

**Enacting Common Core Instruction:  
Strong Central Management and Strategic Delegation  
of Responsibility Drove Implementation of LDC in  
Florida's Hillsborough County Public Schools**

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## A Note about Terminology

In this case study, we use several terms that are specific to the Literacy Design Collaborative (LDC) initiative and the Hillsborough County Public Schools. Brief definitions are provided below.

- The **LDC Framework** includes CCSS-aligned **template tasks**, which educators fill in with their specific content to create a writing task. Teachers identify the skills students need to complete the task and create a **module**, a plan for teaching students the content and literacy skills necessary to complete the writing task.
- **LDC** refers to the broader initiative, which includes professional development to help teachers and other educators use modules on a daily basis.
- **Hillsborough County Public Schools** is the full name of the Hillsborough school district. We will also use the district and Hillsborough as shorthand for the full name.
- **District literacy leaders** are the two key central office leaders responsible for rolling-out and overseeing the initiative in Hillsborough. They hold the positions of district director of literacy and resource teacher for literacy.
- **District administrators** include a broader group of district central office leaders.
- **District leaders** refers to the combination of district literacy leaders and district administrators.

## The LDC and MDC Initiatives: An Overview

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Funded by The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Literacy Design Collaborative (LDC) and Math Design Collaborative (MDC) offer a set of instructional and formative assessment tools in literacy and math, 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.”<sup>1</sup> 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 modules are designed to deliver CCSS as a foundation for teaching.

As part of MDC, experts from the Shell Centre developed a set of Formative Assessment Lessons (Lessons) for secondary mathematics teachers to facilitate CCSS-based student mathematics learning and provide teachers with feedback about student understanding and mastery. Lessons reverse the traditional, teacher-driven instructional model by challenging students to work on a series of math problems both independently and collaboratively.<sup>2</sup>

In the early years of the LDC and MDC initiatives, 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.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.mygroupgenius.org/literacy>

<sup>2</sup> The Daily: Unleashing Group Genius, Volume 2, Number 1, June 27, 2011. Retrieved from: <http://www.kenton.kyschools.us/userfiles/915/Acrobat%20Document.pdf>

