Mississippi Learning Institute
Evaluation Report
Volume I—Findings

Submitted to
Mississippi Learning Institute

By the
Academy for Educational Development

New York City

Spring 2009
# Table of Contents

Acknowledgements ........................................................................................................................ i

Executive Summary ........................................................................................................................ i

Introduction .................................................................................................................................. 1
  MLI Structure ............................................................................................................................. 1
  AED Role ................................................................................................................................ 1

II. Year Five Findings: Observations and Interviews ................................................................. 3
  MLI Executive Committee and Collaborative Growth Team .................................................... 3
  Professional Development .......................................................................................................... 4
  Literacy Instruction in MLA Classrooms .................................................................................... 6
  Coaching ................................................................................................................................ 19
  Data-driven Decision Making .................................................................................................. 25
  Findings from the College of Education ................................................................................... 27

III. Year Five Teacher Survey Findings ....................................................................................... 39
  Survey Administration and Data Analysis ............................................................................. 39
  Elementary School Survey Findings ...................................................................................... 40
  Middle School Survey Findings ............................................................................................. 53
  High School Survey Findings ................................................................................................ 57

IV. Summary of Overall Findings .............................................................................................. 60
  Impact of MLI on Teaching and Schools ............................................................................... 60
  MLI Impact on Students .......................................................................................................... 61
  Implementation Issues ............................................................................................................. 66
  Findings Pertaining to the MLI Collaborative Growth Team .................................................. 66
  Findings Pertaining to COE ................................................................................................... 66

V. Conclusion and Recommendations ......................................................................................... 68
  Replicating or Scaling-Up the MLI Initiative ......................................................................... 70

VI. References ............................................................................................................................ 74
List of Tables

Table 1. Questioning Techniques Observed in Grades K-3 .................................................... 8
Table 2. Duration of Instruction for Six Aspects of Literacy Instruction K to Grades 3 .......... 10
Table 3. NRP Guidelines and MLA Literacy Instruction ....................................................... 12
Table 4. Application of Literacy Instruction to Teaching: K to Grade 3 ............................... 16
Table 5. The Level of Emphasis of Five Components in Observed Classes ....................... 18
Table 6. Supports for Coaches’ Work ................................................................................... 22
Table 7. Challenges in Coaching Work ................................................................................. 22
Table 8. Teacher Practices ................................................................................................... 23
Table 9. Coach Satisfaction with MLI ................................................................................... 24
Table 10. Principal Perceptions of MLI Coaching Impact .................................................... 25
Table 11. Observed Categories of Instruction in COE Literacy-related Classes ................. 30
Table 12. Observations of 16 ACEI and IRA Standards/Substandards Content in 12 COE Literacy-related Classrooms ................................................................. 34
Table 13. Elementary: Frequency of Reading Instruction Activities .................................. 42
Table 14. Elementary: Frequency of Reading Instruction Activities .................................. 43
Table 15. Elementary: Frequency of Reading Instruction Activities – MLA/Comparison Differences Over Time ................................................................. 45
Table 16. Elementary: Frequency of Reading Instruction Activities—MLA/Comparison Differences Over Time ................................................................. 46
Table 17. Rationales for Frequency of Selected Instructional Practices: Year 5 ..................... 48
Ask students to discuss different interpretations of what they have read ............................. 48
Table 18. Frequency of Teacher-Led and Whole-Group Activities: Year 5 .......................... 50
Table 19. Elementary: Opinions about Schools’ Professional Development Activities: Trend Analyses ........................................................................................................... 52
Table 20. Middle School: MLI and Preparedness ................................................................. 55
Table 21. MCT Scale Score Comparisons between MLA and Comparison Schools, Yrs. 1-4 ............................................................................................................... 64
Acknowledgements

Conducting a four-and-one-half year evaluation of an initiative as multifaceted as the Mississippi Learning Institute (MLI) is a major endeavor. The evaluation, this final report, and the annual reports throughout the evaluation are the results of much collaborative work and creative effort. A great many people in and around Jackson, Mississippi, including staff from MLI, Jackson Public Schools (JPS), and Jackson State University (JSU), helped make this a worthwhile and successful endeavor of the Academy for Educational Development (AED).

We thank all staff who contributed great support to our work, including Ronald Mason, Jr., president of JSU, Monique Guillory and Nikisha Ware, executive directors of MLI, and Amy Berry, MLI interim director.

We also thank all the members of the MLI executive committee and collaborative growth team who gave their opinions and insights. Special recognition is given to those who helped orchestrate our data collection efforts, especially the JSU College of Education deans, Ivory Phillips, and Daniel Watkins; the former JPS superintendent, Earl Watkins; and the principals (and former principals) of the MLA schools: Theresa Green, Mary Bailey, Nerhu Brown, Evan Caine, Yolanda Lloyd, Theophilus King, and Lydia Haynes. We are also deeply indebted to the faculty, department chairs, literacy coaches, and students of JPS and JSU who were considerate and patient through hours of observations, shadowing, focus groups, interviews, and surveys. We are especially grateful to Willie Johnson, director of the JPS Office of Accountability and Research, who contributed much to our student data collection efforts.

We acknowledge the assistance provided by AED’s Mississippi-based staff and consultants, Ruthie Smith Stevenson, Nancy Cheney, and Sharea Myrick. We also extend our appreciation to AED’s New York staff who, over the years, managed, analyzed, and reported the MLI quantitative data and findings—Cheri Fancsali, Sandra Langley, Ian Beckford, Adria Gallup-Black, and Eliana Orellana—as well as to Elayne Archer who skillfully edited all MLI evaluation reports and Sandy Weinbaum who gave us advice and encouragement as the officer-in-charge.

The evaluation study was funded through JSU by grants from the U.S. Department of Education and the Barksdale Institute, for which we are deeply thankful.

Vernay Mitchell-McKnight, Ph.D.
MLI Evaluation Director

Lea Williams Rose, M.S.
MLI Evaluation Deputy Director

Academy for Educational Development
New York City

2009
Executive Summary

Introduction

MLI Structure and Mission

This executive summary presents major findings from the evaluation of the Mississippi Learning Institute (MLI) conducted by the Academy for Educational Development (AED) from 2004 to 2008. MLI is a preK-20 collaboration involving four partners—Jackson Public Schools (JPS); the College of Education (COE) at Jackson State University (JSU); the Mississippi State Department of Education (MSDOE); and the Barksdale Reading Institute. MLI seeks to improve literacy instruction and student performance in JPS and to deepen knowledge and understanding of reading theory and practice among JPS and JSU faculty.

MLI involves an academy of five schools encompassing one JPS feeder pattern—three elementary schools, a middle school, and a high school—together called the Mississippi Learning Academy (MLA). During the years of the evaluation, MLI provided extensive professional development (PD) and coaching to teachers in MLA schools. In addition, many MLI-sponsored meetings, workshops, events, and retreats for stakeholders at all levels promoted and fostered reform in reading and literacy instruction. The MLI governing structure entails an executive committee with members from all partners and a collaborative growth team. The MLI executive director serves on both these governing groups.

AED Evaluation

AED's multimethod evaluation included analysis of individual student record data on the Mississippi Curriculum Test (MCT) for MLA students and yearly interviews with JSU and JPS administrators and other state and local stakeholders. AED also observed classrooms and meetings and participated in some PD sessions. Lastly, AED conducted an annual teachers' survey.

MLI Approach to Literacy

MLI takes a “balanced” approach to reading instruction based on five components—phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and text comprehension. Initially, PD activities were delivered to MLA schools by nationally known experts and trainers and then by JPS teachers trained by MLI and COE faculty. PD was also delivered by MLI literacy coaches, who worked in the class with teachers, modeling instruction, co-teaching, and providing feedback. This work sought to enhance teachers understanding of reading instruction and increase their skill in addressing students’ different learning styles. MLI PD also sought to increase schools’ use of student performance data to inform classroom practice. This overall approach is well aligned with rigorous research identifying effective strategies for teaching reading such as those recommended by the National Reading Panel (NRP).

Summary of Overall Findings

This section summarizes the major findings of AED’s four-and-a-half-year evaluation of MLI under the following headings: the impact of MLI on teaching, schools, and students; implementation issues, including MLI collaborative growth team; findings pertaining to COE; and scaling up or replicating MLI.

Impact of MLI on Teaching and Schools

Quality of MLI Professional Development and Coaching

- Overall, AED observers judged the PD sessions to be of high quality and very appropriate to MLA teachers’ needs.
In addition, evaluation findings indicated MLA principals and teachers highly valued the work of the MLI literacy coaches who supplemented the PD offerings by helping teachers deal with specific classroom issues, providing feedback on lessons, helping orientate new teachers, and providing resources.

**Literacy Instruction in MLA Classrooms**

- Overall, evaluation findings indicated that MLA teachers were implementing what they learned in PD sessions by addressing the five components of literacy instruction. In addition, the duration of all observed lessons fit into the NRP guidelines.
- Observers especially saw an increasingly high degree of differentiated instruction in MLA classrooms, with teachers addressing the multiple and differing needs of learners in appropriate ways.
- Of the teachers surveyed, more teachers applied literacy instruction techniques from MLI-sponsored PD compared with other teacher training they had received (94.7% vs. 47.4%).
- In year 4, the MLA teachers exceeded the NAEP (National Assessment of Educational Progress) national respondents in feelings of preparedness for most of the literacy-related teaching practices, especially in the areas of using software in the teaching of both reading (86% to 12%) and writing (70% to 17%).
- In comparing the long-term trends with those of the comparison group, there were two areas in which the MLA teachers consistently reported doing with greater frequency than the comparison group teachers: asking students to write about something they had read and to explain or support their understanding of something read. Although the differences might not have been significant in all evaluation years, the consistent MLA-comparison differences of these two items remain noteworthy.

**Data Use in MLA Schools**

- Observations, interviews, and survey data all indicated that using data to inform teaching and learning has become routine in MLA schools. This includes teachers’ applying data-driven decision making in their classes, carrying what they learned in MLI over into classroom practice, and sharing their practice with one another.
- MLA teachers had increased capacity to develop high-quality lesson plans and standard-based assessments to identify student needs and develop effective instructional practices, such as small-group instruction and enrichment exercises.

**Teacher Satisfaction with MLI Professional Development**

- However, as the evaluation progressed, teachers expressed less overall satisfaction with MLI PD in several important areas. There were significant declines in the percentage of teachers who felt they had influence over the PD content (66% to 48%) and that their school provided teachers with adequate resources and materials to implement what they had learned in PD activities.
- The only cases for which the MLA teachers seemed to fare better than their national counterparts were in the areas of PD follow-up and feedback, which may speak to the positive role of the MLI coaches, who were mainly responsible for this follow-up.

**Teacher-Centered Classrooms**

- In addition, MLA classrooms are still very teacher-centered, with teachers imparting information and giving directions. In particular, many teachers’ questions remained the closed type that require rote knowledge rather than the open-ended type that require more higher order thinking. However, in year 5 there was some improvement in this area, especially in grades 1 and 2.
**MLI Impact on Students**

**Findings over Time: Elementary**
- In the first evaluation year, we reported that MLA students who were not language proficient at baseline improved to proficiency the following year at a greater rate than comparison students. MLA students who were proficient at baseline on both reading and language tests remained proficient at a greater rate than comparison students.

- By the third year of the evaluation, however, we reported that there were no significant differences between the MLA and comparison schools on average over time with respect to MCT score growth patterns. We argued that this suggested two things. First, we knew that several school improvement interventions were implemented in the comparison schools when MLA was implemented in George and Isable, which might explain the marked improvement in the comparison schools in years 3 and 4 of the evaluation. In addition, there might have been a “leveling off” or a “plateau effect” in the MLA schools. Further analyses conducted in the fourth year indicated that this was no quirk in the data and was indeed the beginning of a trend.

- By year 4 of the evaluation, we found that the greatest increases in proficiency were among the grade 5 MLA students—increases that in some cases surpassed those of the comparison schools. This strongly suggested that there was a cumulative effect among the older students in the MLA elementary schools, who had the benefit of four years of MLA. This, however, was not universal: Poindexter’s fifth graders also improved significantly, even though they had only two years’ worth of MLA. In this case, we suspected the learning curve for Poindexter might have been shorter—that is, the school had benefited from the experiences in George and Isable.

- There was a similar cumulative effect among more experienced teachers regarding their assessment of MLA’s effectiveness in preparing them to implement selected teaching practices. Although the MCT data and the survey data represented different years in the evaluation, the fact that the greatest increases occurred with the oldest students and the more experienced teachers, and later rather than sooner in MLI’s implementation, suggests that real change takes time—sometimes years.

**Findings over Time: Middle School**
- In Year 3, we found that the MCT and proficiency scores for the students in Blackburn, the MLA middle school, did not exceed or even differ appreciably from those for students in the comparison group. We suspected that this might stem from the teachers’ overall ambivalence about MLI and the fact that few teachers were implementing MLI at Blackburn.

**Findings over Time: Jim Hill**
- By the third year of the evaluation, some MLI impact was suggested by the shifts within the level of proficiency—mainly, the decline in students scoring at the "basic" level. This suggested that MLI might have had an effect on those students who were not at the very bottom but not quite performing to par. We found the same outcome in the fourth year of the evaluation.

**MLA and Comparison Schools: MCT Scores**
- In comparing MCT scores for reading and language arts in terms of increases in proficiency and in moving from “below proficient” to “proficient,” students in MLA elementary schools showed a positive difference on 16 of 18 categories across three grades, compared with students in comparison schools.
However, out of 12 measurement categories across two grades, the MLA middle school scores were positive in only four categories compared with the comparison school, which scored higher in eight categories.

Findings Pertaining to the MLI Collaborative Growth Team

- The MLI collaborative growth team is a great asset that, according to all data sources, has benefited preK-20 education in and around Jackson in multiple ways. It has taken risks and withstood some of the challenges of partnering. However, several challenges remain, and team members expressed differing opinions about how the team was working. This demonstrates that there is still work to be done to strengthen and clarify the team’s operations, collaboration, and understandings.

Findings Pertaining to COE

- Findings showed that instruction in COE classes was appropriate for the literacy subject matter and for what teacher candidates should know in terms of content and pedagogy. Much of the content followed the recommendations of scientifically-based research and NCATE (National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education) standards. Professors employed a variety of methods to teach literacy instruction and communicate clear standards for the quality and timeliness of written assignments.

- However, students in COE literacy classes tended to ask practical/functional questions rather than questions that would deepen their knowledge and understanding of certain approaches to reading or help them as teacher address the higher order thinking skills of JPS students. Similarly the faculty members often responded to the immediate question and often not in ways that enhanced the thinking skills of COE students, and increased their capacity to foster the higher order think skills of their future pupils.

Findings about Replicating and Scaling Up MLI

Scaling up or replicating educational initiatives such as MLI is a complex process requiring careful planning, analysis of readiness factors in particular settings, and collaboration among the necessary key partners. These will differ depending on whether the proposed replication is within or outside the school district in which the initial implementation occurred.

AED’s evaluation of MLI has produced evidence that higher student achievement occurred during the time MLI was implemented and has suggested some of this increase was the result of the design and implementation of the initiative. Secondly, the evaluation has shown that because of MLI’s structure—with key players from the four partners serving as permanent members of both the MLI executive committee and the collaborative growth team—the initiative, to a large extent, matched the school/district, university, and state cultures more closely each year. These implementation factors, as well as the alignment of the program’s PD and other supports for teachers show that MLI has the necessary implementation components for replication.

However, many challenges remain to successful MLI scale-up or replication. These include the readiness of other schools—including questions of leadership and teacher “buy-in”; the policy and political context that may affect implementation; and questions of funding and the role of the state. There are also communication and distance factors. A MLI replication in a district located at some distance from Jackson will make it more difficult for new implementers to work easily with the existing MLI executive committee and growth team. This will in turn hinder the easy development of the trust, rapport, and collaboration so necessary for successful scaling up or replication of any comprehensive educational reform initiative.
Recommendations

Recommendations are provided in key areas of MLI work. These include PD, the use of data, strengthening MLI in middle and high schools; strengthening family and community involvement in MLI; issues pertaining to the MLI collaborative growth team and COE; and scaling up/replicating MLI.

Professional Development

Overall, evaluation findings indicated that MLA teachers were implementing what they learned in PD sessions by addressing the five components of literacy instruction in a variety of ways, as well as meeting the needs of individual learners in appropriate ways. However, evaluation findings suggested that continued PD is necessary, both to build on MLA strengths and to foster teacher capacity in other areas, such as questioning techniques and making MLA classrooms more student-centered.

Over the course of the evaluation teachers’ favorable opinions about MLI PD declined. Overall, MLA teachers felt they had less influence over their PD, fewer resources, and less support from the school leadership. Any future MLI PD must be co-constructed with teachers. It must seek teacher input and address their expressed needs, rather than present a curriculum devised solely by others. PD must also foster networking and sharing among teachers. Support for this process could include giving stipends for monthly/bimonthly meetings and/or workshops to foster teacher sharing and networking; annual conferences and/or retreats, and an electronic newsletter, etc.

Data Use in MLI

Using data about student achievement was an important aspect of MLI. Teachers and administrators need ongoing help to continue to use data to gauge student learning and address student needs. This could entail providing ongoing help through workshops and individual assistance so that data findings are appropriately transferred to changes in instructional practice.

MLI might also want to track some additional indicators of success. These could include evidence that students understand the work and take the initiative to read and write on their own—indicators that JPS students are active participants in their own learning.

Strengthening MLI in Middle and High School

On the whole, the AED evaluation found that MLI fared better in elementary schools with respect to improvements than it did in the middle and high schools. The results of this evaluation could be used to begin a new conversation about the improvement of literacy skills in middle and high schools. Firstly, a facilitator is needed to help the executive committee and growth team explore current trends in secondary school literacy. From that understanding should come a process whereby a written MLI theory of change is developed specifying the inputs needed to improve literacy instruction and student achievement, and what outcomes are to be expected.

Family and Community Involvement in MLI

MLI functioned to reemphasize the importance of literacy instruction to teachers, COE faculty, and the school district in general but it lacked a “reach” into the wider community, including families and parents. If the original proposal to include parents in MLI is still essential to the MLI mission, the executive committee and the growth team should redouble efforts to make the connection with the community. Since the parent coordinator model did not continue, a taskforce of parents (perhaps a group already formed) could report parent questions and comments about MLI to the executive committee. The committee should find appropriate venues at which to respond to parents.
Issues Pertaining to the MLI Collaborative Growth Team
The MLI collaborative growth team is a great asset to the initiative, but challenges remain to improve its work. The growth team should continue to put into practice the lessons from reading the Jonathan Tisch book, *The Power of We*. We especially recommend that the team review the sections of the book covering experiencing work from the point of view of others in the partnership; the “flow” of communications; reacting to crises in time or resources; and assuring that all members know what values the partnership believes in.

It is important that all team members understand what must be done before the next meeting. The final agenda item at each meeting should stipulate this. There could also be an annual retreat for the executive committee and the collaborative growth team.

Issues Pertaining to JSUCOE
Over the course of the MLI evaluation, COE involvement improved dramatically. AED observations in the final year showed that COE instruction was appropriate in terms of both content and pedagogy. However, findings also indicated that COE preservice teachers need help, as do JPS teachers, in asking questions that will promote their own and their students higher order thinking. COE faculty must be encouraged to engage teacher candidates in such questioning and other instructional practices that will deepen understanding.

COE faculty must also make sure that all textbooks are up-to-date and that students in all classes are taught in ways that explore the links between these pedagogical courses and other courses, such as foundations of education and child psychology.

