

# ENACTING COMMON CORE INSTRUCTION: A Comparative Study of the Use of LDC Literacy Tools in Three Sites

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## Enacting Common Core Instruction: A Comparative Study of the Use of LDC Literacy Tools in Three Sites

As of the writing of this report, the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) are being implemented in 45 states and the District of Columbia. Approaches to implementing the standards, however, are highly varied. For the past 3 years, RFA has been tracking how one approach to implementing the literacy standards—the Literacy Design Collaborative (LDC)—has played out in diverse settings. In this document, we show how three of these settings—a medium-size urban/suburban district, a large urban district, and a regional educational service agency—used LDC to help teachers align instruction with the CCSS. Our research shows that there are some best practices that are shared across all sites. Yet we also find that adapting to unique contextual factors is an integral part of successful implementation; and that there remain opportunities for further consideration and development at all sites.

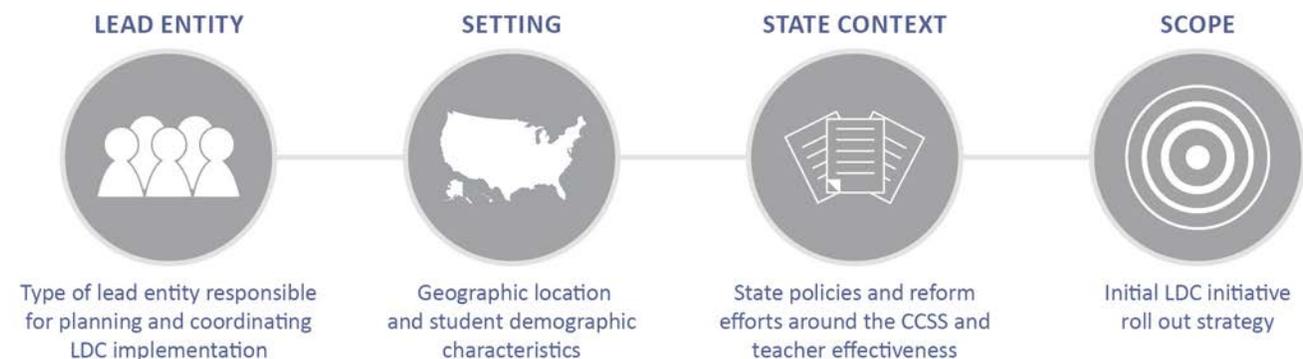
The cross-case study report is intended as a resource that can assist policymakers and education leaders in understanding the variation of best practices in LDC implementation, and also as a “road map” for sites that are considering adopting LDC tools.

### Cross-Case Study Background

In 2010, Research for Action (RFA) began a comprehensive, multi-year study of the scale-up and sustainability of the LDC Framework tools. In 2012-13, RFA conducted case study research on the implementation of LDC in three separate locations across the country: Kenton County, Kentucky; Hillsborough County, Florida; and Lancaster-Lebanon Intermediate Unit 13, Pennsylvania.

The three case studies illustrate how LDC tools were adopted in different settings and contexts, and which approaches and supports contributed to the successful adoption and use of the tools. RFA chose case study sites that experienced initial success in implementing the tools, but which differed on four dimensions (see Figure 1):

Figure 1. Dimensions of Case Study Sites



Each case study illustrates how the tools were implemented and scaled under a specific set of circumstances likely to be present in many other sites. As such, they are intended to inform further exploration and discussion on how to effectively roll out the LDC tools across a wide range of districts and schools. Table 1 provides an overview of the three case study sites on which this report is based. More information about our larger study, as well as links to the individual case studies upon which this document is based, can be found on page 41.

Table 1. Case Study Sites

Case Study Site	Kenton County, KY School District	Hillsborough County Public Schools, FL	PA Lancaster-Lebanon IU 13
District Size/Type	Single, mid-size, rural and suburban district	Single, large, urban and suburban district	22 small and mid-size, urban, rural and suburban districts
Lead Implementation Entity	District	District	ESA
Tools Implemented	LDC and MDC	LDC	LDC
Publication Date	December 2012	May 2013	January 2014

**About This Case Study**

This report provides cross-case analyses that identify the following:

- **Common Best Practices**, which are implementation strategies that are shared across all three sites;
- **Distinct Approaches**, which are implementation strategies that, while successful, differ across the sites; and,
- **Areas of Opportunity**, which are works in progress in at least one of the three sites that highlight ways to strengthen LDC implementation.

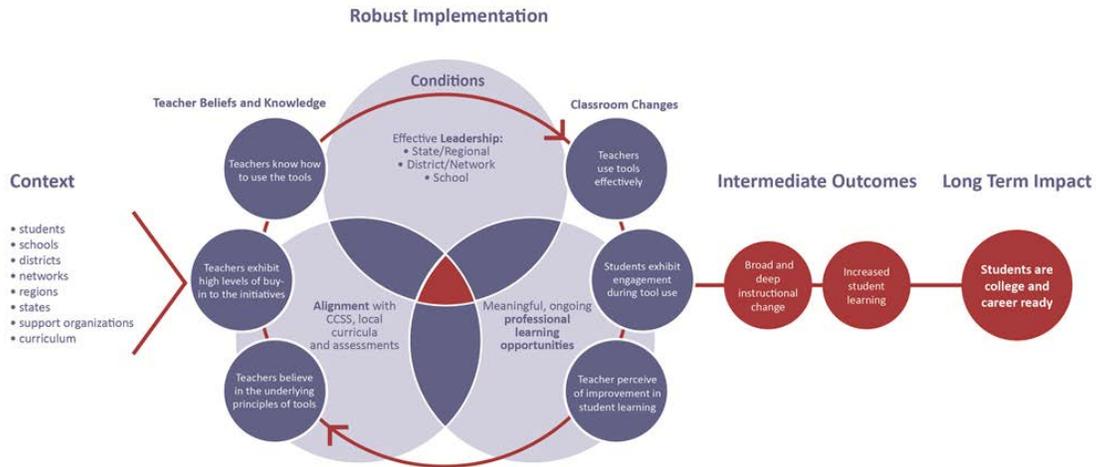
These analyses are grounded in the LDC Theory of Action, which contains three related conditions necessary for effective scale-up of LDC:<sup>1</sup>

- Effective **leadership** at multiple levels;
- **Alignment** with the CCSS, curricula, and state assessments; and,
- Meaningful and ongoing **professional learning opportunities (PLOs)**.

These conditions are depicted as three overlapping circles in the Theory of Action for the overall initiative (see Figure 2).

<sup>1</sup> More details on RFA’s Theory of Action for the LDC/MDC Initiatives can be found in our Year Two report on the adoption and implementation of the tools at [www.researchforaction.org](http://www.researchforaction.org).

Figure 2. Theory of Action



This report is organized around the three conditions outlined in the Theory of Action, and also identifies several implementation factors that cut across the three conditions.

### Summary of Key Findings

Table 2 provides a snapshot of Common Best Practices, Distinct Approaches, and Areas of Opportunity in the three Conditions for Success as depicted in the Theory of Action above. The remainder of this document discusses each in more detail.

Table 2. Key Findings across Conditions

<b>C</b>	<b>Common Best Practices:</b> Successful strategies common to all three sites
<b>D</b>	<b>Distinct Approaches:</b> Successful strategies that differed from site to site
<b>A</b>	<b>Areas of Opportunity:</b> Works in progress highlighted by one or more of the sites
<b>Leadership</b>	
<b>C</b>	<b>Identifying Strong LDC “Implementation Leaders:”</b> Implementation Leaders in all three sites embodied strong leadership characteristics that enabled them to gain the trust of district and school staff and guide the initiative through its initial roll-out phase.
<b>C</b>	<b>Building School-Level Leadership Capacity:</b> Implementation Leaders invested time and resources to engage and cultivate leaders that could help spread and scale up the use of LDC in the classroom.
<b>D</b>	<b>Selecting and Releasing Responsibility to Teacher Leaders:</b> Although all three sites made it priority to train and support teachers as leaders in LDC implementation, they went about this task in different ways.
<b>D</b>	<b>Creating Processes around LDC Module Development:</b> Implementation Leaders in the three case study sites worked hard to ensure that modules met high standards in terms of quality, relevance, clarity, and rigor, yet they approached the module development process in different ways.
<b>D</b>	<b>Leveraging Strategic Partnerships:</b> Districts and other entities may opt to develop LDC content on their own, or they may opt to work with a number of partnering organizations to assist with LDC implementation on the ground.
<b>A</b>	<b>Promoting Strong Leadership at both District and School Levels:</b> The unique structure of IU 13 further highlights the importance of strong LDC leadership at both the district and school levels.

## Alignment

- C** **Communicating Alignment between LDC and the CCSS:** All three sites worked hard to illustrate the alignment to the CCSS.
- C** **Aligning to District Curriculum:** Implementation Leaders worked to ensure that LDC fit well with existing and future district curriculum materials.
- D** **Aligning LDC to Teacher Evaluation Tools:** The three states in which the case studies took place were in various stages of adopting new teacher effectiveness systems during the period of the LDC grants, which led case study sites to adopt diverse approaches to aligning LDC to teacher evaluation tools.
- A** **Providing Support for Teachers around Curriculum Alignment:** For many teachers—especially science and social studies teachers—the LDC initiative represents an enormous shift in curricula and instruction, both in terms of structure (i.e., using literacy modules) and the expected rigor of instruction (i.e., teaching high-level critical thinking).
- A** **Accounting for the Shifting Nature of State Assessments:** Some teachers found it difficult to see the connections between LDC and their state assessments given that their state’s tests were not yet fully aligned to the CCSS.

## Professional Learning Opportunities

- C** **Pursuing Collaborative Approaches to Professional Development:** Implementation Leaders in all three case study sites actively encouraged collaboration because they believed that collaboration would enhance the quality and rigor of LDC implementation, as well as help teachers understand the value of the LDC initiative as a whole.
- D** **Engaging Instructional Support Teachers as Resources:** Given the differences in their overall size and resources, the three sites engaged additional school-level educators to differing degrees.
- D** **Using Student Work:** Although all three sites examined student work as means to revise and refine LDC implementation, they did so with different end goals in mind.
- A** **Facilitating More Effective Collaboration:** PLOs must be more effective in ensuring that LDC teachers can effectively collaborate across grade levels, content areas, schools, and, in some cases, even within grade-level and content-area teams.
- A** **Facilitating LDC Online Learning Environments:** Survey data suggest that LDC websites were not frequently accessed by teachers.
- A** **Differentiating LDC Tools for Diverse Student Needs:** Although the LDC tools are intended for use with all students at all ability levels, teachers across the three districts requested specific training on differentiating the tools for specific types of student learners.

## Cross-Condition Strategies

- C** **Creating Intentional Feedback Loops:** All three case study sites approached the process of gathering feedback in a serious, concerted way, using a range of strategies to gather information that they would later use to improve upon their implementation strategies.
- D** **Piloting LDC Tools:** All three sites piloted the LDC tools and implementation processes with a small cohort of schools/teachers before they began scaling the initiative. But within the three cases, Implementation Leaders chose different piloting strategies in the first year.
- A** **Planning for Sustainability:** Although Implementation Leaders in all three sites were keenly aware of the limited timeline of the Gates Foundation funding and were able to articulate the ways in which they planned to scale up the depth and breadth of implementation by the end of the funding period, most were still working out long-term plans for ongoing financial support for LDC.

## Organization of the Report

The cross-case report is organized into four sections:

1. Background information on the three sites.
2. Findings related to Leadership, Alignment, and PLOs, detailing Common Best Practices, Distinct Approaches to Successful Implementation, and Areas of Opportunity for the adoption and scale-up of LDC.
3. Discussion of cross-condition findings.
4. Conclusion and essential questions for policymakers and practitioners.

## The Three Case Study Sites in Focus

RFA conducted case study research in Kenton County, Kentucky; Hillsborough, Florida; and the IU13 Educational Service Agency in Pennsylvania. The three case study sites varied along four key dimensions:

- **Lead Entity:** Type of lead entity responsible for planning and coordinating LDC implementation;
- **Setting:** Geographic location and student demographic characteristics;
- **State Context:** State policies and reform efforts around the CCSS and teacher effectiveness; and,
- **Scope:** Initial LDC initiative roll out strategy.

**A Note about Lead Entities.** Differences in Lead Entity emerged as a particularly important contextual dimension in the LDC implementation process. In Kenton County and Hillsborough County, the school district was the Lead Entity, and district administrators served as Implementation Leaders who were responsible for determining the scope of LDC implementation, recruiting school administrators and teachers for leadership roles, and developing guidelines for module creation and professional development. IU 13, however, is a very different type of Lead Entity. As an Educational Service Agency, IU 13 provides technical assistance to 22 districts in central Pennsylvania, 16 of which implemented the LDC tools. Implementation Leaders in IU 13 provided guidance and recruited district and school leaders to assist in implementation, but they also had to allow for variation in LDC implementation among districts due to their responsibility to serve all districts in their region, and their lack of direct district governance and oversight. Some districts took an active role in administering and scaling up LDC tools, whereas others served more as facilitators of the IU's implementation efforts.

Given these differences, it is helpful to keep in mind that “Implementation Leader” refers to district staff in Kenton County and Hillsborough County, but it refers to IU 13 staff for that site.

