004; Cambron-McCabe et al., 2007; McDonald, 2005; Siwatu, 2011). In addition, researchers implored school
administrators to require more professional development courses in ESL instruction, advocate for their students, and put funding towards successful language programs to bridge the gap between school and home (Ayscue, in press; Diem et al. 2016; Field, 2008; Siwatu, 2011). The first key finding addresses all aspects of the aforementioned research because administrators support a systemic culture of success for all students, including ELLs. This systemic culture of success equates to social justice because ELLs are achieving. Suburban administrators across the three high performing districts are supporting the systemic culture of success by offering free, convenient SEI and ESL professional development to teachers and by allocating funds to support extended school opportunities for ELLs and for hiring ESL staff.

The literature revealed that ESL teachers in suburban districts are often experiencing unrealistic demands, which may result in ELLs not receiving enough ESL instruction (Field, 2008; Gaylord & Passuite, 2008). Field (2008) asserted that often one ESL teacher must instruct the entire ESL population in a suburban district. The second key finding defied what was presented in the literature because the high performing suburban districts are employing ample, highly qualified ESL staff. In addition, the findings revealed that even with the high number of ESL teachers, suburban district administrators and teachers desired additional ESL staff in the future.

The last key finding regarding the high performing suburban districts engaging in extended school opportunities to promote ELL achievement and to engage parents of ELLs speaks to challenges that are highlighted in the literature. According to Field (2008) and Gaylord and Passuite (2009), schools often do not provide teachers with the tools to connect with parents. The multi-case study findings revealed that the high performing districts are providing teachers with necessary tools to engage families, particularly through extended school opportunities. All
of the districts engage families in unique ways outside of the traditional school day at coffee hours, event “meet ups” and world culture nights.

Examining the literature in relation to both sets of findings assists in uncovering commonalities and distinctions in regards to suburban ESL education. The first set of findings reaffirms previous research assertions, while the second set of findings goes beyond the literature; presenting new, effective ESL practices that if implemented could potentially benefit other suburban public school districts in educating ELLs.

**Implications of the Findings**

The primary audiences that serve to benefit from the findings of this qualitative multi-case study are other suburban public school districts that are experiencing an influx in their ELL population. The findings have implications on both the micro and macro levels. On a micro level, suburban public schools may choose to use these findings as a framework for their local ESL practices and policies. On a macro level, policy makers may use these findings to assist in crafting policy and guidelines that will best serve public school districts in educating their ELL populations.

The first implication for other suburban public schools involves addressing the two sets of findings, revealing that high performing suburban public school districts are adhering to best SEI practices, and are also going beyond what is known to scholars and practitioners in the field to assist their ELLs. If other suburban public schools were to use these findings to help implement an ESL model of success in their districts, they would first consider engaging is best SEI practices, including the use of native language to assist their ELLs in acquiring English and achieving academically. They would also ensure that general education teaching staff is highly trained in SEI pedagogy. In conjunction, suburban public school districts could draw on the
three key findings to assist in embedding a systemic mindset of success for ELL students, hiring ample, highly qualified ESL staff and offering extended school opportunities to promote achievement and engage families of ELLs.

On a macro level, both sets of findings have implications for policy makers. As detailed in the previous sections, several of the thematic findings reaffirmed what is already known in the literature. The first finding that could inform policy is the intersection between ESL and special education. Currently, according to the Massachusetts DESE (2016) transitional guidance document for ELE (English Language Education) there are no clear guidelines as to when to consider special education testing for ELLs or when to exit an ELL student who is receiving special education services. The second finding that could potentially inform policy is state and federal mandates posing a challenge for study participants because teachers claimed that ELLs were being held to the same testing standards as native speaking peers even before ELLs reached high levels of English proficiency. Lastly, the key finding that states that high performing districts employ ample ESL teachers who are highly qualified also has implications for policy makers. The Massachusetts DESE (2016) transitional guidance document for ELE requires school districts to provide specific hours of ESL support in relation to ELLs’ English language proficiency. However, the Massachusetts DESE (2016) guidance document does not provide guidance in regards to how many ESL teachers could realistically provide the recommended number of hours of ESL support for numbers of ELL students, which could result in suburban districts having insufficient numbers of ESL teachers.

On an even greater macro level, the study has the potential to inform federal policy. According to NCLB, Title III funds are only granted to districts that are responsible for educating more than 100 ELLs. A key finding of this study revealed that high performing
districts are engaging in extended school opportunities to promote achievement for ELLs and to engage families of ELLs. All three districts were allocating funds for extended learning opportunities; however, the district that was engaging in the most extensive extended school programs for ELLs was District #2 because District #2 received Title III federal grant monies. If there is currently an influx of ELLs in suburban districts, policy makers must interrogate whether policy should be adjusted to meet the current trends if all students are to succeed in suburban schools.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to identify and document suburban ESL practices as they relate to ELL achievement in three high performing suburban public school districts in Massachusetts. The study intended to uncover practices for educating ELLs in suburban districts so that these practices may be applicable to other suburban districts that are also experiencing growth in their ELL population. Three main questions guided the study:

1. How do teachers and district administrators across three high achieving suburban school districts perceive the challenges to effectively meeting the needs of a growing ELL population?

