

# EXECUTIVE Summary

2009-10 School Year

## Ensuring Literacy For All

This report presents the current progress of the Ensuring Literacy for All (ELFA) Initiative implemented beginning in the 2004-2005 school year. Extensive research was conducted to ascertain the degree to which ELFA is aiding students in reaching higher levels of literacy in Louisiana. Both quantitative and qualitative measures were used. Student performance data from local and statewide assessments, careful analysis of teacher mobility information, survey instruments of regional coordinators, literacy coaches, and intervention specialists, focus group interviews with LDE staff and regional coordinators, and site observations of a small sample of schools were conducted to gain a clear picture of the successes and challenges of the initiative in its sixth full year of implementation.

The good news is ELFA schools are doing better than non-ELFA schools over the course of the last six years. The program is working. The ELFA initiative does make a difference in serving disadvantaged populations. Students of minority and poverty that typically have not attained high levels of achievement are increasing their rate of improvement more in ELFA schools than in non-ELFA schools. Students in ELFA (while serving a more at-risk population) are coming closer to meeting these important goals of reading success. It is clear that the effectiveness is increasing the longer each cohort participates in the ELFA initiative.

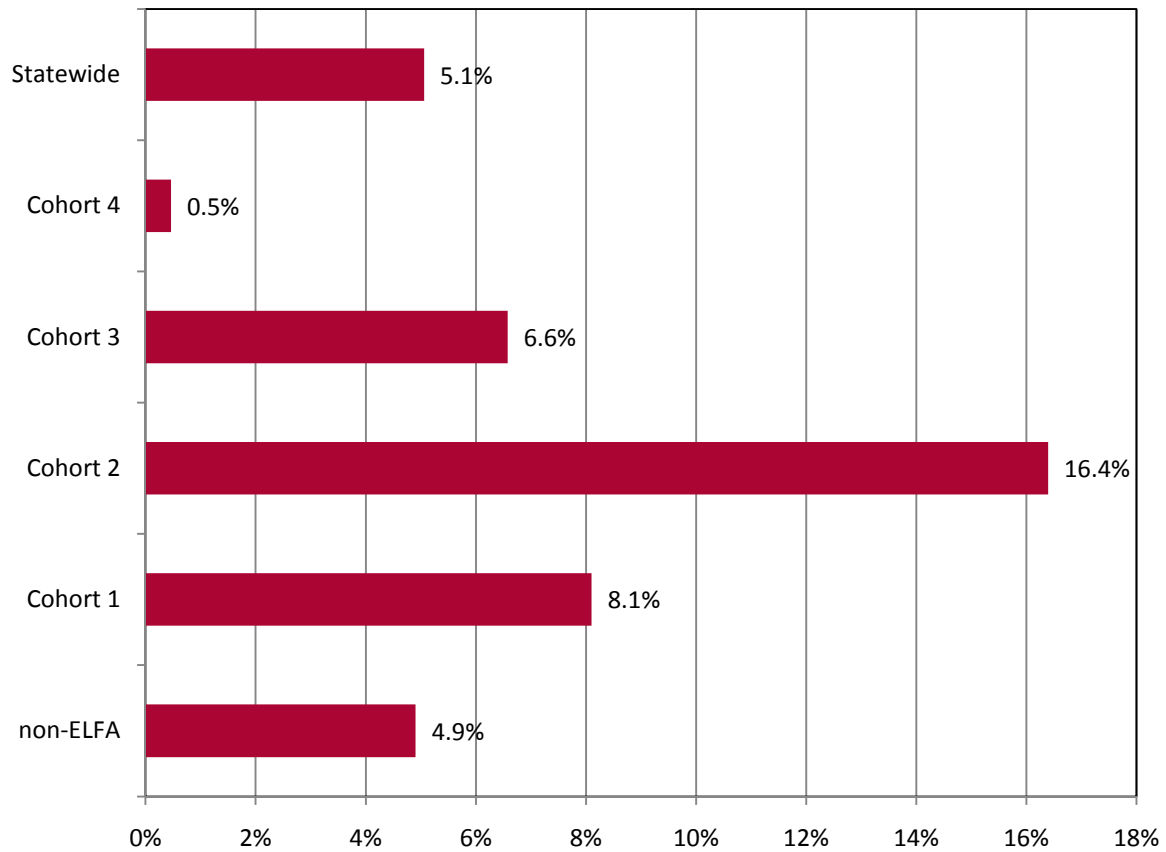
The following table displays the iLEAP results for ELFA and non-ELFA schools over the last five years, since the iLEAP replaced LDE's use of the Iowa Test of Basic Skills. Clearly, there have been substantial increases in the percent of students scoring basic or above across the state. The first two cohorts of ELFA schools display a substantially greater increase in the percentages of students that are scoring basic or above. Cohort 1 increased over 8% and Cohort 2 increased over 16%. While the results from the two most recent cohorts are not as large over the whole time period, there is substantial growth in each over the previous year; Cohort 3 increased 3.5% and Cohort 2 increased 2.9%, while non-ELFA schools improved 2.4%.