The variation in the sites along the three remaining dimensions – setting, state context, and scope – can be depicted along a set of spectrums, as shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Comparing Case Study Sites

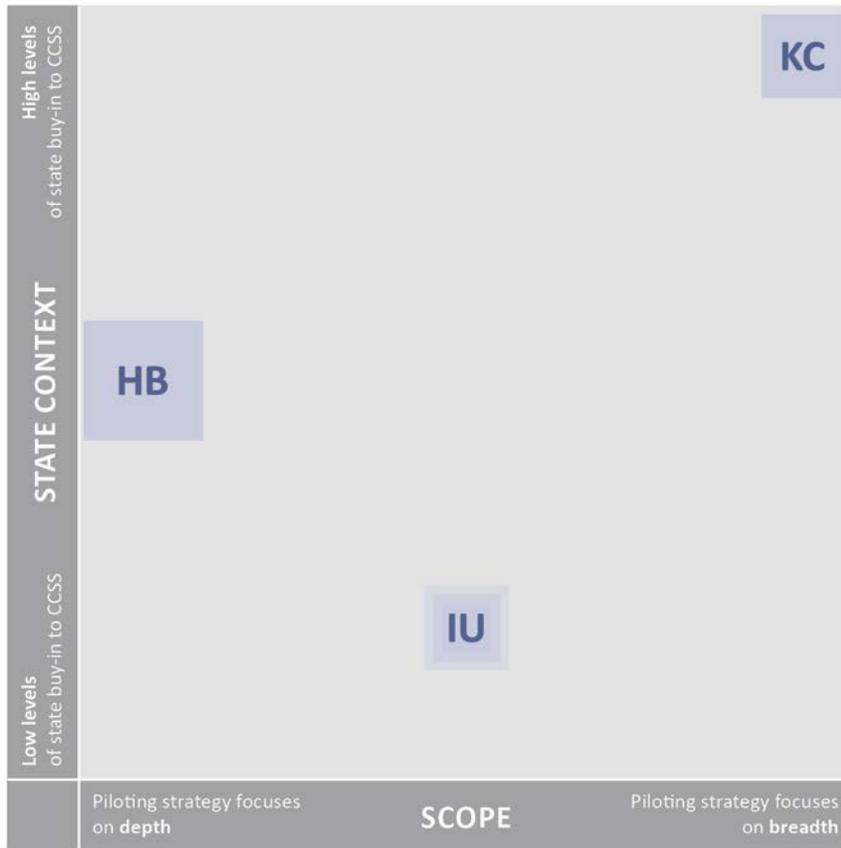


Figure 3 depicts that Hillsborough County, the largest of the three sites, piloted for depth and had moderate levels of buy-in to the CCSS at the state level. Because IU 13 is comprised of many districts within a defined region, its size is a small to medium depending on the district. IU 13 piloted the LDC tools using a combination of breadth and depth, but also contended with the state’s low levels of buy-in for the CCSS. Finally, Kenton County is a medium size district that piloted the LDC tools for breadth, while the state showed high levels of support for the CCSS.”

Table 3 provides an overview of the three case study sites, including basic descriptive and demographic information.

Table 3. Overview of Demographic Characteristics and Student Performance by District

 <b>Number of Schools in District</b>		<b>Number of Students in District</b>	
KC	18 schools	KC	14,253 students
HB	267 schools	HB	200,074 students
IU	Range: 3-20 schools	IU	Range: 1,360 - 11,158 students

Student Demographics in District					
	White	Hispanic	Black	Asian	Other
KC	89.2%	3.6%	2.2%	1.4%	3.7%
HB	38.9%	30.5%	21.5%	3.6%	5.5%
IU	Range: 15.4% - 92.1%	Range: 3.8% - 58.3%	Range: 0.9% - 18.5%	Range: 0.6% - 8.3%	Range: 1% - 6%

 <b>Free and Reduced Price Lunch Eligible</b>	
KC	37.9%
HB	59.28%
IU	Range: 18.6% - 82.4%

 <b>English Language Learner Population</b>	
KC	2.5%
HB	11.9%
IU	Range: 0.8% - 17%

 <b>Special Education Population</b>	
KC	13%
HB	14%
IU	Range: 11.1% - 21%

 <b>High School Graduation Rate</b>	
KC	84.1%
HB	73.4%
IU	Range: 68.7% - 96%

 <b>Student Attendance Rate</b>	
KC	96%
HB	94.1%
IU	Range: 93% - 97%

 <b>Per Pupil Spending</b>	
KC	\$8,457
HB	\$6,252
IU	Range: \$10,683 - \$16,746

 <b>Proficiency Scores</b>	
KC	Based on the 2012-13 district grading results, Kenton was classified as a "Proficient/Progressing" district. <sup>2</sup>
HB	Based on the 2012-13 district grading results, Hillsborough received a "C". <sup>3</sup>
IU	Based on the 2012-13 state assessment results, 13 out of 16 districts scored at or above the state average in both math and reading. <sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Kenton ranked in the 84th percentile in Kentucky, and therefore has met the Annual Measurable Objective (AMO) goal for all student groups and each subgroup. <http://applications.education.ky.gov/src/>

<sup>3</sup> 55% of the students in Hillsborough scored satisfactory or higher in reading, math, writing, and science, all of which factor into the Annual Measurable Objectives (AMO) that make up the district grade. <http://schoolgrades.fldoe.org/>

<sup>4</sup> Districts report their results on the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) grades 3-8, Keystone Exams grade 11, and the Pennsylvania Alternate System of Assessment (PASA) grades 3-8 and 11. The statewide test scores show that overall 73% of students are proficient or advanced in math and 70% in reading.

As shown in Table 3, Hillsborough County is by far the largest and most diverse of the three sites. Kenton County, though much smaller than Hillsborough County, is still larger than any district in the IU 13 region, which is due to the fact that IU 13 is comprised of mostly small, rural and suburban districts. Although it is difficult to directly compare the sites to one another given the variation within IU 13's 16 districts that participate in LDC, a few similarities and discrepancies are worthy of mention:

- **Special education percentages and student attendance rates are roughly the same** across the sites;
- **High school graduation rates vary** across the sites with Hillsborough County having the lowest graduation rate (73.4%), Kenton County having a slightly higher rate (84.1%), and IU 13 ranging from 68.7% in one district to 96% in another.
- **Per-pupil spending varies** among the three sites. In all the districts that IU 13 serves, per-pupil spending is higher (range: \$10,683 - \$16,746) than in either Kenton County (\$8,457) or Hillsborough County (\$6,252).

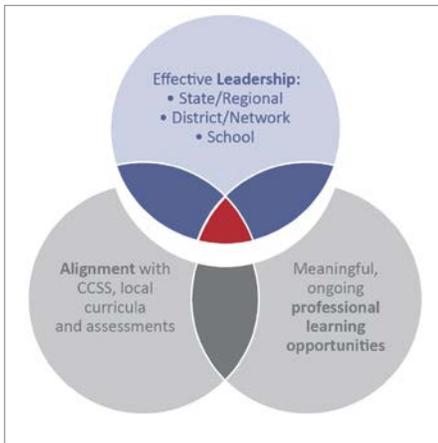
## Findings from Three Case Study Sites

Even within vastly different implementation contexts, there are common strategies and approaches to LDC implementation that are markers of robust implementation of LDC tools. These “Common Best Practices” are strategies that were employed in each of the three case study sites and were central to each site’s overall LDC implementation approach.

By the same token, context does indeed matter. Our findings suggest that implementing sites also adopted “Distinct Approaches” that reflected their specific educational environments, and that took into account both their unique strengths and their recognized shortcomings.

Finally, Implementation Leaders across the sites readily admitted that there were opportunities for improved implementation of the LDC tools. Describing these “Areas of Opportunity” in detail makes practitioners and policymakers aware of potential challenges during the LDC implementation process.

The remainder of this section details the Common Best Practices, Distinct Approaches, and Areas of Opportunity in each of the three conditions for LDC implementation success: Leadership, Alignment, and Professional Learning Opportunities (PLOs).



## Implementation Condition: Leadership

The LDC initiative requires leadership at many different levels. Taking note of the Common Best Practices, Distinct Approaches, and Areas of Opportunity in leadership can help new and existing LDC leaders alike capitalize on the most effective strategies for implementing the LDC initiative and avoid potential pitfalls in implementation.

Table 4 summarizes our major findings in this area:

Table 4. Implementation Condition 1: Leadership

**C** Common Best Practices    **D** Distinct Approaches    **A** Areas of Opportunity

Implementation Condition 1: Leadership		
<b>C</b> Identifying Strong LDC “Implementation Leaders”	<b>D</b> Providing Structure around Teacher Leadership Responsibilities	<b>A</b> Promoting Strong Leadership at both District and School Levels
<b>C</b> Building School-Level Leadership Capacity	<b>D</b> Creating Processes around LDC Module Development	
	<b>D</b> Leveraging Strategic Partnerships	

Findings from across the three sites highlight the need for strong, effective leaders at the school, district, and regional levels. Implementation Leaders, who are the primary individuals responsible for LDC initiative roll-out, play a particularly critical role in guiding and championing the LDC initiative. Implementation Leaders across the three sites shared a number of key responsibilities:

- Coordinating the scale-up of LDC;
- Supporting leadership structures at the school level;
- Providing resources and training for district staff, principals, and teachers; and,
- Helping teachers and district/school administrators understand how the initiative fits into an overall plan for educational improvement.

Also important are school-level personnel, including principals and teacher leaders, who were involved at various points during the LDC roll-out to ensure effective utilization of LDC as a cross-content, cross-grade, and cross-school literacy tool.

Survey findings from teachers across all three sites highlight the important role that school leaders play in guiding the initiative and ensuring effective implementation: Over three-fourths of responding teachers (n=518) said that administrators had encouraged them to participate in the initiative.

Below are the Common Best Practices, Distinct Approaches, and Areas of Opportunity in LDC Leadership.

## Common Best Practices in LDC Leadership

There are two Common Best Practices in the area of Leadership. The first strategy involves identifying individuals with strong leadership characteristics to serve as “Implementation Leaders” for the LDC initiative across a district or region. The second strategy is focused on cultivating school-level personnel for leadership roles that assist with LDC implementation.

### Leadership Strategy 1

#### Common Best Practice: Identifying Strong LDC “Implementation Leaders”

Implementation Leaders, whether they are housed at district or educational service agencies, are the individuals who shoulder most of the responsibilities for guiding successful LDC implementation. In Kenton County, the Implementation Leadership team was composed of three project leaders who were also part of a Secondary Curriculum and Instruction group in the district. In Hillsborough County, two central office leaders – both literacy leaders – centrally directed and managed LDC implementation. In IU 13, two individuals well known throughout the state for their high-quality professional development expertise (one a curriculum and instruction specialist, and the other a literacy consultant) were in charge of LDC roll-out and scale-up in the 15 districts.

Implementation Leaders in all three sites embodied the following leadership characteristics that enabled them to gain the trust of district and school staff and guide the initiative through its initial roll-out phase:

**Implementation Leaders had content expertise.**

Implementation Leaders in all sites had expertise in literacy, as well as experience in delivering high-quality, meaningful professional development and technical assistance to school administrators and teachers. In Kenton County, for example, teachers said that they viewed Implementation Leaders as “coaches” and “super colleagues.”

Findings from the teacher survey in Kenton County supported this finding: Over four-fifths (83%) of Kenton County teacher respondents (n=60) agreed that their district administrator firmly understand the LDC framework.

And, in IU 13, a teacher described the Implementation Leaders at the IU as “fantastic,” and a literacy coach in a participating LDC district described them as experienced in “providing training, communication, providing resources, answering questions, [and] providing feedback.”

**Implementation Leaders spent time building relationships with teachers.**

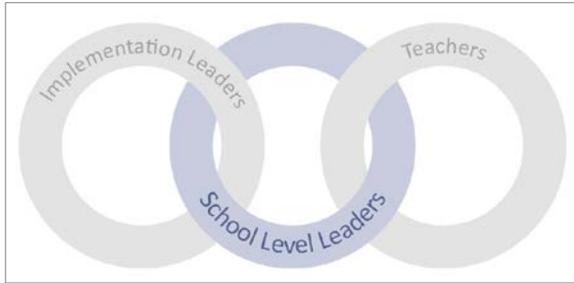
Implementation Leaders developed strong relationships with teachers, which enabled them to guide efforts for initial implementation and ongoing technical assistance. As part of these efforts, Implementation Leaders were widely accessible to teachers and other school staff. Implementation Leaders in IU 13, for example, gave out their contact information so that they could be reached via cell phone, e-mail, Twitter, or Skype. A teacher in Kenton County said of one Implementation Leader: “I call the guy’s cell phone all the time any time I have any question. He always answers me on the first round, no matter what he’s doing, poor guy. He can be in the middle of supper, and he’ll still answer me and address all my questions.”

## Leadership Strategy 2

### Common Best Practice: Building School-Level Leadership Capacity

One of the key responsibilities of Implementation Leaders is to identify, train, and support leaders at the school level. While the three sites built school-level leadership capacity in slightly different ways, they all invested time and resources to engage and cultivate leaders that could help spread and scale up the use of LDC in the classroom in the following ways:

#### Implementation Leaders positioned school leaders as essential connectors within LDC.



Implementation Leaders in IU 13 focused their Leadership capacity-building efforts on principals and instructional support teachers, including librarians, technology specialists, and reading coaches. In Hillsborough County, Implementation Leaders delegated responsibility to both principals and to reading coaches. Hillsborough County teachers reported that reading coaches in particular played an important role as “LDC connectors,” which meant that they served

as communicators between teachers and the district office. Implementation Leaders in Kenton County supported principals by convening monthly principal sessions where they emphasized LDC tool use and alignment to the CCSS. In Kenton County, one principal explained the importance of knowing and messaging the value of LDC tools to teachers: “What the principal has to do is [let] everybody know this is what I believe in and this is what I’m always going to believe in, and if you’re not doing these things, we’re going to have a problem.”

As this principal notes, teachers need to see that their school-level leaders believe in the value of the LDC tools if they are going to prioritize implementation of the modules in their classrooms.