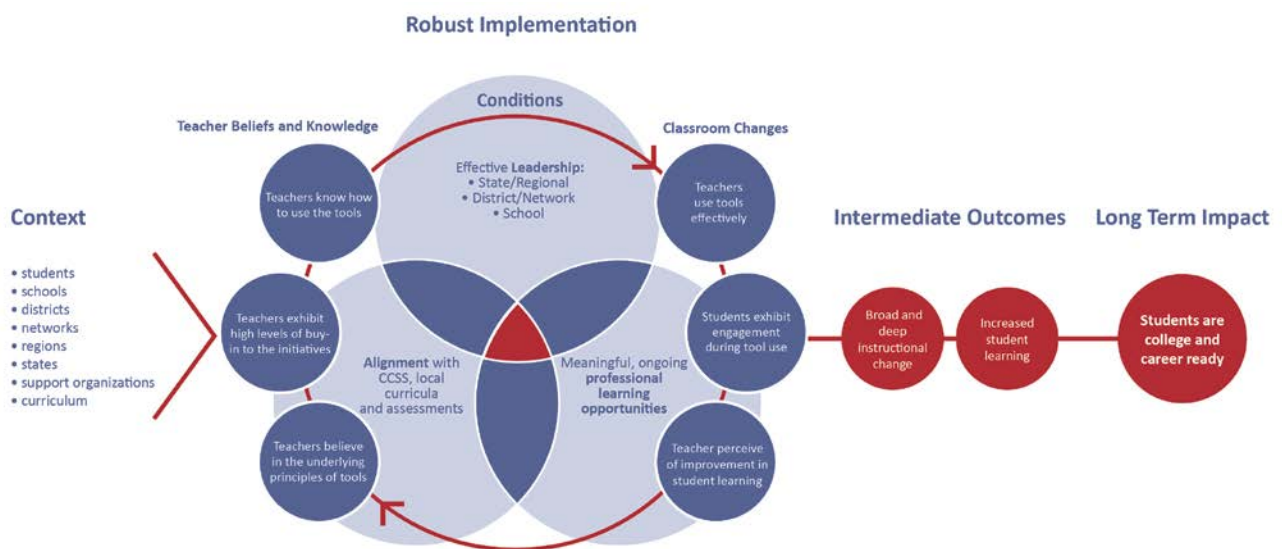
## Case Study Background

Following two years of extensive data collection in eight sites throughout the country, Research for Action (RFA) is producing three case studies to illustrate how the LDC and MDC tools have been adopted in different settings and contexts, and which approaches and supports have contributed to the successful adoption and use of the tools. The case studies provide a set of “road maps” for other sites that will be adopting or scaling up the tools. They are grounded in the three overlapping conditions found to be necessary for effective scale-up of these tools:

- 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 1).

Figure 1. Theory of Action<sup>3</sup>



These conditions provide the organizing framework for the case studies and guide our analysis of the strategic approaches undertaken by state, regional, local, and network entities that enabled strong initial implementation.

RFA chose case study sites that shared initial success in implementing the tools, but which differed dramatically on three dimensions:

- Geographic location and student demographic characteristics;
- Type of lead entity responsible for planning and coordinating implementation, such as a state department of education, a local district, an educational network, or a regional service center; and,
- Scope of the initial tool roll out.

<sup>3</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).

Each case study illustrates how the tools were implemented and scaled under a specific set of circumstances that are likely to be applicable to many other sites. As such, they are intended to inform further exploration and discussion on how to effectively roll out the LDC and MDC tools across a wide range of districts and schools.

Table 1. Case Study Sites

Case Study Site	Kenton County, KY School District	Hillsborough County Public Schools, FL	PA Intermediate Unit 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 with 16 in LDC
Lead Implementation Entity	District	District	Regional service center
Tools Implemented	LDC and MDC	LDC	LDC
Publication Date	December 2012	May 2013	November 2013

### About this Case Study

This document describes how Hillsborough County Public Schools implemented the LDC initiative. It is comprised of the following sections:

- A brief overview of the educational reform and policy context in Florida and Hillsborough;
- A summary of Hillsborough’s hybrid approach to LDC implementation: strong central management combined with incremental and strategic delegation of responsibility; and,
- Descriptions of eight district-initiated strategies that have impacted early adoption and success of the LDC initiative.

## Hillsborough County Public Schools, Florida: Fertile Ground for Multiple Education Reforms

### Florida Context

Over the past decade, the state of Florida has made significant strides in improving student performance in math, reading, and science. According to Education Week's independent *Quality Counts* report, Florida's education system ranked 11<sup>th</sup> in the country in 2009 and rose to 5<sup>th</sup> in the country by 2011 as measured by over 100 indicators that include K-12 student achievement, teacher quality and capacity, school finance, and standards and accountability.

State context for Common Core implementation is important because a key rationale for adopting LDC is that it supports teacher translation of the CCSS to the classroom. The Florida State Board of Education adopted the CCSS in English/Language Arts and Mathematics in July 2010. Because Florida had adopted the Next Generation Sunshine State Standards (NGSSS) only a few years before the CCSS, the State Department of Education has taken a gradual approach to full CCSS implementation in order to ease the transition from NGSSS to CCSS. For example:

- During the 2012-13 school year, state assessments such as the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT 2.0) and end-of-course tests continued to be aligned to the Next Generation Sunshine State Standards (NGSSS).
- Instruction in 2013-14 will include full implementation of the CCSS in Kindergarten, first, and second grades with a blend of both the NGSSS and the CCSS across grades three through twelve.
- Students will not be assessed across grades and subjects *solely* on the CCSS until 2014-15 with the implementation of the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) test.<sup>4</sup>

The state has been in the forefront of the teacher evaluation reform movement, passing the Student Success Act (Senate Bill 736) in 2011. The law eliminates tenure and mandates that teachers be evaluated annually based 50 percent or more on student learning growth as measured by statewide assessments. It further requires the development of performance pay systems by districts and the dismissal of teachers who receive multiple poor evaluations.<sup>5</sup> As will be discussed below, Hillsborough's approach to teacher evaluation and its relationship with the teachers' union are important contextual features of LDC adoption.