There should be some sort of recognition for COE faculty who publish books or articles related to their involvement in MLI, thus encouraging participation among other faculty and signaling the importance of this work to the field and bringing attention to JSU and JPS. Lastly, JSUCOE should consider a teacher-in-residence program in which JSU teachers spend time on campus.

Replicating or Scaling-Up the MLI Initiative
Scaling up/replicating educational initiatives is a complex process requiring careful planning, and analysis of readiness factors, funding, and context. Given these challenges, a replication within JPS may be the next logical step. Such a replication could more easily take advantage of the key players with JPS, COE, and MSDOE, as well as teachers from MLA schools. This would also facilitate more immediate contact and communication and foster the trust, rapport, and collaborative spirit so necessary for the successful scaling up of a complex initiative such as MLI.

*****

In conclusion, it should be noted that while no causal link can be made between MLI and the accomplishments presented in this summary, there is strong evidence that MLI, along with other initiatives, such as the Barksdale Schools and an increasing focus on literacy throughout Mississippi, produced more awareness, more high-quality PD, improved literacy instruction, improved student achievement, and more effective collaboration and planning among school staff in MLA schools. Much of the work was driven by the MLI executive committee that governed the initiative in an active and focused manner and included the appropriate mix of partners including a representative of the funder and the strong presence of the university president. The findings show success in implementation and some of the outcomes but also confirm what we already know about effective educational reform: real change takes time—sometimes years.
Introduction

This final report documents and assesses the work of the Mississippi Learning Institute (MLI) from March 2004 to October 2008. The Academy for Educational Development (AED) has collected data over four and a half years to conduct a comprehensive evaluation of the structure, outcomes, and impact of this bold initiative to change literacy instruction and outcomes in the Jackson Public Schools (JPS) and the College of Education (COE) at Jackson State University (JSU).

MLI Structure

MLI is organized and administered through the collaborative efforts of four partners JSU, JPS, the Mississippi State Department of Education (MSDOE), and the Barksdale Reading Institute. Over its six years of existence, MLI has forged closer ties between the university and the school system—both of which recognize major responsibility for the formal teaching and learning process in this community. MSDOE has participated in MLI as a partner with broad concerns about state-level education policy and the status of reading and literacy statewide. The Barksdale Reading Institute has provided funding, guidance, and advice to the initiative and participated directly as a partner in the governance of MLI.

To fulfill its goals of reforming literacy instruction and outcomes, MLI’s developers adopted a framework incorporating the best research-based instructional practices into the public schools and university curriculum to both increase research-driven practice and foster knowledge and understanding of reading theory and practice among JPS and JSU faculty. The format for the institute is a collaborative structure, involving the partners mentioned above and consisting of an executive committee with members representing all partners and an MLI “growth team.” This collaborative team includes administrators of participating JPS schools; COE faculty; and JSU administrators. The MLI executive director serves on both these governing groups. Many MLI-sponsored meetings, workshops, events, retreats, and activities for stakeholders at all levels promote and foster reform in reading and literacy instruction to improve students’ academic outcomes.

In addition to promoting change in how teachers are trained in literacy subjects at JSU, MLI involves an academy of five schools encompassing one JPS feeder pattern—three elementary schools, a middle school, and a high school—together called the Mississippi Learning Academy (MLA). MLI’s mission is to affect both the quality of literacy instruction and student performance on various measures of reading achievement, as well as their overall performance in various content areas. Professional development (PD) activities were delivered to these schools—at first by nationally known experts and trainers for the state and district and, increasingly, in the past two years, by JPS faculty trained by MLI and COE faculty. These experts and trainers worked directly with teachers, teacher aides, and tutors modeling lessons, distributing reading materials, suggesting teaching materials and techniques for use in classrooms, and conducting research studies in MLA classrooms. Faculty development in reading instruction was also delivered by five literacy coaches and a literacy coordinator selected to work in MLA schools.

AED Role

Originally in 2004, the MLI partnership contracted AED to conduct a four- and one-half year evaluation (from 2004 to 2008) of MLI. The evaluation was to focus on implementation of the initiative, the work of the collaborative partnership, and MLI’s impacts on schools, pupils, teachers, the district, and the university. In four annual reports, AED made detailed assessments framed by a series of evaluation questions. (See appendix for the original set
of evaluation questions.) Twice during the evaluation a new agreement was signed, increasing the number of schools to be studied, changing the focus from the MLI executive committee to the collaborative growth team, increasing the number of observations done in MLA classrooms, eliminating the comparisons with National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) data, collecting more detailed data about the coaches' work, changing the survey instrument, and targeting JSUCOE for more intensive study. This study was to include an analysis of syllabi and classroom observations for undergraduate courses related to literacy instruction. Each successive change slightly altered how the study was conducted but also continued to bring the evaluation in line with the needs of the initiative as it was modified through data-driven decision-making.

Our multimethod data-collection strategy also included a review of important documents produced by and for MLI, an analysis of individual student record data (state test scores) for MLA students as they proceeded through the grades, and yearly interviews with JSU and JPS administrators and other state and local stakeholders, including a representative of the funder, the Barksdale Reading Institute. We also observed classrooms and meetings and participated in some PD sessions. Lastly, AED conducted an annual teachers' survey and, for the first four years, findings were linked year to year, allowing a longitudinal analysis of teacher development and MLI outcomes. In year 5 of the evaluation, MLI administrators asked for changes in the survey, including adding a new battery of questions and deleting others. The results of the new survey are reported in this report; however, it was not possible to report longitudinal links for findings from these new questions.

Throughout this document we refer to years 1-5 in reporting findings. In all cases we are referring to the years of the evaluation. This convention had to be set since the five MLA schools did not all begin participating in the initiative the same year. The following should be used as a guide.

- Year 1—SY 2003-2004 (Data collection in Isable and George elementary schools only)
- Year 2—SY 2004-2005 (Data collection began in Poindexter Elementary School and Blackburn Middle School.)
- Year 3—SY 2005-2006 (Data collection began in Jim Hill High School.)
- Year 4—SY 2006-2007 (Data collection in all MLA schools)
- Year 5—SY 2007-2008 (revised teacher survey and data collection intensified in grades K-3, among coaches and at COE; data collection decreased in Blackburn Middle School and Jim Hill High School.)

This final report presents these overall findings, with a major focus on year 5. It includes the following major sections: Year Five Findings: Observations and Interviews; Year Five Survey Findings; Summary of Findings; and Recommendations. The appendices contain various materials mentioned throughout this report.
II. Year Five Findings: Observations and Interviews

Throughout this and the next section, findings for year 5 are compared with those of other evaluation years. However, this section focuses largely on year 5 (SY 2007-08) since those findings have not been reported in previous reports. As requested by MLI, these findings focus especially on the work of the MLI collaborative growth team, activities in elementary school classrooms, and the work of MLI coaches. Findings are presented below under the following headings: MLI executive committee and growth team; PD; literacy instruction in MLA classrooms; coaching; data-based decision making; and findings from COE.

MLI Executive Committee and Collaborative Growth Team

As the executive committee and the growth team continued their work of administering and governing this initiative, they coordinated their meetings to occur monthly, with the executive committee meeting after the growth team. In general, members of both teams became better at their work as they gained a more thorough understanding of the resources and processes needed to progress, but some barriers continued to challenge them as they revisited issues, such as stipends for PD sessions and the role of the executive director.

In the fifth year of the evaluation under a new contract, AED’s concentration on the structure of MLI changed from a concentration on the executive committee to more emphasis on analyzing the work of the growth team. In the 2007-08 school year, AED observed meetings of the growth team, collected minutes and handouts, and interviewed members of the growth team and executive committee.

As MLI administrators who had been with the initiative since its inception reported, the MLI growth team was created so that MLI governance would include principals viewed as being “on the ground in the schools.” This was both to ensure that MLI administrators knew “what was, and what was not, working” and to provide JSU faculty with opportunities to work more directly in JPS classrooms. It was expected that JSU and JPS could inform one another in ways that would align the entire preK-20 literacy efforts. For example, JSU could see if the skills and concepts learned in teacher preparation were evident in JPS classrooms, and JPS teachers could inform JSU faculty about ways to change teacher preparation to better fit the realities of teaching in JPS schools. However while the initial few years of growth team retreats brought JPS principals and JSU faculty together physically, there was not always the “meeting of the minds” needed to accomplish the challenge of aligning the pre-K–20 curriculum. Some JSU faculty revised syllabi or carried out research projects related to MLA schools, but it was difficult to resolve turf issues, as reported in previous evaluation reports.

By the fifth year of the evaluation when a sharper focus on the growth team was requested, the data was quite mixed with a very wide range of opinions about whether the team had realized its potential after such a difficult start and whether MLI had created a workable approach to literacy that could be implemented throughout the preK-20 education pipeline. The following three opinions from JPS and JSU administrators about the growth team express these views.

The executive committee has high expectations of what the growth team should be doing (e.g., pulling data from schools and other sources, conducting progress monitoring, and such). Yet I cannot recall at any meeting having real conversations about our work. The work needs to be defined. There are set meetings, the executive director sends meeting reminders and gives agenda items, but when we have the meetings, we review the agenda and talk about the items [that is, but not the work].
The mission of the growth team is to become more cohesive and work better together. We are the middle team that keeps the work going—we implement the work—we see the needs of schools and JSU (COE). This year we are implementing the PD needs of COE, teachers, and schools. As a growth team we do that body of work (e.g., effective and targeted PD.). We come from different venues—levels and areas of education (e.g., COE, the schools—elementary, middle, high schools). We have a common purpose, yet a different purpose at the same time. We are on the same page though, and we have learned how to compromise. Everyone understands they play an important role.

We appreciate the new lines of communication that come from being involved in a collaborative growth team. We do planning sessions together. It is successful because we now have two level-five schools and one level four. MLI has helped COE people understand things about the Mississippi Framework Curriculum, and COE people made MLI people more aware of NCATE and the standards always present in our syllabi. There has been growth on both sides. . . the team has come a long way since it was just the growth team. Originally they wanted just JPS principals and COE chairs of departments on it and that didn’t work. So the redesigned team includes others like the heads of department. Now everyone has a stake in it.

As evaluators we see these three statements from growth team members as weak, moderate and strong, respectively. The first quote expresses the opinion that the growth team continues to be weak, with this member wanting to get to the work rather than talking about it. This is an issue of how well members understand the team’s role and the limitations of monthly meetings. It may be necessary to detail what members should do between meetings to make the monthly meetings more productive. The second quote acknowledges that a body of work is being done and that there is more understanding among team members of this work, despite continuing differences in purpose. The third quote implies that the past difficulties experienced by the growth team have been rectified—especially now that it is called the “collaborative growth team” and with new CEO members—and that members have moved on to improved collaboration and thus greater success. These differing opinions demonstrate that there is still work to be done to strengthen the team’s operations, collaborations, and understandings of MLI’s mission, expected outcomes, and future work.

In observations of growth team meetings, evaluators saw genuine efforts on the part of JPS and JSU stakeholders to collaborate and remain open to one another’s ideas. In most instances the team acknowledged the challenges of both MLI and, more specifically, of the MLI partnership and tried to devise remedies to address these. For example, a taskforce was suggested to delve deeply into MLI’s role in the secondary schools, which have always shown less progress during MLI when compared with progress in the MLI elementary schools. This taskforce was necessary since the larger group cannot spend the time necessary to define and address this challenge. Creating this taskforce addresses the above comment about the need to “get to the actual work” and may constitute a more efficient way for the group to operate—in subcommittees with representation from all levels engaged in the MLI partnership.

Professional Development

As in prior years, MLI and the JPS school district continued to provide teachers and administrators with PD appropriate for the ongoing improvement of JPS literacy instruction
and outcomes. AED evaluators observed some of these sessions and reviewed handouts from others during the 2007-08 school year. In addition, questions about the appropriateness and quality of PD sessions were on our instruments for principal interviews and teacher surveys.

A major priority of MLI PD was to build capacity for higher quality instruction using a balanced literacy approach.\(^1\) In later years there was more emphasis on using data to inform classroom practice in literacy instruction, especially given the introduction in SY 2007-08 of the revised pre-K–grade 12 Mississippi Curriculum Frameworks. In response, MLA principals sought to leverage district and MLI PD opportunities to forge an alignment between district/state expectations and MLI work. Principals stressed the need to use MLI PD resources in tandem with meeting district/state competencies. Two MLI principals stated:

\[\text{MLI cannot be an independent operating entity. It must be married with district expectations.}\]

\[\text{The introduction of the new Mississippi Frameworks in SY 2007-08 caused the focus on literacy to be more intense. As principals we had to find PD that would best help teachers and students transition to rigorous assessment, and having a support system of other MLA principals helped.}\]

In general, as implied above, principals wanted more control over the content of PD offered to their teachers.

In year 5 a series of PD sessions took place on Saturdays and focused on “unpacking” the objectives of the new Mississippi reading/language arts and mathematics curricula. Three observed sessions are described and assessed below:

1. One session focused on what instruction should look like, its measurable parts, and what students should know, understand, and apply. Participants developed common grade-level assessments for the objectives to be taught during the week of October 8-13, 2007 in MLA schools so that all teachers would be teaching and assessing all competencies in a uniform manner. It was a high-quality work session: the facilitators were knowledgeable, enthusiastic, and able to keep their work groups on task. The teacher participants were familiar with the task at hand and worked well together in the development of their assessments.

2. Another session focused on leadership for student achievement. The presenter led an interactive discussion, facilitated by a PowerPoint presentation, on the leadership techniques, practices, and culture essential to promoting student achievement, as well as the challenges of these. The presenter was knowledgeable and forthright, and the discussion was in-depth and well facilitated. The session was well received, with participants obviously appreciating the opportunity to discuss their opinions and experiences with the presenter.

3. Another session was a working session, using data from the district’s second nine-week assessment. This session entailed teachers in grades 4 and 5 discussing and

\(^1\) The balanced approach to literacy instruction used by MLI was introduced to the initiative in 2003, before this evaluation began, by Dr. Dale Willows. What Dr. Willows referred to as a “balanced literacy diet” consists of phonics instruction, whole-language instruction and instruction using the “four blocks.” The overall approach is well aligned with rigorous research studies that identify methods leading to reading success, such as those recommended by the National Reading Panel. Dr Willows provided much of the professional development for MLA teachers in the first two years of MLI and led some seminars on literacy instruction at JSU.
developing the kind of thinking strategies that students need to successfully meet the objectives for these grades. The session was energetic and productive. All teachers participated, and there was a high level of collegiality among the teachers as they stayed on task.

In two of these sessions, there were minor logistical problems. For example, in one session, the food arrived late, and at another the presenter spent over 15 minutes trying to work the sound component of her video presentation while participants sat with nothing to do. Later the facilitator did not have enough materials for all participants. Nevertheless, AED observers judged the PD sessions as very good and appropriate to the needs of MLA teachers, based on observations in literacy-related classroom lessons. When surveyed, elementary teachers increasingly said these PD sessions were valuable, although this positive change was not always statistically significant.

**Literacy Instruction in MLA Classrooms**

AED researchers conducted observations in all three MLA elementary schools, concentrating in the final two years on grades K-3. This section of the report describes an overview of how classrooms were organized in terms of the five components of reading instruction; the instructional methods in used in MLA classrooms; and the time spent on specific aspects of literacy instruction. This section also describes teacher feedback about MLI coach support for their work, their application of what they learned about literacy instruction in teacher education classes and from MLI PD sessions, and the continuing challenges of their work.

**Overview of the Five Components of Reading Instruction**

As required by the year 5 evaluation agreement, AED increased the number of observations in grades K-3, looking specifically for the five components of reading instruction—phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary development, fluency, and text comprehension. In total, 31 observations of 45 minutes were completed. The following are two explicit examples of the instruction in the five components of reading instruction; the appendix contains other examples.

**Example One**

This was a third-grade spelling lesson. The first part of the lesson was a spelling test; the next part of the lesson dealt with word endings and their use; the teacher then reviewed letter sounds; and the final part of the lesson covered homonyms. The teacher and the assistant “floated” throughout the room during the assignment to ensure that students were on task. Students were praised when they gave correct answers. Additionally, students chose cheers to do after the class review of spelling words. The class addressed four of the five components of reading instruction, as described below:

- **Phonemic awareness**: During the spelling test, the teacher emphasized the “th” sound at the end of the word “with,” and a student pointed out that “were” had an “er” sound in the middle.

- **Phonics**: This entailed some letter-sound review, with the teacher making letter/blend sounds and motions, and the students writing the corresponding letter/blends on their paper.

- **Vocabulary development**: This involved a homonym lesson about the different meanings of the same-sounding words.
Comprehension. This was a word-endings activity to make sure students knew how using the plural or different tenses changed the meaning.

Throughout the class, open-ended questions were used—for example, during the part of the lesson on word endings (-s, -es, -ing, -ed), students were asked to explain why they chose a particular word ending and the other cases in which that ending might be used. The class reviewed their answers to the assignment together.

**Example Two**

Students were involved in their center rotations—dictionary activity, comprehension center with the teacher, individual reading, sequencing, and fact/opinion activities. The center activities served as interventions for students who needed help developing particular skills. Centers provided different approaches to learning, such as reading a workbook silently, working with a teacher or assistant in a small group, and working cooperatively with peers. This third-grade class addressed three of the five components of reading instruction, as described below: The class also addressed another important aspect of reading instruction—the integration of literacy skills into other subjects. The teacher and the assistant worked with students in groups in 20-minute sessions.

- **Vocabulary development.** The assistant led a vocabulary center where student used a dictionary to find the meanings of words. The assistant talked about the uses of the words and gave some synonyms.

- **Comprehension.** The teacher led a center that involved reading a passage to students and then walking through a multiple choice activity regarding context clues and author purpose. The students had to phrase their responses to the multiple choice options, “This answer is correct/incorrect because. . . ”

- **Fluency.** The teacher modeled fluent reading in her reading of the passage. Then students were involved in independent reading.

Thus it was demonstrated in our observations that the instruction in the five components of reading instruction in these observed classrooms was more intensive than we reported in the first few years of the evaluation.

**Instructional Methods in Elementary Classrooms**

MLA teachers used numerous classroom practices to motivate students and foster their learning. Below we describe three of these methods: questioning techniques, peer assistance, and differentiated instruction.

**Questioning Techniques**

In previous reports we have emphasized the need for teachers to ask questions that encourage students to generalize and develop other higher order thinking skills in their responses. Central to this is the use of open-ended, rather than closed, questions. A closed question can be answered with a simple answer, many times relying on rote memory. These questions often begin with words like “who,” “what,” “where,” or “when”—for example, “In the story we read, who went to work?” An open-ended question requires deeper thought and an answer greater than a single word or two—for example, “What would have happened in the story if the plan had not worked out?” Such questions often promote problem-solving and synthesizing skills. AED observers especially looked for an improvement in questioning during observations in year 5 since we had been noticing since year three that questioning techniques needed to be more varied in MLA classrooms. We began recording the number of closed and open-ended questions asked during lessons. The results are presented in Table 1. The greatest use of open-ended questions occurred in grades 1 and 2.
Table 1. Questioning Techniques Observed in Grades K-3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mostly closed ended</th>
<th>Mixed closed and open ended</th>
<th>Mostly open-ended</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kindergarten</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N=9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First grade</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N=8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second grade</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N=7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third grade</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N=6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 shows that most teacher questions in these observed classrooms remain the closed type that require more rote knowledge than open-ended questions that require more higher order thinking. However, the evaluator who has conducted the observations throughout the evaluation believed there had been improvement in this area by year 5, given that, in grades 1 and 2, the percentage of closed and open ended questions are equal. However, grade 3 teachers need to work at asking questions demanding more reflection on the part of students, thus fostering their higher order thinking skills.