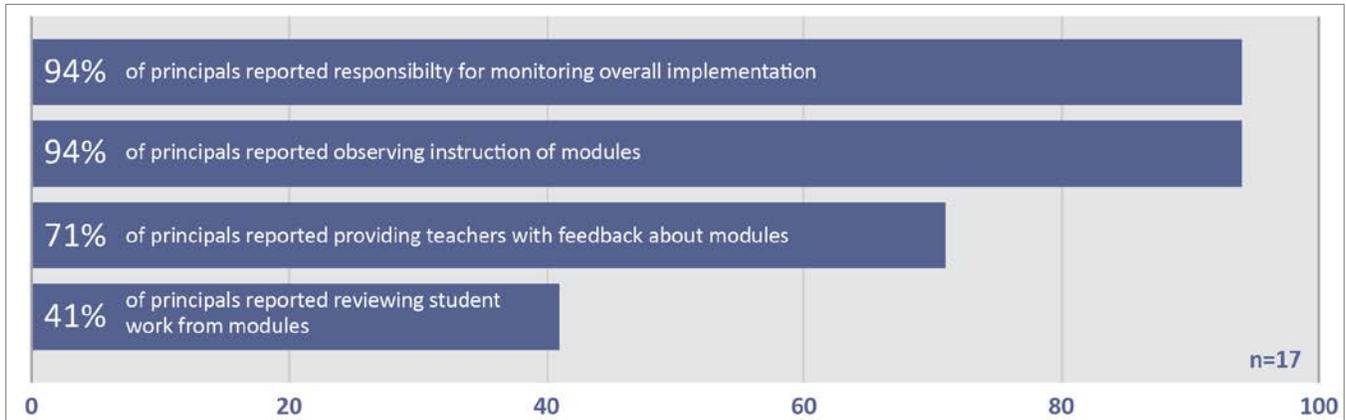
#### Provide school leaders with *clear expectations* around their roles.

As part of their effort to build leadership capacity at the school level, Implementation Leaders established explicit expectations for principals and LDC launch team members and then gradually gave them a larger role in the LDC implementation process. By the second or third year of implementation, school-level leaders across the three sites were taking responsibility for activities such as facilitating module creation, conducting professional development and training, and encouraging activities to foster greater collaboration.

IU 13 provides a useful example, as Implementation Leaders at this site created a Letter of Understanding (LoU) that explained in detail the various responsibilities of principals.

On surveys, IU 13 principals report being actively involved in leading the implementation of LDC at their schools. Figure 4 shows the percentages of IU-13 principal respondents (N=17) who indicated that they were responsible for carrying out specific LDC leadership tasks.

Figure 4. Percentage of IU 13 Principals Engaged in School-level LDC Leadership Tasks



As seen in Figure 4, most IU-13 principal respondents reported that they were responsible for monitoring overall implementation (94%) and observing instruction of modules (94%). In addition, over 70% of principal respondents indicated that providing feedback to teachers on module instruction was part of their role. A relatively smaller percentage of principal respondents (41%) also took responsibility for reviewing student work.

One administrator at the IU (who was not an Implementation Leader) explained that the IU invested time, effort, and energy into school-level leadership – including principals, librarians, and coaches. She stated, “Our philosophy is always to try to focus on the people closest to the work...You need all the levels, but we generally try to put a huge emphasis on where the work is going to be.” For their part, principals reported that they found the LoU to be very helpful and referenced it on a regular basis to keep track of their LDC implementation responsibilities.

### Distinct Approaches to LDC Leadership

Sites also employed a set of customized approaches to implementation that were adapted to the unique contextual factors in each site. We did not analyze whether one approach is “better” than another. Rather, they are presented here to describe how approaches to LDC implementation in the area of leadership varied by context.

#### Leadership Strategy 3

##### Distinct Approach: Selecting and Releasing Responsibility to Teacher Leaders

An essential feature of LDC is that it allows teachers to play a central role in the development of modules and training of colleagues.

The teacher survey data identify the various responsibilities that teacher leaders had in LDC implementation. Over half of all teacher survey respondents across the three sites (60%, N=579) indicated that their involvement in LDC included one or more of the following teacher leadership activities:

- Developing modules;
- Revising modules developed by others;
- Coaching others on how to use the modules; and/ or,

- Presenting at an LDC professional development session.

Although all three sites made it priority to train and support teachers as leaders in LDC implementation, they went about this task in different ways.

**KC** | carefully cultivated a small group of teacher leaders from the start.

In Kenton County, the district initially worked closely with a small group of teacher leaders, and gradually increased the formality of structures around their leadership roles.

- In Year One, the district worked with a small group of 11 teachers across various schools in the district and tasked them with developing modules and implementing them in their classrooms;
- In Year Two, the district retained seven of the original 11 for leadership roles, and had them develop modules and assist in LDC implementation for the larger pool of implementing LDC teachers; and,
- In Year Three, the district increased the pool of teacher leaders, and expanded their roles and responsibilities to include analyzing student work, leading post-module reflection sessions, and attending external events such as conferences on the LDC initiative.

**HB** | slowly delegated responsibility to teacher leaders.

In Hillsborough County, Implementation Leaders did not explicitly cultivate teachers as leaders right away. Instead, they described their approach as one of “gradual release,” in which they slowly delegated responsibility to a larger pool of teachers over time. Explained one Implementation Leader:

*A significant outcome of our ‘gradual release’ process of professional development and curricular support is that once the classroom practitioner has taught an exemplar module...many teachers want to be involved in the review and revision of existing modules and, eventually, the creation of new modules.*

As teachers increasingly embraced learning through peer networks, the district was able to engage additional numbers of teacher leaders, as well as expand their responsibilities.

**IU** | focused teacher leadership efforts using the “launch team” structure.

IU 13 Implementation Leaders used Letters of Understanding to require schools in their first year of LDC implementation to create LDC “launch teams,” setting specific goals for groups of teachers around professional development and module creation. Each team was also responsible for planning for the expansion of LDC. This formal structure, however, did not persist beyond the launch year.

Given its role as a regional entity without formal governance oversight, IU 13 did not manage the deployment of teacher leaders across districts, and therefore could not strictly guide the leadership process in each individual school. Instead, IU 13 Implementation Leaders encouraged teacher leadership by identifying and spotlighting teacher leaders at regional, state, and national levels as exemplars in LDC implementation so teachers could learn from the model work of their colleagues. One literacy coach said that IU 13 Implementation Leaders “did a good job of finding people’s strengths and then giving them opportunities based on those strengths.”

In short, all three sites utilized LDC as a vehicle for promoting teacher leadership, and highly valued the input from teacher leaders.

#### **Leadership Strategy 4**

##### **Distinct Approach: Creating Processes around LDC Module Development**

Developing a strategy around the creation of LDC modules is a key task in the first year of implementation. Implementation Leaders in the three case study sites worked hard to ensure that modules met high standards in terms of quality, relevance, clarity, and rigor, yet they approached the module development process in different ways.

**KC** | delegated development responsibilities immediately.

Kenton County made a concerted effort to cultivate teacher leaders from the start of the LDC grant, so it naturally followed that Implementation Leaders delegated the responsibility for module development and creation to teachers early in Year One. This approach led to a somewhat decentralized module development process. Specifically, Implementation Leaders conducted summer professional development sessions in which they taught teacher leaders to create, review, and refine modules, and then integrate those modules into the school's curricula. Implementation Leaders gradually standardized the modules so that, by Year Three, teachers were using mostly common modules within their schools.

**HB** | centrally controlled module creation in Year One.

In contrast, Hillsborough County Public Schools employed a more standardized process for module development in the first year of implementation. Implementation Leaders in Hillsborough County maintained strong central control over the process in Year One, with district leaders and reading coaches partnering to develop the initial modules and then delivering those modules to the teachers for classroom integration. An Implementation Leader explained the district's approach:

*This centrally-managed approach keeps us moving along in a consistent manner. I hear teachers from other districts talk about developing modules individually. But we have a different philosophy...We do everything with all kinds of pre-established infrastructure and support.*

As this Implementation Leader affirms, the centrally-managed module development approach in Hillsborough County was consistent with the district's philosophy. Another likely contributing factor was the district's size – with nine schools participating in LDC in Year One alone, it was more efficient to coordinate the module development process centrally before delegating that responsibility to teachers, which it eventually began to do in Year Two of the grant.

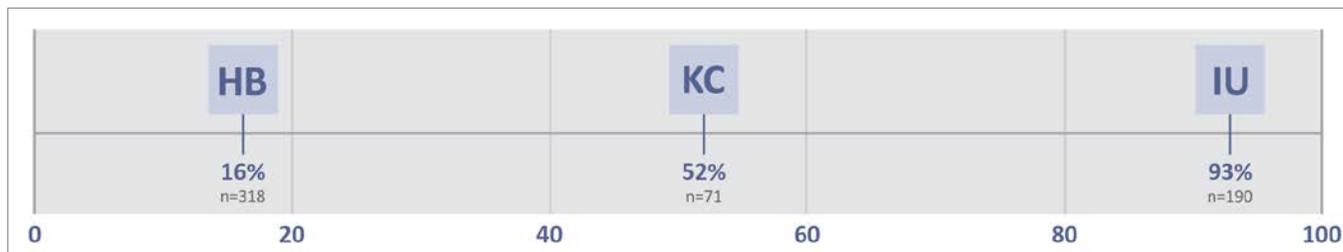
**IU** | consistently involved a large number of teachers in module development.

In IU 13, teachers were members of “launch teams” and were asked to develop two modules each for implementation in their classroom over the course of the year. As the LDC initiative unfolded and the IU responded to changes in state policies, Implementation Leaders asked teachers new to LDC – including teachers in new LDC subject areas – to develop modules that were aligned to the state standards and more fully integrated into course content. The level of standardization in modules, however, varied from district to district. Although Implementation Leaders provided guidance about

curriculum alignment, it was not the IU's role to dictate the specific curriculum-aligned modules that would fit for each individual district. For a more detailed explanation of district curriculum alignment efforts in IU 13, see Alignment Strategy 2 on page 17.

Figure 5 depicts the findings from the teacher survey, in which teachers were asked whether they developed at least one module during the 2012-13 school year.

Figure 5. Percentage of Teacher Survey Respondents Reporting Involvement in Module Development



The wide range of responses reflects different approaches to module development across the sites. Hillsborough County teachers were less involved in module development for two reasons: 1) The district's centrally managed approach meant that small groups of teachers, coaches and Implementation Leaders created modules and then gradually shared them with other teachers; and 2) All LDC implementing educators continued to use and refine those existing modules over time, which meant that there was no need to create additional modules for certain courses. In Kenton County, teachers continued to be involved in module creation, but by Year Three the percentage of involved teachers was tapering off because many teachers were already using and revising common modules. In IU 13, where most participating districts first joined the initiative in Year 2, a large number of teachers participated in initial LDC training in Year 3, which included the commitment to create two modules. In addition, some experienced LDC teachers chose to create new modules due to major curriculum revisions, the introduction of new end of course exams, and the realization that their curriculum had some misalignment with state standards. Also, some experienced LDC teachers mentored new teachers and co-developed a module with them.

### Leadership Strategy 5

#### Distinct Approach: Leveraging Strategic Partnerships

Although the LDC initiative is designed as a cohesive and aligned approach to enhancing literacy instruction in schools, it is not a set of pre-packaged tools. Districts and other entities may opt to develop LDC content – including professional development, modules, and rubrics for grading student work – on their own. Additionally, Lead Entities may also opt to work with a number of partnering organizations that receive financial support from the Gates Foundation to assist with LDC implementation on the ground. In many cases, districts reaped the benefits of tools, processes and/or professional development offered by partners, for example the use of Metametrics' Module Creator to develop modules. In other cases, Lead Entities worked with Gates partners focused on their region or state and/or developed their own relationships with partnering organizations.

## KC | HB | leveraged internal expertise.

Kenton County and Hillsborough County did not actively seek out external partnerships to support their approach to LDC implementation.

The teacher survey data reflect this focus on internal expertise: Only 5% of Kenton teacher survey respondents who had participated in formal PD during the 2012-13 school year (n=39) reported that they had participated in professional development provided by an external partner, and this number was even lower in Hillsborough County (3%, n=238).

In Kenton County, the district worked with an LDC trainer and consultant in the first year of implementation, but did not reach out beyond this individual to form external partnerships. Instead, Implementation Leaders reported that the district's strong staff capacity for LDC implementation allowed them to leverage their internal expertise. In Hillsborough County, Implementation Leaders had relationships with a few outside service providers (Metametrics and the National Paideia Center), but these relationships did not shape the district's approach to LDC implementation.

## IU | proactively sought out external partnerships.

Of the three case study sites, IU 13 had the most proactive approach to leveraging strategic partnerships. Implementation Leaders in IU 13 actively sought out a broad array of LDC partners, and these partnerships helped them to both build capacity and leverage existing resources within the IU. The partners also benefitted from the relationship, as IU 13 leaders gave them LDC materials and resources, recruited study participants for partner-led projects, and delivered technical assistance where needed. Specifically, they worked with:

- *Eduplanet21* to coordinate support for online professional development;
- *Metametrics* to provide training for teachers on the use of tools for module development;
- *SCALE* to provide training for teachers on scoring LDC student work;
- *National Paideia Center* to provide training on LDC tool use and instructional techniques;
- *The Teaching Channel* to give them access to local teachers to use their instructional resources for literacy strategies; and,
- *SREB* to provide technical assistance to SREB on the overall implementation of LDC.

An Implementation Leader in IU 13 explained why she made it a priority to link with services and resources from external partners and stakeholders: "It's my intentional strategy to be the partner that everyone wants to partner with...We are trading with everybody we can get and trying to bring outside expertise knowing that capacity builds capacity. It's an investment."