### Hillsborough County Public Schools Context

Hillsborough County Public Schools (HCPS), the 8<sup>th</sup> largest district in the country with 200,000 students, has emerged as a state and national leader in the implementation of educational reforms that have contributed to substantial student performance gains. The district's national reputation for improving student achievement is reflected in multiple awards and achievements. For example<sup>6</sup>:

- The College Board recognized HCPS with the 2011 Beacon Award for having the largest annual increase in AP exam passing rates of any district in the nation from 2008 to 2010. District fourth graders posted the second highest average FCAT writing scores of any

<sup>4</sup> Florida Department of Education at <http://www.fldoe.org/arra/pdf/ccssRolloutTimeline.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Florida Department of Education at [http://www.fldoe.org/GR/Bill\\_Summary/2011/SB736.pdf](http://www.fldoe.org/GR/Bill_Summary/2011/SB736.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> Hillsborough County Public Schools at <http://publicaffairs.mysdhc.org/pointsofpride>

district in the state in 2012; tenth graders posted the second highest average scores; and eighth graders posted the third highest scores.

Consistent with its reformist reputation, the district was ahead of state requirements during the 2012-13 school year with implementation of the CCSS in grades two through five and the administration of CCSS-aligned, district-created assessments.<sup>7</sup>

Recognizing Hillsborough's role as a reform leader, the Gates Foundation has provided support for two major initiatives in the district – one focused on instituting a teacher evaluation system and the other one on implementing the CCSS. In 2009, Hillsborough won a seven year, \$100 million Gates Foundation grant to develop the Empowering Effective Teachers (EET) initiative. Due to Hillsborough's implementation of this initiative, the district was exempted from Florida Senate Bill 736's requirement that 50 percent of its performance evaluation be based upon student performance. Hillsborough's EET system of evaluation weights student performance at only 40 percent, with the remaining 60 percent divided equally between teacher assessments by principals and peers or mentors.<sup>8</sup>

Following its support for the EET initiative, Gates began funding LDC in Hillsborough in 2010-11. Over the past three years of LDC implementation, Hillsborough has become an LDC implementation leader in Florida. The National Literacy Project, the organization responsible for coordinating the expansion of LDC use to new districts in the state, has relied on Hillsborough to provide leadership and expertise in the scale-up of LDC throughout the state.

Important to Hillsborough's early success in the implementation of LDC and CCSS is the strong collaboration between the district and teachers' union. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan and AFT President Randi Weingarten have cited Hillsborough as an example of how strong union-district collaboration can lead to improvements in student achievement. This collaboration has smoothed the way for implementation of both the teacher performance system and of major curricula initiatives such as LDC. Illustrating this collaboration is Hillsborough's district leadership team, which includes the president of the teachers' union.

Educational policies at both the state and district level over the past decade, along with Hillsborough's more recent track record of advancing CCSS-aligned instructional and teacher evaluation reforms, have provided fertile ground for the early implementation success of the LDC initiative.