**Peer Assistance**

Since peer assistance—students helping other students—is associated with greater academic achievement (McAllister, 1990), we noted it during classroom observations. In every report for years 1 through 4 we cited numerous examples where students partnered with their peers to enhance learning. For example in the year 4 report, we described students in a grade 3 class helping one another in various ways, including understanding directions. In year 5 observers saw a moderate amount of peer assistance taking place, some guided by the teacher and some initiated by the students themselves. The use of peer teaching was fairly widespread, as presented below.

- Five of nine kindergarten classrooms had a certain amount of student assistance, with teachers asking struggling students to choose a friend to help and saying things like “Sometimes we need a friend’s help.” Three classes had minimal student assistance—the teacher asked another student to help a struggling student; and one classroom had no peer teaching during the observation.

- In eight grade 1 observations, there were visible signs of peer teaching in six classrooms. Teachers asked some students to help struggling students; students participated in “think-pair-share work”; and students were allowed to “partner read” or work in center rotation groups.

- Half of the eight grade 2 classes showed evidence of peer teaching. Teachers asked students to help their peers, each student group had a student leader, and students worked together on group work as assigned. Students also assisted one another at learning centers—for example, finding solutions to computer software problems.

- There were also signs of peer teaching in five of the six grade 3 classrooms. For example, students helped one another informally at the learning centers, and in two particular cases where a student was off task, another student reminded a student of what they were supposed to do. Students also worked in groups (e.g. on vocabulary exercise and main idea/summarization activity).
These examples of students assisting other students in several different modes show movement toward greater classroom cohesion. The peer assistance often created a more efficient instructional atmosphere by allowing the teacher to give more time to students who were severely challenged while the simpler challenges, such as following directions, were handled by students who had completed their work or who understood the assignment more rapidly than others.

**Differentiated Instruction**

Another instructional practice emphasized in MLI PD and linked to greater student achievement is differentiated instruction (Christenson, 1987). ASCD describes differentiated instruction as “creating multiple paths so that students of different abilities, interests, or learning needs experience equally appropriate ways to absorb, use, develop, and present concepts as part of the daily learning process.”[^2] This corresponds to what a grade 3 MLA teacher described about the learning centers in her classroom:

> The various centers focus on the different competencies where the students are struggling. The center activities provide interventions where the students are lacking. The centers provide different approaches to learning—working in reading workbook, working with a teacher or assistant, thinking aloud, cooperative learning.

In MLA classrooms observers looked for these appropriate ways of addressing learning needs and saw a high frequency of differentiated instruction where teachers used several methods to teach the same concept, thus addressing many differing learning styles. This high frequency of differentiated instruction stands in contrast to the lower frequency observed in past years of the evaluation, especially in grades 2 and 3. Some examples of ways teachers differentiated instruction are presented below.

- In six of the kindergarten classes, teachers used songs and motion throughout the phonics lesson—students raised their hands to the name of the letter, touched their shoulders, made the letter sound, and then touched the floor (especially good for kinesthetic learners). Teachers also asked students to close their eyes and spell their “tricky” words out loud; others led the class in a song about the days of the week.
- In grade 1 classes, teacher asked students to say-the-word, spell-the-word, and clap-the-word. Students used motions and sounds as the whole class spelled words together, sometimes singing each letter in an opera style. Students also listened to a story on tape while following along in the book, and teachers worked with individuals in reading groups based on their reading levels. For example, students did “whisper” reading while the teacher circulated and assessed student fluency and comprehension by listening and posing questions. Students also took “picture walks,” making predictions about a story, underlining vocabulary words, reading the story together aloud, and then revising their predictions. They also discussed whether particular paragraphs in a story were fact or fiction and then discussed why).
- In grade 2 classes, teachers used visualization techniques to help students create a picture in their minds; as well as sounds and motions, like call and response. For example, in a spelling lesson, students spelled out the word in a low whisper and crouched down to the floor and gradually increased the spelling in volume and rose

to a standing position. Learning centers focused on auditory and visual skills, and manipulatives helped maintain student focus—for example, a popsicle stick with a “googley eye” glued to one end helped students stay focused on a page in their book.

- In grade 3, learning centers provided different approaches to learning (for example, students worked with the teacher or teacher assistant on read alouds, doing game simulations in small groups, and comprehension listening activities on the computer. Teachers also used sounds and motions—having students vary the volume of their voices while reading and having the class stand during the spelling portion of the lesson.

In summary, it is clear that MLA teachers were addressing the five components of literacy instruction in a variety of ways, both explicit and embedded, and using various teaching strategies, including open-and closed ended questioning, peer teaching, and differentiated instruction. The instruction observed in these classrooms are in accordance with practices suggested in MLI PD sessions and the research literature on reading instruction. These types of instructions were more varied and intense in year 5 than in years 1 and 2.

**Time Spent on Specific Aspects of Literacy Instruction**

In addition to the above, evaluators observed MLA classrooms (45 minutes for each observation), noting how much time each classroom spent on six aspects of literacy instruction. These data are presented below in Table 2 for kindergarten and grades 1, 2, and 3, showing the average minutes spent in the observed classrooms on each aspect with a low/high range by grade level.

### Table 2. Duration of Instruction for Six Aspects of Literacy Instruction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspects of Literacy Instruction</th>
<th>Kindergarten</th>
<th>Grade 1</th>
<th>Grade 2</th>
<th>Grade 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Average minutes</td>
<td>Range (low-high)</td>
<td>Average minutes</td>
<td>Range (low-high)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phonemic awareness</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0-20</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0-20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phonics</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0-30</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0-20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary development</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0-15</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0-15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comprehension</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0-20</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0-15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fluency</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0-15</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0-15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integration of literacy into other subjects</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0-10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0-15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As shown in the table, the two aspects of literacy instruction covered the most in the observed kindergarten lessons were phonics and fluency, while in the observed grade 1 classrooms, they were fluency and vocabulary development. The three aspects of literacy instruction covered the most in the observed grades 2 and 3 classrooms were phonemic awareness, comprehension, and fluency. In the observed grade 3 classrooms, there was also vocabulary development. Some examples of how these aspects of literacy instruction were covered during observations are presented below.

- **Phonemic awareness.** In grade 2, a teacher conducted a flash card review of vowel combinations (-oi, -oy, -ie, -ir, -er, etc.), and students spelled words and identified specific phonemes in words.

- **Phonics.** In kindergarten and grade 1, students played “I Spy” with the word wall; the teacher reviewed Jolly Phonics

- **Vocabulary development.** In a grade 3 class, groups were given a vocabulary word that related to the story read earlier. Students in each group worked together, using a dictionary to complete an “umbrella organizer.” The teacher and assistant floated from group to group as needed. Students “reported out” at the end of the exercise.

- **Comprehension.** Kindergarten and grade 1 teachers conducted picture walk-throughs before reading a book, and teachers asked questions to make sure students understood what they were reading. In grade 2, during partner reading, students paraphrased paragraphs and participated in a story retell. In grade 3, students at the reading center used a beach ball with various questions on it to discuss the book they read. The teacher asked follow-up questions throughout the reading session to check student comprehension.

- **Fluency.** Students in kindergarten and grade 1 read words together, with teachers modeling appropriate pacing and vocal inflection. In addition, teachers timed students as they read passages and compared times with those of previous sessions. A grade 2 teacher employed several strategies, including modeling reading and echo and choral reading. In a grade 3 class, students participated in echo and choral reading with the teacher. The teacher also had students read aloud in small groups, using a pointer to keep pace.

- **A most positive finding is that the duration of all observed lessons fit into the guidelines of the National Reading Panel (2000). These guidelines are juxtaposed with how instruction was delivered in MLA schools in Table 3.”
Table 3. NRP Guidelines and MLA Literacy Instruction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NRP Guidelines</th>
<th>Literacy Instruction in MLA Schools</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Phonemic awareness lessons should last no more than 30 min.”</td>
<td>All observed lessons observed fit this guideline.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Phonics lessons”—no specific recommendation of time</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Vocabulary lessons should be taught as part of regular instruction.”</td>
<td>The lesson given as an example was typical, where vocabulary was taught from a previously read story. Time was spent in many lessons integrating literacy into other subjects.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Text comprehension lessons”—no specific recommendation of time</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Fluency instruction”—Specific times have not been determined, but fluency is related to the amount of time students spend reading.</td>
<td>Although the amount of reading done by students could not be calculated, there was some evidence of this in MLA schools when teachers encouraged students to read outside of school. In the classrooms there were activity centers that generally required reading to accomplish the activity.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Teacher Feedback about Support from Coach for the Observed Lessons**

The coach’s role in MLI is described in the next section. This section presents what teachers in observed classrooms said about the support they received, both in general and for the observed lesson. Except for several grade 2 teachers, most teachers said that the coach had not been specifically involved in helping them plan the particular lesson observed. However, teachers and principals described four ways in which the MLI coach/coaches helped them. These included helping with students needing remediation; with specific issues in a classroom; in general as resources; and for orientating new teachers. The quotes below illustrate these aspects of the help provided by the MLI coaches.

**Help with Students Needing Remediation**

*We meet once a week to talk about students that are falling behind and need interventions. She has provided me with a big binder of center ideas and she serves as another pair of eyes in the classroom.* (Kindergarten teacher)

*If a child cannot master a skill, she provides resources and helps me develop an action plan. She assists with activities and enrichment. She also helps with interventions and modeling skills as needed.* (Kindergarten teacher)

*She helps provide activities for guided reading in preparation of the MCT2 and she provides help with different competencies where my kids are lacking.* (Grade 3 teacher)

**Help with Specific Lessons**

*The literacy coach has worked with me on what is supposed to be taught during the guided reading block, text structure, expanded comprehension, as well as specific skills in phonics and phonemic awareness.* (Grade 1 teacher)
She makes classroom observations and gives me feedback and recommendations. She also updates our center idea binder with new activities. (Grade 2 teacher)

The week prior to a lesson she will give us notes, ideas, and activities for reading, language and math.

We work everyday after school on reading lessons. She model lessons and facilitates classroom instruction. (Grade 2 teacher)

As a General Resource

As a resource person, I can bounce ideas off of her or get new ideas as needed. (Grade 3 teacher)

She observes and offers new instructional techniques where needed. (Grade 3 teacher)

Orienting New Teachers

My literacy coach trains our new teachers about the 4-Blocks literacy curriculum. She is able to provide on-site PD. I like the fact we can start something in-house and implement in a timely manner." (Principal, MLA school)

The coach reviews my weekly plans. Most of her lessons are for new teachers, but other teachers can participate. (Grade 3 teacher)

This feedback from MLA school staff make it clear that the MLI coach contributed in many important ways to the ongoing implementation of MLI in the schools. Coaches were observed while they modeled lessons for teachers. Some of the topics presented in these modeling session are shown below.

- Providing constructive feedback to students
- Using questioning techniques for vocabulary building and reading comprehension
- Using manipulatives such as word cubes and basal reading index cards
- Using “think-aloud” strategies to help students access prior knowledge to determine the meaning of words
- Using instructional techniques for visual learners, such as the use of KWL (What I know, What I want to learn, and What I learned) charts and bubble maps (see below).
KWL Chart

*Purpose:* To reinforce reading comprehension and the use of metacognition. Student fills in K and W before reading and fills in L after reading

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>K</th>
<th>W</th>
<th>L</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*K = What I know (accessing prior knowledge)*

*W= What I want to know (setting a purpose for reading)*

*L= What I learned (recalling what has been read)*

Thinking Map (Bubble map)

During a one-on-one debriefing, the school coach showed a second-grade teacher how to use a thinking map (a.k.a. bubble map) when planning a strategic reading lesson for her students. The coach explained the purpose of the bubble map and its various facets. For example, strategic reading should:

- Be interactive: the lesson is engaging for students and the teacher provides constant feedback.
- Include order think-alouds: the teacher should model “think alouds” when expressing her thoughts during a reading lesson. This strategy may help students begin to think metacognitively.
- Involve skill application: if the teacher models think alouds, then later the students can practice think alouds.
- Provide strategies: the teacher should provide clear strategies (e.g., purpose of lesson, directions, etc) at the start of a lesson.
- Activate prior knowledge so that students can make connections to certain vocabulary words and/or a story
- “During” the lesson, the teacher can check in with students to make sure they understand by reiterating certain story themes, stressing vocabulary words, and/or posing questions.
- “After” the lesson, the teacher can ask students to summarize what they read or perform other learning activities (e.g., pair share discussion, or use of story flash cards) to reinforce what they just read
In addition the coaches modeled the following:

- Using “GO” charts (graphic organizers) to empower students as they learn and to promote high order thinking skills.

- Employing instructional strategies in “working with words” lessons, such as using context clues, roots and affixes (prefixes and suffixes) to help students imply the meaning of unfamiliar words.

- Using techniques for students to identify R-controlled vowels in multiple syllable words (e.g., termite, interval, furry, thirst).

- Using the 4 square organizer as part of a 4 square writing lesson to encourage students to think and write about stories logically.

These examples from observations of MLI coaches show that instructional practices fostering students’ metacognitive skills and higher order thinking skills are reinforced in the work coaches model for teachers, but as mentioned above and below in this report, the observations of teachers showed that the use of these techniques needs to be increased in MLI classrooms.
**Application of Literacy Instruction from Both Teacher Training and MLI Professional Development Sessions**

Since an essential component of MLI is the alignment between what is learned in teacher preparation and what those teacher candidates later do in their classrooms as teachers, we tried to obtain a sense of the extent to which MLA teachers used what they learned in both their teacher preparation program (which could have been at JSU or other institutions) and in MLI PD sessions.

Table 4 summarizes the responses of teachers in K through grade 3 about whether they are teaching literacy the way they learned in their teacher training or in MLI PD sessions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher Training</th>
<th>Kindergarten (n=5 teachers)</th>
<th>First Grade (n=5 teachers)</th>
<th>2nd grade (n=5 teachers)</th>
<th>3rd Grade (n=4 teachers)</th>
<th>Total %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Training</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MLI PD</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of the teachers surveyed, more teachers applied literacy instruction techniques from MLI-sponsored PD compared with other teacher training (94.7% vs. 47.4%). The quotes below illustrate how teachers have applied what they learned from other teacher training and MLI-sponsored training.

**Application of Learning from Teacher Training**

Several teachers described how they have been applying what they learned from their teacher training into their literacy instruction:

> Before I graduated from [college], I had to complete five comprehensive learning centers. I currently run eight integrated centers in my classroom. [Kindergarten teacher]

> We were taught to go strictly by lesson plans, curriculum, pacing guide, and use small-group interaction. [Grade 1 teacher]

> I used to be a Reading Recovery teacher, and I find myself using some of those same strategies during working with words. The research is now in synch with what I learned. [Grade 1 teacher]

**Application of Learning from MLI Professional Development**

Many teachers attested to the value of what they learned from the MLI-sponsored PD in their literacy instruction. Many described specific literacy activities that they used, while others described the value of MLI in terms of helping them use data in the classroom. Teachers also attested to the value of networking with other teachers. As discussed above, AED observers saw many of these activities in MLA classrooms. In addition, several teachers spoke of becoming more attuned to the specific needs of their students because of MLI PD. Typical quotes are presented below.
Specific Literacy Activities Learned in MLI Professional Development

Quick-erase, games, etc. I learned about guided reading, working with words and quick drills and sounds. [Kindergarten teacher]

Yes, I use four-square writing, working with words, using movement, and changing your voice. [Grade 2 teacher]

I have been given specific strategies such as core reading and vocabulary development, and I use them in my classroom. [Grade 3 teacher]

Using Data in the Classroom

I am using 4-square writing, using the data to bring to light child-specific needs, which makes me a better teacher. We received lots of materials from Barksdale, and I use their passages for “cold reads” in my class to gauge their progress. [Grade 1 teacher]

MLI “brushes you up” and keeps you aware of what you’re doing in the classroom. Their focus on research, data and research-based strategies keep you abreast of the classroom. [Grade 1 teacher]

The data from district tests were analyzed, and we learned new strategies to meet the deficits that arose from across the district [Grade 3 teacher]

Networking with Other Teachers

I am benefiting from the books they provide and the networking with other teachers. [Grade 1 teacher]

MLI has provided me with more ideas for activities, time for planning tests together with other teachers and the ability to get ideas from other teachers. [Grade 2 teacher]

Understanding Students’ Learning Needs

Yes, with the Depth of Knowledge, I am learning how to unpack the objectives and teach learning skills in a way that children can understand. [Grade 2 teacher]

I learned more about guided reading. I learned about cooperative learning and working with small groups of four to six students, where you are right there… hearing and seeing students and understanding what is going on in their minds. I learned what is important and why. [Grade 3 teacher]

Through MLI I learned that I can stop and question students along the way. I learned about picture walks and predictions. [Grade 3 teacher]

Longitudinal Look at Implementation of the Five Components of Reading Instruction

Over the five years we observed elementary school classrooms in three schools and looked specifically for the five components of reading instruction—phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary development, fluency, and text comprehension. In our convenience sample, we described observable findings in quartiles: low, medium low, medium high, and high. Table 5 presents how often evaluators observed instruction in the five components of reading over the five years of the evaluation, using the following key.
Table 5. The Level of Emphasis of Five Components in Observed Classes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>George Elementary</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yr 1</td>
<td>Yr 2&lt;sup&gt;3&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Yr 3</td>
<td>Yr 4</td>
<td>Yr 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phonemic awareness</td>
<td>high</td>
<td>medium low</td>
<td>high</td>
<td>medium high</td>
<td>high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phonics</td>
<td>low</td>
<td>medium low</td>
<td>low</td>
<td>low</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
<td>high</td>
<td>medium high</td>
<td>high</td>
<td>medium high</td>
<td>high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fluency</td>
<td>medium high</td>
<td>medium high</td>
<td>medium low</td>
<td>medium high</td>
<td>high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text comprehension</td>
<td>medium high</td>
<td>medium high</td>
<td>high</td>
<td>medium high</td>
<td>medium high</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Isable Elementary</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yr 1</td>
<td>Yr 2&lt;sup&gt;4&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Yr 3</td>
<td>Yr 4</td>
<td>Yr 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phonemic awareness</td>
<td>medium high</td>
<td>high</td>
<td>medium high</td>
<td>medium high</td>
<td>medium low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phonics</td>
<td>medium low</td>
<td>medium low</td>
<td>medium high</td>
<td>medium high</td>
<td>medium low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
<td>low</td>
<td>medium high</td>
<td>medium high</td>
<td>medium high</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fluency</td>
<td>medium high</td>
<td>medium high</td>
<td>medium low</td>
<td>medium high</td>
<td>high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text comprehension</td>
<td>medium high</td>
<td>medium high</td>
<td>high</td>
<td>medium high</td>
<td>medium high</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Poindexter Elementary</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yr 3</td>
<td>Yr 4</td>
<td>Yr 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phonemic awareness</td>
<td>low</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>medium low</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phonics</td>
<td>low</td>
<td>low</td>
<td>medium low</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
<td>low</td>
<td>high</td>
<td>high</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fluency</td>
<td>medium low</td>
<td>high</td>
<td>high</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text comprehension</td>
<td>high</td>
<td>high</td>
<td>medium</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>3</sup> This year only grades 4-5 were observed.