IU 13's proactive approach is also due in part to the nature of its organizational mission, which is to provide regional support by connecting districts to resources and providing technical assistance where necessary.

## Areas of Opportunity in LDC Leadership

Although sites employed a range of effective implementation strategies as noted above, there remain Areas of Opportunity for improved approaches to LDC implementation. Ensuring that strong

leadership exists at both the district and school levels, and that the lines of communication between the district and school buildings remain open, is critical to the long-term success of LDC.

#### **Area of Opportunity: Promoting Strong Leadership at both District and School Levels**

Implementation Leaders in Kenton County and Hillsborough County operated out of the district offices and communicated regularly with school-level leaders. These strong relationships with clearly defined roles helped to bolster the two districts' overarching LDC implementation plans because they allowed communication and feedback to flow freely between the district offices and the school buildings that were implementing LDC.

The unique structure of IU 13, however, further highlights the importance of supporting both sets of relationships. Although Implementation Leaders in IU 13 tasked principals with strong roles and provided them with a "principals' guide" to implementing LDC, administrators in the district offices had less-defined roles. Some district administrators took on strong leadership roles, perhaps due to their personal or professional interest in the LDC initiative. However, other district administrators in the IU 13 network served mainly as the pass-through for LDC grant funds while delegating responsibility for implementation to the Implementation Leaders, principals, and teacher leaders.

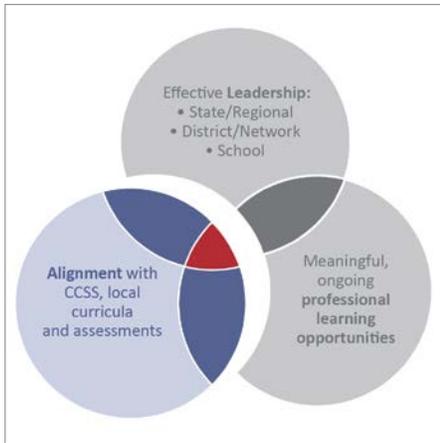
One district superintendent who was actively involved in LDC implementation explained the need for a strong district role:

*My belief is that the central office has to be on board...[because we have to] build a culture in the district of what [the LDC Implementation Leaders'] expectations are. If the high school is doing something that has an impact on other [schools], then the central office needs to be on board.*

As this superintendent in an IU 13 district explains, district administrators should work closely with building principals to help ensure that the LDC initiative is implemented consistently across all LDC implementing schools.

The experience of IU 13 also highlights the need for district and building-level leaders to collaborate on developing plans for sustainability. Although Implementation Leaders in IU 13 were clear that district leaders were responsible for developing sustainability plans for LDC beyond the term of the grant, administrators who were more highly involved in the day-to-day administration of the initiative were better situated to work with principals to develop comprehensive sustainability plans.

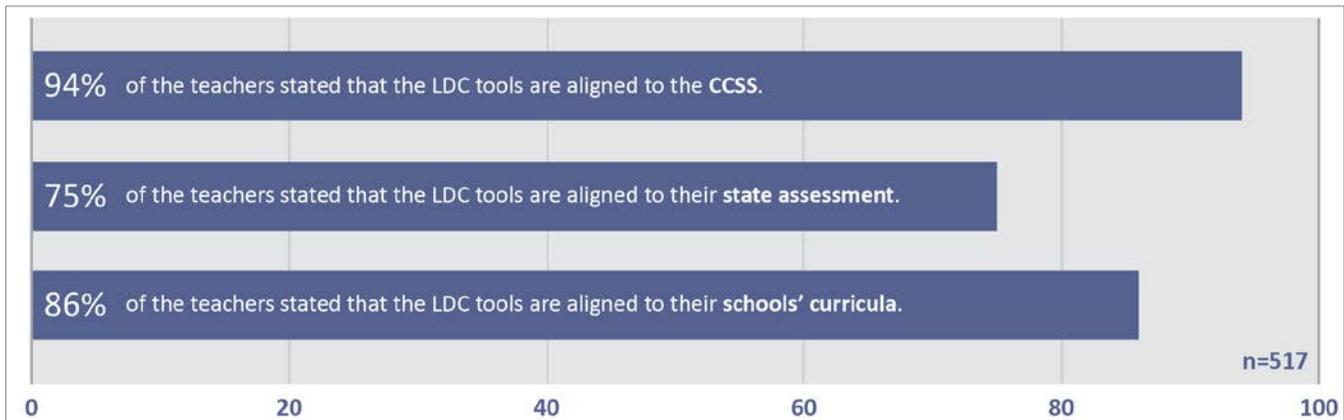
## Implementation Condition: Alignment



Alignment refers to the LDC initiative’s alignment to the CCSS, as well as alignment to state and local efforts to improve the quality of instruction and student achievement. Across the three sites, study participants repeatedly asserted the importance of aligning the LDC tools to state, regional, and district policies, and then communicating that alignment to teachers, school leaders, and other educators. Alignment reduces the barriers that can be erected when educators believe that the LDC tools are competing with other, contradictory standards.

As Figure 6 shows, across all three sites, strong majorities of responding teachers (N=517) agreed that the LDC tools are aligned to the CCSS (94%), their state assessment (75%), and their schools’ curricula (86%). These findings are consistent with the findings in each of the individual case study sites.

Figure 6. Teachers’ Perceptions of Tool Alignment



A summary of our cross-site analysis of Alignment can be seen in Table 5:

Table 5. Cross-Site Analysis of Alignment

**C** Common Best Practices    **D** Distinct Approaches    **A** Areas of Opportunity

Implementation Condition 2: Alignment		
<b>C</b> Communicating Alignment between LDC and the CCSS	<b>D</b> Aligning LDC to Teacher Evaluation Tools	<b>A</b> Providing Support for Teachers around Curriculum Alignment
<b>C</b> Aligning to District Curriculum		<b>A</b> Accounting for the Shifting Nature of State Assessments

Next, we describe in more detail how the sites created an environment of strong and explicit alignment between the LDC tools, local curricula, and state/national standards.

## Common Best Practices in Alignment

All three sites worked to align LDC with both the CCSS and local curricula; and to communicate and illustrate this alignment clearly.

### Alignment Strategy 1

#### Common Best Practice: Communicating Alignment between LDC and the CCSS

The CCSS calls for a major instructional and curricular shift toward skills that will prepare students for college and beyond. The LDC initiative is comprised of instructional and formative assessment tools in literacy designed to help educators in English/language arts, science, and social studies better prepare all students to meet the CCSS.

#### Implementation Leaders successfully conveyed LDC alignment to the CCSS.

A key responsibility of Implementation Leaders is to convey to teachers how the LDC initiative is aligned to the CCSS. Survey and interview analyses tell the same story: all three sites worked hard to illustrate the alignment, and the message is getting through. In Kenton County, Implementation Leaders conducted monthly training sessions for principals and other school leaders to explain the LDC initiative's link to the CCSS. In Hillsborough County, Implementation Leaders intentionally presented LDC alongside the CCSS during district workshops. Said one Implementation Leader, "LDC is becoming a part of the vocabulary in our CCSS work, workshops, and orientations." And in IU 13, Implementation Leaders created a document called "Connecting the Dots" that outlined the link between LDC and the CCSS (as well as links to a number of different state and local initiatives), and used this document in a number of training sessions with principals, teachers, and other educators.

Teachers reported that they perceived the LDC tools to be highly aligned with CCSS:

**Kenton teacher:** *The connection with CCSS is clearer, not just to me, but also to the students. They're seeing the connection. I have my learning targets up and on their study guides. They know the standards that apply to that unit and are able to see that we hit this or that [related to the standards].*

**Hillsborough principal:** *As we're moving to the Common Core, this is going to be part of the common thread. Reading and writing are woven throughout everything now. Looking at the CCSS and what kids are going to have to do, LDC is right on. LDC makes kids articulate not just the answer but how they got there.*

Teacher survey responses suggest that these sentiments are shared by teachers across the three sites: 92% of teacher survey respondents (N=543) agreed that LDC effectively provided a resource to address CCSS. Furthermore, 86% of teacher respondents (N=537) agreed that the LDC framework supported their students in becoming college-ready.

## Alignment Strategy 2

### Common Best Practice: Aligning to District Curriculum

Because the LDC initiative is designed to supplement, not replace, existing curricula, Implementation Leaders worked to ensure that LDC fit well with existing and future district curriculum materials. This type of alignment was important because it helped teachers to understand that the LDC modules, tasks, and trainings were all part of their district's larger goal of increasing the rigor of literacy instruction.

Sites created alignment by using two different strategies:

#### Integrating LDC tools into existing curricula.

Implementation Leaders often worked to align the LDC tools with existing curricula in a variety of subject areas. In Kenton County, Implementation Leaders invested large amounts time and effort into aligning LDC with existing science and social studies curriculum materials, dedicating two individuals to help with this work throughout the three years that we studied LDC implementation. Although these sentiments were not always shared by science and social studies teachers (see the "Area of Opportunity" on providing support for teachers around curriculum alignment on page 25), one Kenton County social studies teacher said, "I feel like [LDC] fits in pretty well with my curriculum."

In Hillsborough County, teachers and coaches said that they worked hard to find modules that would fit well with their existing curricula. Said one Implementation Leader, "We were strategic about picking the content of the modules so that they would fit well in the curriculum. We purposefully designed modules within the [district's curricular] approach and selected content with difficult concepts that naturally fit with LDC modules."

Implementation Leaders in IU 13 faced a unique challenge because each of the districts in which they worked had its own set of curriculum and supplemental materials already in place. To address this challenge, Implementation Leaders made the case in district- and school-level trainings that LDC aligned with some of the specific curricula in the districts where they worked and offered district technical assistance in curriculum/LDC alignment. These connections were also explained in the "Connecting the Dots" document produced by IU 13 Implementation Leaders.

#### Using LDC as a factor when selecting new curricula.

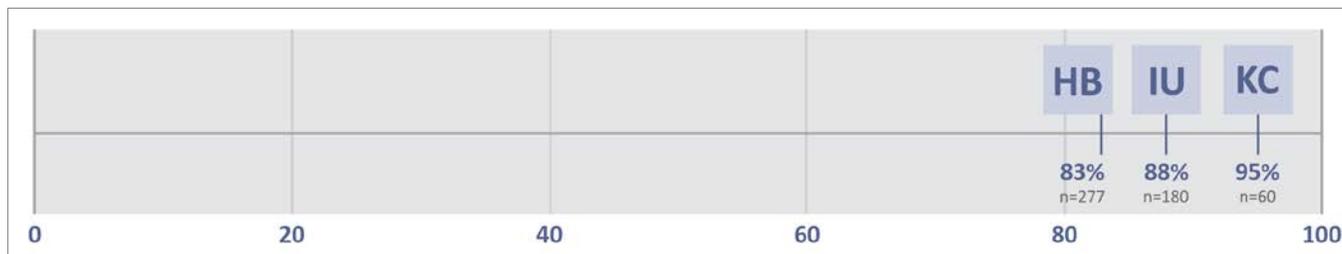
Implementation Leaders reported that they were able to use the LDC frame as a key factor when making decisions around new curriculum materials. For example, in Kenton County, the district began looking for a new English Language Arts (ELA) curriculum soon after it had begun implementation of LDC during Year One. To ensure consistency with LDC and the CCSS, Implementation Leaders met with principals and ELA department heads to discuss their curricular options.

In Hillsborough County, Implementation Leaders took the extra step of designing an entire curriculum around the LDC initiative, creating an all-module curriculum in Year One for their 6th grade advanced reading course. An Implementation Leader described this type of alignment as a "perfect storm" because the implementation of LDC coincided with the district's plan to design a more rigorous curriculum for this course. By Year Three, the district expanded the number of module-based curricula to five courses.

These two ways of aligning LDC to curricula—integrating LDC into existing and new curricula—yielded high levels of perceived alignment to school and district curricula.

Survey responses indicate that a sizable majority of teachers across the three sites (86%, N= 517) agreed that the LDC tools were aligned with their school’s curricula (see Figure 7).

Figure 7. Percentage of Teachers Agreeing that LDC Tools were Aligned with Curricula



Kenton County teachers (95%, n=60) in particular stand out for their very strong agreement that the tools were aligned with the curriculum.

### Distinct Approaches to LDC Alignment

State-level variation in educational reform efforts and political environments is likely to lead to alignment strategies that are customized to some degree. The Distinct Approaches to LDC implementation presented below reflect the fact that the three case study sites are situated in states that are currently in different phases of adopting new ways to measure teacher effectiveness.

#### Alignment Strategy 3

##### Distinct Approach: Aligning LDC to Teacher Evaluation Tools

The three states in which the case studies took place – Kentucky, Florida, and Pennsylvania – were in various stages of adopting new teacher effectiveness systems during the period of the LDC grants. Given these states’ different approaches to reforming their teacher evaluation tools, case study sites adopted diverse approaches to aligning LDC to teacher evaluation tools.

**KC** | continued to align LDC with district teacher evaluation tools.

Beginning in the 2010-2011 school year, Kenton County was selected as one of Kentucky’s 12 “integration districts” to ensure alignment between the LDC tools and the state’s new teacher effectiveness system. This system will be validated through the Gates Foundation’s Measures of Effective Teaching (MET) project and is set to take effect in August 2014. However, the district requested a waiver from the state system soon thereafter due to uncertainty over the degree to which the new state system would align with their own locally-developed teacher effectiveness system, which is based on the Danielson Framework<sup>5</sup> and was developed in collaboration with the teachers’ union.