### **Hillsborough by the Numbers**

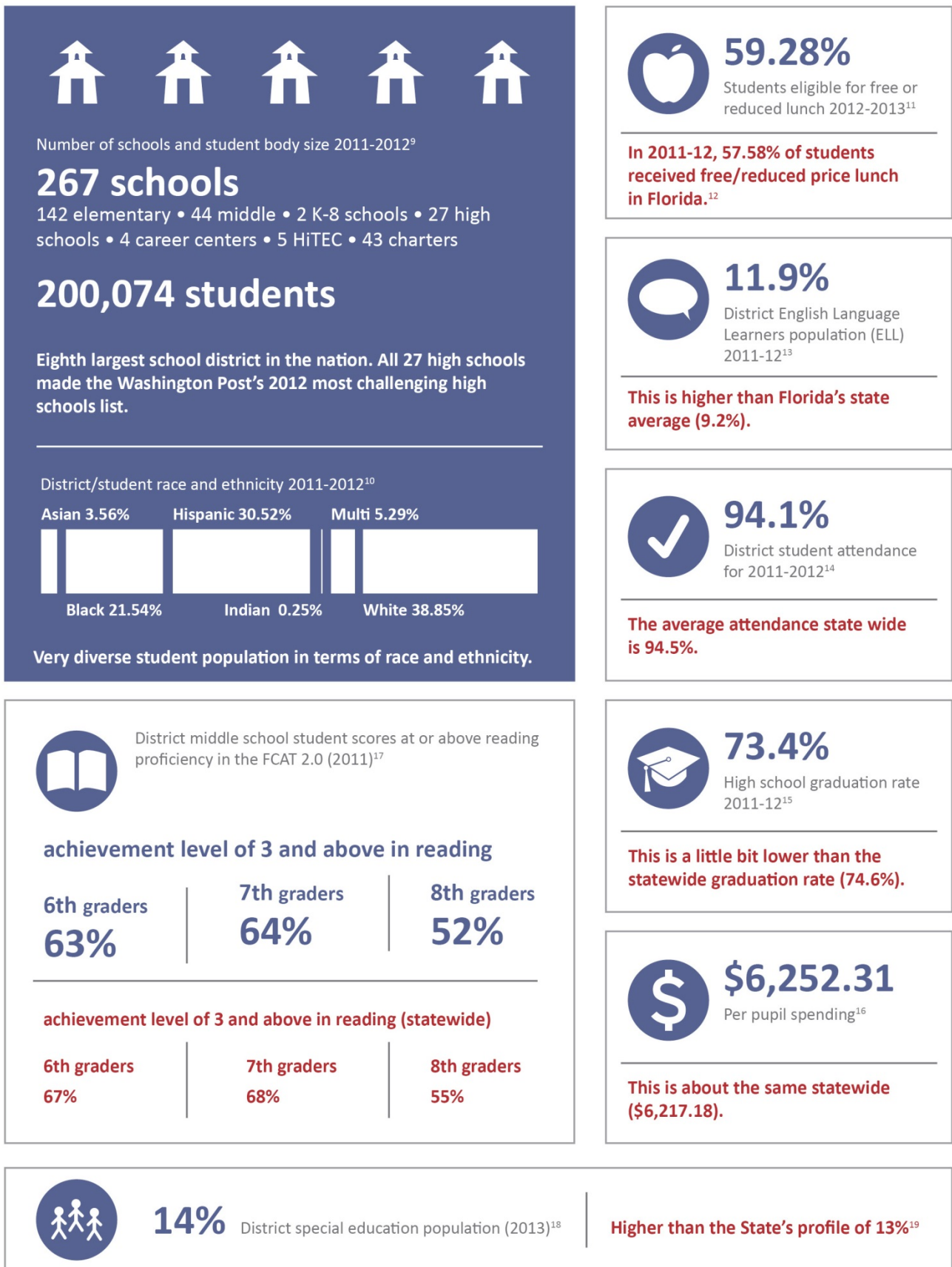
Figure 2 provides a demographic snapshot of Hillsborough County Public Schools. As illustrated in the figure, Hillsborough is a very large school district with a highly diverse student population in terms of race, ethnicity, and socio-economic background. Its high school graduation rate and overall academic performance are both slightly lower than the state average.

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<sup>7</sup> Hillsborough County Public Schools at <http://ccss.mysdhc.org/documents/HCPSTimeline.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.flsenate.gov/Session/Bill/2011/7019/Analyses/QM3nRGPKxvp/jS5GWvI4o15E4MM=%7C7/Public/Bills/7000-7099/7019/Analysis/h7019z.EDC.PDF>

Figure 2. Hillsborough Demographic and Student Performance Overview



<sup>9</sup> Hillsborough School District Facts Brochure 2012-13 school year. Hillsborough school district website: <http://publicaffairs.mysdhc.org/files2012-13/FACTSbrochure2.pdf>



## LDC Roll Out in Hillsborough

Figure 3 illustrates the roll out of the LDC initiative in Hillsborough over the past three years. In Year One, LDC was implemented across nine pilot school sites with strong direction by two district literacy leaders and nine on-site reading coaches already supporting literacy at the nine pilot schools. In Year Two, after a series of summer professional development sessions that engaged teachers in revising and creating LDC modules, LDC implementation expanded to all middle schools, a second course and a second grade level (7<sup>th</sup>). Currently, in Year Three, LDC modules are being used across all Hillsborough middle and high schools