2. How are teachers and district administrators across these high achieving suburban school districts currently meeting the needs of their growing ELL population, as perceived by these educators?

3. How do teachers and district administrators across these high achieving suburban school districts believe they could better foster and support the academic achievement of ELL students?
The researcher followed a qualitative design for the multi-case study and primarily gathered data through interviews with Assistant Superintendents, ELL coordinators, focus groups with teachers and the review of ELL documentation. The researcher interviewed twenty-three participants across the three high performing suburban school districts. The researcher analyzed data from the transcripts from the interviews, focus groups and document reviews to identify overarching themes capturing participants’ perspectives on ESL practices in their respective suburban school districts.

The study initially yielded two sets of findings. The first set of findings was resonant with SEI best practices, the literature and second language acquisition theory. The second set of findings went beyond SEI best practices, the literature and second language acquisition theory; therefore, the researcher drew from the second set of findings to hone three key findings: (1) high performing suburban public school districts that are meeting the needs of ELLs maintain a systemic culture of success for all students that is communicated vertically from administration to teachers. (2) high performing suburban public school districts that are meeting the needs of ELLs employ ample, highly qualified ESL staff. (3) high performing suburban public school districts that are meeting the needs of ELLs are engaging in extended school activities to promote ELL achievement and to engage families of ELLs. The three key findings could potentially serve as an ESL program framework for other suburban public schools that are also experiencing an influx in ELLs and both sets of findings have the potential to inform SEI and ESL policy.

**Limitations**

Recognizing the limitations of this study validates trustworthiness. The first limitation had to do with the three public school districts that were examined. Although the researcher
made an effort in the purposeful sampling process to identify varying socio-economic suburban public school districts with high ELL performance and achievement, the practices and experiences of the participants may not be transferable to other suburban public school districts that have experienced an influx of ELLs.

The second limitation of the study was that it solely focused on ESL practices in high performing suburban districts and does not focus on the cultural and linguistic identities of the ELLs being educated within these schools. Although the study is being examined through the Burke-Litwin model lens to uncover the adaptations the suburban schools have made in order to meet the needs of the external environment (the growing ELL population), it is important to note that ELL students’ cultural and linguistic identities also impact their academic achievement.

In regards to the cultural and linguistic identities of ELL students, an additional limitation of the study is that it does not include all stakeholders involved in the education of ELLs. It does not include the voices of ELL students nor their families. Because the researcher, from a constructivist perspective, sought the perspectives of educators to uncover systemic ESL practices in three high achieving suburban school districts, the researcher employed a multi-case study methodological approach. Future study may examine suburban ESL education through other methodological approaches to include the perspectives of ELL students and families of ELLs.

**Future Studies**

Future study could include exploring ESL practices in low performing public school districts as to draw distinctions and parallels with high performing districts. By recognizing aspects of ESL practices that may not be promoting ELL achievement, low performing schools could adjust practices and make necessary changes to contribute to ELL success.
Future research addressing ESL education in suburban schools could include stakeholders such as ELLs and their families, particularly because ELLs and their families were not included in this study and that was a limitation of the study. Because the interviews and focus groups with teachers were the primary sources of data in this study, future studies could conduct examination of curricula and observations of SEI practices within the suburban classrooms. In that case, future study would examine ESL suburban education through a pedagogical theoretical framework.

Future study could also include a critical race theoretical lens since the literature reveals that more linguistically and culturally diverse teaching staff has positive academic outcomes for culturally and linguistically diverse students (Ayscue, in press). Lucas and Villegas (2011) claimed that a more diverse teaching staff leads to fewer behavior problems, lower drop out, and fewer absences from schools for culturally and linguistically diverse students. Of the twenty-three participants in this study, only one was non-White, which does not represent the diversifying student population. Because the ELL population is continuing to grow in suburbia, looking at student achievement in relation to cultural competency and those cultures represented among the teaching and student bodies could have potential benefits.

**Personal Reflection and Recommendations**

Public schools have a great responsibility in assisting immigrant children and ELLs in acculturating to a new environment and establishing ESL programs and practices that will promote English language acquisition and academic success. ESL practices and academic achievement among ELLs was once relevant mostly in urban schools, but with the trend of immigrants settling in the suburbs coupled with the influx of ELLs, suburban schools have to realize their responsibility in establishing successful ESL practices that contribute to the
academic success of ELLs (Ayscue, in press; Diem et al., 2013; de Cohen & Clewell, 2007; Ensle et al., 2009).

Initially, I set out on this research endeavor because I have been an ELL coordinator and teacher in a suburban public school district since 2010. Over the years, I have witnessed an influx of ELLs to suburban classrooms and have also witnessed the challenges and triumphs in educating these newcomers. When I first embarked on the doctoral journey, I attempted to research what was documented about ESL in suburban public schools and how schools were responding to the rapid demographic shift. However, it did not take me long to realize that there was a measurable gap in literature addressing ESL practices in suburban public schools. Therefore, I set out to examine ESL practices in high performing suburban districts, first to see if these practices aligned with my own and second, to provide a framework for other suburban public schools that are also experiencing an influx of ELLs.