Because the state has yet to make a decision on the Kenton County’s waiver application, Implementation Leaders reported that they have focused their attention and energy on aligning LDC to their existing system. Said one Implementation Leader, “We’ve done some work to communicate that [LDC] is a rich place for teachers to develop proficiency or better on the [Danielson] rubric.” This

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.danielsongroup.org/userfiles/files/downloads/2013EvaluationInstrument.pdf>

Implementation Leader also noted that the state-developed framework aligned well with the district one, and the district will likely revisit the question of adopting the state teacher evaluation system as that system is more fully implemented in the future.

**HB** | aligned LDC to Florida’s Empowering Effective Teachers (EET) initiative.

Hillsborough County teachers saw a direct connection between the state’s rollout of teacher effectiveness measures and the LDC tools. Florida passed the Student Success Act (Senate Bill 736) in 2011, which mandates clear links between teacher effectiveness and student learning growth as measured by statewide assessments. However, as a recipient of a Gates Foundation grant to develop the Empowering Effective Teachers (EET) initiative, Hillsborough County received an exemption from the statewide requirement. To obtain the exemption, Implementation Leaders were required to explain the relationship between the two sets of tools. Accordingly, Implementation Leaders used multiple teachers’ workshops and other training sessions to illustrate how the LDC tools reinforced the district’s EET efforts.

Teachers reported that they understood this critical connection. Said one middle school teacher, “I saw right off the bat that LDC aligns with our EET rubric.”

**IU** | helped districts prepare for changes to the state system for teacher effectiveness.

The Pennsylvania Department of Education has been working since 2010 to develop an educator effectiveness system. The first of the new field-tested systems, designed for classroom teachers and based on portions of the Danielson Framework, was implemented on July 1, 2013. Implementation Leaders in IU 13 have served as information hubs for teachers looking to understand the ways in which the new system will impact their work, as well as for ways in which the LDC curriculum aligns to the new evaluation system.

Implementation Leaders reported that they have made conscious efforts to convey this information through webinars, professional development trainings, and their “Connecting the Dots” alignment document. Explained one Implementation Leader at the IU: “I try to make as many connections to educator effectiveness as I can during visits. And in every webinar we made some kind of link to teacher effectiveness.”

The differing approaches to alignment in this area illustrate how LDC implementing entities must take into account the unique conditions that shape the policy environment in their state.

### **Areas of Opportunity in LDC Alignment**

Although the three sites worked hard to align LDC to district curricula and state policies, two persistent challenges to alignment remain. The first relates to how implementation entities support teachers – especially teachers who may not readily identify as “literacy teachers” – as they work to integrate LDC into their curriculum and instruction. The second relates to how Implementation Leaders can address areas of poor alignment between LDC and the existing state assessments of student achievement, while acknowledging that the policy environment around state assessments is rapidly changing.

### Area of Opportunity: Providing Support for Teachers around Curriculum Alignment

For many teachers, the LDC initiative represents an enormous shift in instructional approach, both in terms of structure (i.e., using literacy modules) and the expected rigor of instruction (i.e., teaching high-level critical thinking). This is especially true for science and social studies teachers who are expected – perhaps for the first time in their careers – to see themselves as literacy teachers.

Survey data indicate that science and social studies teachers experienced challenges in integrating LDC into their curricula: Although over 90% of science and social studies teacher survey respondents across the three sites (N=284) agreed that LDC encouraged them to teach literacy skills, over half (56%) agreed that they were unsure how best to give feedback to student writing, compared to only 34% of non-science and social studies teachers.

A high school science teacher in Kenton County explained her struggle to effectively implement LDC tools:

*Where does being a science teacher stop and being an English teacher begin? I am not an English teacher. I do not feel qualified to help these students...You don't write argumentative pieces in science; you write lab reports in science. I had to go refresh my own memory. Helping them write this paper took so much time away from my content. I started to panic.*

In response to concerns like the one expressed above, Implementation Leaders in all three sites tried to clearly communicate the overarching value of the LDC tools in preparing students to meet the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century workforce, in which strong literacy skills are imperative. They did so in the following ways:

- **Kenton County:** A former science teacher and a former social studies teacher, both of whom were already working in the district offices, became Implementation Leaders whose main goal was to help science and social studies teachers integrate LDC into their classes.
- **Hillsborough County:** Administrators conveyed the value of the tools to teachers by providing them with common planning time and cross-content meetings to collaborate and share their concerns.
- **IU 13:** Implementation Leaders encouraged an interdisciplinary approach to LDC implementation in Year One by requiring that each school-level “Launch Team” include two English, two social studies, and two science teachers, as well as one instructional support teacher (e.g., librarian, special education teacher, reading coach).

These efforts are evidence that the three sites were aware of the need to gain teacher buy-in to the initiative, and that a concerted effort is necessary to successfully convey the degree to which the LDC tools are aligned with teacher efforts to ensure students' college and career readiness in a variety of subject areas.

### Area of Opportunity: Accounting for the Shifting Nature of State Assessments

Just as the states are in flux with regard to their teacher evaluation systems, they are also transitioning to new assessments of student achievement. Since state assessments greatly influence school improvement efforts, it is important that school-level implementers understand how the LDC initiative fits into statewide efforts to reform the ways in which they measure and report student achievement.

Some teachers reported that they found it difficult to see the connections between LDC and their state assessments given that their state's tests were not yet fully aligned to the CCSS. In Kenton County, for example, teachers expressed concerns that LDC tools were not well aligned to the EOC exam. One Kenton County teacher said,

*[LDC] totally does not fit in with the pressure that I'm under to do that by the end of course exam. I've resigned myself to say it's more important to teach reading and writing than to pass that exam...[because] I think LDC is teaching them the skills they need to go into their college class or job and be able to read and think critically and write coherently.*

#### State Context in Kentucky, Florida, and Pennsylvania

Kentucky, Florida, and Pennsylvania have all received waivers from the Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). Replacing these provisions are requirements that states measure schools' progress toward Annual Measurable Objectives (AMOs) in a number of areas. All three states are looking to align their state tests to the CCSS (although, as mentioned previously, Pennsylvania has retreated somewhat from CCSS alignment to the state tests, and Florida's commitment to CCSS remains uncertain). Moreover, all three states are in the process of implementing end-of-year assessments at the high school level. Kentucky<sup>6</sup> and Florida's<sup>7</sup> EOC exams both went into effect in the 2011-2012 school year, whereas the rollout of Pennsylvania's Keystone Exams<sup>8</sup> began in the 2012-2013 school year.

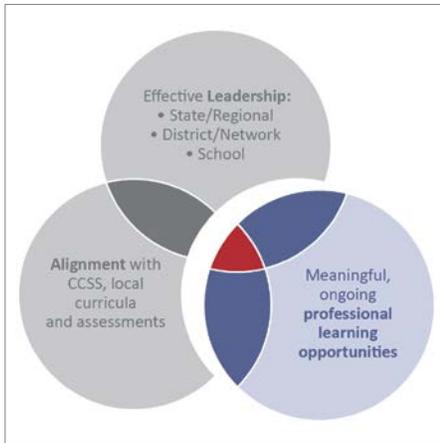
Despite her belief in the value of LDC, this teacher's concerns about alignment point to a disconnect in alignment between LDC and state policy. Although Implementation Leaders can help to explain the many ways that LDC tools can help students prepare for the state assessments by improving their writing, critical thinking, and literacy skills, they must also be prepared to address the difficult questions about the timing and scope of LDC module implementation given the pressure around test preparation for the existing state assessments, which may not be fully aligned to the CCSS.

<sup>6</sup> <http://education.ky.gov/AA/distisupp/Pages/EOC.aspx>

<sup>7</sup> <http://fcats.fldoe.org/eoc/>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.pdesas.org/module/assessment/Keystone.aspx>

## Implementation Condition: Professional Learning Opportunities (PLOs)



Like the CCSS, the LDC initiative presumes that all teachers, regardless of their subject-area specialty, must teach literacy. For this reason, LDC represents an enormous instructional shift for many teachers and other educators.

Professional learning opportunities (PLOs) help to bridge the gap between existing classroom practice and this new, more comprehensive approach to literacy instruction. Meaningful PLOs can engage school-level leaders and teachers in learning practical techniques for developing LDC content and integrating LDC tools into their instructional practice.

Findings in this section highlight the need for a thoughtful, collaborative approach to conducting PLOs for teachers and teacher leaders. A summary of our findings can be found in Table 6.

Table 6. Cross-Site Analysis of Professional Learning Opportunities

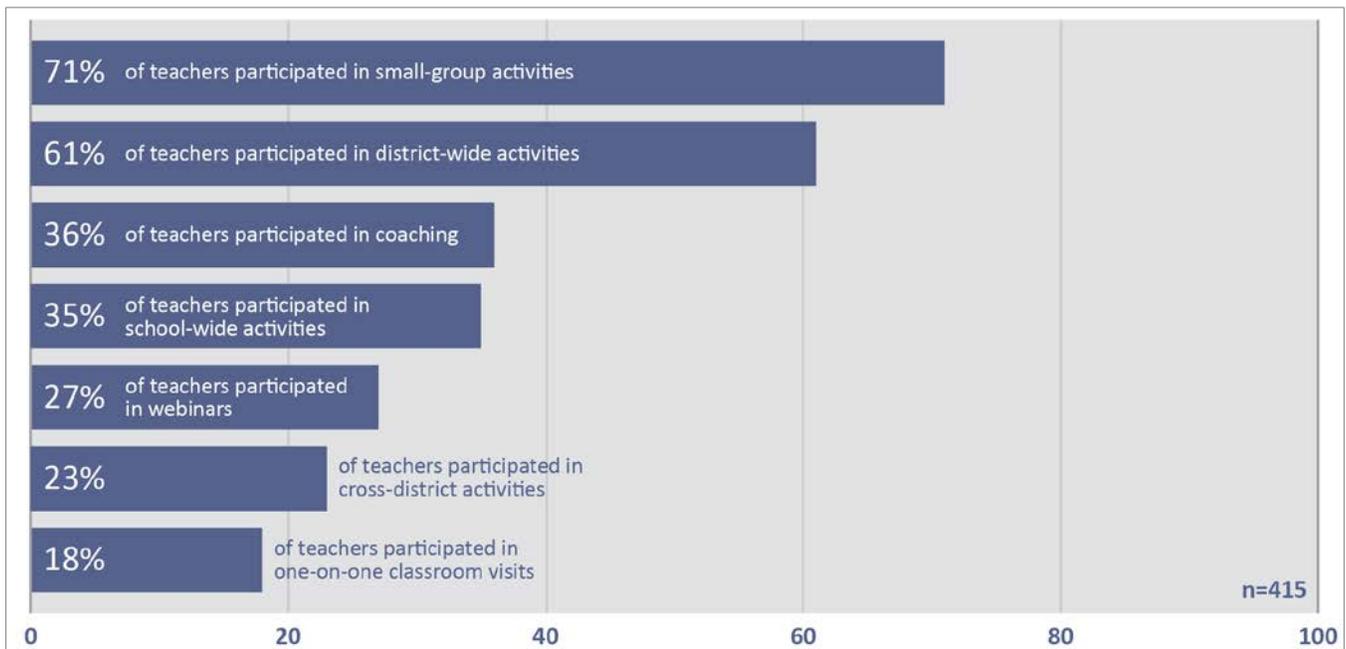
**C** Common Best Practices    **D** Distinct Approaches    **A** Areas of Opportunity

Implementation Condition 3: Professional Learning Opportunities		
<b>C</b> Pursuing Collaborative Approaches to Professional Development	<b>D</b> Engaging Instructional Support Teachers as Resources	<b>A</b> Facilitating More Effective Collaboration
	<b>D</b> Using Student Work	<b>A</b> Facilitating LDC Online Learning Environments
		<b>A</b> Differentiating LDC Tools for Diverse Student Needs

On a broad scale, the survey data suggest that teachers are taking advantage of a wealth of professional development opportunities. According to teacher survey data, 80% of teacher respondents in all three case study sites (N=517) participated in formal professional development on LDC tool use in 2012-13.

Figure 8 displays the types of LDC professional development activities offered across the three case study sites along with the percentages of teacher respondents who participated in each type.

Figure 8. Percentage of cross-case teachers participating in LDC PD activities in 2012-2013 by type of activity.



The most common types of professional development attended were small group meetings (71%, N=415) and district-wide meetings (61%, N=415).

Below are the Common Best Practices, Distinct Approaches, and Areas of Opportunity in Professional Learning Opportunities.

### Common Best Practices in LDC PLOs

Findings from the interviews and survey revealed an important PLO Common Best Practice: collaboration during the LDC implementation process. This strategy is detailed below.

#### PLO Strategy 1

#### Common Best Practice: Pursuing Collaborative Approaches to Professional Development

The LDC initiative has offered many opportunities for teachers to collaborate around LDC. Depending on the lead entity’s teacher leadership structure, teachers collaborated by:

- Working together to develop and/or revise modules;
- Observing experienced colleagues implement modules in their classrooms;
- Scoring student work using common rubrics; and/or,
- Participating in other activities.

Implementation Leaders in all three case study sites actively encouraged these forms of collaboration because they believed that they would enhance the quality and rigor of LDC implementation, as well as help teachers understand the value of the LDC initiative as a whole.

Survey data indicate that teachers benefited from these collaborative opportunities. High percentages of teacher respondents across the sites (N=517) agreed that collaborating with LDC colleagues helped them use the LDC framework rubric (81%) and provide feedback to students about their writing (78%).