Figure 3. Expansion of LDC in Hillsborough County

Course	YEAR ONE 2010-2011	YEAR TWO 2011-2012	YEAR THREE 2012-2013	
LDC	6th Grade Advanced Reading	4 modules 9 middle schools	5 modules 46 middle schools	6 modules 46 middle schools
	6th-8th Grade Science			2 modules per grade 46 middle schools
	7th Grade Advanced Language Arts		2 modules 9 middle schools	2 modules 46 middle schools
	7th-8th Grade Remedial Reading		3 modules 2 middle schools (7th grade only)	4 modules per grade 9 middle schools
	8th Grade Social Studies			3 modules 9 middle schools
	9th Grade Advanced Reading		1 modules 3 high schools	3 modules 27 high schools
	12th Grade English			4 modules 27 high schools

school size, race/ethnicity, per pupil spending

<sup>10</sup> Hillsborough county ethnic enrollment chart.

Publicaffairs.mysdhc.org/files2012-13/ethnickenrollment2.18.13.pdf

<sup>11</sup> Hillsborough county Meal enrollment chart Publicaffairs.mysdhc.org/files2012-13/mealstatus2.18.13.pdf

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.fldoe.org/eias/eiaspubs/pubstudent.asp>

<sup>13</sup> Florida Department of Education. FDOE website English Language Learners, 2012-13 link

<http://www.fldoe.org/eias/eiaspubs/pubstudent.asp>

attendance, ELL

<sup>14</sup> Florida Department of Education 2010-2011 school year. FDOE website:

<http://www.fldoe.org/eias/eiaspubs/archives.asp>

<sup>15</sup> Florida Department of Education Five year modified graduation rates, 2011-12 Final Calculation link

<sup>16</sup> Florida Department of Education 2011-12 Final Calculation link: <http://www.fldoe.org/fejp/pdf/11-12-final.pdf>

<sup>17</sup> Florida Department of Education Website's Student Performance Results: Demographic report.

<http://app1.fldoe.org/fcatdemographics/>

Includes all FCAT 2.0 scores

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.fldoe.org/ese/pdf/2013LEA/Hillsborough.pdf>

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.fldoe.org/ese/pdf/2013LEA/SEA.pdf>

## Hillsborough’s Hybrid Approach to LDC Implementation: Strong Central Management with Incremental and Strategic Delegation of Responsibility

Given the large size of the district, Hillsborough district leaders recognized the need to combine strong central direction of the overall LDC initiative with the delegation of responsibility for specific components of the work to groups of educators. If done well, this hybrid approach promised to facilitate both consistency across numerous schools, and deep LDC integration at the classroom level. Each element of Hillsborough’s approach is described below.

### Strong Central Management

Two Hillsborough central office leaders have guided LDC implementation since the beginning of the initiative. They hold the positions of district director of literacy and district resource teacher for curriculum and instruction.<sup>20</sup> Since introducing LDC to Hillsborough in 2010-11, these district literacy leaders have centrally directed and managed the following aspects of the work:

- **Module development and revision.** District literacy leaders were central to the initial development of modules and have continued to shape the evolving process of module development and revision in collaboration with reading coaches, teachers, and other district educators.
- **Linkage of modules to curricula and courses.** District literacy leaders decide which courses use LDC each year and how to link LDC to courses. For example, they decide whether courses will use an all-LDC curriculum or whether specific modules will be integrated into existing curricula.
- **Monitoring of module quality.** District literacy leaders work with reading coaches and teacher teams to assess module quality and to decide what further revisions are needed.
- **Training and deployment of reading coaches, teachers, and other district-level staff.** District leaders plan when and how to engage various levels of educators and content experts in the work and what kind of professional development and LDC implementation supports to provide.