<sup>4</sup> This year only grades 4-5 were observed.
Table 5 shows that, in general, during the earlier part of MLA, elementary school instruction appeared to center heavily on fluency and text comprehension. As the years progressed phonemic awareness and vocabulary development received greater instructional emphasis. Phonics instruction appeared to fluctuate throughout the years, but, on the whole, appeared to be less emphasized compared with the other components of reading instruction. Notably, between years 4 and 5, a new curriculum and standardized test were introduced, with the result that intensive efforts to improve student achievement may have altered the instructional approach.

**Continuing Challenges of Implementing MLI-related Practices**

When asked about the challenges they encountered in implementing the instructional practices emphasized by MLI, teachers gave many responses typical of what would be expected of most teachers in similar schools and with similar student populations. MLA teachers described the challenges of covering all the material, of keeping students interested and motivating them to learn, and of integrating new students into the class. They also worried about meeting individual students’ needs and keeping on track with learning benchmarks. In addition, some teachers mentioned behavior management issues and the challenges of narrowing the achievement gap between low- and high-achieving students.

In the first year of the MLI evaluation, we reported that teachers specifically mentioned having trouble meeting the needs of children with differing reading levels in one class, helping students build their vocabulary, and teaching students to write well. These challenges did not disappear in later years, but teachers did not mention them as often, perhaps because MLI PD concentrated on practices such as differentiated instruction and the five components of reading instruction, which address these issues.

**Coaching**

During year 5 of the evaluation AED put a major focus on the coaches at the request of MLI. AED researchers conducted coach-shadowing visits and two on-line surveys of the three literacy coaches who worked in MLA elementary schools in spring and summer 2008. This section presents a summary of coach activities and brief snapshots of the three MLI coaches. It also presents coaches’ views of their supports and challenges and the impact of their coaching, as well as their satisfaction with MLI. Lastly this section presents principals’ views of coaches’ effectiveness. The findings from the shadowing visits substantiated the findings from the teacher surveys, as described later in this report.

**Summary of Coach Activities**

Although coaches juggled numerous activities, all three described the majority of their work as supporting classroom pedagogy and content. Supporting pedagogy entailed making classroom visits, modeling instruction, co-teaching, and providing feedback to teachers. Supporting content entailed reinforcing instruction of the five components of literacy, providing resources and tools, and working with teachers to plan and implement lessons. The box below lists the major activities of coaches in MLA schools.
### Major Coaching Activities in MLA Schools

- Facilitating weekly planning meetings
- Conducting classroom observations and providing feedback
- Meeting one-on-one with the principal to suggest curriculum changes
- Presenting new ideas, activities, and resources to teachers to enhance classroom instruction
- Helping analyze assessment data
- Creating interventions for students based on test results
- Reviewing teachers’ lesson plans
- Preparing and setting up learning centers
- Providing classroom strategies, co-teaching lessons, and modeling lessons
- Compiling resources, such as a literacy center notebook that was given to all teachers

### Coach Profiles

**Coach One**

During the 2007-08 school year, coach one described her main goal as helping teachers understand the new curriculum requirements. This included providing PD in K-2 phonemic and phonological awareness, comprehension and vocabulary strategies, and use of small-group instruction, correlating these to the New Mississippi Curriculum Framework. This coach modeled these practices and provided feedback to teachers in debriefing sessions. She also followed up by visiting teachers’ classrooms to ensure proper implementation of PD. Judging from teacher and principal feedback, school staff trusted coach one and found her help valuable.

**Class Observation: Coach One**

Coach one observed a teacher’s 4-square organizer exercise. Previously the coach modeled this exercise and wanted to check the teacher’s instruction. In the after-class debriefing, coach one gave feedback to the teacher and then asked the teacher what she felt about this lesson. She asked such questions as “What did you like about the lesson?” “Why?” and “Do challenges still exist?” Overall, it was an instructive discussion the teacher was able to reflect on her practice and the coach was able to give her an immediate critique.

**Coach Two**

Coach two mentioned three focus areas of her work: to “have consistency” (that is, the same content coverage) across classes; to improve the school’s assessment practices; and to find more instructional strategies for teachers to improve rigor in the classroom. She described her plan specifically as to “introduce new reading strategies to teachers in order to maximize quality literacy instruction.” Strategies were to be introduced “periodically in the planning, delivery, and follow-up phases, each time looking at the impact of the strategies on student performance.”

Coach two expressed a sense of urgency about the work, given changes in the district curriculum, with the result that “everyone in the school” was “playing catch up.” She also
stressed the importance of attending to the needs of all students: “We have a focus on students with lower grades, but we still need to be mindful of students at a higher academic level.”

Coach two spent a good deal of time in the classrooms, observing teachers, providing feedback, modeling instruction, and supporting the teachers. Initially, veteran teachers did not want her in the classroom but after seeing the useful strategies she modeled, they welcomed her suggestions. Coach two was described as a valuable resource to the school; her wealth of knowledge about literacy centers was especially noted.

### Class Observation: Coach Two

Coach two did a “stop in” visit to check on the content and rotation of centers in one classroom. According to the principal and coach two, the teacher’s centers had been “off” for several weeks. The coach worked her way from center to center, questioning students about their activities.

Coach two then held a follow-up conversation with the principal and, based on her classroom observations, recommended changing the guided reading back to Scott-Foresman readers. At the time, teachers were integrating science and social studies into guided reading, but these efforts were not successful. The text level was either too high or too low, and the coach did not think that students were benefiting from guided reading on the whole. The coach agreed to meet with teachers about this integrated approach.

### Coach Three

Coach three focused mainly on student preparation, stating “Students are at the heart of it all!” Her overall plan included assisting teachers in developing rigorous lesson plans, creating assessments, and recording and analyzing data about student learning. She observed many classrooms, modeling instruction and providing feedback.

During the final MLI year, coach three concentrated on teachers in grades 2 and 3, given student test score results in those grades. She had extremely good working relationships with the teaching staff—she was very collaborative in her approach, co-teaching and helping teachers integrate best practices in their classrooms. She also was described as a person with “unstoppable energy to help students succeed.” To accomplish this, coach three created several tools. For example, based on class observations, she created teacher action plans. She also developed a Tutor-Teacher Prescription Plan, which allowed teachers to pinpoint specific areas where students needed to improve. In turn, student tutors used the prescription plan to customize skill-building exercises for students.

### Class Observation and Co-teaching: Coach Three

During the lesson coach three eased into a co-teaching role, calling on students while the teacher wrote on the board. Later students moved into small groups and coach three quietly eased back into an observer role. She circulated among the groups to see if students were on task. Occasionally she made notations on her observation rubric for classroom visits.

In the after-class debriefing, the coach reviewed the rubric/checklist with the teacher and suggested how and when to use certain manipulatives (e.g., word cubes, basal reading index cards). Coach three also showed the teacher how to use other techniques that were especially useful for visual learners, such as a KWL chart, pictures, and “story” thinking (e.g., bubble maps).
Supports and Challenges of Coaching Work

When coaches were surveyed about supports that facilitate their work, coaches mentioned three factors that most supported their work: the principal; other MLI coaches; and teacher buy-in. These findings are illustrated in the table below. These findings are seen in Table 6 below.

Table 6. Supports for Coaches’ Work

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Supports for Coaches Work</th>
<th>Mean*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other MLI Coaches</td>
<td>4.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers receptivity/buy-in</td>
<td>3.67</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Based on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1=not at all supportive low to 5=extremely supportive.

Although coaches have great supports for their work, a few challenges remained. Lack of time is a common issue with coaches and other support personnel or program staff. One coach mentioned that she was always juggling tasks and time. In response to having a lack of resources, a coach said she wished she had more outside resources to access, especially with the pressure of having a new curriculum and assessment requirements. Finally, one coach expressed an interest in staying abreast of current research and being able to obtain high-quality national PD. She wanted to be able to "stretch myself more and to stay current." These challenges are displayed in Table 7.

Table 7. Challenges in Coaching Work

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenges</th>
<th>Mean*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lack of time</td>
<td>2.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of resources (e.g., materials, access to experts, etc.)</td>
<td>2.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of PD opportunities outside of MLI</td>
<td>2.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Based on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1=low challenge and 5= high challenge.

Coaches’ Perceived Impact of Their Work

Coaches were asked about the overall impact of their work on schools as a whole, as well as on teacher practice and student literacy.

Overall School Practices

When coaches were surveyed about the level of impact they felt MLI coaching had on their schools, three areas were identified as having been greatly impacted: teacher instruction; communication among teachers; and the school’s ability to focus on school improvement in the face of competing demands. Coaches also felt that overall during their tenure in the schools that students’ literacy skills had improved. In particular, they felt that students were more motivated to read and had more critical reading and thinking skills and could make logical connections between different texts they read. In addition, two of the three coaches thought that their schools had improved in terms of classroom management and overall student achievement.
Teacher Literacy Practices

All three coaches described teachers as implementing three major practices to a “great extent.” These included applying data-driven decision making in their classes, carrying what they learned in MLI over into classroom practice, and sharing their practice with one another. Specifically, coaches reported that teachers had more developed, high-quality lesson plans and various standard-based assessments to identify student needs and help in developing effective instructional practices, such as small-group instruction and enrichment exercises. Some of this work took place collaboratively in teacher meetings, as well as in meetings with school leadership teams. Table 8 below gives examples of these teacher practices in MLA schools.

Table 8. Teacher Practices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher Practice</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Data-driven decision making</strong></td>
<td>• Students are grouped according to areas of strengths and weaknesses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Teachers employ flexible grouping practices, which are based on needs; instruction interventions are based on data results.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Teachers use progress monitoring tools to develop center groups and activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Teachers use assessments to provide one-on-one instruction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Teacher learning is carrying over into classroom practice</strong></td>
<td>• Teachers eagerly implement new strategies learned during training; instruction and assessment practices are modified to accommodate specific needs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• New strategies are shared by a literacy coach and are implemented during instruction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Teachers share strategies and implement them during instruction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• The new strategies can be found in teacher lesson plans.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Teachers are willing to share their practice with one another</strong></td>
<td>• Teachers collaborate by grade level as well as in cross-grade-level teams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Strategies shared during team meetings, cross-grade strategies shared during inclusive accountability meetings, these strategies are evident during common planning sessions and feeder pattern PD sessions.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data-driven decision making was a high priority for MLI. MLA elementary school teachers and principals stressed its importance in their schools and classes. During the coach shadowing, we heard coaches describe how they supported teachers in this area. Examples of data-driven decisions making throughout MLI are given in a later section of this report.

Level of Satisfaction with MLI

When coaches were surveyed about their satisfaction with the MLI initiative, they expressed a high level of satisfaction overall, mentioning the features they most appreciated. These findings are illustrated in Table 9.
### Table 9. Coach Satisfaction with MLI

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspect of MLI</th>
<th>Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The timeliness of MLI PD</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The content of MLI PD</td>
<td>3.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The level of support received in regards to comp time</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Findings based on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1=not satisfied to 5=extremely satisfied.

### Perspectives of MLA Principals

During fall 2008, AED evaluators interviewed the three MLA elementary school principals, asking them about MLI implementation and their perceptions of the impact of MLI coaching in their schools. In terms of implementing MLI, principals cited facilitating features and challenges.

Facilitating features included:

- The decision by the school district and the university to take on MLI—the “synergy” between them
- The resources brought by MLI—funds and professional development
- The coach
- Improved procedures and processes for dealing with the budget in year 5

Challenges included

- Delayed payments for teachers
- Loss of a literacy coach
- In general over the years, the challenges of implementation have decreased and the facilitating factors have increased. Previously principals cited bureaucratic issues and the lack of involvement of JSU as challenges. It is clear that now principals are much more comfortable with MLI as all partners are fully involved and many procedures have been changed and clarified through the work of the growth team and the executive committee. One principal stated that MLI was now “routine”—“it fell in order”

Principals were asked to judge the impact of MLI coaching on their schools on a scale from 1-3. They identified two areas as having been greatly impacted—communication among teachers and data-driven decision making. Teacher instruction and student literacy outcomes were also identified as having been affected. Table 10 shows the four areas that principals viewed as most impacted by MLI coaching.
Table 10. Principal Perceptions of MLI Coaching Impact

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspect Affected by MLI Coaching</th>
<th>Mean*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communication among teachers</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data driven decision making</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher instruction</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student literacy outcomes</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* On a scale of 1 to 3, where 1= low impact and 3= high impact..

The three principals especially emphasized that their coaches were in constant contact with teachers. Two stated:

*My coach is in the classrooms constantly. She attends to teachers’ needs right away. She will model lessons and the teacher will watch. Then the coach will follow up with the teacher. Later she’ll visit the classroom to see how a teacher is implementing a lesson.*

*My coach’s sole responsibility is to work with staff. She will work with staff all day—she trains staff, observes them, redirects instruction, she assesses staff and helps them interpret data. She also keeps me well informed.*

In brief it is clear that MLA principals valued the work of the MLI coaches in their schools.

**Data-driven Decision Making**

Even before the evaluation began and then throughout the five years, a major focus of MLI was to create a culture of data-driven decision making in the schools—to build the capacity of teachers and administrators to assess the quality of school data and use it to make changes to improve instruction or organizational features of the school. This process was emphasized by the JPS superintendent for all schools in the district. In year 3, he said, “We don’t teach to the test. We use data to decide when to change our teaching and how to change it.” During years 4 and 5, this focus on data increased in PD sessions and occurred more frequently in meetings of the collaborative growth team and executive committee. The following are examples of how data were used to assess or improve literacy instruction or other MLI priorities.
**Evidence of Data-driven Decision Making in MLA Schools and Classes**

A kindergarten teacher described looking at DIBELS data with another kindergarten teacher and the literacy coach. They used the data to develop interventions for individual students and monitored the interventions every six weeks. The teacher also described teachers using a new script from the literacy coach for their “Working with Words” unit. The weekly test results showed that students were not mastering the skills needed to break words down into individual sounds. They made changes in how they taught these skills and began to chart student growth and mastery of individual objectives.

A second-grade teacher indicated that teachers reviewed weekly tests, the nine-week test data, and DIBELS data within and across classrooms. Together with the literacy coach they developed benchmark charts and measured student progress, which enabled them to make certain interventions for individual students and develop new learning centers for an entire class to address weak areas.

Another second-grade teacher described teachers reviewing unit tests and the curriculum guide, to determine what objectives were not being met by students, what areas needed more work, and which students needed more help. Additionally, the principal and the literacy coach examined the same data and suggested what types of interventions were needed in the classroom.

A third-grade teacher mentioned that she, other teachers and the coach looked at and analyzed weekly district assessments. In addition, the principal and the coach designed new centers on guided reading with a focus on comprehension based on assessment data.

A principal stated,

*Data-driven decision making is what we do. It’s a district initiative and an integral part of a coach’s work. My coach is able to take an initiative from the district or state and pull it apart, interpret it, and tell teachers what can be done in the classroom. She redesigned a guided reading block and changed the intervention during the regular teaching time based on student literacy skills. She also developed a progress-monitoring tool that helps us fulfill a new state requirement for documenting the progress of students.*

Another principal said,

*We redesigned the teaching schedule based on assessments. For example, if we originally planned to focus on four learning objectives and we discovered we could spend more time on two . . . because more than one-half of the class passed 80% of the other two objectives, then we’d self-correct and spend more time teaching the first two.*

A COE member of the growth team said,

*We look at the student teaching data on student performance and let it influence our advisement. We collect data on candidates when they are first admitted to teacher prep. Then we go with them through graduation looking at their grades. We know from data that in redesigning our program, we need to have mentors for candidates. We found that the classroom management piece is hard for our candidates. We want to add a course such as “Life Experience in the Field.”*  

From these examples and quotations, it is obvious that using data to inform teaching and learning has become a routine aspect in MLA Schools and COE.
Findings from the College of Education

AED’s evaluation of MLI was enhanced in the final year to include more interviews with COE faculty and, for the first time, a review of syllabi from literacy-related COE courses and observations of literacy-related classes.

In general the full implementation of MLI at COE began well after it was underway within the five MLA schools. Although JSU was a partner in MLI, the relationship between MLI and COE during the early years was strained due to a lack of trust and a misunderstanding of roles, as reported in previous reports: Specifically, there was a lack of support for the initiative from COE initially and communication with COE was a problem. In addition, the relationship between JPS and COE was characterized by the turf issues and strains typical of any two large bureaucracies.

In 2006 the appointment of an interim dean, who eventually became the dean, brought a different vision to the COE mission and thus a new understanding of the role it could play in MLI. In addition to a pledge to bring the college in line with the most cutting-edge operations and instruction, the new vision was more in line with acknowledging the pre K-20 continuum and the importance of the mutual support that COE and JPS could lend one another. Thus throughout the evaluation in later years, tensions decreased and the relationship between JPS and COE became stronger and more open. This fostered more substantive work in terms of linking the need for high-quality teacher preparation at COE to address the needs of students in MLA/JPS schools.

Perspectives of Faculty and Staff

During interviews in year 5, COE faculty and administrators on the collaborative growth team discussed the workings of this improved relationship. Four of them said:

- We can call on JPS teachers to reflect with us on how we develop teachers, and we can see how they teach in the real world. MLI helped us better understand the Mississippi Framework Curriculum.

- COE has looked at the survey data from our graduates who were first-year teachers in Mississippi. We now know what they need more of in their teacher preparation in order to do a good job—more instruction in special education and classroom management.

- We have really come to an agreement on the professional development needed for MLI, and it mirrors what COE instruction should be.

- MLI has broken down barriers that have existed for a long time. JSU and JSP now sit together to work for seamless K-20 education.

Although these opinions differ somewhat from those of JPS members on the growth team, (reported above), when compared with responses these interviewees gave in the first few years of the evaluation, they show progress of the kind that will help sustain the JSU/JPS partnership in the future. A challenge will be to foster agreement among JPS and COE growth team members on the specific work of the team and how to undertake it collaboratively.

Observations at the JSU College of Education

A change in the evaluation contract for year 5 called for AED to conduct observations of COE teacher preparation classes. The goal of this new methodology was to collect data on how teachers are prepared in those classes most related to the literacy issues of importance in MLI. For two semesters, spanning two different academic years—2007-08 and 2008-09—
COE staff sent AED a list of all classes for that semester concerned with literacy instruction. AED used these lists to draw a convenience sample of classes to be observed. In all, 15 undergraduate classes were chosen as shown below.

January 2008
- RE 312-01 Early Literacy II
- RE 455-26 Diagnostic Reading Instruction
- RE 309-26 Early Literacy II
- RE 310-26 Teaching Reading in Content Areas
- RE 309-26 Early Literacy I

February 2008
- RE 309-26 Early Literacy I
- RE 312-01 Early Literacy II
- RE 204-26 Pre Reading Skills
- EDCI 301-01 Communication Arts for Children
- RE 311-01 Strategies in Teaching Reading in Elementary School

October 2008
- RE 455 Diagnostics
- RE 204 Pre Reading Skills
- RE 455 Diagnostics
- RE 309 Early Literacy I
- RE 311 Strategies and Techniques for Elementary Reading

Each class was observed for the entire class between 80 minutes and 170 minutes, except for three classes where tests were given for all or part of the period. In that case the observer left when the test began—in one case this was 40 minutes after the class began and, in the other two cases five minutes after the class began. We collected syllabi from some of the 15 classes, as well as many materials, tests, and assignments handed out in class.