Implementation leaders utilized a range of collaboration strategies. Specifically:

**Implementation Leaders pursued both formal and informal collaboration opportunities.**

Implementation Leaders in all three sites structured formal professional development sessions so that teachers worked with one another. These collaboration opportunities sometimes challenged teachers to step outside their comfort zone and work with people they had never met before. Due to the regional scope of IU 13, Implementation Leaders there were able to ask teachers to work across schools and districts. An Implementation Leader in IU 13 explained that she encouraged collaboration due to her belief that “all learning is social.” At the district level, a teacher in Kenton County explained how formal professional development opportunities affected his experience with the LDC tools:

*One of the wonderful side effects of this work is that this is the first time in my 12 years of teaching that the district has brought together all three high schools to work closely together on something. Before, we were just separate entities. Now we are working with people from the other high schools to make curriculum maps together, build in the Lessons into our curriculum, and evaluate the best placement of a Lesson.*

Teachers also reported that Implementation Leaders hoped that the lines of communication between teachers would extend beyond the confines of professional development sessions. These informal collaboration opportunities often happened within the school or grade levels. Explained one Hillsborough teacher: “We collaborate a lot in the hall. We’ll come into a room and sit during conference time. We’re always doing that even if we are not documenting it. The three of us with classrooms located together – we’re always collaborating.”

Survey findings also point to the occurrence of informal collaboration. More than half of the teacher respondents (55%; N=517) reported meeting at least every other week with LDC colleagues to have informal discussion around student work, instructional strategies and teaching approaches.

## **Distinct Approaches to Implementing LDC PLOs**

The approaches to creating PLOs varied from site to site based on the context of the Lead Entity. Below are two ways that the three case study sites employed different strategies for implementing professional development and training. The first involves how the sites used school-level personnel other than teachers – which we term “instructional support teachers” – to assist in the LDC implementation and training process. The second involves case study sites’ different approaches to using student work as a tool for LDC implementation.

### **PLO Strategy 2**

#### **Distinct Approach: Engaging Instructional Support Teachers as Resources**

In addition to teacher leaders, principals, and Implementation Leaders, there are a host of educators that can work with teachers to ensure successful LDC implementation in the classroom. Given the differences in their overall size and resources, the three sites engaged these educators to differing degrees.

**KC** | engaged instructional support teachers to assist with LDC implementation.

In Kenton County, Implementation Leaders used some instructional support teachers to help with the overall implementation strategy around LDC, but did not have these individuals take a leadership role. For example, library and media specialists helped to implement LDC by finding relevant texts for LDC modules, working both on the front end with teachers who were planning LDC modules and on the back end with students who were actively participating in the modules. Special education teachers were also involved in the work of LDC due to their role in some instances as classroom co-teachers. Although a district Implementation Leader said that instructional support teachers played an important supportive role, he said, “The core people doing the work are the curriculum consultants, teacher leads, and then the teacher cohorts that are implementing.”

**HB** | engaged reading coaches in the district’s PLO strategy.

In Hillsborough County, Implementation Leaders leaned on school-level reading coaches because they believed that these individuals’ pre-existing role as literacy experts in their schools naturally positioned them to take on LDC implementation responsibilities. One Implementation Leader described reading coaches as the “connective tissue” in supporting LDC implementation. A teacher explained the role of the reading coach in her school: “She facilitates the implementation of each module and works very closely with us. She is very knowledgeable about the modules and is able to address any concerns that arise through the implementation.”

Reading coaches provided support for LDC in a range of ways, including:

- Collaborating on module development;
- Training teachers;
- Attending Professional Learning Community meetings;
- Serving as the conduit for teacher feedback to Implementation Leaders; and,
- Supporting teachers with module implementation.

**IU** | engaged many different educators in the PLO strategy.

Given the broad reach of IU 13, Implementation Leaders were able to engage a number of educators in different districts in the LDC initiative, tailoring their recruitment of these educators to individual district capacity levels and staff strengths. Recruiting these educators was a concerted piece of the IU’s roll-out strategy, as each “launch team” was required to contain at least one instructional support teacher. One Implementation Leader described instructional support teachers as the “secret sauce” of LDC implementation. Across the teacher and principal interviews, individuals mentioned the particular value that librarians added to the LDC initiative. Said one school principal:

*One of the key pieces of our launch team was our librarian [who] helped teachers embrace the idea of research. It was just amazing. I don’t know if a lot of people have done that but, if they haven’t, they’re really missing out by not bringing a media specialist or a librarian to be part of their launch team.*

In addition to librarians, IU 13 Implementation Leaders engaged reading coaches, special education teachers, English Language Learner (ELL) teachers, instructional specialists, and technology coaches in LDC implementation.

As the findings above demonstrate, there are many ways to use the specialized skills and abilities of instructional support teachers. The variation in approaches to tapping this expertise depends on how the implementing entity balances the demand for additional involvement from other educators with the existing human capital in the district or region.

### **PLO Strategy 3**

#### **Distinct Approach: Using Student Work**

Examining student work is a way that everyone involved in LDC implementation can revise and refine approaches to using LDC as an instructional and curricular tool. At the teacher level, comparing student work from one's classroom to that of a peer's classroom (or to an exemplary model of student work) can help teachers understand the gaps in their instructional approaches or deficiencies in the modules themselves. At the teacher leader or principal level, examining student work helps leaders determine where to target professional development, and it also provides an opportunity to create common rubrics for scoring student work. Finally, at the district or regional level, reviewing student work serves as yet another way for Implementation Leaders to assess the progress of LDC implementation in the classrooms.

Survey data confirm that student work was used in professional development sessions. Across the three sites, most teacher survey respondents (84%; N=413) indicated that scoring student work with the LDC rubric was a component of a professional development session that they had attended.

**KC**

**used student work primarily to guide reflection on LDC implementation.**

Kenton County Implementation Leaders used student work primarily as a tool to guide reflective practices around LDC implementation. Implementation Leaders worked hand in hand with identified teacher leaders to analyze student work from all LDC implementing classrooms. These teacher leaders also oversaw small-group reflection sessions after modules were used in the classroom, and used examples of student work as a way to coordinate module revisions.

**HB**

**used student work primarily as a way to structure teacher collaboration.**

Similar to Kenton County, Hillsborough County used student work to support teachers with all aspects of module implementation. But, unlike in Kenton County, the structure around reviewing student work in Hillsborough County was integrated into the district's overarching approach to collaboration: Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). In PLCs, teachers met with department heads and other identified teacher leaders to discuss issues of concern, and student work was often part of these conversations. One Implementation Leader said that the LDC initiative, including these discussions of student work, helped to provide structure for these PLC meetings. "PLCs have been a part of our climate and expectations as a school site for several years. But, oftentimes, they did not have a clear focus...LDC has given those sites and teams a very clear focus and purpose for their time together."

IU 13 Implementation Leaders used student work as a tool to facilitate successful implementation of LDC, using it as a central component of professional development. Teachers involved in LDC were required to submit student work twice a year. Said one Implementation Leader, "We've received feedback that incorporating peer jurying and collecting student work helps to foster an expectation of implementation and grounds the collaboration in authentic products and processes." Implementation Leaders also said that sharing exemplary student work in regional PLOs helped teachers get involved in a "reality-based conversation" about implementation and impact of LDC. As one IU staff person explained, "A module can look great, but when you use it, it can be a disaster. You have to look at the student work, otherwise it's fairytale."

Although all three sites used student work in different ways and with different goals in mind, the use of student work figured prominently into each site's approach to guiding and framing professional learning opportunities around LDC.

### Areas of Opportunity in LDC PLOs

Our research on LDC implementation highlights three areas in which the delivery of professional learning opportunities could be improved. These Areas of Opportunity are not unique to LDC, however, as all three areas – facilitating more effective collaboration, encouraging the use of online learning platforms, and differentiating tools for diverse student needs – are persistent challenges for many schools and districts. Describing how these barriers specifically relate to LDC implementation, however, provides a more targeted view of the ways in which schools, districts, and regional entities are attempting to reframe common barriers into opportunities to engage teachers in new and innovative ways.

#### Area of Opportunity: Facilitating More Effective Collaboration

PLOs must be more effective in ensuring that LDC teachers can effectively collaborate across grade levels, content areas, schools, and, in some cases, even within grade-level and content-area teams.

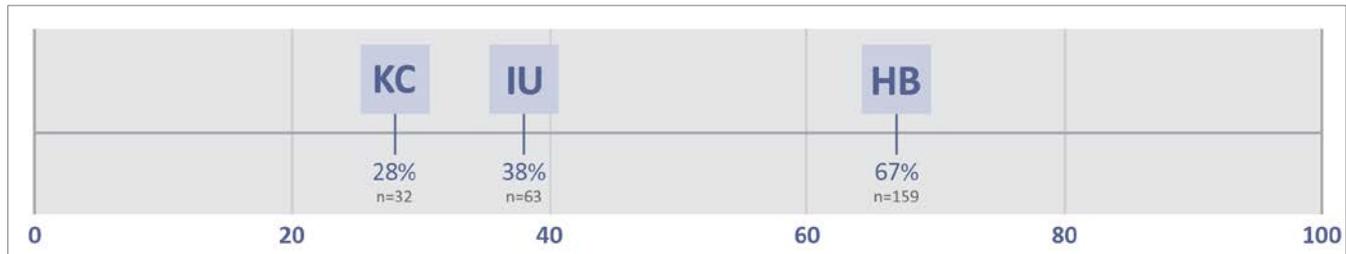
Interview data from teachers paints a mixed picture of collaboration:

- Kenton County: Teachers reported that they enjoyed meeting at the district level, but that they had trouble finding the time to collaborate with teachers in their own schools.
- Hillsborough County: Teachers had opportunities to meet within content-area PLCs, but reported that they needed assistance in breaking down barriers to collaboration across content areas. Implementation Leaders were experimenting with developing instructional leadership teams (ILTs) to address this concern.
- IU 13: Although the IU built collaboration into its professional development, they control over whether and how collaboration happened at the district or school level. Many schools, especially high schools, lacked common planning time for LDC teachers. Structures and supports for collaboration varied greatly across sites and the collaboration that did take place was often informal. In addition, collaboration across departments, grade levels or schools was limited.

The findings above suggest that teachers might not be collaborating to the extent they would like—or to the extent that is optimal for strong LDC implementation. In many cases, this was due to the difficulty in finding the time and space for teachers to collaborate.

As shown in Figure 9, the survey data reveal the relatively low incidences of opportunities for collaboration, despite the high value that teachers placed on these types of interactions.

Figure 9. Percentage of survey respondents who reported meeting with LDC colleagues to discuss their work at least on a bi-weekly basis



As Figure 9 shows, the frequency of shared meetings varied across sites. Roughly two-thirds of teacher survey respondents in Hillsborough County reported that they met frequently with their colleagues (at least on a bi-weekly basis), but this percentage was much lower in both Kenton County and IU 13. The higher percentage in Hillsborough County likely reflects the PLC structure in place to support teacher collaboration.

Despite low levels of collaboration in two of the individual case study sites, survey data from across the three sites support the contention that collaborating with peers was a valuable contribution to teachers' professional learning. Teacher survey respondents reported that collaborating with colleagues helped them to:

- More effectively use the LDC framework (89%, N=517)
- Better support student learning (89%, N=517)

#### Area of Opportunity: Facilitating LDC Online Learning Environments

Survey data suggest that LDC websites were not frequently accessed by teachers. Across the three case study sites, 30% of teacher respondents (N=546) indicated that they had “never” accessed existing modules online, and only 14% said they “often” access existing modules online.

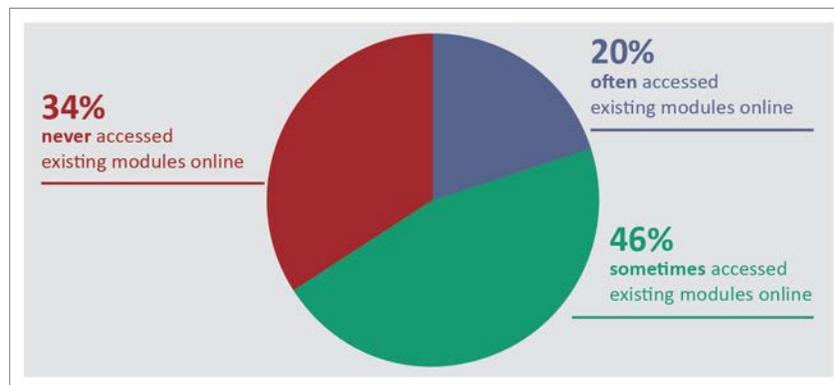
Of the three case study sites, Hillsborough County and IU 13 both experimented with using online formats to enrich the LDC initiative experience. These online formats were different for the two sites, and in both sites the approaches remain a work in progress. By contrast, Implementation Leaders in Kenton County delivered professional development and collaboration entirely in person. One Implementation Leader explained, “We see the face-to-face as the critical part of professional learning.” Accordingly, the district had no immediate plans to incorporate an online platform into its implementation strategy.

In Hillsborough County, Implementation Leaders used their LDC website as a mechanism to encourage collaboration. Teachers could post questions to an online message board, review modules created by their peers, and access other types of commonly used LDC materials. Additionally, reading coaches had a separate “coaches’ corner” of the LDC website where they could communicate online. While some

teachers reported that they used the online platform for sharing questions and concerns, a majority of interviewed teachers and reading coaches said that they were not using it regularly.

The irregular use of LDC websites by Hillsborough teachers is reflected in teacher survey responses (see Figure 10):

Figure 10. Teachers' Perceptions of Module Accessibility



Although accessing modules online is only one component of the online portal, Implementation Leaders recognized the irregular usage patterns by teachers and other educators and were hoping that rolling out improvements to the platform in the 2013-2014 school year would result in teachers and coaches engaging online more.