Central management of these aspects of the LDC work facilitated greater consistency in module use across courses and schools. In contrast to other LDC districts in which teachers work individually or in small groups to create modules, Hillsborough has centrally managed the module creation process to enable teachers to implement common, centrally-developed, and approved modules in all courses using LDC. One of the district literacy leaders described Hillsborough’s district-led curriculum management philosophy: “We have curriculum guides, pacing guides, materials, and expectations. Our curriculum is not scripted, but there are certain elements that we expect to be taught in each course.” She added:

*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 work as a team and it’s a very team-driven approach. We do everything with all kinds of pre-established infrastructure and support, such as the curriculum and pacing guides.*

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<sup>20</sup> We will refer to these two central office leaders as “district literacy leaders” throughout the rest of the case study.

## Strategic Delegation of Responsibility

While the overall approach is district-led, district literacy leaders have also sought to gradually release – or strategically delegate - responsibility for specific aspects of LDC work as the initiative has progressed. Over time, a broad array of district educators has become more involved in aspects of the work, including module development and revision.

Teachers and coaches have taken on leadership roles facilitating professional development sessions and participating in module development and revision teams. District literacy leaders identified the gradual release approach in an interview in Year One, and it has remained an important framework for LDC implementation. In Year Three, the director of literacy noted:

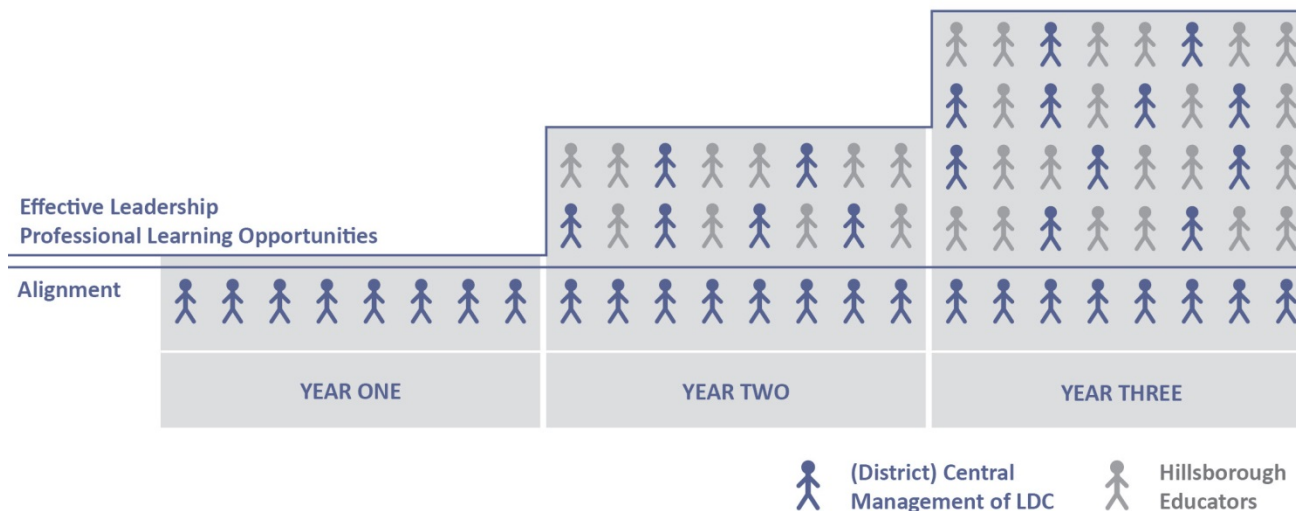
*This gradual release mandate is integrated into many pieces of our instructional model. We have to involve lots of folks, develop a systematic approach to gradually releasing implementation responsibility out to more folks, and identify what the implementation targets are along the way.*

## How Hillsborough’s Approach Supports the Conditions for Robust Implementation of LDC

District administrators employed this hybrid “central management-gradual release” approach to address the dual challenge of developing sufficient capacity in a large district and sustaining the LDC work over the long term. This combination of central management and gradual release has worked to support the conditions for robust implementation which RFA identified during its first two years of LDC research. Depicted in the case study background section, these conditions are: **effective leadership** at multiple levels; **alignment** with local and state standards, curricula and assessments; and, meaningful and ongoing **professional learning opportunities**.