In order to frame our observations we created a list of items from our experience in assessing teacher education that would help assess COE classes. These include:
- Required textbook
- Subject-matter content
- Approaches, frameworks or paradigms for teaching and learning
- Depth of coverage of subject matter
- Pedagogy used by COE faculty
- Pedagogy suggested by faculty, including modifications
- Assessment of student learning
- References to professional standards/ethics in education
- References to educational infrastructure (e.g., state or district mandates, curriculums or policies
- Questions posed by students, responses given by faculty, and advice or other support given to teacher candidates

In addition, we consulted research literature on effective teaching, teacher preparation, and literacy instruction that would help us look for high quality in COE literacy classes. These included Barber and Bullock (1980), who look historically at the evaluation of reading instruction; Danielson (2007), who presents a constructivist framework for assessing teacher practice; Newmann and Wehlage (1995), who analyze the “authentic intellectual work” that should take place between teachers and students; and Resnick and Hall (2001), who define a set of rubrics to identify teacher practices correlating highly with student achievement.

These rubrics identify classroom practices that promote achievement such as quality of classroom discussions, the rigor of learning activities, and the expectations communicated to students about the quality of their work. More specifically, the Resnick and Hall rubrics address the higher implementation of “accountable talk”—classroom talk presenting knowledge that is accurate and relevant to the issue under discussion, uses appropriate evidence, responds to and further develops what others in the group have said, and follows norms of good reasoning. Another component of these rubrics is academic rigor. This means that problem-solving and thinking should be taught in the context of a solid foundation of knowledge of major concepts that students are expected to know deeply, and teaching should engage students in active reasoning about these concepts and promote the active use of knowledge. And finally there should be clear expectations in a way that defines explicitly what students are expected to learn.

From our own experience and this review of relevant literature, AED constructed an observation instrument to guide the data collection. Observers used the instrument to take field notes that were later coded and analyzed for content. (The appendices contain the observation instrument and two summaries of field notes explicitly showing the instruction in COE classrooms). We used the rubric below to assess COE classes on the following components: academic rigor, accountable talk, high-quality discussion, use of evidence, and clear expectations.

- Poor—the components are completely absent in the lesson. None of the lessons we observed fit this category.
- Good—the components are occasionally present in the lesson. Three of the lessons we observed fit this category.
- Very good—the components are frequently present in the lesson in different contexts. Six of the observed lessons fit this category.
- Outstanding—the components are used throughout the lesson in different contexts. Three of the observed lessons fit this category.

Our findings from the 12 classes in which observations of at least one hour took place showed that instruction in these classes was appropriate for the literacy subject matter and for what teacher candidates should know in terms of content and pedagogy. Throughout the classes, COE faculty instructed, assessed the students, and reviewed the literacy content as necessary. However, while questions and comments from students were welcomed, most classes were faculty-focused—led and managed mainly by the faculty member who imparted information, gave directions, asked questions, and elicited answers from students. Sometimes there was time for students to work independently or in small groups. In four of
the classes, students made individual or group presentations—often with self-made or online educational materials—planned from assignments handed out in previous classes.

However, the purpose of these oral presentations was not always clear. In some instances students were giving information to their classmates about lessons and materials available to teachers. In other cases these presentation were chances to teach a lesson similar to one they would teach to students and obtain feedback from classmates and the professor. It should be noted that if such a presentation is “practice teaching,” the demeanor of the presenter should be different from a presentation providing information to peers. Education students sometimes experience difficulty making the shift from telling their preservice classmates about a lesson to “teaching” the lesson. This shift is important to master before preservice teachers enter the classroom, and education students need opportunities to do both kinds of presentations intentionally.

Table 11 summarizes some of the broad areas of learning in the observed COE literacy-related classes. For each area, numerous examples are listed from the observation data.

Table 11. Observed Categories of Instruction in COE Literacy-related Classes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AREA OF LEARNING</th>
<th>EXAMPLES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Literacy subject matter</td>
<td>• The alphabetic principle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• The four blocks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Rules and common patterns, such as vowel-consonant-vowel and consonant-vowel-consonant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Phonemic awareness compared with phonological awareness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• The five components of reading instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• High-frequency sight words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Structural analysis of words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Attributes of spoken language—rhymes, syllables, onsets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Symbolism and metaphor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Literacy-rich environments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• The ethnic and social class components of language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Fact vs. opinion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Specialized vocabularies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Active reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Pronunciation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Literacy assessment instruments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Reading vs. decoding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy pedagogy suggested or used by COE professors</td>
<td>• Tailoring lesson plans for different kinds of learners, including special education students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Monitoring and assessing (informal: checking for understanding, observations, quizzes, portfolios, inventories; formal: individual norm-referenced, group norm-referenced)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Incorporating songs into instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Using a variety of teaching modes—direct teaching, demonstration, Socratic method, simulations, drill and practice, group discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Writing objectives—matching instruction to the objective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Remembering how the brain functions in learning—rehearsing for retention; how past experiences affect learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Understanding the components of a lesson—anticipatory set, learning objective, purpose, input, materials, assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Writing, reviewing, critiquing lesson plans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AREA OF LEARNING</td>
<td>EXAMPLES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reviewing assessment instruments</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critiquing research articles</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asking questions about students’ field placements and relating responses to the lesson content</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Literacy policies and standards</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Comparing MSDOE standards to those with IRA and SPAs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working in groups to link lesson objectives with standards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Devising objectives and lessons based on the state standards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpreting standards and substandards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State accreditation level for schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depth of knowledge levels and Bloom’s Taxonomy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MSDOE pacing guides</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Encouragement, motivation, advice for literacy teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Finding resources on the internet, modifying them to fit the standards and the students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moving away from using candy to reward students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remembering that children know how the teacher values them by looking at the teacher’s face and watching actions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using literacy-related services, such as the mobile unit that serves JPS schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attending literacy conferences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passing the Praxis exam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giving feedback—(Quotes from two different COE classes: “Class, you have done well with this assignment”; “Those who have not followed the assignment and did not do all the steps will do this over and hand it in next time.”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using teachers manuals sparingly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding that teaching is much more than “covering” the curriculum and that all teachers are reading teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identifying the skills, standards and benchmarks in every lesson plan</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These areas of learning and examples give a picture of what happened in the observed COE classes. However, since the sample was not drawn randomly, the findings cannot be generalized to all COE literacy-related classes. Still, it is clear from the observation that COE teacher candidates have opportunities to learn about the five components of reading in many ways—lectures, class discussions, assigned readings, devising lesson plans, hearing their peers, and cooperating JPS teachers presenting lessons on these components. These candidates also gain access to a plethora of ideas and lessons about literacy categorized by grade level and aligned with state standards. In some classes the ideas and lessons are collected in individual binders that the COE faculty checks periodically.

**Typical Questions and Answers in COE Classes**

In addition to observing the content of literacy instruction, many exchanges between COE students and faculty shed light on the types of interactions and the academic climate characterizing these classes. Some typical questions asked by COE students are presented below, along with responses by COE professors.
Q: How do you know what grade the skill is for?
A: If you look at the standard for a skill you would know, or if you get a skill lesson off the web, that will tell you. But you should be testing and assessing all the time so you know what skills may be a problem. If kids need the skill to do certain work, it is the right time to teach it.

Q: How do I bring reading into math? I’m going to be a math teacher—students may be math literate but can’t read.
A: We will get to that in this class—talking about reading within different subject matters. We want you to bring up questions like that. We are a professional learning community with all re-enforcing the others.

Q: What can you do to help struggling readers?
A: Working with students an extra five minutes per day may not seem to help right away, but over time it will build skills.

From these typical exchanges, we can infer several attributes of COE literacy classes. Firstly the students tend to ask practical/functional questions that could fulfill an immediate need for working in classrooms. They typically did not ask questions that would deepen their knowledge of the reasoning for certain approaches or allow them to contrast some with others. Seldom did they question or comment in ways that would increase their metacognition or make them more aware of the metacognition strengths and weakness of their prospective pupils. Similarly the faculty members in these instances replied to students in ways that responded to the immediate question. They gave practical suggestions and model ways that teachers could motivate pupils in K-12 classrooms, but again did not always push the learning to more abstract levels.

This kind of practical-functional exchange constituted most faculty-student exchanges in six of the 12 classes (50%) that were observed for at least an hour. This may have been because all the observed classes were “methods” classes. However, discussion of methods should be linked to some framework or theory. It is possible, however, that the theory was discussed in classes where the observer was not present.

In three classes (25% of the observed classes), the faculty member did push the students away from the most practical/functional realm toward deeper understandings of literacy instruction and learning in general. For example, in one class this came in the form of contrasting the whole-reading approach to teaching with the five components and citing what research says about each. In the same class when the students agreed that tests should not contain items that had not been taught, the faculty member spent more than 12 minutes explaining the integrative nature of learning whereby the learner creates new knowledge from that previously learned. The class also discussed the dilemmas of test construction in terms of the tension between high-quality measurement of skills vs. making the test easy to administer.

In another class rated highly by the observer, there was an in-depth discussion about giving feedback to pupils as part of an assessment strategy. Specific points discussed included how not to be over-critical, how feedback and grades overlap, and how to bring the learner into the feedback process. After this foundation was laid in terms of what children need socially and emotionally at different points in their development, the students and teacher practiced the types of phrases to be used with children. Thus, in this exchange, a theoretical foundation came first (similar to Brookhart, 2008), followed by an explanation of the developmental issues and ending with specific examples. This class was in contrast to other
observed classes where the instruction included only the examples of what a teacher can do in the classroom, mostly in a teacher-centered way. The more highly rated discussion (as in the class cited above) took the teaching candidates far beyond what is functional and practical for the classroom. It raised the level of thought and linked the elements under discussion in this class to those most likely taught in others like psychology. COE classes that contain this type of teaching and learning come closer to the cutting-edge of what should be done in teacher preparation programs—teacher candidates at all times should be engaged in disciplined inquiry rather than in the routine use of facts and procedures (Newmann and Wehlage 1995) as was observed in six of the classes.

Another way we assessed the quality of teacher preparation for literacy at COE was to consult the NCATE standards. For elementary school teachers those standards follow the recommended standards of the Association for Childhood Education International (ACEI) and the International Reading Association (IRA). We looked specifically for ACEI standard 2.1 on Reading, Writing and Oral Language. We also looked for some of the substandards included in IRA standard 1.1 on Foundational Knowledge and 2.1 on Curriculum and Instruction. These standards and substandards are presented in Table 12 along with the number of classes in which we observed them.
Table 12. Observations of 16 ACEI and IRA Standards/Substandards Content in 12 COE Literacy-related Classrooms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Association for Childhood Education International (ACEI) Standards</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.1 Reading, Writing, and Oral Language—Candidates demonstrate a high level of competence in use of English language arts and they know, understand, and use concepts from reading, language and child development, to teach reading, writing, speaking, viewing, listening, and thinking skills and to help students successfully apply their developing skills to many different situations, materials, and ideas. <strong>Observed in 6 classrooms</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>International Reading Association (IRA) Standards:</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.1.1 Explain major theories of reading and writing processes and development in the elementary school years with supporting research evidence. <strong>Observed in 3 classrooms</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1.2 Explain language and reading development across the elementary school years in word-level components (i.e., phonemic awareness and phonics, syntax and semantics, and making meaning), text-level components (i.e., vocabulary development, fluency, comprehension strategies, strategies for content area reading, and critical literacy), and reading-writing connections using supporting evidence from theory and research. <strong>Observed in 3 classrooms</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1.3 Design environments that support individual motivation to read and write (e.g., access to online and offline resources, choice, challenge, interests) <strong>Observed in 8 classrooms</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1.4 Read the scholarship of the reading profession and seek to understand the theoretical knowledge base in relation to the reading and writing of elementary grade students. <strong>Observed in 3 classrooms</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2.1 Identify major milestones in reading scholarship and interpret them in light of the current social context. <strong>Observed in 5 classrooms</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3.1 Show fair-mindedness, empathy, and ethical behavior in professional activity. <strong>Observed in 9 classrooms</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1.1 Implement curriculum based on what students need to know and be able to do. <strong>Observed in 12 classrooms</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1.2 Understand how the reading and writing curriculum is related to local, state, and professional standards. <strong>Observed in 7 classrooms</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1.3 Evaluate curriculum to ensure instructional goals and objectives are met. <strong>Observed in 3 classrooms</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1.4 Work with other teachers and support personnel in designing, adjusting, and modifying curriculum to meet students’ needs in both online and offline contexts. <strong>Observed in 4 classrooms</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2.1 Understand various instructional approaches and the rationale for their use. <strong>Observed in 7 classrooms</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2.2 Select instructional approaches based on evidence-based rationale, student needs and purposes for instruction. <strong>Observed in 8 classrooms</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3.2 Select quality online and offline materials guided by an evidence-based rationale. <strong>Observed in 3 classrooms</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3.3 Use online and offline sources, professional associations, and colleagues to locate a wide range of instructional materials. <strong>Observed in 5 classrooms</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3.4 Build an online and offline classroom materials library that is accessible, multi-level and diverse. <strong>Observed in 3 classrooms</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 12 shows that of the 16 standards/substandards tracked, instruction related to all of them was apparent to some extent in the 12 COE classes. Some of the standards, (#s 1.1.3, 1.3.1, 2.1.1, and 2.2.2) were apparent in a majority of the classes. Others (#s 1.1.1, 1.1.2, 1.1.4, 2.1.3, 2.3.2, and # 2.3.4 were observed very few times. The following are examples of how some of the standards were observed.

- **Standard 1.1.2** – This standard requires learning the word-level components of reading. Many classes demonstrated this type of learning such as when professors made sure the COE students used the word phoneme, phonics, vocabulary, etc. in their oral responses. Professors also led students through the meanings of these components. However, the reason the evaluator assessed this standard as being present in only 3 observations was that the standard also requires the use of supporting evidence for theory and research. In only three observations were connections to theory made.

- **Standard 1.1.3** – In one class students were asked to describe learning environments in the public schools. (All students in this class were doing observations in local schools.) The students discussed and gave examples of class environments such as how to elicit feedback from pupils while making them feel safe to respond, how to give constructive feedback being sensitive and not overcritical of errors, finding things to celebrate so that the classroom can be seen as festive and allowing for creative choice even in the most academic subjects.

- **Standard 1.3.1** – In one class the professor led a discussion of teachers’ responsibility to each other in a professional learning community and teachers’ professional responsibilities to their pupils in terms of equity. The professor mentioned the responsibility of teachers to “give all students the best education and make sure all are successful.” The COE students were encouraged to go to the “accountability link” on the state education website.

- **Standard 2.1.2** – In one class it was discussed and practiced (with a written assignment) how to look at lessons and identify the skill, standard and MS benchmark being taught.

- **Standard 2.3.4** – The professor in one class described the resource binder of curriculum materials that is required for that class. There was also a review of the *Daily Lesson Planner* during the class. The COE students asked many questions about the level of detail needed in the planner.

The measurement of the times standards were observed is not scientifically precise since some of the standards have more than one item to measure, but the table and the examples can be used as an estimate as to which standards were emphasized and which ones received less attention in the observed COE classes. This suggests that COE faculty and administrators should look more closely at items like online/offline sources, curriculum evaluation, and especially theoretical concerns, which were the least taught areas in observed COE classes.

It is clear that a variety of literacy content and positive messages characterize the literacy-related COE coursework. Much of the content follows the recommendations of scientifically-based research and NCATE standards. Professors employ a variety of methods to teach literacy instruction and communicate clear standards for the quality and timeliness of written assignments. They care about the students’ performance and give extra help to those who need it after class, at office hours, and with extra assignments. Of the 12 classroom observations we included in the study, we judged six of them to be good, three to be very
good, and three to be outstanding using the categories described above: academic rigor ensuring a solid foundation of knowledge of major concepts that students are expected to know deeply; clear expectations communicated to students about the quality of their work; and high-quality discussion and “accountable talk” presenting knowledge that is accurate and relevant to the issue under discussion, uses appropriate evidence, and follows the norms of good reasoning. All observed classrooms demonstrated some of these components. Those that were judged as "good" showed fewer of the components or a superficial implementation of them. (See the example above where the expectations for how students should make presentations were unclear.) Those judged as outstanding showed all of the components at a deeper level that is described in the literature as highly correlated with learning. (For example students were asked to give evidence for their responses or opinions, which illustrated “accountable talk.”)

MLI has clearly become an integral feature of instructional practices JSU COE in the past two years of the evaluation. Evidence shows that the teaching staff are aware of, understand, and teach about scientifically-based research strategies in literacy instruction. COE students are encouraged to understand and use these practices in their future careers as teachers. In most cases, the findings show that the standards-based content is delivered in preservice classes. Students leave with a rich repertoire of classroom practices, but fewer of the pedagogical components that connect instructional practice to theories of teaching. Students may learn these theories in their foundations of education courses, but connections must be made between theories and frameworks about how children learn and putting these into practice in the classroom.

Analysis of COE Syllabi

In addition to these classroom observations at COE in year 5 of the evaluation, we collected and analyzed syllabi from 15 COE literacy-related classes: seven of the syllabi were from observed classes; the other eight were from classes taught before 2008 (we wanted to document changes in the syllabi over time.) The syllabi we analyzed represented classes from summer 2002 through fall 2008. Our major findings from this analysis are presented below.

- In most cases—11 out of 15—the required textbooks were up-to-date—published within three years of when the class was held. Only four syllabi showed the use of a text that would be considered old—two published four years before the class and one published six years before. Six years is generally too old for a text, given the frequency of changes that take place in our new knowledge and understanding of how students learn and what makes for effective instruction. (We do recognize, however, that in some cases an outstanding textbook becomes a seminal work in the field that is used again and again.) In three cases in which we had syllabi from the same course over time, the syllabi showed that the required textbook was changed as newer editions were published.

- In terms of course descriptions in the syllabi, we did not observe much variation over time. Even in the case where we had three syllabi for a course spanning six years from 2002 to 2008, the course description remained the same. This may be because the professors use the description from the course catalogue and the catalogue had not been updated during that time. Perhaps this is not unusual, but because of the influence of MLI in reforming teacher preparation, we had thought there might have been reason to alter the course descriptions.
However, in terms of the course content (what the students had to know and do) described in the syllabi, faculty made various changes over the years that could be related to MLI. For example, the course content for one syllabus was changed to include “knowledge of research-based materials.” In another the change was written as “Summarize reading articles from professional journals.” Both of these changes were made during the implementation of MLI, and both are related to making preservice teachers more aware of the literature concerning literacy.

The objectives listed in the 15 syllabi came from these sources.

- ISTE (International Society for technology in Education)
- INTASC (New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium Standards)
- IRA (International Reading Association
- NCATE (National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education
- INTASC (Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium)

The sources listed above are the most appropriate ones for standards and objectives in teacher preparation for literacy instruction. They are the standard by which teacher preparation is judged on an international scale. In this area the syllabi of COE classes are on point for today’s teaching candidate. The extent to which these standards and objectives are met in each course is unknown since not all classes of the courses were observed. But a review of tests and quizzes collected in the observed classes show that while the quizzes in these classes usually reflect textbook learning asking for specific definitions and aspects of literature (such as tension and conflict in books), the midterm exams question students more broadly and require more substantive responses. For example, two mid-term exams contained these items:

- Discuss the differences between phonics, phonemic awareness, and phonological awareness (in that order).
- Explain semantic and syntactic clues.

These and other questions show that COE faculty are assessing students according to the high standards developed by the primary academic and professional institutions as specified in the syllabi of their courses. The accepted responses to these items should be more than giving a definition.