The findings of this multi-case study examining ESL practices in three high performing public school districts mirror many of the experiences that I have had as an ELL coordinator in suburbia. Two years ago, the suburban district where I teach received 100 percent compliance for the Massachusetts DESE CPR, one of the data points I used in sampling other high performing districts. However, I did not wish to study the district where I work since it may present a conflict and I already have knowledge of the ESL practices that are being employed. I wanted to look at other suburban districts that have experienced even greater growth in their ELL population. Commonalities between my own experiences and the findings are present. I have experienced scheduling difficulties, particularly for high school ELL students. I have seen the strain that standardized testing puts on limited English proficient newcomers. I have witnessed the over- and under-identification of ELLs who require special education services. I have
exhausted myself traveling to four schools per day to successfully meet the number of hours of ESL support service that is mandated by the state. I have been fortunate enough to have strong, supportive leadership from my district Superintendent who allows me to have a “voice” in ESL district decision-making and who relies on my expertise in second language acquisition theory and SEI practices to inform ESL program decisions. What was new for me were those findings that went beyond my experiences and what is known to scholars and practitioners in the field. The findings will play an important role in shaping my future experiences as an ELL coordinator in a suburban school district because I will make recommendations based on these findings. The findings of this study also have the potential to shape other suburban districts’ ESL programs. Suburban schools and policy makers can glean insight from the two sets of research findings. Recommendations for suburban public schools who are exhibiting a growth in their ELL population would include adherence to best SEI practices. Everyone involved in the education of ELLs should be highly trained in proven, effective SEI pedagogy such as the SIOP model (Echevarria, Vogt & Short, 2004). One way to ensure highly trained educators would be to offer free, ongoing, in-house professional development. Suburban districts should employ ample ESL staff and per the request of study participants, should determine time for collaboration between general education teachers and ESL staff. Suburban schools should allocate funds for extended school opportunities for ELLs such as those documented in this study: field trips, family “meet ups”, winter and spring break learning camps, summer school ESL programs and after-school and summer tutoring. Native language support should be used to engage families and promote academic achievement, which could be achieved by hiring more multi-lingual staff and offering more native language academic resource materials. Finally, suburban district administrators should reflect the districts’ mission of promoting achievement
for all students, including ELLs. By examining this study through the Burke-Litwin model of performance and change, I believe that leadership is at the crux of suburban ESL programs’ successes and ultimately ELLs’ achievement.

This study can also serve as a basis for recommendations for policy makers. Policy makers should offer guidelines to school districts regarding how to identify ELLs with special education needs and offer exit criteria for ELLs who receive special education services. Policy makers should consider funding suburban public schools’ ESL programs so that suburban schools can engage in successful practices such as extended school opportunities. State and federal funding is becoming even more urgent since immigration trends continue to reveal a trend towards immigrant suburbanization (Ayscue, in press; Riehl, 2000). Since Massachusetts DESE policy makers offer guidelines for hours of ESL support in accordance to English language proficiency levels, then they too should offer guidelines to districts regarding how many ESL teachers should feasibly and realistically be able to support numbers of ELL students. Finally, policy makers should reconsider assessing ELL students based on the same criteria as native English speaking peers until ELLs achieve higher levels of English proficiency.

As an ESL teacher and scholar of second language acquisition theory, it is my hope that from a social justice perspective, this study will assist educational leaders, policy makers and teachers in implementing equitable educational practices for a growing number of ELL students in suburban public schools so that they may experience higher academic achievement. As the suburban ELL population continues to increase, implementing effective ESL practices in suburban public schools is a critical task.
References


Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (2013). Rethinking equity in teaching for English language learners (RETELL). Retrieved from
http://www.doe.mass.edu/retell.


Subject Line: Request for permission to conduct an ESL case study in your district

Dear Superintendent,

My name is Amy Somers-Quealy and I am the ELL Coordinator for West Bridgewater Public Schools. I am also a student in the Doctor of Education program at Northeastern University. I am conducting a study for my doctoral thesis and would like to include your successful school district as a research participant.

I am conducting a multi-case study of three suburban public school districts that have successfully adjusted to the influx of ELLs according to the Massachusetts DESE data on ELL MCAS scores and the successful evaluation of the district’s ELE program. Historically, the concentration of ELLs has been in urban classrooms; however, increasing immigration to America's suburbs is rapidly changing the linguistic and cultural landscape of suburban classrooms. Examining ESL practices in high performing suburban districts such as yours has the potential to propel practice, pedagogy and legislation forward to ensure an equitable education for all students, including ELLs.

I will primarily gather data through qualitative interviews with administrators and focus groups with teachers as well as a review of ELL documentation. I truly appreciate your openness to assisting me in this study. Please let me know if I have permission to conduct the study in your district. If permission is granted, I will need a letter stating that I have been granted permission to conduct the doctoral study in your district. I will then follow up with recruitment of the administrator who oversees ESL within the district, the ELL coordinator and two teachers from each of the various academic levels: elementary, middle and high school. I look forward to hearing from you and would be happy to answer any questions you may have about the study and intended procedures.

