

**2012 Program Self-Assessment
English Language Education Program
Belmont Public Schools
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Program Background and Description:

Currently, the Belmont Public Schools serve 142 English Language Learners [ELL]. 106 are classified as Limited English Proficient [LEP], meaning they cannot access the curriculum in English without support, and 36 are Formerly Limited English Proficient [FLEP] students who were released from the English Language Education [ELE] program but who continue to be monitored by ELE staff for two years. Our goal for these students has been and continues to be to include them in regular education classrooms with support from ELE teachers and tutors at each school.

Our Families

Because of Belmont's location, this community welcomes a number of families for whom English is not their first language. During the 2011-12 school year, over 13% of Belmont students reported a home language other than English. At our most linguistically diverse school, the Butler, 30.2% of students speak a first language other than English. Butler students come from 25 countries and speak 38 different languages at home. In the district as a whole, Chinese and Korean are the most common first languages spoken by ELL students.

Many international families make their home in Belmont and carry out graduate studies or teach on sabbatical at area universities, most often Harvard and MIT. The community also attracts families who are interested in opening businesses or who work for international corporations. Because Crown Princess Masako of Japan is a graduate of Belmont High School and Harvard University (where her father was a visiting professor), many Japanese families choose Belmont as their home. We also host even larger communities of Korean and Chinese families, and have begun to attract families from Nepal as well.

Many of the families of English Language Learners do not remain in Belmont. They return to their country of origin at the conclusion of their sabbaticals at local universities or when their business is concluded. The implication of this practice for the Belmont Public Schools is that we deal with a fairly transient ELL population. In fact, 61% of our ELL students this year were in their first or second year in the United States, a much greater proportion than at nearby districts such as Lexington, Arlington, or Newton (all with percentages in the mid-thirties). Such students are often referred to as "newcomers" in the field and present with additional needs for instruction and support. Depending on past educational experience, they may be unfamiliar with the most basic routines of school. Many of our older ELL students, however, have in fact studied English in their home countries and arrive with some proficiency in the language.

Families of ELL students in Belmont have very high expectations for their students. They want to make the most of their opportunity to learn a new language and

experience a new culture. They also want their students to receive a rigorous curriculum in every content area and have access to challenging courses at the high school level. Many high school students plan to attend college here. Princess Masako, who was president of the National Honor Society before graduating from Belmont High School in 1981, is one of our most famous graduates, but many others have done what she did—acquire an excellent education in the Belmont schools before continuing on to college in the United States.

Our Schools

Belmont has four elementary schools. While English language learners are registered in every school, the Wellington School and the Butler School have proportionally the largest populations of English language learners. At the elementary level, students are placed in Sheltered English Immersion (SEI) classrooms with peers who are native speakers. ELL teachers or tutors work with students individually or in small groups to foster the development of reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills. Students work outside of the classroom with an ELL teacher or tutor, but the majority of the school day is spent in an SEI classroom.

The Chenery Middle School serves students in grades 5-8 and has between 20 and 30 English language learners annually; Belmont High School contains grades 9-12 and serves a similar number of ELL students. English language learners are placed in SEI classrooms with their English-speaking peers. ELL teachers or tutors assist students both in the content classroom and individually or in small groups away from the regular classroom. In addition, the ELE department offers Transitional English classes to lower-proficiency students in the high school, and will do so at the Chenery next fall. In this class, students focus on the skills needed to build proficiency in reading, writing, listening, and speaking in an academic setting. Students can transition to an SEI English language arts class at any point in the year.

Strengths of the Program:

Student Performance

When Belmont's ELE staff were asked to reflect upon the strengths of the program, the first indicator they identified was student performance. Belmont is proud of its students' successes, and our ELE students are successful by many measures: progress on the Massachusetts English Proficiency Assessment [MEPA], MCAS scores, college admissions, and even formal recognition in the arts.

Our ELL students perform well on MCAS despite their lack of proficiency in English, though there is a gap between their scores and those of their native-speaking peers. Last year, the Composite Performance Index [CPI] for ELL students on the English language arts MCAS was 88.7, as compared to 95.8 for FLEP students and 96.5 for non-ELE students. Seventy-one percent of ELL students scored proficient or advanced, a considerable increase from the year before. In mathematics, the CPI for ELL students was 83.6, compared to 91.7 for FLEP students and 92.4 for non-ELE students. Fifty-nine percent scored proficient or advanced, a decrease from the year before. In both cases, the changes seen in the ELL subgroup from 2010 to 2011 mirror the direction of

changes in the aggregate scores for math and ELA, a reflection of how well ELL students are integrated into mainstream instruction.