Also notable was the way the descriptions of the courses give students a glimpse of the level and breadth of the courses. Some examples from four of the syllabi are as follows:

- The course will provide comprehensive information . . .
- The course will introduce concepts, materials and teaching strategies . . .
- Students in the course will participate in situations . . .
- This course is designed to assist students in using a diagnostic/prescriptive model. . .

These examples let the prospective student know how detailed or comprehensive the course might be, if it is introductory, if it is participatory, or if a certain model is stressed. Although most of these courses are mandatory for all teacher candidates, the descriptions allows students to anticipate what is expected and hold faculty accountable for what should happen in the course.

Overall, our combined findings from the observations of COE classes and study of COE syllabi are that these follow the recommended curriculum for preservice teachers developed
by professional and accrediting organizations. However, COE faculty must ensure that all textbooks are up-to-date and that students in all classes are taught in ways that explore the links between pedagogical courses and other courses, such as foundations of education and child psychology.
III. Year Five Teacher Survey Findings

In year 5 of the evaluation, AED staff and members of the MLI executive committee significantly changed the teacher survey. Also in year 5 AED did not use MCT (Mississippi Curriculum Test) data in the evaluation as had been done in past years. (This lack of MCT data in year 5 was an agreement in the original contract before the end date of the evaluation was changed.) In this section, we report findings from the year 5 survey, especially when combined with our findings from four previous years of surveys and MCT data.

The year 5 survey for elementary school teachers differed from those administered previously in several important ways. First, MLI administrators requested that we program the survey so that answers for almost all responses were mandatory. Second, many individual questions and groups of questions were eliminated in order to accommodate two new questions. These two questions sought to determine the frequency of whole-group and teacher-led instruction in reading and writing, as well as the reasons that teachers devoted as much or as little time as they did to selected instructional practices.5 (The appendices contain the new survey instrument used in year five.)

Survey Administration and Data Analysis

In spring 2008, surveys were administered to the three MLA elementary schools (George, Isable, and Poindexter), as well as two schools selected as comparison schools, Marshall and Watkins. Also surveyed were teachers in the sole MLA middle school, Blackburn Middle School, a comparison school, Brinkley Middle School, and the MLA high school, Jim Hill. This was the second year in which the surveys were conducted online.

The data for the MLA schools and comparison schools are grouped by the year of the evaluation study:6

- Year 1—SY 2003-2004 (data collection in Isable and George only)
- Year 2—SY 2004-2005 (data collection began in Poindexter and Blackburn)
- Year 3—SY 2005-2006 (data collection began in Jim Hill)
- Year 4—SY 2006-2007 (all MLA schools)
- Year 5—SY 2007-2008 (revised teacher survey and data collection intensified in grades K-3, among coaches and in COE)

The various analyses were conducted in SPSS, using the cross-tab function and, in selected cases, independent samples t-tests in order to determine the significance of the differences in the MLA schools from year to year and between the MLA and comparison schools (except for Jim Hill, which had no comparison school). We also conducted a series of comparisons that cut across the MLA schools at all three levels (elementary, middle, and high).

5 This report of elementary school findings will depart somewhat from those reported in the past because of these new questions. The surveys administered to middle and high school teachers remained similar to those administered in previous years.

6 Not all MLA schools entered the study or participated in the survey at the same time. See the appendix for more information on this.
Because many MLI survey questions were taken from the NAEP survey, in years 2 through 4, we conducted additional analyses designed to answer how MLI survey respondents fared compared with their national counterparts. In presenting these findings, we reminded readers of one important caveat: namely, that the NAEP data, which were gathered in 2002, had not changed during the course of the evaluation.

To simplify the analysis, and to illustrate both long- and short-term changes, we will compare most of year 5 findings with those from year 1 (long-term) and year 4 (short-term).

**Elementary School Survey Findings**

*Overall Findings*

In the elementary schools, there appeared to be a positive “cumulative effect” of MLI over the five years of the evaluation for both teachers and students. In year 5, we found—for the first time in the evaluation—that the more experienced the teacher, the greater the likelihood that s/he believed that MLI had improved her/his preparedness for almost every literacy practice mentioned on the survey. (The 2008 survey is in the appendix). This positive finding among experienced MLA teachers indicates their confidence in the success of MLI.

For elementary students, we reported in year 4 that MLA fifth graders improved their proficiency levels at greater rates than fifth graders in comparison schools. Although the MCT and the survey data represented different years in the evaluation, the fact that the greatest increases occurred with the oldest students—who we had tracked over four years—is another indication of MLI success over time. That these positive findings occurred both with the students who had been in MLA schools the longest and among the more experienced teachers suggests that change in an initiative such as MLI is incremental and takes time—sometimes years. The greatest positive changes are seen in those who have been influenced by the initiative the longest.

This was not, however, the case with teacher opinions about literacy practices in either the middle school (with the sole exception of computer-based reading instruction) or in the high school. As acknowledged by MLI administrators and evaluators, the initiative has not been implemented in the MLA secondary schools as long or as intensively as in the elementary schools. This showed in the survey results where there were no significant relationships between MLI implementation and an improvement of literacy practices. Whether the trend in these schools will match those found in the elementary schools is a question for further study once the secondary schools are more fully involved in MLI.

*Specific Survey Findings in Elementary Schools*

Several specific findings from the elementary school surveys are presented below in the short- and long-term. These include the frequency of instructional practices, whole-group and teacher-led instructional practices, preparedness to teach and MLI’s impact. On the whole, short-term findings—that is, between years 4 and 5—are not as dramatic as cumulative effects of MLI over time.

---

7 We had also conducted analyses of state data; however, those data predated the MLA evaluation by as much as seven years and, for that reason, are excluded here.
Frequency of Instructional Practices

Short-term

- Changes in the frequency at which the MLA teachers conducted their instructional activities in literacy changed minimally between years 4 and 5. However, while there were small to no differences between the MLA and comparison school teachers with regard to those who reported “at least once or twice a week,” (see Table 13, below), more MLA than comparison school teachers reported that they’d “[asked] students to tell [them] about something they had read” and “[asked] students to explain/support their understanding of what they have read” at least once a day (see Table 14, below). A separate discussion about the rationales behind the frequency will follow shortly.
Table 13. Elementary: Frequency of Reading Instruction Activities
(those reporting “at least once or twice a week”)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>At least Once or Twice a Week . . .</th>
<th>MLA</th>
<th>Comparison</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N=42</td>
<td>N=46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YR1</td>
<td>YR4</td>
<td>YR5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work on phonics with students</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask students to read aloud</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask students to talk with each other about what they have read</td>
<td>98%</td>
<td>91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work on phonemes with students</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask students to tell you about what they have read</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>98%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask students to write about something they have read</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask students to read silently</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work on vocabulary with students</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Give students time to read books they have chosen themselves</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask students to do a group activity or project about what they have read</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourage students to read outside of school</td>
<td>98%</td>
<td>91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask students to discuss different interpretations of what they have read</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask students to explain/support their understanding of what they have read</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>97%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask students to make predictions about what they read as they are reading it</td>
<td>98%</td>
<td>95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask students to make generalizations on and draw inferences from what they have read</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask students to describe the style or structure of the text read</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicate with parents about reading instruction</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use differentiated instruction</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use a balanced inquiry approach</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>97%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Statistically significant change from year 1 and/or year 4 to year 5, or between MLA and comparison schools at year 5 at the p<=.05 level, as per a two-tailed t-test.
NA = not asked
Table 14. Elementary: Frequency of Reading Instruction Activities
(those reporting “almost every day”)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage Responding “Almost every day”</th>
<th>MLA</th>
<th>Comparison</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N=42</td>
<td>N=46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>YR1</td>
<td>YR4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work on phonics with students</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask students to read aloud</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask students to talk with each other about what they have read</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work on phonemes with students</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask students to tell you about what they have read</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask students to write about something they have read</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask students to read silently</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work on vocabulary with students</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Give students time to read books they have chosen themselves</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask students to do a group activity or project about what they have read</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourage students to read outside of school</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask students to discuss different interpretations of what they have read</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask students to explain/support their understanding of what they have read</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask students to make predictions about what they read as they are reading it</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask students to make generalizations &amp; draw inferences based on what they have read</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask students to describe the style or structure of the text they have read</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicate with parents about reading instruction</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use differentiated instruction</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use a balanced inquiry approach</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Statistically significant change from year 1 and/or year 4 to year 5, or between MLA and comparison at year 5 at the p<=.05 level, as per a two-tailed t-test.
NA = not asked

It is important to note that the values in the previous two tables (Tables 13 and 14 are “nested,”—i.e., teachers who responded “at least once or twice a week” include those who responded “almost every day.”
Long-term (including comparisons with national data)

- The differences between the percentage of MLA teachers and comparison school teachers who responded “almost every day” to these items were quite large at first, but declined over time. This is most likely because the comparison schools were undergoing similar reforms around the same time as the evaluation. However, on average, the MLA teachers consistently remained more likely to respond “almost every day” than their comparison school counterparts.

- With respect to the percentage of MLA and comparison school teachers who responded “almost every day” and “at least once or twice a week,” there were two areas in which the MLA teachers consistently worked with greater frequency than the comparison-group teachers: asking students to write about something they have read and asking students to explain or support their understanding of what they have read.8 Although the differences might not have been significant for all years, the consistency remains noteworthy.

- In addition, with regard to the number of items for which one group reported doing at least one or twice a week than the other. In years 2 and 4 of the evaluation, the comparison group teachers reported conducting with greater frequency eight and nine (respectively) of the 17 literacy-related instructional activities listed on the survey. And in year 3, the MLA teachers reported conducting with greater frequency all but three of the activities. Again, while some of the differences were not statistically significant, the consistency of the more positive responses over time among MLA teachers should be noted. By year 5, there were no significant differences between the comparison and the MLA teacher when it came to frequency of doing the literacy-related practices, as show in Tables 15 and 16 below.

---

8 It should be noted that the first question was not asked in year 5, so it is difficult to determine whether the trend would have continued.
Table 15. Elementary: Frequency of Reading Instruction Activities – MLA/Comparison Differences Over Time
(those reporting “at least once or twice a week”)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>At least Once or Twice a Week….</th>
<th>% point difference: MLA% minus Comparison %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>YR2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work on phonics with students</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask students to read aloud</td>
<td>-4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask students to talk with each other about what they have read</td>
<td>-8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work on phonemes with students</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask students to tell you about what they have read</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask students to write about something they have read</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask students to read silently</td>
<td>-1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work on vocabulary with students</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Give students time to read books they have chosen themselves</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask students to do a group activity or project about what they have read</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourage students to read outside of school</td>
<td>-2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask students to discuss different interpretations of what they have read</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask students to explain/support their understanding of what they have read</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask students to make predictions about what they read as they are reading it</td>
<td>-2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask students to make generalizations &amp; draw inferences based on what they have read</td>
<td>-8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask students to describe the style or structure of the text they have read</td>
<td>-8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicate with parents about reading instruction</td>
<td>-5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: the items pertaining to using a balanced inquiry approach and differentiated instruction were included only in year 4.
Table 16. Elementary: Frequency of Reading Instruction Activities—MLA/Comparison Differences Over Time
(those reporting “almost every day”)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage Responding “Almost every day”</th>
<th>YR2</th>
<th>YR3</th>
<th>YR4</th>
<th>YR5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Work on phonics with students</td>
<td>14%*</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>-2%</td>
<td>-1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask students to read aloud</td>
<td>63%*</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask students to talk with each other about what they have read</td>
<td>37%*</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>35%*</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work on phonemes with students</td>
<td>-4%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>15%*</td>
<td>-1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask students to tell you about what they have read</td>
<td>13%*</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask students to write about something they have read</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>-27%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>23%*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask students to read silently</td>
<td>-22%*</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>40%*</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work on vocabulary with students</td>
<td>49%*</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>-6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Give students time to read books they have chosen themselves</td>
<td>21%*</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask students to do a group activity or project about what they have read</td>
<td>-33%*</td>
<td>-63%</td>
<td>-59%*</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourage students to read outside of school</td>
<td>20%*</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>37%*</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask students to discuss different interpretations of what they have read</td>
<td>-19%*</td>
<td>-33%</td>
<td>-12%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask students to explain/support their understanding of what they have read</td>
<td>68%*</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask students to make predictions about what they read as they are reading it</td>
<td>81%*</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>39%*</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask students to make generalizations &amp; draw inferences based on what they have read</td>
<td>50%*</td>
<td>-9%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask students to describe the style or structure of the text they have read</td>
<td>-45%*</td>
<td>-5%</td>
<td>-20%*</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicate with parents about reading instruction</td>
<td>-58%*</td>
<td>-43%</td>
<td>23%*</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*** Average MLI-Comparison difference</td>
<td>14%*</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Statistically significant difference between MLA and Comparison in at the p<=.05 level, as per a two-tailed t-test.
NA = not asked

It is important to note that the values in the previous two tables are nested, i.e., teachers who responded “at least once or twice a week” include those who responded “almost every day.”
For one of the new questions on the year 5 survey, the question asking teachers to indicate the reasons that they answered the “How often do you do the following…” item as they did, the majority of MLA teachers indicated that their principals encouraged them to do so in every case, except for asking the students to read aloud.

In response to this same question, the majority of comparison teachers indicated that their teacher training had informed their practice for all items except for working on phonics with students (“principal encourages” was the main answer here) and “ask students to explain or support their understanding of what they have read,” in which teacher training was tied with “principal encourages.” This was one important difference between the MLA and comparison group, the former who, as noted above, were more inclined to credit their principal with their practice. (That said, “principal encourages” was a strong second among the comparison group teachers.) Although the differences were not statistically significant, this finding does speak to the positive leadership shown by principals in MLA schools. Table 17 presents teachers' rationale for selected instructional practices.

Rationales for the frequency of instructional practices (year 5 only)
Table 17. Rationales for Frequency of Selected Instructional Practices: Year 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>School policy</th>
<th>District policy</th>
<th>Principal encourages</th>
<th>Professional development</th>
<th>Teacher training</th>
<th>Books, articles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>MLA</td>
<td>Comp</td>
<td>MLA</td>
<td>Comp</td>
<td>MLA</td>
<td>Comp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work on phonics with students</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask students to read aloud</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work on phonemes with students</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask students to tell you about what they have read</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask students to write about something they have read</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work on vocabulary with students</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask students to discuss different interpretations of what they have read</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask students to explain/support their understanding of what they have read</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask students to make predictions about what they read as they are reading it</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask students to make generalizations &amp; draw inferences based on what they have read</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: “Not applicable” responses are not included on this table.
Whole-group and teacher-led instructional practices: frequencies and influences (year 5 only)

- Another new year 5 question asked about teachers about how often they taught reading and writing in whole-group and teacher-led settings. Most MLA teachers indicated that they taught both subjects every day in both settings, as did most comparison-group teachers. Overall however, more comparison teachers than MLA teachers answered “every day” to questions about teaching the five components of reading and writing in both teacher-led and whole-group settings with the sole exception of teaching writing in a teacher led-setting, which more MLA teachers reported doing “every day” than the comparison teachers. These findings are consistent with the observation findings reported above. In observations we generally saw teacher-led instruction, but often this was mixed with work in small groups and/or peer-led work.

Table 18 presents the frequency of teacher-led and whole-group activities in year 5.
Table 18. Frequency of Teacher-Led and Whole-Group Activities: Year 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>For the following, how often do you provide explicit instruction in the five components of reading…</th>
<th>In a whole group setting?</th>
<th>In a teacher-led setting?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>MLA</td>
<td>Comp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phonemic Awareness</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phonics</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fluency</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comprehension</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>For the following, how often do you provide explicit instruction in writing…</th>
<th>In a whole group setting?</th>
<th>In a teacher-led setting?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>MLA</td>
<td>Comp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phonemic Awareness</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phonics</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fluency</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comprehension</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Preparedness to Teach

Short-term

- MLA teachers reported that MLI improved their preparedness to implement the following practices: combining reading and writing, vocabulary development in the teaching of reading, teaching comprehension skills, and writing across the curriculum. However, MLI did not fare well with respect to improving teachers’ preparedness in anything involving computers (except for using internet resources) or with multicultural literature.

- At the same time, the comparison teachers surpassed MLA teachers in “well prepared” responses to all the preparedness items except for writing across the curriculum, using computer software to teach writing, and teaching grammar, spelling, and punctuation/mechanics.

- However, MLI fared less well when it came to preparing teachers to combine reading and writing: the percentage of teachers who felt well prepared to do this, as well as the percentage who felt that MLI increased their preparedness, both dropped 12% between year 1 and year 5.

- In years 2 through 4, MLA teachers’ responses to questions about how well their professional development prepared them to implement a range of literacy practices were compared with those from the NAEP, which provided another perspective. In year 2, fewer MLA teachers than NAEP respondents reported feeling well prepared to implement many literacy practices, except for combining reading and writing; phonics, using multicultural literature, using computer software for teaching reading, and writing across the curriculum. By year 4, the practices in which the MLA teachers felt more prepared than NAEP respondents also included content-area reading. However, the two areas in which MLA teachers felt least prepared—using computers in reading and using multicultural literature—are among those in which they exceeded their NAEP counterparts.

Opinions about Professional Development

Short-term

- Favorable opinions about MLI PD declined from the previous year for all survey items and fell significantly in two areas: “Teachers have influence over the content of MLI professional development activities offered to teachers in this school” and “This school provides teachers with adequate resources and materials to implement what they learn in MLI professional development activities,” both of which declined by 13%. There was also a significant difference between the MLA and comparison teachers when it came to the first of the two questions above: 12% more comparison teachers felt that they had influence over the content of their PD offerings.

Long-term (including comparisons to national trends)

- The long-term trends (that is, from the first year of MLI to the fifth) were similar to the shorter-term trends with regards to the declining favorable opinions of MLI PD. The sharpest decline (19%) was in the percentage of teachers who at least agreed with the statement, “This school provides teachers with adequate resources and materials to implement what they learn in MLI PD activities.” Table 19 presents teachers’ opinions about MLI PD.
Table 19. Elementary: Opinions about Schools’ Professional Development Activities: Trend Analyses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>YR 1 (N=42)</th>
<th>YR4 (N=46)</th>
<th>YR5 (N=29)</th>
<th>% chg fr YR4</th>
<th>% chg fr YR1</th>
<th>Comp (N=43)</th>
<th>% fr MLA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teachers have influence over the content of MLI professional</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>-13%*</td>
<td>-7%</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>-12%*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>development activities offered to teachers in this school.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MLI Professional development activities offered to teachers</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>-8%</td>
<td>-3%</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>-1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in this school usually include follow-up activities or</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>experiences to help teachers implement what they have learned.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This school provides teachers with adequate resources and</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>-13%*</td>
<td>-19%*</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>-1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>materials to implement what they learn in MLA professional</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>development activities.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In this school, teachers are encouraged by school leadership to</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>-3%</td>
<td>-4%</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>try out new ideas in their teaching.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MLI professional development activities offered to</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>-8%</td>
<td>-6%</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>teachers in this school provide opportunities for teachers to</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>receive feedback on their teaching.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In general, MLI professional development</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>-4%</td>
<td>-7%</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The school leadership supports MLI professional development</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>-7%</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>98%</td>
<td>-5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>efforts.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NA: not asked

* Statistically significant change from year 1 and/or year 4 to year 5, or between MLA and comparison schools at year 5 at the p<.05 level, as per a two-tailed t-test.
With respect to comparisons with NAEP—which were conducted in years 2 through 4—there was a notable shift between years 3 and 4. In year 3, MLA teachers felt they had less influence over their PD, fewer resources, and less support from the school leadership than teachers around the country. The only cases for which the MLA teachers seemed to fare better than their national counterparts were in the areas of PD follow-up and feedback. This may speak to the positive role of the MLI coaches, who were mainly responsible for this follow-up and feedback. In year 4 as well, the rate at which MLA respondents felt that their PD included opportunities for follow-up and feedback remained higher than at the national level. In addition, MLA teachers were also more likely than the NAEP respondents to report that they had influence over their PD in year 4 than they did in year 3.