Kind Regards,

Amy Somers-Quealy

somers-quealy.a@husky.neu.edu
Subject Line: ESL Research Study Invitation

Dear (Assistant Superintendent and ELL Coordinator),

I hope you are doing well!

As you may already know, I am a student in the Doctor of Education program at Northeastern University. I was recently granted permission to conduct an ESL study in your district for my doctoral thesis and am seeking research participants.

I am conducting a multi-case study of three suburban public school districts that have successfully adjusted to the influx of ELLs according to the Massachusetts DESE data on ELL MCAS scores and the successful evaluation of the district’s ELE program. I will primarily gather data through qualitative interviews with administrators and focus groups with teachers and through the review of ELL documentation.

The purpose of this email is two-fold. First, I would like to request an interview with you. If you choose to participate in this study, we will go over the consent form at the beginning of the interview. This will limit your time commitment for this study. After completing the in-person interview, which will last about 45 minutes, at a later date, I will provide you the transcript of our in-depth interview and a summary of my interpretation of your account. You will have the opportunity to share additional information and clarify any areas. No meetings will take place during the normal school day.

Secondly, I will need help identifying two teachers from each academic level: elementary, middle and high school. Teachers should be either classroom or core content teachers who are licensed Massachusetts educators and have had at least three years’ experience working with ELLs within your district. Once you have identified these teachers, if you could provide me with their email addresses, I will follow up with an invitation email to participate in the study. Their participation will be voluntary. The time commitment for teachers will be roughly 1.5 hours. During the onsite visit, I will provide a light snack.

Please email me at somers-quealy.a@husky.neu.edu if you would like to volunteer to be interviewed and/or provide teachers’ contact information. Your participation is entirely voluntary. I appreciate your consideration.

Kind Regards,

Amy Somers-Quealy somers-quealy.a@husky.neu.edu
Appendix C

Recruitment Email (Targeted email to Teachers)
Northeastern University College of Professional Studies
Doctor of Education Program

Subject Line: ESL Research Study Invitation

Dear (Teacher),

As you may already know, I am a student in the Doctor of Education program at Northeastern University. I have recently been granted permission to conduct an ESL study for my doctoral thesis and am seeking research participants. Your administrators have identified you as a Massachusetts licensed educator who has had at least three years’ experience working with ELLs in your school district.

I am conducting a multiple case study of three suburban public school districts that have successfully adjusted to the influx of ELLs according to the Massachusetts DESE data on ELL MCAS scores and the successful evaluation of the district’s ELE program. Historically, the concentration of ELLs has been in urban classrooms; however, increasing immigration to America's suburbs is rapidly changing the linguistic and cultural landscape of suburban classrooms. Examining ESL practices in high performing districts such as yours has the potential to propel practice, pedagogy and legislation forward to ensure an equitable education for all students, including ELLs.

I will primarily gather data through qualitative interviews with administrators and focus groups with teachers and the review of ELL documentation. If you choose to participate in this study, you will have only one in-person meeting with me, at a focus group with other teachers. Other correspondence will be exclusively through email so as not to be a burden on your time.

The focus group should last no more than 70 minutes and will be solely for teachers and will not have any district or school administrators present. For the focus groups, I will also ask teachers to bring any documentation or samples of ELLs’ academic work that is relevant to the discussion. However, it is not required that you bring documentation in order to participate.

The focus groups will be audio recorded and transcribed, but your name will never be used in the writing of the study or any subsequent communication. I have also attached the questions that I will ask you so you can review them in advance.

Remember that your participation is entirely voluntary. Please email me somers-quealy.a@husky.neu.edu or call me at 781-864-1041 if you have any questions or would like to volunteer to participate.

Regards, Amy Somers-Quealy
Subject Line: ESL Research Study with Amy Quealy

Dear (Assistant Superintendent and ELL Coordinators),

Thank-you for your interest in the ESL research study. I look forward to meeting you and interviewing you regarding ESL practices in your high achieving school district. Based on your response to my initial email, I will plan on our initial meeting taking place on ___________. Again, at this time you will select a pseudonym to protect your identity, we will go over the informed consent form that you must sign in order to participate in the study, and you can ask me questions about the study. Then I will conduct an approximately 45 minute interview session. The in-depth interview will be about your experiences and perceptions of ESL education in your district and schools. The interviews will be one on one. The interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed into writing. I have again attached the questions that I will ask you so you can review them in advance. Following our interview, through email, I will provide you the transcript of our in-depth interview and a summary of my interpretation of your account. You will have the opportunity to share additional information and clarify any areas.

Again, I appreciate your participation in the study. If you have any questions or need to reschedule our initial meeting, please do not hesitate to contact me. Please email me (somers-quealy.a@husky.neu.edu or call me at 781-864-1041) if you have any questions.

Regards,

Amy Somers-Quealy
Appendix E

Follow Up Recruitment Email (Teachers)
Northeastern University College of Professional Studies
Doctor of Education Program

Subject Line: ESL Research Study with Amy Quealy

Dear (Teachers),

Thank-you for your interest in the ESL research study. Below, I have identified several dates, times, and locations for potential times to conduct a focus group. From the list below, I will determine from all those collected across teachers as most convenient for the greater majority of potential participants.