Belmont ELL students also demonstrate their success through steady improvement on MEPA. Belmont has made Annual Measurable Achievement Objectives (similar to making AYP) every year for which reports are available. Most of our students score in Levels 3 and 4 (scoring high Level 4 and Level 5 being indicators of proficiency). Though only 48% of students scored proficient on MEPA last year, reflecting the general level of student proficiency in the program, 73% made progress.

To give these numbers some context: the state recently published rankings of districts by size and ELL performance. In the moderate-incidence group, Belmont outshone many other districts in the category according to 2011 MCAS and MEPA scores. According to two different measures of ELL performance on the ELA MCAS (CPI and Number of Students Proficient/Advanced), we were topped by only one district out of 116 in the moderate category. On math, eight or fewer districts outperformed us, and on the percent of students making progress on MEPA, we were 27th out of 116. These numbers are a reflection of our success both in developing student proficiency in English and in delivering to them a high-quality, rigorous education across the curriculum. Belmont ELL students are succeeding in the classroom.

Belmont ELL students are also succeeding beyond the classroom. During the last three years, all graduating ELL and FLEP students have gone on to attend college. This year a partial list of schools our seniors are planning to attend includes Boston University, the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, Mary Washington College, and the engineering program at the University of Illinois Urbana/Champaign. Over the past five years, ELL and FLEP students have been accepted at MIT, Stanford, Tufts, Brandeis, and John Hopkins, among others. Students in the ELE program have also been recognized in and outside of the school for their excellence in music, economics, math, and the arts over the past few years. Over the past three years, five ELL and FLEP students were inducted into the National Honors Society at Belmont, following in the footsteps of Crown Princess Masako.

Professional Development

Through the hard work of our middle and high school ELE teachers, we have been able to offer a great deal of professional development in the field of English language education to all faculty in the Belmont Public Schools. Since 2004, the state has expected all teachers of ELLs to work their way through a series of state-designed trainings called the Category trainings, which educate teachers in how to offer Sheltered English Immersion in the content area to their ELL students. Our two ELE teachers, who became trainers themselves, have held countless workshops in the Categories over the years and the Belmont faculty is comparably well-trained thanks largely to their efforts. In 2011, 62% of the entire teaching staff had completed at least one Category training, and 53 staff members were considered particularly well-qualified to work with ELLs, having completed two of Categories 1, 2, or 4 (Category 3 is less substantive).

Though our intention was to continue a comprehensive effort to train all Belmont teaching staff in the four Categories, the RETELL initiative and the state's new intention to require all core academic teachers to obtain an ELL endorsement have caused Belmont, along with the rest of Massachusetts, to discontinue Category trainings. Our

current plan is to continue offering our teachers professional development in English language education through EDCO courses and the non-Category professional development provided by our two ELE teachers. As a medium-incidence, high-performing district, we will likely not have access to the ELL endorsement course next year, though we hope to learn soon when our teachers will be able to take the course and become even more proficient in offering Sheltered English Immersion in the content areas.

Integration in the Community

We are proud of how well our students have integrated into their school communities, despite cultural differences and a lack of proficiency in English. ELE staff are attentive to the importance of social development and construct opportunities, such as Lunch Bunches and ice cream socials, for students to interact with native-speaking peers in a social setting. It's common to see ELL students speaking in English even with their peers who speak the same first language. Some of our older students volunteer as conversation partners in after-school and summer-school programs for the younger ELLs. The ELE program is also attentive to the need to help students adjust to life in America. Our middle school and high school ELE teachers take their students on field trips to cultural attractions, whether the Peabody Museum for the Asian exhibits or apple-picking in the fall, to learn more about the breadth and diversity of American culture. Teachers incorporate lessons on social customs and holidays into the curriculum.

Staff

We are most fortunate in having attracted and retained very talented ELE teachers and tutors at the Belmont Public Schools. We were able to fund a half-time ELE teacher at the high school starting in the 2010-11 school year, promoting a tutor who had worked in the district as a certified English teacher and an ELE tutor since 2002. She is currently finishing her Ph.D. in Language Education at Boston University and brings a wealth of knowledge to her position. She provides frequent professional development in English language education and development for staff, teaching a graduate course for faculty last year on language acquisition. At the middle school, our full-time ELE teacher, who holds several leadership positions within ELE professional organizations, has been in the district since 2003. She is a DESE-certified trainer for all four categories and runs many workshops for us and for EDCO, besides the study group in language and culture she offers at the district each year. At the elementary, we have four tutors, two of whom have been here for over fourteen years. Our newest addition is an ELL certified teacher who works half-time at the Butler School and has written a newcomer curriculum for grades K-4. She also designed and runs our ELL elementary summer camp.