**MLI Impact on the School and on Teaching Practices**

**Short-term**

- Although not statistically significant, the upward trend of positive opinions about the impact of MLI on the school and on teaching practices continued from year 4 to year 5. Similarly, fewer teachers reported any challenges in implementing MLI. This agrees with the finding from the qualitative data reported above—throughout the years the challenges to implementation decreased among teachers.

**Long-term**

- The percentage of teachers who reported experiencing challenges in implementing MLI dropped significantly (19%) since year 1.
- There was a similar change in opinions on the impact of MLI on the school since year 1: the percentage of teachers who thought that MLI had an impact rose by 12%, while the percentage of those who didn’t declined by 13%.
- Likewise, the percentages of teachers responding favorably and negatively to questions about MLI’s impact on teaching practices were similar: the percentage of teachers who answered “a fair amount” rose by 19%, and that of teachers who answered “a great deal” declined by 16% since year 1. One plausible rationale is that teachers might have been more inclined to answer “a great deal” in the first year of MLI, when the initiative was new and the practices represented a change from what had been going on prior to implementation. By year 5, MLI was a known entity, so to speak, and the inclination to answer “a great deal” might not have been as great.

**Middle School Survey Findings**

As in the previous years, the very small number of language arts teachers in both the MLA and comparison schools—to whom the questions about language arts practices were addressed—made significance tests unfeasible. As a result, in keeping with past practice, the findings will be presented in general terms. However, in the last two years, the surveys were made available to all teachers at Blackburn Middle School (the MLA school). Thus, while MLA teachers’ opinions about PD and the impact of MLI on the school from year to year might not be comparable, we were able to determine statistically significant differences between the MLA and comparison school (Brinkley) for some of the other kinds of questions, which will be noted below.
Specific Survey Findings

Impact on Frequency of Teacher Practices
- Over both the short- and long-term—from both year 4 and year 2—the percentage of teachers who increased the frequency of all MLI literacy activities increased or, in the case where 100% reported conducting an activity, at least twice a week, remained the same. This points to a consistent, upward trend with respect to the frequency with which the MLA teachers incorporated MLI-based practices.

Preparedness to Teach

Short-term:
- In year 5, the strong trend towards greater preparedness to implement the MLI literary practices continued. The same can be said for teachers' positive assessment of the impact that MLI made on that preparedness.
- The MLA teachers surpassed their comparison school peers when it came to preparedness, with the sole exception of teaching spelling, grammar, and punctuation/mechanics, about which more comparison teachers than MLA teachers felt well prepared to teach.

Long-term:
- In years 2 and 3 of the evaluation, teacher perception of preparedness was low overall, as were their opinions about whether MLI made a difference. This changed in year 4, which saw a dramatic spike both in the percentage of teachers who felt well prepared and in the percentage who felt that MLI made a difference.

Table 20 presents the findings on the preparedness of MLI middle school: teachers.
**Table 20. Middle School: MLI and Preparedness**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Respondents reporting that they were “well prepared” to implement</th>
<th>Respondents reporting that MLI increased their preparedness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>YR 2 (N=5)</td>
<td>YR3 (N=9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literature-based reading instruction</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content area reading</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combining reading and writing</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phonics in the teaching of reading</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching multicultural literature</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using computer software for teaching reading</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching spelling, grammar, and punctuation/mechanics</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: these questions were not included in the year 1 survey.

* Statistically significant change from year 2 and/or year 4 to year 5, or between MLA and Comparison at Year 5 at the p<=.05 level, as per a two-tailed t-test.

NA = not asked
MLI Impact on Teacher Engagement with and Support from Peers and Schools

In this and the following sections, trends in responses to teacher engagement and support from years 4 and 5 only are reported. In these years, the questions on engagement and support were administered to all teachers in the middle school, compared with only the language arts teachers (which was the case before year 4).

- Between years 3 and 4, there was a significant increase in the percentage of MLA teachers who reported that they at least sometimes observed another teacher teaching (by 23%), taught lessons with a colleague (by 23%), and discussed books or articles on education with other teachers (by 18%).

- The year 5 differences from the comparison school were even greater: the MLA teachers surpassed the comparison group teachers with respect to the frequency at which they engaged in the following activities: teach lessons with a colleague (by 17%); discuss books or articles on education with other teachers (by 22%); discuss with other teachers what they learned at a workshop or conference (by 22%); share and discuss student work with other teachers (by 16%); and work with colleagues to develop curricula, lessons or assessment (by 19%).

This, to some extent, is in contrast to year 4 findings, in which we reported that MLA middle school teachers in general had fewer dealings with other teachers than their comparison school counterparts: they were less likely to observe another teacher teaching (57% versus 90%) or to teach lessons with a colleague (45% versus 64%). (In year 5, MLA teachers were still less likely to observe another teacher teaching, but the difference—6%—was not significant.) This points to a trend towards greater involvement among the MLA middle school teachers in one another's work and practices.

Opinions about Professional Development and MLI’s Overall Impact

- In year 4, we reported that MLA middle school teachers were significantly more positive about their PD than their comparison school counterparts in all items but having a say about their PD, about which the MLA teachers were more positive than those in the comparison group but not significantly so. In year 5 the same was somewhat true, although this year there was actually a significant difference: there were 14% fewer MLA teachers than comparison group teachers who felt that teachers had a say in their PD (48% versus 62%). This is similar to the feelings about PD expressed by elementary school teachers.

- Although the MLA middle-grades teachers were, on the whole, more positive about their PD experiences than their comparison school counterparts, they were less positive than they had been in year 4. There were declines in positive responses to all the PD questions. For example, significant declines were found for the percentage of teachers who felt that they had influence over the content of their PD (66% to 48%) and who felt that their school provided teachers with adequate resources and materials to implement what they learned in PD activities (94% to 80%). However, the percentage of middle school teachers who experienced challenges in implementing MLI related practices fell from 29% to 4%.

- In year 4, MLA teachers were more likely to think that MLI had at least “a fair amount” of impact on their instructional practices (56% to 63%). In year 5, the percentage increased further to 79%. However, the percentage who believed that the change in practice had an impact on their students fell from 50% to 18%. This is a finding of utmost concern. Further study should be done with middle school teachers
In year 5, over 9 out of 10 middle school teachers (92%) felt that MLI had an impact on their school, up 78% in the previous year.

High School Survey Findings

Unlike the case with the elementary and middle schools, we do not have a comparison high school in this evaluation study. However, four sets of data (baseline plus three years of implementation) provide some information into how MLI operated in the high school.

Overall, the most striking finding in this year of MLI at Jim Hill is the almost universal trend with respect to more favorable opinions about preparedness, MLI's role in increasing that preparedness, and MLI PD. Also noteworthy was the frequency with which Jim Hill's teachers implemented or conducted instructional activities that were consistent with the MLI mission and goals.

This is in stark contrast to the previous year in particular, in which we found discouraging findings, with some issues perhaps stemming from the school leadership. This pattern of positive results in year 5 might be an artifact of what was considered an unusually sharp decline in such responses in the previous year. However, there were, as will be discussed, real and significant favorable trends from the first year of MLI at Jim Hill.

Specific Survey Findings

Practices and Engagement with and Support from Peers and Schools

Short term

- In year 5, there were increases in the frequency with which teachers engaged with one another and with their principals in every way, and the increases were statistically significant for all items, except for teaching lessons with a colleague and receiving public recognition for their work. The items with the greatest increases were “discuss book or articles on education with other teachers” (up by 35%); “work with colleagues to develop curricula, lessons or assessment” (up by 25%); and “get general feedback from your principal” (up by 24%).

Long-term

- Since year 3 there have been significant increases in the frequency with which teachers discussed their teaching with another teacher who had observed them (from 58% to 75%); discussed with other teachers what was learned at a workshop or conference (from 78% to 91%); and shared and discussed student work with other teachers (from 80% to 97%).

- However, there were declines in the frequency with which teachers taught with other teachers, received recognition, or met with their principal, but they were not significant.

Preparedness to Teach and MLI's Impact:

Because questions pertaining to preparedness and MLI’s impact were given only to language arts teachers—who, as in the case of the middle school—averaged 10 in number—no significance tests were conducted, and findings will be presented in general terms.
Short-term

- In year 5, there were increases in the percentage of teachers who felt well prepared to implement all MLI–related instructional techniques, with the minor exception of content-area reading (which declined slightly). This is almost a mirror opposite of the previous year’s findings, in which we reported that the percentage of teachers who felt well prepared to implement MLI declined, with the exception of content-area reading and multicultural literature.

- There were also increases in the percentage of teachers who felt that MLI increased their preparedness, in the areas of literature-based instruction, content-area reading, combining reading and writing, and teaching spelling, grammar, and mechanics. The only declines were in the areas of teaching multicultural literature and using computer software to teach reading. Once more, we have almost a mirror opposite from the prior year, in which we reported that using computer software to teach reading was the sole exception to a pattern of sharp declines in the assessment of MLI’s impact.

Long-term

- Since year 3, there have been increases in the feelings of preparedness in all literacy-related instructional techniques, with the exception of teaching spelling, grammar, and mechanics, which remained unchanged.

- Feelings were mixed, however, when it came to teachers’ assessment of MLI’s impact. Since year 3 there were no changes in the percentage of teachers who felt that MLI positively impacted their preparedness for literature-based instruction or teaching spelling, grammar, and mechanics, and there were declines in the percentage who felt that MLI improved their preparedness in teaching multicultural literature and using computer software. Content-area reading and combining reading and writing were the only areas with increases.

Opinions about Professional Development and MLI’s Overall Impact

Short-term

- In a departure from the previous year, high school teachers’ opinions of their MLI PD opportunities and experiences at year 5 were more positive. There were significant increases in the percentage of teachers who thought that MLI PD activities included follow-up activities (71% to 84%) and that teachers were encouraged by school leadership to try new ideas (79% to 94%). Coincidentally (or perhaps not), these were two of the three areas in which we found the greatest declines in positive opinions in year 4.

- In year 5, high school teachers had a slightly more favorable opinion of MLI as a change agent than they did in year 4 when it came to teaching practices: the percentage of teachers who thought that MLI changed their practices “a little” dropped sharply from 34% to 19% and those who answered “a fair amount” rose almost significantly from 41% to 53%. More high school teachers were inclined to feel that the changes made a difference with their students than they did in the prior year (39% to 63%), and more felt that MLI had an impact on the school (48% to 66%).
Long-term

- There were significant declines in the percentage of teachers who felt that MLI made little to no difference in their teaching practices from year 3 from 41% to 22%. The increase in the percentage that felt that MLI made at least a fair amount of difference rose from 53% to 78%. The percentage of teachers who answered “a great deal” almost doubled from years 3 to 5, from 13% to 25%. More teachers felt that these changes made a difference to their students, from 40% to 63%.

- The percentage of teachers who experienced challenges in implementing MLI fell from 43% to 22%—almost half.

- The percentage of teachers who felt that MLI made a difference in their school rose from 56% to 66%—a difference that was not statistically significant but notable nonetheless. However, the percentage of teachers who remained unsure of MLI’s impact on the school was not insubstantial (28%).
IV. Summary of Overall Findings

This section summarizes the major findings of AED’s four-and-a-half-year evaluation of MLI. Findings are presented under the following headings: the impact of MLI on teaching, schools, and students; implementation issues, including MLI collaborative growth team; and findings pertaining to COE. This section combines both qualitative findings—from observations and interviews—and quantitative findings—from teacher surveys, document review, and analysis of student MCT scores.

Impact of MLI on Teaching and Schools

Quality of MLI Professional Development and Coaching

A major priority of MLI PD was to build capacity for higher quality instruction using a balanced literacy approach.

- Overall, AED observers judged the PD sessions to be of high quality and very appropriate to MLA teachers’ needs.
- Of the teachers surveyed, more teachers applied literacy instruction techniques from MLI-sponsored PD compared with other teacher training (94.7% vs. 47.4%).
- In year 4, the MLA teachers exceeded the NAEP respondents in feelings of preparedness for most of the literacy-related teaching practices, especially in the areas of using software in the teaching of both reading (86% to 12%) and writing (70% to 17%).

Literacy Instruction in MLA Classrooms

- In observations, it was clear that MLA teachers were addressing the five components of literacy instruction in a variety of ways, both explicit and embedded, and using various teaching strategies, including open-and closed questioning, peer teaching and differentiated instruction.
- Observers especially saw an increasingly high degree of differentiated instruction in classrooms, with teachers addressing the multiple and differing needs of learners in appropriate ways.
- In addition, the duration of all observed lessons on the five components of reading instruction fit into the guidelines of the National Reading Panel.
- In comparing the long-term trends with those of the comparison group, there were two areas in which the MLA teachers consistently reported doing with greater frequency than the comparison group teachers: asking students to write about something they have read and asking students to explain or support their understanding of what they have read. Although the differences might not have been significant in all years of the evaluation, the consistent MLA-comparison differences of these two items remain noteworthy.

Data Use in MLA Schools

In later years, the MLI PD included an emphasis on the use of data by teachers and schools, especially given the introduction in SY 2007-08 of the revised preK–grade 12 Mississippi Curriculum Frameworks.

- Observations, interviews, and survey data all indicate that using data to inform teaching and learning has become a routine aspect in MLA schools. This includes
teachers’ applying data-driven decision making in their classes, carrying what they learned in MLI over into classroom practice, and sharing their practice with one another.

- Teachers had more capacity to develop high-quality lesson plans and standard-based assessments to identify student needs and help in the development of effective instructional practices, such as small-group instruction and enrichment exercise.

**MLI Coaches**

Coaches contributed in many important ways to the ongoing implementation of MLI in the schools.

- In principal and teacher interviews, and observations of coaches’ practice, it was clear that coaches helped teachers and principals in numerous ways, including remediation; specific issues in classrooms; as resource persons, and in orientating new teachers.

**Teacher Satisfaction with MLI Professional Development**

As the evaluation progressed, teachers expressed less overall satisfaction with MLI PD in several important areas.

- For example, significant declines were found for the percentage of teachers who felt that they had influence over the content of their PD (66% to 48%) and who felt that their school provided teachers with adequate resources and materials to implement what they learned in PD activities. This may have been due to decreased funding levels to MLA schools as the initiative progressed.

- The only cases for which the MLA teachers seemed to fare better than their national counterparts were in the areas of PD follow-up and feedback. This may speak to the positive role of the MLI coaches, who were mainly responsible for this follow-up and feedback.

**Teacher-Centered Classrooms**

- MLA classrooms are still very much teacher-centered, with teachers imparting information, giving directions, asking closed ended questions, and eliciting answers from students, although some areas are provided where students can work independently or in small groups. Rarely are students agents of their own learning and in very few instances did they build on what the teacher said.

- In particular, many teachers’ questions remained the closed type that require rote knowledge rather than the open-ended type that require more higher order thinking. However, in year 5 there was some improvement in this area, especially in grades 1 and 2. Grade 3 teachers need to work at this skill so that children are obliged to use higher order thinking more often.

**MLI Impact on Students**

Over the five years of evaluating MLI, the quantitative data have informed the evaluation in many important ways. The survey data allowed us to place the student achievement data into context: when we found both positive assessments of preparedness coupled with greater student achievement—as was the case with the elementary school students in the first years of MLI—it brought to light the possible impact of MLI on student achievement. Even when the findings contradicted one another—as they did in the case of the middle
grades students in the later years of the evaluation—they enabled us to look deeper into the findings to try to determine if there was another variable involved.

**Findings over Time: Elementary**

- In the first year of the evaluation, we reported that MLA students who were not language proficient at baseline improved to proficiency the following year at a greater rate than comparison students. MLA students who were proficient at baseline on both reading and language tests remained proficient at a greater rate than comparison students.

- By the third year of the evaluation, however, we reported that there were no significant differences between the MLA and comparison schools on average over time with respect to MCT score growth patterns. We argued then (and now) that this suggested two things. First, we knew that several school improvement interventions were implemented in the comparison schools when MLA was implemented in George and Isable, which might explain the marked improvement in the comparison schools in Years 3 and 4 of the evaluation. In addition, there might have been a “leveling off” or a plateau effect in the MLA schools. Further analyses conducted in the fourth year indicated that this was no “quirk” in the data and that it was indeed the beginning of a trend.

- By year 4 of the evaluation, we had found that the greatest increases in proficiency were among the 5th grade MLA students—increases that in some cases surpassed those of the comparison schools. This strongly suggested that there was a cumulative effect among the older students in the MLA elementary schools, who had the benefit of four years of MLA. This, however, was not universal: Poindexter’s 5th graders also improved significantly, even though they had only two years’ worth of MLA; in this case, we suspected that perhaps the learning curve for Poindexter might have been shorter, and the school might have benefited from the experiences in George and Isable.

- There was also a similar cumulative effect among the more experienced teachers with respect to their assessment of MLA’s effectiveness in preparing them to implement selected teaching practices. Although the MCT data and the survey data represented different years in the evaluation, the fact that the greatest increases occurred with the oldest students and the more experienced teachers later rather than sooner in MLI’s implementation suggests that real change takes time—sometimes years.

**Findings over Time: Middle School**

- In Year 3, we found that the MCT and proficiency scores for the Blackburn students did not exceed or even differ appreciably from those for students in the comparison group. We suspected that this might stem from the teachers’ overall ambivalence about the impact of MLI, as well as the fact that few were implementing MLI at Blackburn. In addition, the introduction of similar types of improvements in the comparison schools during the course of the evaluation might have tempered those impacts.

**Findings over Time: Jim Hill**

- By the third year of the evaluation, some MLI impact was suggested by the shifts within the level of proficiency—mainly, the decline in students scoring at the “basic” level. This suggested that MLI might have had an effect on those students who were
not at the very bottom but not quite performing to par. We found the same outcome in the fourth year of the evaluation, and recommended that the next step might involve focusing on those students who were at the bottom, which comprised approximately a third of the student body.

**MLA and Comparison Schools: MCT Scores**

Table 21 below represents a summary of the comparisons between MLA schools and comparison schools in terms of MCT scale scores from the beginning. It shows the differences in student scores by grade. (Individual student scores were tracked longitudinally and averaged to show an analysis of growth over four years.)

- It is notable that for the elementary grades out of 18 measurement categories across the three grades, 16 categories show a positive difference (MLA schools scored higher than comparison schools).
- In terms of the middle school, however, out of 12 measurement categories across the two grades, the MLA middle school scores were positive in only four categories compared with the comparison school (the comparison school scored higher in eight categories).