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<th>LOCATION</th>
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Once I have reviewed your responses, I will email you detailing the date, time, and location of the focus group. At the time of the focus group, I will review the purpose of the study once again, review the informed consent form with you and answer any questions. Then, if you should still agree to participate, you will provide me with your signature and subsequently participate in the focus group at that time.

The focus group should last no more than 70 minutes and will be solely for teachers and will not have any district or school administrators present. For the focus groups, I will also ask teachers to bring any documentation or samples of academic work that is relevant to the discussion. However, it is not required that you bring documentation in order to participate.

The focus groups will be audio recorded and transcribed, but your name will never be used in the writing of the study or any subsequent communication. I have again attached the questions that I will ask you so you can review them in advance.

Please get back to me to let me know what date and time from the list above would work best for you to conduct the focus group. I truly appreciate your interest in participating in this study. Please email me (somers-quealy.a@husky.neu.edu or call me at 781-864-1041) if you have any questions.

Regards,

Amy Somers-Quealy
Appendix F

Informed Consent
Northeastern University College of Professional Studies
Doctor of Education Program

Northeastern University College of Professional Studies

Name of Investigator(s): Principal Investigator Dr. Chris Unger, Student Researcher: Amy Somers-Quealy

Title of Project: Exploring ESL Practices in Suburban Public Schools

Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study

We are inviting you to take part in a research study. This form will tell you about the study, but the researcher will explain it to you first. You may ask this person any questions that you have. When you are ready to make a decision, you may tell the researcher if you want to participate or not. You do not have to participate if you do not want to. If you decide to participate, the researcher will ask you to sign this statement and will give you a copy to keep.

Why am I being asked to take part in this research study?

We are asking you to be in this study because you have been involved with the education of English Language Learners (ELLs).

Why is this research study being done?

I am researching ESL practices in suburban public schools. Your school district has been identified as a public school district that has successfully adjusted to the influx of ELLs according to Massachusetts DESE data on ELL MCAS scores and the successful evaluation of the district’s ELE program. Examining ESL practices in high performing suburban districts such as yours has the potential to propel practice, pedagogy and legislation forward to ensure an equitable education for all students, including ELLs. The study will attempt to uncover strategies, allocations of resources and overall systemic ESL practices in yours and two other high achieving districts since these practices may be applicable and useful for other suburban schools that are also experiencing a growth in their ELL population.

What will I be asked to do?

If you decide to take part in this study, we will ask you to participate in either a one on one in-person interview for administrators or a focus group for teachers of ELLs. The focus group will occur with approximately five other teachers. The in-depth interview and focus group will be about your experiences and perceptions of ESL education in your district and schools. Following our interview and focus group, through email, I will provide you the transcript of our meetings and a summary of my interpretation of your account. You will have the opportunity to share additional information and clarify any areas.

Where will this take place and how much of my time will it take?
Interviews with administrators will take place at the administrative offices and will last approximately 45 minutes. The focus group should last no more than 70 minutes and will be solely for teachers and will not have any district or school administrators present. The interviews and focus groups will be audio recorded and transcribed, but your name will never be used in the writing of the study or any subsequent communication. No meetings will take place during the normal school day as to prevent coercion.

**Will there be any risk or discomfort to me?**

The risk of participation in this study is low, particularly given the confidentiality measures. The researcher will respect boundaries during interviews and focus groups and will allow you to skip any questions that you do not feel comfortable answering.

**Will I benefit by being in this research?**

There will be no direct benefit to you personally for taking part in this study. Examining ESL practices in high performing districts such as yours has the potential to propel practice, pedagogy and legislation forward to ensure an equitable education for all students, including ELLs.

**Who will see the information about me?**

Your role in this study will be confidential. Only the researcher will see information about you and your school district. If you take part in the study, you will select a pseudonym that will be used throughout the study to protect your identity. All reports, discussion and presentation associated with the study will utilize the pseudonym and will not include any personal information linked directly to you. Information about your age, gender, race, and educational position will be included to assist others in interpreting the research findings. All interviews and focus groups will be audio recorded and transcribed into writing. The researcher will code the written transcripts to identify themes and patterns within the interviews and focus groups and also across interviews and focus groups with other high performing school districts. All physical documents will be stored in a locked file cabinet and electronic files will be stored on a password-protected device. Only the researcher will have access to stored data. All data will be retained and then destroyed after seven years.

**Can I stop my participation in this study?**

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You do not have to participate if you do not want to and you can refuse to answer any question. Even if you begin the study, you may quit at any time. If you do not participate or if you decide to quit, you will not lose any rights, benefits, or services that you would otherwise have as an employee of your school district.

**Who can I contact if I have questions or problems?**

If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact the student researcher, Amy Somers-Quealy at somers-quealy.a@husky.neu.edu. You can also contact the principal investigator Dr. Chris Unger at c.unger@neu.edu.