While the data available is insufficient to definitively explain the different levels of growth over this time period, there are a few possible explanations that may help in understanding. First, cohorts 1 and 2 were very low performing when they entered the program; at the time of their entry, there was a strong requirement that participating schools be low-performing and high-poverty. The low performance of these schools provides greater opportunity for improvement. Cohorts 1 and 2 began with 50% and

39% of students scoring basic or above on the ELA portion of the 3rd grade iLEAP, compared to cohorts 3 and 4 where 59% and 67% of the students were basic or above. Also, the earlier cohorts have had more time to show improvement. Finally, while literacy is generally a focus of all schools for the early elementary grades, it is not known how aggressively non-ELFA schools were working to improve literacy.

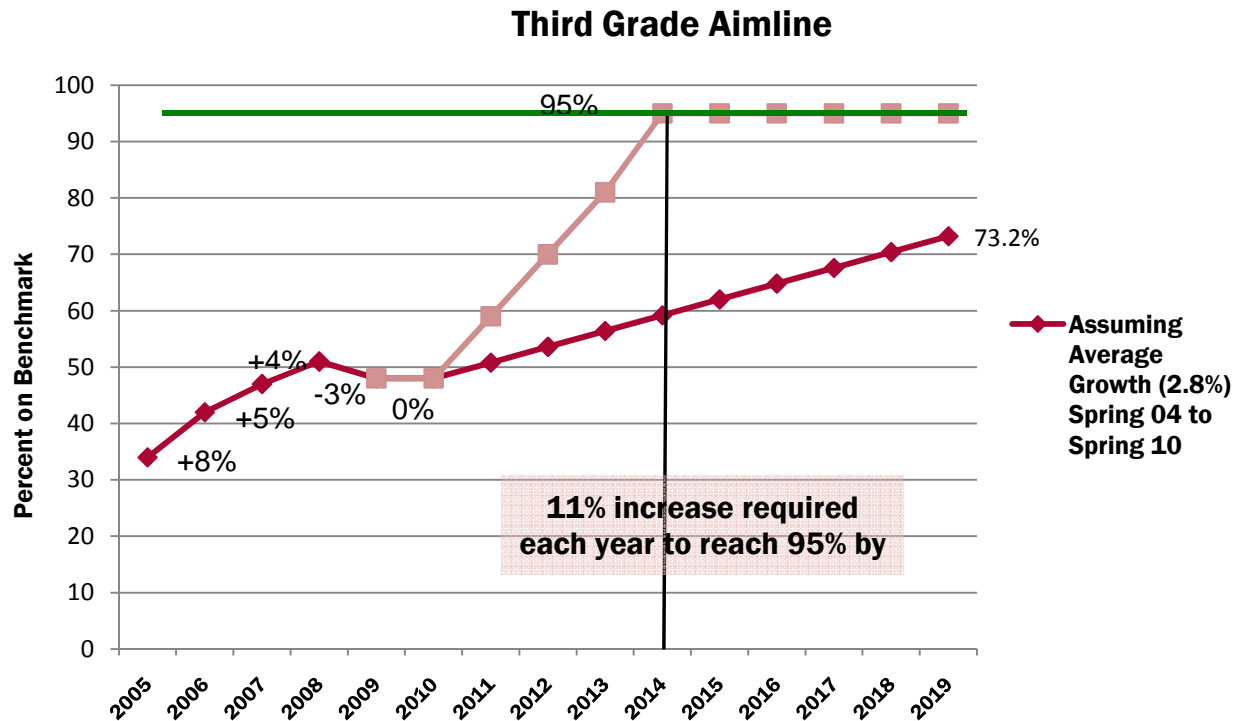
Figure 1: Performance Gains by ELFA School Cohorts compared to gains statewide of on the English Language Arts portion of the 3rd Grade iLEAP