As the findings show repeatedly in this report, the elementary schools where MLI was implemented more fully showed more positive increases in literacy related instruction and outcomes than did the comparison elementary schools. This is a strong indication suggesting the positive impact MLI has made over time especially for the five categories that show a positive significant difference.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Grades</th>
<th>MLA</th>
<th>Comparison</th>
<th>Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading: MCT scale score increases</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language Arts: MCT scale score increases</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading: Below Proficient to Proficient, (% of students)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>-15*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>15*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language Arts: Below Proficient to Proficient, (percentage of students)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>18*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>21*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>14*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading: Stayed Proficient (percentage of students)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELA: Stayed Proficient, (percentage of students)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>13*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
MCT Scale Score Comparisons between MLA and Comparison Schools, Yrs. 1-4

Middle Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>MLA</th>
<th>Comparison</th>
<th>Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading: MCT scale score increases</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELA: MCT scale score increases</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>-9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading: Below Proficient to Proficient, (percentage of students)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELA: Below Proficient to Proficient, (percentage of students)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading: Stayed Proficient (percentage of students)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELA: Stayed Proficient, (percentage of students)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Statistically significant difference between MLA and Comparison at the p<=.05 level, based on a two-tailed t-test

**In Summary**

- The elementary school students fared better with respect to improvements than those in the middle and, to some extent, high schools. While there was indeed a cumulative effect, we also found that the MCT scores of schools newer to MLI (i.e., Poindexter) matched those of the George and Isable, suggesting that the newer schools might have benefited from lessons learned by the older schools.

- The greatest increases occurred with the oldest students and the more experienced teachers, and later rather than sooner in MLI’s implementation. The improvements in the proficiency levels of the fifth graders in the MLA schools, as compared with the comparison schools, might be a function of a cumulative effect of four years of MLI. It is consistent with a similar effect found on the teacher surveys—that is, a more favorable assessment of MLI’s impact on preparedness to teach) found among the more experienced teachers in the MLA schools. On the whole these findings confirm what we already know about effective educational reform: real change takes time—sometimes years.
Implementation Issues

- In general over the years, the challenges of implementation have decreased and the facilitating factors have increased. Previously principals cited bureaucratic issues and the lack of involvement of JSU as challenges. It is clear that now principals are much more comfortable with MLI as all partners are fully involved and many procedures have been changed and clarified through the work of the growth team and the executive committee.

- In addition, interviews indicate that the MLI initiative and its mission became embedded into the hiring decisions and the orientation process for JPS faculty.

- While AED only studied the collaborative partnership for the first four years, we saw positive progress in its working relationships. We reported in year four that the executive committee made progress as the years went by—beginning in 2004 as a team lacking trust and a co-constructed vision for the initiative to a group of partners with amiable relationships and more effective problem-solving strategies.

Findings Pertaining to the MLI Collaborative Growth Team

- MLI collaborative growth team is a great asset that, according to all our sources of data, has benefited preK-20 education in and around Jackson in multiple ways. This component of the partnership has taken risks and withstood some of the challenges of partnering. Some barriers continued to challenge team members, some of whom expressed differing opinions about how the team was working. This demonstrates that there is still work to be done to strengthen and clarify the team’s operations, collaboration and understandings.

Findings Pertaining to COE

- Our findings from the 12 classes in which observations of at least one hour were done showed that instruction in these classes was appropriate for the literacy subject matter and for what teacher candidates should know in terms of content and pedagogy. Much of the content follows the recommendations of scientifically-based research and NCATE standards. Professors employ a variety of methods to teach literacy instruction and communicate clear standards for the quality and timeliness of written assignments. Six classes were assessed as good, 3 as very good and 3 as exceptional.

- Students in COE literacy classes tended to ask practical/functional questions that could address an immediate need for working in classrooms. They typically did not ask questions that would deepen their knowledge of the reasoning for certain approaches or allow them to compare and contrast approaches. Nor did they ask questions or make comments in ways that would increase their metacognition or make them more aware of the metacognition skills of their prospective pupils. Similarly the faculty members’ replies often responded to the immediate question and often not in ways that enhanced the thinking skills of COE students—and by extension—enhance their ability to foster the higher order think skills of their pupils.

---

9 In year five, by contract the focus was shifted off of the executive committee and on to the collaborative growth team.
In conclusion, it should be noted that while no causal link can be made between MLI and these accomplishments, there is strong evidence that MLI was a major factor in bringing about change. The triangulation of findings from this multimethod study shows that MLI, along with other initiatives, such as the Barksdale Schools and an increasing focus on literacy throughout Mississippi, produced more awareness, more high-quality PD, improved literacy instruction, and more effective collaboration and planning among school staff. Much of the work was driven by the MLI executive committee that governed the initiative in an active and focused manner and included the appropriate mix of partners including a representative of the funder and the strong presence of the university president. These probable effects were not limited to COE and the MLA schools but clearly spilled over to other schools in the district as the awareness and capacity increased among other educational professionals.
V. Conclusion and Recommendations

Recommendations are provided in key areas of MLI work. These include professional development, the use of data, strengthening MLI in middle and high schools; strengthening family and community involvement in MLI; issues pertaining to the MLI collaborative growth team and COE; and getting the word out about MLI. The last section discusses issues and makes recommendations relevant to scaling up or replicating MLI.

**Professional Development**

The core of the MLI approach to educational improvement is professional development. Overall, evaluation findings indicated that MLA teachers were implementing what they learned in PD sessions by addressing the five components of literacy instruction in a variety of ways, as well as meeting the needs of individual learners in appropriate ways. In addition, evaluation findings indicated that MLA principals and teachers highly valued the work of the MLI literacy coaches who supplemented the PD offerings by helping teachers deal with specific classroom issues, offering feedback on lessons, helping orientate new teachers, and providing resources.

However, evaluation findings also suggested that continued professional development is necessary both to build on MLA strengths and foster teacher capacity in other areas, such as questioning techniques and making MLA classrooms more student-centered.

Over the course of the evaluation teachers’ favorable opinions about MLI professional development declined. Overall, as the evaluation progressed, MLA teachers felt they had less influence over their PD, fewer resources, and less support from the school leadership than teachers around the country when MLI data was compared with NAEP data.

Any future MLI professional development must be co-constructed with teachers. It must seek teacher input and address their expressed needs, rather than present a curriculum devised solely by others. The use of outside consultants is appropriate at times, but teachers were more comfortable with, and responsive to, local PD providers. Such development must also foster networking and sharing among teachers and engage teachers in an ongoing learning process. Support for this process could include giving stipends for monthly/bimonthly meetings and/or workshops to foster teacher sharing and networking; annual conferences and/or retreats, and an electronic newsletter, etc.

**Data Use in MLI**

Using data about student achievement was an important aspect of MLI.

Teachers and administrators need ongoing help to continue to use data to gauge student learning and address student needs. This could entail providing ongoing help through workshops and individual assistance so that findings from the data are appropriately transferred to changes in instructional practice. Teachers should be encouraged to report on the changes and how they affected classroom teaching and learning.

MLI might also want to track some additional indicators of success. These could include evidence that students understand the work, take the initiative to read on their own, take the initiative to write and to correct their own writing, and other indicators that JPS students are active participants in their own learning.

**Strengthening MLI in Middle and High School**
On the whole, the AED evaluation found that MLI fared better in elementary schools with respect to improvements than it did in the middle and high schools.

The results of this evaluation could be used to begin a new conversation about the improvement of literacy skills in middle and high schools. Firstly, a facilitator is needed to help the executive committee and growth team to explore current trends in secondary school literacy. From that understanding should come a process whereby a written MLI theory of change is developed specifying the inputs needed to improve literacy instruction and student achievement in middle and high schools and what outcomes are to be expected.

**Family and Community Involvement in MLI**

MLI functioned to reemphasize the importance of literacy instruction to teachers, COE faculty, and the school district in general, but it lacked a “reach” into the wider community, including families and parents.

If the original proposal to include parents in MLI is still essential to the MLI mission, the executive committee and the growth team should redouble efforts to make the connection with the community. Since the parent coordinator model did not continue, a taskforce of parents (perhaps a group already formed) could report parent questions and comments about MLI to the executive committee. The committee should find appropriate venues at which to respond to parents.

**Issues Pertaining to the MLI Collaborative Growth Team**

The MLI collaborative growth team is a great asset that, according to all our data sources, has benefited preK-20 education in and around Jackson in multiple ways. However, there is still work to be done to strengthen the growth team’s knowledge of the latest research in pre-K-20 education reform, as well as team operations and collaborations among team members.

The growth team should continue to put into practice the lessons learned from reading the Jonathan Tisch book, *The Power of We*. We especially recommend they review these areas of the book:

- Trying to experience work from the point of view of others in the partnership.
- Reviewing how communications flow (is it only one way; are some the talkers while others only listen?) and who pays attention to whom?
- Reacting to crises in time or resources
- Assuring that all members know what values the partnership believes in

In the growth team, it is important that every member knows what work needs to be accomplished before the next meeting. The final agenda item at each meeting should be a review of what needs to be accomplished before the next meeting.

There could also be an annual retreat for the executive committee and the collaborative growth team.

**Issues Pertaining to JSUCOE**

Over the course of the MLI evaluation, COE involvement improved dramatically. AED observations in the final year showed that that instruction in COE classes was appropriate for the literacy subject matter and for what teacher candidates should know in terms of content and pedagogy.
However, findings also indicated that COE preservice teachers need help, as do JPS teachers, in asking questions that will promote their students higher order thinking. They typically did not ask questions or make comments in ways that would increase their metacognition or make them more aware of the metacognition skills of their prospective pupils.

Similarly the faculty members’ replies often responded to the immediate question and often not in ways that would enhance the thinking skills of preservice teachers—and by extension—enhance teachers’ ability to foster the higher order think skills of JPS students. COE faculty must be encouraged to engage teacher candidates in disciplined inquiry, in addition to learning the use of facts, materials, and procedures.

More metacognitive activities throughout the MLI pre-K-20 spectrum are needed.

Our combined findings from the observations and examination of COE syllabi are that the recommended curriculum for preservice teachers developed by professional and accrediting organizations is the actual content seen on syllabi and in the observed classes. COE faculty must make sure that all textbooks are up-to-date and that students in all classes are taught in ways that explore the links between these pedagogical courses and other courses such as foundations of education and child psychology.

There should be some sort of recognition for COE faculty who publish books or articles related to their involvement in MLI, thus encouraging participation among other faculty and signaling the field of the importance of this work and bringing attention to JSU and JPS.

JSUCOE should consider a teacher-in-residence program in which JSU teachers spend time on campus and become members of the MLI collaborative growth team.

JSUCOE should also implement a plan to upgrade technology available to faculty. This would allow a wider variety of interactions between faculty and students and model what the students can do when they become teachers.

Replicating or Scaling-Up the MLI Initiative

Scaling up educational initiatives such as MLI is a complex process requiring a critical examination of the first implementation and the use of evaluation findings to set the stage and identify the possible challenges to the new implementation. This section reviews some of the research literature in the context of MLI and sets out some preconditions necessary for scaling up. It also briefly discusses the challenges of scaling up, as well as steps to identify what parts of the initiative would be best to replicate.

Preconditions for Scaling Up or Replicating MLI

According to Baker (2004), there are two important critical aspects that need examining before scaling up an intervention: design and implementation. In terms of design, AED’s evaluation of MLI has produced evidence that higher student achievement occurred during the time MLI was implemented and has suggested some of this increase was the result of the design and implementation of the initiative. Secondly, the evaluation has shown that because of MLI’s structure—with key players from the four partners serving as permanent members of both the MLI executive committee and the MLI collaborative growth team—the initiative to a large extent matched the school/district, university, and state cultures more closely each year. These implementation strategies as well as the alignment of the program’s PD and other supports for teachers show that MLI has the necessary implementation components for replication.
Having said that, two questions arise: Is this the right time to introduce MLI-types of changes in other settings? And if so, what are those settings and how ready are they? (Sharing Success, 2009). If the replication is in the same school district but within other feeder patterns, many of the readiness factors are already in place. For MLI it may be only a matter of keeping the executive committee intact and expanding the collaborative growth team to include administrators from other schools or starting a second growth team for the replication. This second growth team would hopefully be characterized by the more positive attributes of the existing growth team. Still, with this replication of MLI, the necessary work will have to be done initially to ensure that there is overall support for the replication on the part of teachers and administrators. We feel that the first few years of outreach and planning meetings for the present implementation of MLI showed that the executive committee is adept at generating such support.

On the other hand, if the proposed replication or scale-up is outside of JPS, more up-front work is needed to ensure readiness. Once the funds are guaranteed, representatives of the funder and the present MLI executive committee need to coach the new “team” on start-up. In addition, for other school districts, there should be a list of preconditions or non-negotiables that the new MLI implementers must adhere to. These should include at the least, an executive committee with all partners present all the time, a growth team, and very well-funded support for teachers.

These requirements should also include an external evaluator from the preplanning stage onward. An evaluation design should be co-constructed by the evaluator and MLI administrators. There should be a researcher from JSU who becomes the liaison between the evaluator and the new MLI initiative. Once the design is agreed on, it should remain the same until the end of the study. In this way the replication site would be able to document increased student learning and changes in schools and the district in a rigorous evaluation study using true baseline and follow-up data. Furthermore, if an experimental design (gold standard) is desired the random assignment of classrooms or schools to treatment and control groups must be accomplished before the replication begins and buy-in by both treatment and control group participants must be maintained throughout the study. There can be no way that the control group can be exposed to or influenced by the MLI “treatment.” Such a replication study combined with AED’s study of the first MLI implementation would contribute to a body of evidence that determines whether MLI-type interventions produce the desired instructional changes and student learning outcomes across settings and populations (Engelman & Engelman, 2004).

This evaluation should also include an ongoing study of the executive committee and the growth team rather than one or the other. Such a study would provide a context for findings about instruction and learning and would continue to contribute to research literature about pre-K-20 partnerships, to which AED has contributed in the first four years of its MLI the evaluation.

Lastly, whether the replication is within JPS or scaled-up to other districts, the funders and administrators must determine the practicability of scaling up the intervention, as well as the likelihood that changes achieved through the intervention can be maintained (Goldman, 2004). They should make sure the feeder pattern or district is stable enough in terms of central administration and community support. The new implementers should sign memoranda of understanding that allow the originators of MLI to work with them over several years.

Other questions include:

What policy and political situations exist that will affect replication or scale up?
Is the funding sufficient with the appropriate inflation factors considered for sustainability? Is a sustainability plan in place?

Will the state continue to play an insider role as it has for MLI?

How may that role be enhanced to leverage the will for other districts to participate?

Beyond these considerable requirements, the new district could tailor the initiative to its own context, as emphasized in the literature (see next section).

**Some Challenges MLI Administrators Should Consider**

There are numerous challenges to scaling up an education initiative. Increasing the size of the student population exposed to MLI will increase the variation in the context in which the initiative occurs. This variability in the context creates uncertainty that the program will achieve similar outcomes. Therefore, it is paramount that program managers not impose “one-size fits all” interventions on districts or schools (Baker, 2004). New participants vary and may not respond the same way—no matter how well-defined it is.

Secondly, encouraging participants to modify the intervention to best fit their situation increases buy-in and depth of implementation. According to a study of New American Schools scale-up, the following factors improved quality and depth of design implementation:

1. School understood design.
2. School “bought-in” to design.
3. School did not have a high level of “inner strife.”
4. There was no turnover in leadership during study-period (Bodilly et al., 1998).

The same study identified the following factors associated with high levels of implementation:

1. Leadership that is perceived as stable and as supportive of the effort, and that communicates clearly.
2. Lack of political crises in jurisdiction
3. Strong level of trust between central office and schools
4. Enough school-level autonomy given to adequately implement design
5. Generous provisions of resources for professional development and planning.

In addition to the variability in the context, a major challenge to scaling up is sustainability of the changes accomplished through the intervention. Coburn (2003) argues that “schools that successfully implement reforms find it difficult to sustain them in the face of competing priorities, changing demands, and teacher and administrator turnover.” Externally developed school reforms may be especially vulnerable to this problem because implementation typically involves a short-term influx of resources, professional development, and other forms of assistance to facilitate implementation that dissipates over time . . . ” (p 6).

Additional challenges to sustainable scaling-up can include both distance and communication issues. The distance between replication sites and the original group can decrease level of implementation (Buzhardt, Greenwood & Abbot, 2006). With the use of technology some meetings and TA between the original executive committee and growth team and the scale-up site may be done over a distance, but, to a large extent, at least
Initially, the trust, rapport, and collaboration so necessary for successful scaling up can only be established with face-to-face contact.

Furthermore, instructional changes will spread more quickly if MLA teachers and literacy coaches are able to collaborate directly with those in the replication or scale-up sites. Change in the new classrooms cannot be allowed to be made in the isolation of individual teachers’ classrooms (Carpenter & Franke, 2004). MLA teachers and coaches should be part of any assistance provided to new sites.

Lastly, it must be remembered that that the MLI scaling-up participants whether in a new feeder pattern or a different district are used to seeing “new programs come and go” and are often disillusioned with reform (Glennan & Resnick, 2004). Any MLI replication should not “overtax” staff or expand the staff too quickly, which prevents proper training and introduction to the program (Slavin & Madden 2004). A review of the annual reports written by AED shows the challenges that MLI has had over the years to put the initiative in place and keep it on track. Any MLI replication efforts must have these reports to look back on to increase the chances that the initiative implemented in a new setting can achieve success more efficiently and effectively than was possible for MLI in its early years.

Given these challenges, and given the advantages of proximity, a replication of MLI within the Jackson Public Schools district may be the next logical step until resources and planning are sufficient to cover the cost and time associated with traveling to another district.
VI. References


The Academy for Educational Development (AED) is an independent, nonprofit organization committed to addressing human development needs in the United States and throughout the world. As one of the world's foremost human and social development organizations, AED works in five major program areas: U.S. Education and Workforce Development; Global Learning; Global Health, Population and Nutrition; Leadership and Institutional Development; and Social Change. At the heart of all our programs is an emphasis on building skills and knowledge to improve people's lives.

The AED Center for School and Community Services is part of AED’s U.S. Education and Workforce Development Group. The Center uses multidisciplinary approaches to address critical issues in education, health, and youth development. To achieve its goals, the center provides technical assistance to strengthen schools, school districts, and community-based organizations. It conducts evaluations of school and community programs while striving to provide the skills and impetus for practitioners to undertake ongoing assessment and improvement. The Center also manages large-scale initiatives to strengthen practitioner networks and accelerate systems change. Lastly, the Center uses the knowledge gained from its work to advocate for effective policies and practices and disseminate information through publications, presentations, and on the World Wide Web. Over the past 30 years, the Center for School and Community Services has worked on over 145 projects in urban, suburban, and rural areas across the country. The Center belongs to AED’s U.S. Education and Workforce Development Group.

In 2005, the Educational Equity Center at AED (EEC) was formed. The Center is an outgrowth of Educational Equity Concepts, a national nonprofit organization with a 22-year history of addressing educational excellence for all children regardless of gender, race/ethnicity, disability, or level of family income. EEC’s goal is to ensure that equity is a key focus within national reform efforts to ensure equality of opportunity on in schools and after school settings, starting in early childhood.

AED is headquartered in Washington, DC, and has offices in 167 countries and cities around the world and throughout the United States. The Center for School and Community Services is mainly located in AED’s office in New York City, with some staff in the Washington, D.C. office and throughout the country. For more information about the Center’s work, go to the Center’s website at www.aed.org/scs or contact Patrick Montesano or Alexandra Weinbaum, co-directors, at 212-243-1110, or e-mail sweinbau@aed.org or pmontesa@aed.org.

Principal Offices
1825 Connecticut Avenue
Washington DC 20009-5721
Tel: 202-884-8000
Fax: 202-884-8400
www.aed.org

100 Fifth Avenue
New York, NY 10011
Tel: 212-243-1110
Fax: 212-627-0407
www.aed.org/scs