We are also fortunate in having supportive and well-trained faculty and administrators who take responsibility for all our ELL and FLEP students. Classroom teachers are dedicated to all their students, and take the responsibility to provide equal access to the curriculum very seriously. They are strong advocates for the ELLs in their rooms. The principals of each of the six schools are as well. They oversee student registration for FLNE families and consult with a placement team to determine if the student is eligible for ELE services. That placement team, consisting of guidance and ELE staff, carries out testing and a review of other assessment data to decide on

placement and services to meet the learning needs of the student. In addition to the principals, the ELL director also monitors provision of services to ELE students. She organizes policy and procedure materials, collects and analyzes assessment data on students, and ensures that records of all student testing and progress are maintained. The director locates resources for staff and students and oversees the ELE curriculum. She oversees the professional development program in this area and supports the work of our teachers. Most importantly, she advocates for the program and for its students.

Challenges

Finances

Funding continues to be a challenge. In the 2010 fiscal year, per pupil expenditures in Belmont were nearly \$1500 below the state average, and the situation has not improved. In the past two years we have worked with significant reductions to the operating budget, narrowly missing a large reduction in force last year. Despite cuts in other departments, the district has increased both tutor and teacher FTEs in the ELE program in order to meet growing student needs. However, we have not been able to keep pace. Our priorities are clear, and additional resources are needed to achieve them.

Time

It is difficult if not impossible to both provide students with the recommended number of hours of English language development curriculum while still giving them access to a high-quality education in all other content areas within the constraints of the 6 or 6 ½ hour school day. If students are pulled out of class to receive additional hours of English language instruction, they are missing instruction in other areas. We have not been able to find a satisfactory solution to this problem which both fulfills the state's recommendations for time spent with an ELE teacher as well as time spent meeting state standards in the other curricular areas. Instead, we have focused on measuring student outcomes to make sure that we are indeed supporting both their English language education and their education in the content areas.

Uncertainty

This has been a time of much change for professionals in the field of education, and ELE teachers and directors face additional changes besides those occasioned by the adoption of new state frameworks and a new educator evaluation system. In response to directives and guidance from the federal government, Massachusetts has changed the requirements for Sheltered English Immersion professional development, as described above (RETELL initiative). Teachers will now have to earn an ELL endorsement on any core academic teaching license. The uncertainty about how teachers will earn this endorsement and when Belmont teachers will have access to the endorsement course makes it difficult to plan for the future. Belmont benefitted from having two very skilled Category trainers on staff, who offered SEI trainings to our teachers every year. We will continue to offer other trainings on language acquisition and culturally-sensitive education, but our plans for SEI training must be put on hold.

In addition to the RETELL initiative, the state has also adopted a new set of standards for English language instruction, World-Class Design and Assessment [WIDA], to replace the English Language Proficiency Benchmarks and Outcomes [ELPBO] and a new standardized test of English language proficiency, ACCESS, to replace MEPA. There have been a few offerings of professional development around these new standards, of which we have taken full advantage, but more information about how to use these standards in the classroom is still needed. The standards cover the language of instruction, of English, of math, of science, and of social studies, and it will take a great deal of work to rewrite our curricula in alignment with these new standards. Complicating the process is that, in contrast to the more gradual transition timetable adopted for MCAS and the new state frameworks, we are expected to adopt the new standards in September and test our students on them in January with ACCESS.

The new ACCESS test is a rigorous test which focuses on vocabulary in the content area. We do not yet know how the state will compare student scores and calculate student progress from one test (MEPA) to the next (ACCESS), but feedback from trainers experienced in ACCESS indicates that students will likely score lower on ACCESS than on MEPA. A level 3 or even 4 on MEPA is similar to a level 2 on ACCESS. This muddies our picture of student progress from 2011 to 2012, and also may indicate that, according to state guidelines, students will stay in the ELE program longer before being deemed proficient according to ACCESS. It is too soon to tell—which makes it hard to anticipate staffing needs for 2012-13, both for administering the test (which is more time-consuming than MEPA) and for teaching students.

Concluding Comments

Teachers, aides, tutors, school administrators, and the Superintendent for the Belmont Public Schools are proud of the diversity present in our district. We believe that we are working hard to meet the needs of English language learners and that our students have shown considerable success. We do, however, want to see improvement. Seventy-three percent of students making progress in developing English language proficiency last year compares well with other districts—but still leaves 27% of students languishing. Our goal is to improve that percentage to 90% and beyond over time. We also hope that all our core academic teachers will be able to earn their ELL endorsements quickly and improve their delivery of SEI instruction accordingly. Finally, we also believe that the adoption of WIDA and ACCESS is a change for the better, ultimately, and want to successfully implement the curricular and programmatic changes needed to support student improvement under the new standards. All of these goals are manageable if we have the needed resources. It is our conclusion that additional funding and staffing will be necessary in order for us to meet the increased expectations in English language education as well as the increasing needs of our students.