### Gains since 2006



There are several factors that are barriers to accelerating or increasing progress. External factors such as teacher mobility, funding limitations and school-level behaviors adversely affect student literacy learning opportunities. These reduce the likelihood of accelerating the improvement and achieving the LDE stated goal of having 95% of all students reading at grade level by third grade by 2014.

Figure 2: A comparison of growth in the percentage of students scoring in the benchmark range of DIBELS to the average growth since the start of ELFA in relation to the goal of having 95% of students on benchmark by the end of 3rd grade



Trend analysis indicates growth has flattened. We have three consecutive years of data that reveal the current implementation levels have reached their potential. Two factors may positively influence further growth. The first is refining the implementation of the programs. Qualitative data reveal substantial room for improvement in how literacy instruction is provided. It is largely within the control of school sites to influence the quality of classroom instruction. The Louisiana Coaching Cycle model is recognized as a good program for professional development, but budget constraints at the regional coordinator level inhibit their ability to continue to provide needed levels of support. The other, external factor that could help increase student achievement is a reduction in teacher and principal mobility. Teacher mobility is very high. Given that over 44% of teachers are moving into new positions, it is remarkable that student achievement improves at all.

Teacher mobility levels are very high, and they are higher in low performing schools. Teacher turnover creates an ongoing need for basic professional development. While those teachers who remain in a position benefit from advanced training to refine their professional practice, teachers who are new to a school or position create a burden for trainers and coaches to provide them foundational training others have had. School mobility rates ranged from a high of about 86% to a low of about 10.5%. Overall Faculty Mobility Rate for 2008-09 to 2009-10 was 55.48% who remained in a prior

position and 44.52% moved from the position they had occupied the prior year. Another reflection of the data reveals that 35% of the schools had at least 50% staff movers and only 15% kept 75% or more of their staff in place.

## **Conclusions**

Across regions in the state, and also across all job categories, teachers want additional assistance and training in how to best work with struggling readers to build comprehension and writing skills. They understand the need to differentiate instruction, but thus far do not seem to feel confident that they can effectively do so.

The one factor that was not part of the original research design (and thus not studied specifically) is actual real-time literacy instruction opportunities for students. Whether a feature of the culture of a school or district or statewide mandates for accountability and testing that require resources and attention that detract from the literacy focus, student reading in schools seems to be losing the struggle to be the number one priority. Unless and until that issue is addressed, it will be particularly challenging to implement the ELFA initiative with sufficient fidelity to ensure that all children will be literate by third grade.

ELFA has made a difference; however there are internal and external factors that are barriers to further improvement and growth. Directly addressing both the internal and external factors would potentially enable the program to achieve greater success.

## **Recommendations**

1. Since ELFA represents the best chance to increase students' literacy achievement currently available in Louisiana, it would be wise to use all available resources to perpetuate the initiative.
2. The Louisiana Literacy Coaching (LLC) model is a proven method for high-level and appropriately-differentiated staff development. As such it provides the greatest promise for providing teachers with professional learning opportunities in differentiation of instruction, writing, comprehension, and struggling readers.
3. Continue to refine the LLC model to focus on implementation fidelity issues at sites. Improved execution of the tiered support system, effective core instruction, and use of best practice teaching strategies will likely allow ELFA schools to move students beyond current achievement levels.
4. It would be advisable to require site leadership to participate in and support implementation of an LLC model program targeted at school structure, leadership, collaboration, and professional learning communities that make literacy instruction a priority. Additional data summits and principal-specific training activities will assist school sites in increasing literacy.
5. Given the challenges to ongoing implementation that teacher mobility present, consider a program to provide incentives to increase teacher stability. One such program that was effective in California that might prove effective is "APLE"—

**Assumption Program for Loans of Education—which pays student loan balances for teachers after completion of their first year of service in a challenged school, and continues to make payments for up to four years. Other possible alternatives might be to provide teachers who remain in these schools additional teaching materials and increased training opportunities.**