IU 13 also had an online platform and used it as part of the region's blended approach to delivering professional development, combining face-to-face trainings with virtual online learning systems. The primary mechanism for online PLO delivery was webinars, which Implementation Leaders presented live and then made available on the IU 13 LDC website in archive form. Similar to Hillsborough County, they also made available modules and other LDC materials on the website.

Although some teachers and building leaders reported that they appreciated the archived webinars, they also said that they felt intimidated asking questions in live webinars. Said one teacher: "I think it's a lot easier to ask questions when the person is there physically with you. A webinar is like a classroom. You don't want to be the one who asks a stupid question in front of everyone." Accordingly, Implementation Leaders reported that they had reduced the total number of webinars to just a few key popular topics and had changed the format of the webinars to a shorter, video tutorial style.

Among the three sites, IU 13 had the highest percentage of teacher respondents who indicated that they often or sometimes used the online platform (78%; n=184) while Kenton County had the lowest percentage of teacher respondents who indicated that they used an online platform (59%; n=63).

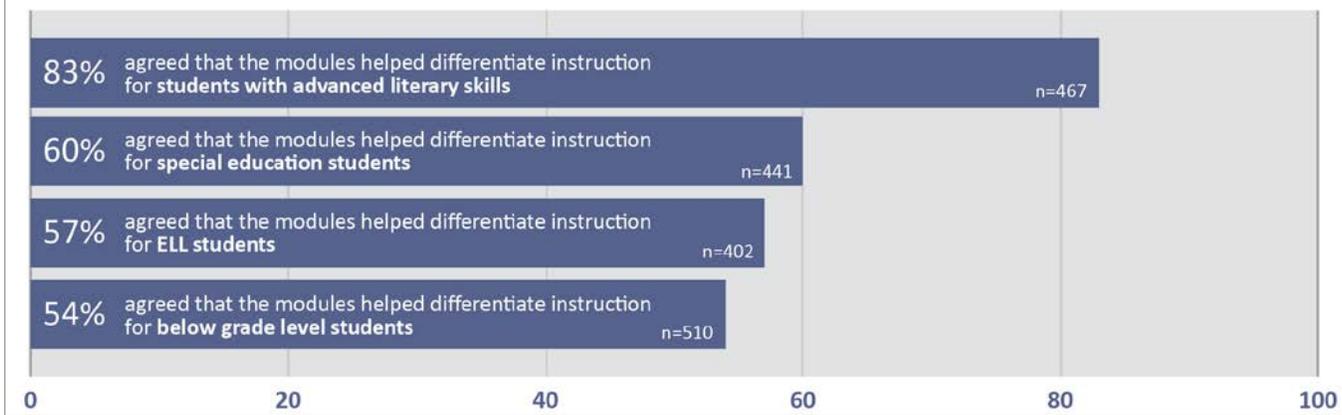
#### **Area of Opportunity: Differentiating LDC Tools for Diverse Student Needs**

Although the LDC tools are intended for use with all students at all ability levels, teachers across the three districts reported that they desired specific training on differentiating the tools for specific types of student learners.

The survey data suggest that teachers had an easier time using the LDC tools with advanced readers than they did with students reading below their grade level.

While more than four-fifths (83%, N=467) of responding teachers in all three sites agreed that the modules helped differentiate instruction for students with advanced literacy skills, lower percentages of teachers agreed that modules helped differentiate instruction for struggling students, ELL students, and students with special needs (see Figure 11).

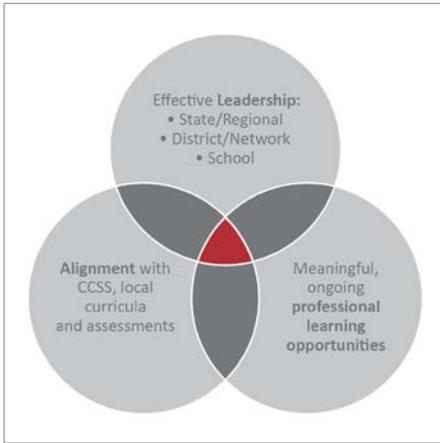
Figure 11. Teachers’ Perceptions of Module Differentiation Strategies



Implementation Leaders can help teachers use LDC as a tool for differentiated instruction by training them to adapt materials to different learning needs, learning styles, and ability levels. Teachers were vocal about their need for guidance in this area. Said one Kenton teacher, “Some of these [modules] were just absolutely too hard for the kids to even make sense of context clues or anything.”

Survey results suggest that teachers would welcome more support in differentiating the LDC tools: In each of the three sites, approximately three-fourths of responding teachers indicated that they would like more professional development on differentiating module instruction to meet student needs (78%, N=413) and implementing modules with below-grade-level students (74%,N=413).

Although all three case study sites identified this as an Area of Opportunity, Hillsborough County Implementation Leaders took the most proactive approach to remedying teachers’ concerns. In Year One, the district rolled out LDC for advanced or average readers, and then in Year Two the district became one of two sites nationally at the time that was implementing “LDC-Accelerated,” which is designed for below-grade-level readers. Said one Hillsborough County teacher about her struggling students, “I found out they were more capable than I thought.” And a high school reading coach added, “I think my LDC teacher realizes now that students can do it if they’re pushed...she was amazed at how much they’ve accomplished and were able to do.”



## Cross-Condition Strategies

As depicted in the Theory of Action at the beginning of this report, the conditions for effective implementation of the LDC tools are overlapping. At the center of this overlap, RFA found three “cross-condition” themes – strategies that touched on each of the three conditions of leadership, alignment, and professional learning opportunities.

A summary of these cross-condition strategies is presented in Table 7:

Table 7. Cross-Condition Strategies Findings

**C** Common Best Practices    **D** Distinct Approaches    **A** Areas of Opportunity

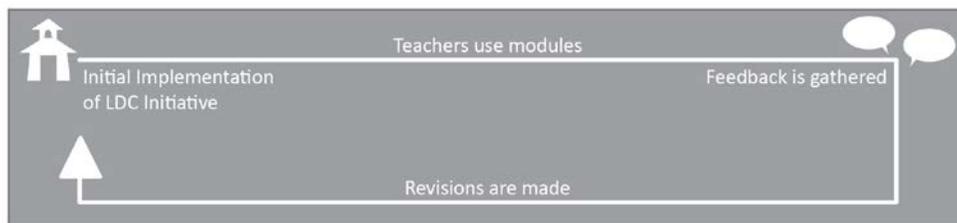
Cross-Condition Strategies		
<b>C</b> Creating Intentional Feedback Loops	<b>D</b> Piloting LDC Tools	<b>A</b> Planning for Sustainability

### Cross-Condition Strategy 1

#### Common Best Practice: Creating Intentional Feedback Loops

All three case study sites approached the process of gathering feedback in a serious, concerted way, using a range of strategies to gather information that they would later use to improve upon their implementation strategies. Figure 12 details the mechanisms that the lead entities used for gathering feedback, as well as the resulting changes in practice.

Figure 12. Mechanisms for Gathering Feedback



**KC**

In Kenton County, Implementation Leaders created space and time for principals and teachers to give feedback about all aspects of the LDC initiative. They listened to principals’ and teachers’ requests, questions, and concerns, and made changes based on this feedback. For example, principals informed Implementation Leaders mid-way through Year One that they needed to involve more teachers in the roll-out of the initiative, which led the district to involve all middle school English, science, and social studies teachers in the initiative in Year Two. Suggestions from teachers and principals also led to changes with the format of professional development, clarification of module development responsibilities, and refinement of PLO offerings.

**HB** In Hillsborough County, leaders gathered feedback from teachers and reading coaches via multiple venues, including training sessions, professional learning community meetings, and online. The district made several major refinements based on this feedback, including revising the process of developing modules and integrating them into curricula. When teachers or reading coaches saw their feedback shaping module revisions, it increased their buy-in to the initiative as a whole. Said one teacher:

*I saw the input being used. It was about teacher writing lessons for teachers and it was fantastic. So I helped write the next module. I got feedback from one of my 8th grade teachers and she said she was so excited about teaching this new lesson because ...she could see that the roadblocks we had the first time had been addressed.*

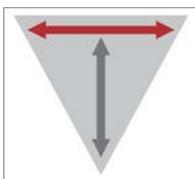
**IU** IU 13 Implementation Leaders solicited feedback in post-training evaluations, through beginning and year-end surveys, and during face-to-face training and technical assistance visits. As a result, the IU made a number of changes to its LDC roll-out plan. One important change – a principal guide – was made at the request of principals themselves, who said they needed more structure around their roles in the initiative. The IU also refined their professional development schedule and changed expectations for module development based on teachers’ and other educators’ feedback. Once they had made these changes, Implementation Leaders in IU 13 communicated how they were making changes based on feedback. One principal said, “The IU described how they had modified their training based on feedback from the previous year.”

### Cross-Condition Strategy 2

#### Distinct Approach: Piloting LDC Tools

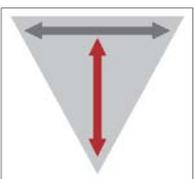
In all three case study sites, scale-up of the LDC initiative was gradual. All three sites piloted the LDC tools and implementation processes with a small cohort of schools/teachers before they began scaling the initiative. But within the three cases, Implementation Leaders chose different piloting strategies in the first year.

**KC** | piloted for breadth.

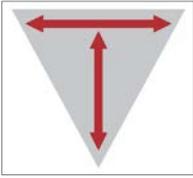


In Kenton County, Implementation Leaders aimed for breadth of adoption, beginning with a small pool of teachers that stretched across all of the district’s middle and high schools in all content areas. This meant that teachers may have had one other LDC colleague in their school in Year One, but many did not. Over time, they drastically increased the number of participating teachers (going from 11 teachers in Year One to 76 teachers in Year Two and 152 teachers in Year Three), which allowed intra-school collaboration.

**HB** | piloted for depth.



By contrast, Hillsborough County Implementation Leaders focused on depth of adoption, beginning with a cohort in just one subject area (6th grade advanced reading) across a small subset of middle schools (9 out of 46). In accordance with the district’s “gradual release” strategy for implementation, they increased the number of implementing LDC schools in Year Two, which also included some high schools. By Year Three, they were implementing LDC in all Hillsborough County middle and high schools. Implementation Leaders termed their strategy as “pilot-learn-refine-scale.”



Finally, IU 13 employed a hybrid approach to piloting the LDC tools that focused on both breadth and depth. In terms of depth, the IU focused on just two schools in two of the IU's 22 districts in Year One. But they also established a breadth approach by working with a broad range of teachers and other educators within these two schools (one in each district). Specifically, they asked the districts to construct a team of middle school teachers, including teachers from 2-3 subject areas, which included support teachers such as special education teachers or librarians. Once the IU had secured additional Gates Foundation funding, they were able to scale the initiative to 16 implementing districts over the following two years.

Despite differences in piloting strategies, all three case study sites eventually scaled the LDC initiative to a much larger number of teachers and schools, so that teachers and other educators could work both within and beyond their school walls to share their experiences and refine implementation of the LDC tools. The differences in scale-up approaches, however, signal that there are multiple pathways for districts or other lead entities to roll out LDC in the initial year of implementation.

### Cross-Condition Strategy 3

#### Area of Opportunity: Planning for Sustainability

For LDC to be sustained beyond the initial grant funding, Implementation Leaders need to plan ahead. Although Implementation Leaders in all three sites were keenly aware of the limited timeline of the Gates Foundation funding and were able to articulate the ways in which they planned to scale up the depth and breadth of implementation by the end of the funding period, most were still working out long-term plans for ongoing financial support for LDC.

Of the three cases study sites, IU 13 had the most comprehensive funding sustainability plan for the period of time after the expiration of the funding. Due to the structure of the IU, they developed their sustainability plan at the regional level rather than at the district level. The plan had four components:

- 1) **Financial Planning:** IU 13, given its position as a regional entity, was able to create a “fee-for-service” model to continue providing LDC professional development to districts. Explained one Implementation Leader, “What we really wanted to do was create something that was scalable in terms of human capacity but also financially.”
- 2) **Resource Accessibility:** Implementation Leaders designed the online portal to serve not only as a tool for teachers and other educators who were currently implementing LDC, but also as an archive of materials and resources for future implementers who might start using LDC after the period of the official Gates Foundation grant. An IU 13 administrator described the portal as a “low cost way of continuing services.”
- 3) **Continuity at State Level:** Implementation Leaders worked to integrate LDC into other ongoing initiatives at the state level, for example including LDC as an official supportive strategy for the state’s Striving Readers Grant, and also referencing LDC in the Pennsylvania Comprehensive Literacy Plan.
- 4) **Seeding Sustainability at the District Level:** Implementation Leaders required that school launch team members develop a plan to guide LDC implementation and spread the initiative beyond the initial year of launch team training.

Survey responses from IU 13 principals reflected IU 13's efforts toward sustainability. Of the 17 IU 13 principals who responded, 82% of them agreed that the District plans to continue LDC next year, and 88% have participated in discussions to sustain the LDC use over time. Additionally, 71% of IU-13 principal respondents identified additional funding to continue the use of the LDC tools moving forward.

Implementation Leaders in Kenton County and Hillsborough County said that they planned to use existing local, state and federal funding sources to continue supporting LDC. One Implementation Leader in Kenton County said that the district planned to use dedicated hours of professional development stipulated in the teacher contract to support LDC sustainability. And an Implementation Leader in Hillsborough County cited the district's existing PLC structure as a way that the district could find time for teachers to collaborate on LDC instructional practices and curriculum alignment.

Despite the differing levels of engagement with sustainability planning across the three sites, a majority of teacher survey respondents perceived that their districts were committed to sustaining LDC. Survey data show that Kenton had the highest percentage of teacher respondents to "agree" that their district was committed to sustaining LDC (83%; n=60), while 69% of Hillsborough teacher respondents (n=278) and 59% of IU 13 teacher respondents (n=180) agreed with the statement.