**Who can I contact about my rights as a participant?**
If you have any questions about your rights in this research, you may contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, 490 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University, Boston, MA 02115. Tel: 617.373.4588, Email: n.regina@neu.edu. You may call anonymously if you wish.

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<th>Will I be paid for my participation?</th>
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<td>You will not be paid for your participation in the study. A light snack will be provided during the focus group sessions.</td>
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<th>Will it cost me anything to participate?</th>
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<td>No financial costs will be incurred as a result of your participation in the study. Your time and participation will be all that is required if you chose to participate in the study.</td>
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<th>Is there anything else I need to know?</th>
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<td>In order to participate in the study, you must be a licensed Massachusetts educator and have worked with ELLs for at least three academic years.</td>
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<td>Signature of person who explained the study to the participant above and obtained consent</td>
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Appendix G

Interview Questions
Assistant Superintendents
Northeastern University College of Professional Studies
Doctor of Education Program

1. Has your district experienced an influx of ELLs over the past decade?
   Possible Follow Up: Are many of your ELLs newcomers with little or no English, intermediate English proficient students or advanced English proficient students? What, if any, is the predominant native language spoken among ELLs in your district?

2. How is your district and schools supporting/promoting the academic achievement and English language acquisition of ELLs?

3. What is your district’s ESL program model?
   Possible Prompts: Is your district using a SEI (Sheltered English Instructional) model with pull-out or push-in support? Possible Follow Up: How many ESL teachers are there in the district and how often do they work with ELL students?

4. Are there differences in how the elementary, middle and high schools are implementing ESL practices?

5. What is working well in regards to ESL education in District #? How do you know?

6. How are financial resources allocated within the district to support ELLs and ESL education?
   Possible Prompts: Is there an ESL budget and what are the funds used for? Does District # receive Title III funding? If so, how are the funds being allocated?

7. What are some challenges that your district and schools have experienced in meeting the needs and promoting academic achievement of ELLs?

8. Describe the kinds of professional development (PD) training that educators of ELLs have received in your district?
   Possible Follow Up: How many core content teachers have received state-mandated SEI training in the district? Do you think that the ESL/SEI PD that your teachers have received has been useful?

9. Can you describe why you feel your district and schools have been successful in meeting the needs of ELLs?

10. What do you feel your district and schools could do better to support the academic achievement of ELLs in the future?
Appendix H

Interview Questions
ELL Coordinators
Northeastern University College of Professional Studies
Doctor of Education Program

1. How are you supporting/promoting the academic achievement and English language acquisition of ELLs?

2. Do you assist in implementing your district’s ESL program model?
   Possible Prompts: Is your district using a SEI (Sheltered English Instructional) model with pull-out or push-in support? Possible Follow Up: How many ESL teachers are there in the district and how often do they work with ELL students?

3. What is working well in regards to ESL education within your district and schools? How do you know?

4. Do you assist in making financial allocation decisions within the district to support ELLs and ESL education?
   Possible Prompts: Is there an ESL budget and what are the funds used for? Does your district receive Title III funding? If so, how are the funds being allocated?

5. What are some challenges that your district and schools have experienced in meeting the needs and promoting academic achievement of ELLs?

6. Describe the kinds of professional development (PD) training that you and other educators of ELLs have received in your district?
   Possible Follow Up: Do you feel that this PD has been useful?

7. Do you collaborate with classroom and content area teachers to facilitate ELL achievement and acquisition of English? If so, how?

8. Can you describe why you feel your district and schools have been successful in meeting the needs of ELLs?

9. What do you feel your district and schools could do better to support the academic achievement of ELLs in the future?
Appendix I

Interview Questions
Focus Groups with Teachers
Northeastern University College of Professional Studies
Doctor of Education Program

1. Have you experienced an influx of ELLs over the recent past years in your classroom?  
   Possible Follow Up: Are many of your ELLs newcomers with little or no English, intermediate  
   English proficient students or advanced English proficient students? What, if any, is the  
   predominant native language spoken among ELLs in your class?

2. How are you supporting the academic achievement and English language acquisition needs  
   of ELLs in your classroom?

3. Has your practice and pedagogy changed with the influx of ELLs to your classroom? If so,  
   how?

4. What are some challenges that you have experienced in meeting the needs and promoting  
   academic achievement and English acquisition of ELLs?

5. Describe the kinds of professional development geared toward the education of ELLs that  
   you have received?  
   Possible Follow Up: Have you received state mandated SEI training? Has PD been useful?

6. Can you describe why you feel your district and school has been successful in meeting the  
   needs of ELLs?  
   Possible Prompts: What specifically is your district and school doing well to support ELLs and  
   promote ELL achievement?

7. What do you feel you could do in the future to better support the academic achievement of  
   ELLs?

8. What do you feel your district and school could do better to support the academic  
   achievement of ELLs in the future?
Appendix J

Participant Questionnaire
Northeastern University College of Professional Studies
Doctor of Education Program

Personal Information

Today’s Date: __________________________

Full Name: ____________________________

Pseudonym: ____________________________

Native Language: ______________________

Ethnic Identification: ____________________

Gender Identification: ____________________

Professional Information

How long have you been an educator? ____________________

What subject and grade level do you teach? ____________________

What training or professional development have you received in regards to ELLs (English Language Learners), ESL (English as a Second Language) or SEI (Sheltered English Instruction)?