Figure 4 illustrates how these conditions for robust implementation operate in Hillsborough. In Hillsborough, **effective leadership** and meaningful **professional learning opportunities** take place at both the central office level, which has retained direction and management of certain components of LDC implementation, and across schools at multiple levels, where educators in various roles are growing into LDC “experts” and supporting and coaching other staff on the use of modules. In terms of **alignment**, Hillsborough’s central office has retained primary responsibility for communicating and directing the alignment of LDC with CCSS, curricula, and the teacher evaluation system. District leaders have utilized various levels of educators across the district to support LDC messaging efforts and implement district-guided alignment directives.

Figure 4. Hillsborough’s Hybrid Approach to Robust LDC Implementation



### What the Conditions Looked Like in Hillsborough County

#### Cross-Cutting Strategy

- Strategy 1: Use a piloting framework to continuously improve LDC implementation and modules

#### Effective Leadership

- Strategy 2: Leverage existing district and school-level staff resources to carry out hybrid approach
- Strategy 3: Give reading coaches a central role leading LDC in their schools

#### Effective Leadership and Professional Learning Opportunities

- Strategy 4: Develop LDC teacher leaders

#### Professional Learning Opportunities

- Strategy 5: Create collaboration opportunities for teachers, reading coaches, and district leaders

#### Alignment

- Strategy 6: Consistently communicate to all stakeholders that LDC is a central vehicle for reaching district goals
- Strategy 7: To anchor LDC in district curricula, create all-module curricula or integrate modules into existing curricula
- Strategy 8: Use LDC as a vehicle for differentiating instruction and improving the literacy skills of all students

For each of these strategies, we provide a concrete description of how Hillsborough enacted the strategy; what its rationale was for adopting it; and what impact the strategy has had on the District’s implementation of LDC. We pay particular attention to describing how each strategy has evolved or grown over the three years of LDC implementation.

## Strategy 1: Use a Piloting Framework to Continuously Improve LDC Implementation and Modules

Conditions Addressed:	Alignment	Effective Leadership	Professional Learning Opportunities
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### What did Hillsborough do?

District leaders decided to use a “pilot-learn-refine-scale” process to (1) scale-up the initiative and (2) strengthen the quality and curricular integration of LDC modules into reading, English Language Arts (ELA), and other curricula.

#### Piloting Framework to Scale Up Initiative Across More Schools and Courses

Year	1	2	3
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The intention of Hillsborough district leaders was to use a piloting framework to test and refine the expansion of LDC module use across the district. As Figure 3 illustrates, during the first two years of the initiative, district leaders focused primarily on implementing LDC in just one new course each year and piloted each course in nine of the district’s 46 middle schools.

Years	1	2	3
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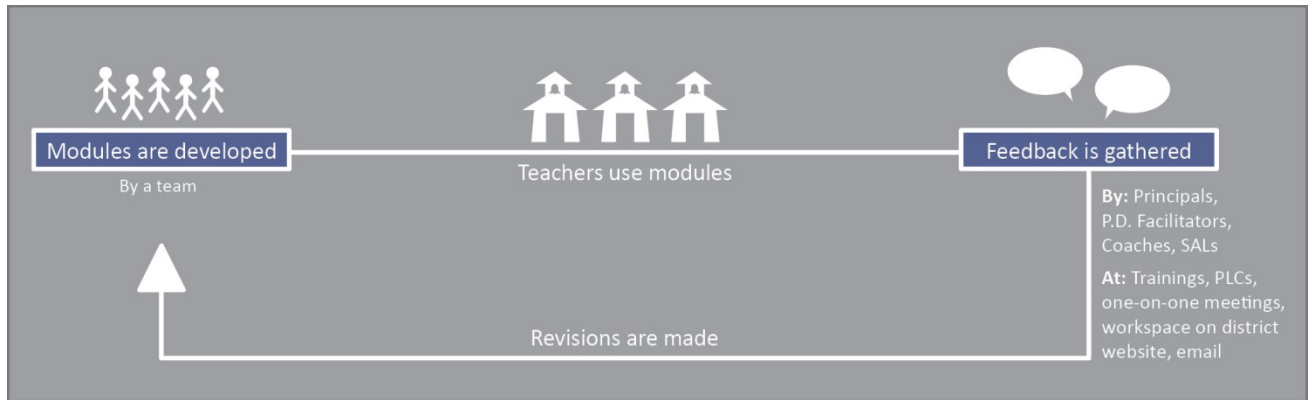
Following two initial years of intense learning and implementation refinements, district leaders decided to significantly expand LDC during the third year of implementation. In Year Three, district leaders increased the number of courses using LDC from four to ten, with five of these new courses required across all district schools. The district-wide expansion of LDC modules in science during the third year of the initiative reflects how early implementation lessons informed scale-up decisions. A district literacy leader said, “When we went into science, we had a lot more experience, and the science content supervisors trusted that experience. The science content leader advocated strongly for implementing in all schools at once.” The science content leader believed that the LDC framework created a natural bridge between the CCSS Content Literacy demands and the explicit literacy expectations in the National Science Standards. In addition, teachers and administrators have examined student work at their sites and see that, as one district administrator said, “students’ products have far surpassed work that was previously deemed acceptable or even exemplary.” Seeing this quality also encouraged some leaders to advocate for a more rapid expansion.