Notably, survey responses reveal a contradiction between teachers' perceptions about their district's commitment to sustainability and their perceptions about whether their district had funding in place to sustain LDC. Sixty-seven percent (67%) of teacher respondents across the three sites (N=518) agreed that their districts were committed to sustaining LDC but only 32% of them agreed that their districts had the funding to do so.

As the survey results show, there is an opportunity for Implementation Leaders to spearhead efforts to sustain the LDC initiative beyond the grant period. The proactive approach of IU 13 Implementation Leaders highlights potential ways that LDC implementing sites can ensure the sustainability of the initiative.

## Conclusion

The three LDC implementation sites highlighted in this document – Kenton County, Kentucky; Hillsborough County, FL; and Lancaster-Lebanon IU 13, Pennsylvania – had a set of core strengths that guided the initial implementation of the LDC initiative. These strengths were tightly aligned to the conditions for robust implementation that RFA identified after its first year of research, and which are illustrated in the Theory of Action (see page 3):

- **Choosing Strong Leaders** – Implementation Leaders were strong advocates for LDC, and they, in turn, selected a strong set of leaders at the school and classroom levels to assist in implementation efforts;
- **Creating and Messaging Alignment** – Implementing entities constantly messaged alignment to the CCSS and worked to ensure alignment to other statewide and regional initiatives so that the LDC initiative was seen by principals, teachers, and other educators as part and parcel of their ongoing efforts at improving student achievement; and,
- **Providing High Quality Professional Development** – Implementation Leaders created the time and space for teachers and other educators to come together and learn about the broad goals of

the initiative, as well as the details around module development, the scoring of student work, and improvements to instruction.

The findings in this cross-case study also highlight that there are multiple pathways for the successful implementation of the LDC initiative. RFA's research shows that a variety of approaches focused on strong leadership, multiple levels of alignment, and meaningful professional learning opportunities have led to successful implementation of LDC. Districts or other lead entities interested in adopting LDC or making improvements to their existing LDC initiative may want to consider how some of these approaches could inform their efforts.

Finally, the Areas of Opportunity throughout the report demonstrate ways that the initiative can be further refined. In particular, the need to carefully consider sustainability plans is critical.

We conclude with "questions to consider" for policymakers and practitioners.

## Questions to Consider for Policymakers

- a. What supports can policymakers provide to help implementing entities build leadership capacity for LDC implementation?
- b. Who are the people – at the district, regional, or school level – best positioned to implement the LDC initiative? What are the skills and capacities needed to build credibility with teachers and bridge communication between state, district, and school leaders?
- c. What types of national, state, or local platforms exist that give LDC implementers access to online module repositories and other LDC resources? (Note: The newly-founded LDC organization is one example of this type of resource. Visit <http://www.literacydesigncollaborative.org/> for more details.)
- d. How does LDC fit into existing state and regional efforts at literacy instruction? How can LDC become further integrated into this strategy?
- e. What types of strategic partnerships can support the work of local implementers?
- f. How can policymakers help implementing entities plan for long-term financial sustainability of the LDC initiative?

## Questions to Consider for Practitioners

- a. Which of the three sites in this study best fits your local context?
- b. Which piloting strategy (breadth, depth, or a hybrid) best fits your local context?
- c. How can your district/region leverage the expertise of building-level personnel and teachers to guide the LDC initiative?
- d. To what extent is the LDC initiative aligned with your local curricula? Your state assessment?
- e. What types of PLO would be most successful in your district/region? Is online professional development and/or collaboration a good fit with your local context?
- f. How can your district/region encourage collaboration around LDC tools?
- g. How can your district/region use LDC as tools for differentiated instruction?
- h. How does your district/region collect feedback about the initiative?
- i. What is your district/region's sustainability plan?

## About Research for Action

Research for Action (RFA) is a Philadelphia-based nonprofit organization. We seek to use research as the basis for the improvement of educational opportunities and outcomes for traditionally underserved students. Our work is designed to strengthen public schools and postsecondary institutions; provide research-based recommendations to policymakers, practitioners, and the public at the local, state, and national levels; and enrich the civic and community dialogue about public education. For more information, please visit our website at [www.researchforaction.org](http://www.researchforaction.org).

## About RFA's Work to Study the Implementation of LDC/MDC Teacher Tools

RFA is currently in the third year of a mixed-methods study examining implementation of literacy and math tools aligned to the CCSS in multiple sites across the country. RFA researchers have collected survey data and conducted observations and interviews to determine teachers' use and perceptions of the tools. In addition, RFA is investigating the context and conditions necessary for scaling and sustaining tool use across districts and states, and for maximizing their impact on teacher effectiveness and student learning.

RFA has produced a number of research products geared to both inform the Gates Foundation's strategy for supporting use of the tools, and for the teachers and administrators who are or will be using them. A complete listing of products associated with this project can be found at <http://www.researchforaction.org/rfa-study-of-tools-aligned-ccss/>.

## Appendix A. Data/Methodology

### Data and Methodology

For this study, RFA employed a mixed-methods comparative case study approach. The primary data sources are qualitative interviews and focus groups with individuals who were involved in the adoption and/or scale up of the LDC tools. Interviewees included district/Intermediate Unit staff (the “Implementation Leaders” of LDC tools), school administrators, instructional support teachers, and classroom teachers.

The report also draws upon data from RFA surveys administered to teachers and principals in each of the three sites during the 2012-13 school year. For Kenton County and Hillsborough County, we highlight teacher responses; whereas for IU 13, we include both teacher responses and – where appropriate – principal responses.

We include principal data for IU 13 because the Implementation Leaders in IU 13, unlike their counterparts in the single-district cases, focused a great deal of effort on building principal leadership for LDC.

Table 1A specifies the participants in the interview and survey components of the study. Differences between sites in interview and survey sample sizes reflect variation in the overall scope of roll-out, as well as variation in the size of the lead entity.

Table 1A. Interviewees and Survey Respondents across Sites

	Kenton County, KY	Hillsborough County, FL	IU-13, PA
Interviews			
Implementation Leaders	3	2	2
Regional/State Personnel	0	0	3
District Administrators	0	1	7
Principals	7	12	10
Instructional Support Teachers	0	12	5
Teachers	32	53	36
Total Interviewees	38	80	61
Survey			
Principals <sup>9</sup>	NA	NA	17
Teachers <sup>10</sup>	71	318	190

<sup>9</sup> Response rates for principals were 71.4% in Kenton County, 25.3% in Hillsborough County, and 65.4% in IU 13. We exclude the responses from Kenton County because the sample size (n=5) was too small for the data to be included in the analysis. We exclude responses from Hillsborough County due to the increased likelihood of biased results from the low response rate.

<sup>10</sup> Response rates for teachers were 60.2% in Kenton County, 39.9% in Hillsborough County, and 80.2% in IU 13.

## Appendix B. Background Information

### A Note about Terminology

In this cross-case study, we use several terms that are specific to the Literacy Design Collaborative (LDC) initiative. Brief definitions are provided below.

- **LDC** refers to the broader Literacy Design Collaborative initiative, which includes professional development to help teachers and other educators develop and/or use modules.
- **Modules** are LDC-specific plans for teaching students the content and literacy skills necessary to complete an LDC CCSS-aligned template task. Educators fill in the template with their specific content to create a writing task.
- **Implementation Leaders** are leaders at either the district level (in the case of Kenton County and Hillsborough County) or the regional level (in the case of Intermediate Unit 13) who were responsible for rolling out and overseeing the LDC initiative.
- **School Leaders** include principals, assistant principals, and other administrative staff at the building level who were responsible in part for implementing the LDC initiative.
- **Lead Entity** is the educational organization with primary responsibility for implementing the LDC initiative.
- **Educational Service Agency**, or “ESA,” refers to regional education service centers, which include the Intermediate Units in Pennsylvania.
- **Years of LDC implementation:**
  - Year One refers to the 2010-11 school year.
  - Year Two refers to the 2011-12 school year.
  - Year Three refers to the 2012-13 school year.

### The LDC Initiative: An Overview

Funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Literacy Design Collaborative (LDC) offers a set of instructional and formative assessment tools in literacy, which were developed to help educators better prepare all students to meet the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and succeed beyond high school. The Foundation’s goal is to provide supports for educators to implement the instructional shifts called for by the CCSS.

According to the LDC website, LDC “offers a fresh approach to incorporating literacy into middle and high school content areas.” It makes literacy instruction the foundation of the core subjects, allows teachers to build content on top of a coherent approach to literacy, and prepares students with the rigorous reading and writing skills necessary for postsecondary success. LDC is a literacy framework that connects the CCSS with secondary English/language arts, social studies, and science classrooms.

In the early years of the LDC initiative, the Gates Foundation supported the districts and school networks to co-develop and pilot the tools. This support included professional development, efforts to link tool-users across sites, and ongoing refinement of the tools to better meet the needs of educators.

## Appendix C. Profile of Three Sites

### Kenton County, KY



#### SETTING: Mid-size rural / suburban school district

Kenton County School District is a largely white, mid-sized district of mixed income that serves a proportion of special education students slightly higher than the state average.



#### STATE CONTEXT: Kentucky is committed to CCSS, student achievement gains

After many years at the bottom tier of states on a number of student achievement indicators, Kentucky rose to 14th in the nation in 2011, according to Education Week's Quality Counts report. Kentucky's educational transformation resulted from decades of collaborative work among the state, local districts, and the Pritchard Committee for Academic Excellence. Kentucky was the first state to adopt the CCSS in 2010.



#### SCOPE: Implementing LDC across a broad set of schools

Kenton County began its work with LDC soon after Kentucky became the first state to adopt the CCSS in 2010. The district received two grants from the Gates Foundation to support LDC implementation, the first of which was an initial implementation grant, and the second of which intended to help the district integrate LDC with the new statewide educator evaluation system. Twelve "integration districts" received this second grant across the state.

**Year One:** Kenton County recruited 11 teachers in to assist in the initial implementation of LDC, with one to two middle school and high school teachers in the district, in every participating content area: ELA/English, science and social studies.

**Year Two:** All middle school teachers in the three content areas participated in LDC and additional high school teachers joined as well.

**Year Three:** Kenton County included additional high school teachers.

### Hillsborough County, FL



#### SETTING: Large urban / suburban district

Hillsborough County Public Schools is the 8th largest district in the country with 200,000 students and 267 schools. Hillsborough has a solid reputation as a reform-oriented district, receiving recognition from The College Board for large increases in AP exam passing rates, and from the State for posting high scores in various subjects and grade levels on the FCAT, which is the state's standardized test.



#### STATE CONTEXT: Florida is gradually implementing CCSS, has reformed teacher effectiveness

Florida adopted the CCSS in July 2010, but has taken a gradual approach to full implementation in order to ease the transition from its current state standards to CCSS. The state expects to assess students on the CCSS by the 2014-15 school year. Additionally, Florida passed S.B. 736 a new teacher evaluation reform bill in 2011. This bill establishes new measures for assessing student learning growth, develops performance pay systems for teachers, and requires the dismissal of teachers who receive multiple poor evaluations.



#### SCOPE: Pursuing a "gradual release" approach to LDC implementation

Hillsborough received two grants from the Gates Foundation, one of which focused on implementing LDC, and a second (unrelated) grant that focused on instituting the state's new teacher evaluation system. The district began implementing LDC in the 2010-11 school year and pursued a "gradual release" approach to LDC implementation.

**Year One:** Hillsborough implemented LDC for a sixth grade advanced reading class in nine pilot middle school sites in the first year.

**Year Two:** Implementation expanded to sixth grade advanced reading classes in all 46 district middle schools, seventh grade language arts classes at nine pilot schools, and a reading class in 3 high schools.

**Year Three:** Implementation expanded to include a range of classes at all 46 middle schools and 27 high schools, including social studies and science classes at the middle schools.

## Lancaster-Lebanon IU13, PA



### **SETTING:** ESA serving 22 small and mid-size, urban, rural and suburban districts

In Pennsylvania, educational service agencies are called Intermediate Units (IUs). There are 29 IUs in the state, charged to provide “cost-effective, management-efficient programs to Pennsylvania school districts.” Intermediate Unit 13 (IU 13) serves the 22 public school districts in Lancaster and Lebanon counties, which vary significantly in terms of size, student demographics, per-pupil spending and student performance indicators.



### **STATE CONTEXT:** PA focusing on translating CCSS to local contexts

Despite adopting the standards in 2010, Pennsylvania lawmakers withdrew from the two CCSS testing consortia and, in September 2013, changed the name of the standards to the PA Core Standards to signal that the state is adapting the standards to the Pennsylvania context. Despite these challenges to the standards, Pennsylvania has developed a number of resources to assist districts in implementing the standards, and depends on the Intermediate Units to provide training on the implementation of the CCSS.



### **SCOPE:** Piloting year preceded full implementation

In 2010, the Gates Foundation provided funding to IU 13 to form the Lancaster-Lebanon Literacy Design Collaborative.

**Year One:** The initiative began during the 2010-11 school year in two districts.

**Year Two and Three:** The Gates Foundation provided additional funding to expand the project to 16 schools in Lancaster and Lebanon counties.

For the 2013-14 school year, IU 13 asked the Gates Foundation for an extension of the grant, utilizing the funding they had been able to reserve. The IU will continue to provide services to schools and districts already involved in the initiative while bringing new sites on through a fee-for-service model.

## Appendix D. Special Thanks

This research would not have been possible without the generous support of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. We are also very appreciative of the time and efforts of key players in multiple states and districts implementing the LDC tools. Principals, teachers, district leaders, and other educators graciously gave their time and openly shared their successes and challenges in using the tools on RFA survey instruments and interviews.

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