____________________________________________________________________
Appendix K

Interview Protocol
Superintendents or Assistant Superintendents
Northeastern University College of Professional Studies
Doctor of Education Program

Interviewee (Title and Name): ____________________________________________

Interviewer/Researcher: Amy Somers-Quealy ______________________________

Date: _______________________

Location of Interview: ____________________________________________

Background information: ____________________________________________

INTRODUCTION

Part I: Build rapport, describe the ESL study, answer any questions, review and sign IRB protocol and form for tape recording.

You have been selected to speak with me today because your district has been identified, through Massachusetts’ DESE data, as a district that has been successful in educating English language learners (ELLs). The purpose of this study is to examine suburban ESL practices as they relate to ELL achievement in three high achieving suburban public school districts in Massachusetts. The study will attempt to uncover strategies, allocations of resources and overall systemic ESL practices in yours and two other high achieving districts since these practices may be applicable and useful for other suburban schools that are also experiencing a growth in their ELL population.

Your responses are essential to the success of this study and I want to capture your responses and our conversation completely. I would like permission to audio tape our conversation today. I will also be taking written notes during the interview. I assure you that all responses will be confidential and only a pseudonym will be used to describe yourself and the school district. A transcriptionist will transcribe the tapes and pseudonyms will be used in the subsequent quotations. I will be the only one who has access to the transcripts and the audio will be destroyed after it is transcribed.

In order to meet our human subjects requirements at Northeastern University, you must sign this consent form. The form states that: all information will be held confidential, your participation is voluntary and you may stop at any time if you feel uncomfortable, and we do not intend to inflict any harm. (The participant reviews the form). Do you have any questions about the interview or study?
The interview is scheduled to be 45 minutes. If we are running close to the time, I may need to interrupt you to move to another question. Do you have any further questions before we begin.

Researcher’s Background – My name is Amy Somers-Quealy. I am a doctoral student at Northeastern University. I am currently in the thesis phase of the program and writing my dissertation. I am also an English as a Second Language (ESL) coordinator and teacher for West Bridgewater Public Schools, grades K-12. I have been teaching ELLs for over seven years and have been responsible for conducting professional development in ESL and Sheltered English Instruction (SEI) for two years.

Has your district experienced an influx of ELLs over the past decade?

Possible Follow Up: Are many of your ELLs newcomers with little or no English, intermediate English proficient students or advanced English proficient students? What, if any, is the predominant native language spoken among ELLs in your district?

How is your district and schools supporting/promoting the academic achievement and English language acquisition of ELLs?

What is your district’s ESL program model?
Possible Prompts: Is your district using a SEI (Sheltered English Instructional) model with pull-out or push-in support? Possible Follow Up: How many ESL teachers are there in the district and how often do they work with ELL students?

Are there differences in how the elementary, middle and high schools are implementing ESL practices?

What is working well in regards to ESL education in District #? How do you know?

How are financial resources allocated within the district to support ELLs and ESL education?
Possible Prompts: Is there an ESL budget and what are the funds used for? Does District # receive Title III funding? If so, how are the funds being allocated?

What are some challenges that your district and schools have experienced in meeting the needs and promoting academic achievement of ELLs?

Describe the kinds of professional development (PD) training that educators of ELLs have received in your district?
Possible Follow Up: How many core content teachers have received state-mandated SEI training in the district? Do you think that the ESL/SEI PD that your teachers have received has been useful?

Can you describe why you feel your district and schools have been successful in meeting the needs of ELLs?
What do you feel your district and schools could do better to support the academic achievement of ELLs in the future?
Appendix L

Interview Protocol
ELL Coordinators
Northeastern University College of Professional Studies
Doctor of Education Program

Interviewee (Title and Name): ____________________________________________

Interviewer/Researcher: Amy Somers-Quealy _____________________________

Date: ______________________

Location of Interview: _______________________________________________

Background information: _______________________________________________

INTRODUCTION

Part I: Build rapport, describe the ESL study, answer any questions, review and sign IRB protocol and form for tape recording.

You have been selected to speak with me today because your district has been identified, through Massachusetts’ DESE data, as a district that has been successful in educating English language learners (ELLs). The purpose of this study is to examine suburban ESL practices as they relate to ELL achievement in three high achieving suburban public school districts in Massachusetts. The study will attempt to uncover strategies, allocations of resources and overall systemic ESL practices in yours and two other high achieving districts since these practices may be applicable and useful for other suburban schools that are also experiencing a growth in their ELL population.

Your responses are essential to the success of this study and I want to capture your responses and our conversation completely. I would like permission to audio tape our conversation today. I will also be taking written notes during the interview. I assure you that all responses will be confidential and only a pseudonym will be used to describe yourself and the school district. A transcriptionist will transcribe the tapes and pseudonyms will be used in the subsequent quotations. I will be the only one who has access to the transcripts and the audio will be destroyed after it is transcribed.

In order to meet our human subjects requirements at Northeastern University, you must sign this consent form. The form states that: all information will be held confidential, your participation is voluntary and you may stop at any time if you feel uncomfortable, and we do not intend to
inflict any harm. (The participant reviews the form). Do you have any questions about the interview or study?

The interview is scheduled to be 45 minutes. If we are running close to the time, I may need to interrupt you to move to another question. Do you have any further questions before we begin?

Researcher’s Background – My name is Amy Somers-Quealy. I am a doctoral student at Northeastern University. I am currently in the thesis phase of the program and writing my dissertation. I am also an English as a Second Language (ESL) coordinator and teacher for West Bridgewater Public Schools, grades K-12. I have been teaching ELLs for over seven years and have been responsible for conducting professional development in ESL and Sheltered English Instruction (SEI) for two years.

How are you supporting/promoting the academic achievement and English language acquisition of ELLs?

Do you assist in implementing your district’s ESL program model?
Possible Prompts: Is your district using a SEI (Sheltered English Instructional) model with pull-out or push-in support? Possible Follow Up: How many ESL teachers are there in the district and how often do they work with ELL students?

What is working well in regards to ESL education within your district and schools? How do you know?

Do you assist in making financial allocation decisions within the district to support ELLs and ESL education?
Possible Prompts: Is there an ESL budget and what are the funds used for? Does your district receive Title III funding? If so, how are the funds being allocated?

What are some challenges that your district and schools have experienced in meeting the needs and promoting academic achievement of ELLs?

Describe the kinds of professional development (PD) training that you and other educators of ELLs have received in your district?
Possible Follow Up: Do you feel that this PD has been useful?

Do you collaborate with classroom and content area teachers to facilitate ELL achievement and acquisition of English? If so, how?

Can you describe why you feel your district and schools have been successful in meeting the needs of ELLs?

What do you feel your district and schools could do better to support the academic achievement of ELLs in the future?
Appendix M

Interview Protocol
Focus Groups with Teachers
Northeastern University College of Professional Studies
Doctor of Education Program

Interviewee (Title and Name): ____________________________________________

Interviewer/Researcher: Amy Somers-Quealy ____________________________

Date: ______________________

Location of Focus Group: ____________________________________________

Background information: _____________________________________________

INTRODUCTION

Part I: Build rapport, describe the ESL study, answer any questions, review and sign IRB protocol and form for tape recording.

_You have been selected to speak with me today because your district has been identified, through Massachusetts’ DESE data, as a district that has been successful in educating English language learners (ELLs). Further, you all have been identified as teachers of ELLs. The purpose of this study is to examine suburban ESL practices as they relate to ELL achievement in three high achieving suburban public school districts in Massachusetts. The study will attempt to uncover strategies, allocations of resources and overall systemic ESL practices in yours and two other high achieving districts since these practices may be applicable and useful for other suburban schools that are also experiencing a growth in their ELL population._

_Your responses are essential to the success of this study and I want to capture your responses and our conversation completely. I would like permission to audio tape our conversation today. I will also be taking written notes during the focus group. I assure you that all responses will be confidential and only a pseudonym will be used to describe yourselves and the school district. A transcriptionist will transcribe the tapes and pseudonyms will be used in the subsequent quotations. I will be the only one who has access to the transcripts and the audio will be destroyed after it is transcribed._

_In order to meet our human subjects requirements at Northeastern University, you must sign this consent form. The form states that: all information will be held confidential, your participation is voluntary and you may stop at any time if you feel uncomfortable, and we do not intend to_
inflict any harm. (The participant reviews the form). Do you have any questions about the focus groups or study?

The focus group is scheduled to be 70 minutes. If we are running close to the time, I may need to interrupt you to move to another question. Do you have any further questions before we begin?

Researcher’s Background – My name is Amy Somers-Quealy. I am a doctoral student at Northeastern University. I am currently in the thesis phase of the program and writing my dissertation. I am also an English as a Second Language (ESL) coordinator and teacher for West Bridgewater Public Schools, grades K-12. I have been teaching ELLs for over seven years and have been responsible for conducting professional development in ESL and Sheltered English Instruction (SEI) for two years.

Have you experienced an influx of ELLs over the recent past years in your classroom?
Possible Follow Up: Are many of your ELLs newcomers with little or no English, intermediate English proficient students or advanced English proficient students? What, if any, is the predominant native language spoken among ELLs in your class?

How are you supporting the academic achievement and English language acquisition needs of ELLs in your classroom?

Has your practice and pedagogy changed with the influx of ELLs to your classroom? If so, how?

What are some challenges that you have experienced in meeting the needs and promoting academic achievement and English acquisition of ELLs?

Describe the kinds of professional development geared toward the education of ELLs that you have received?
Possible Follow Up: Have you received state mandated SEI training? Has PD been useful?

Can you describe why you feel your district and school has been successful in meeting the needs of ELLs?
Possible Prompts: What specifically is your district and school doing well to support ELLs and promote ELL achievement?

What do you feel you could do in the future to better support the academic achievement of ELLs?

What do you feel your district and school could do better to support the academic achievement of ELLs in the future?