#### Piloting Framework to Strengthen Module Quality and LDC Integration into Curricula

Years	1	2	3
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District leaders also used a piloting framework to strengthen the quality and sustainability of the modules themselves and their classroom use. For this reason, district leaders were committed from the very beginning of the initiative to the development of feedback mechanisms so that teachers and reading coaches could inform the development and revision of modules. Figure 5 illustrates the feedback loop created by this strategy.

Figure 5. Module Feedback Loops



Hillsborough’s piloting framework strategy – used to both scale-up and strengthen module use in the classroom - exemplifies the district’s hybrid approach of strong central management and gradual and strategic delegation of responsibility. District literacy leaders selected specific courses for LDC implementation each year. By the third year of LDC implementation, a broader group of district administrators, such as science content supervisors, were also beginning to shape decisions regarding use of the LDC framework.

Over the course of LDC implementation, district leaders have developed multiple processes for gathering teacher and reading coach feedback. These feedback processes include:

- Formal professional development sessions during the year and summer;
- Informal professional learning opportunities at the school level;
- Professional Learning Community meetings;
- Specialized web portals; and,
- In-person and email communication.

District literacy leaders have used the feedback received through these multiple avenues to guide and inform how teams of teachers, coaches, and district administrators work together to revise, integrate, and pace modules in the curriculum. Once the modules go through a revision process after the first year of implementation, they continue to be used in courses and curricula. Hillsborough may choose to revisit existing modules again after longer periods of implementation.

Shared knowledge, responsibility, and experience with multiple years of LDC implementation have enabled a growing group of educators to revise and refine the original LDC implementation model. While district literacy leaders have retained the responsibility for vetting and approving modules, a diverse group of educators across the district has become increasingly involved in creating and revising modules and designing their integration into curricula.

### Rationale

District leaders recognized that a piloting framework could help them learn from early implementation and make refinements to their scale-up plans, the integration of LDC modules into curricula across content areas and to the modules themselves. Multiple factors shaped Hillsborough district leaders’ decision: the large size of the district, the existing district-led approach to curriculum development, and a strong commitment to using LDC as a vehicle to align instruction with CCSS across the district.

## What was the impact of this strategy?

Hillsborough's piloting framework has played a key role in shaping the early implementation success of the LDC initiative.

**District literacy leaders noted that the piloting framework greatly strengthened implementation.** Though the district had rarely used the approach of piloting in a subset of schools prior to LDC, district literacy leaders found that the gradual approach of the first two years was useful. One district literacy leader explained that the piloting framework has worked because “you have a chance to correct initial mistakes before it goes too far.” For example, district literacy leaders realized that the 6th grade advanced reading course needed an introductory module to help students understand different types of writing. A district literacy leader explained: “If we had rolled out LDC to everyone at the beginning, we would not have known that we needed this introductory module. Before you go whole scale, you have to work the kinks out. We have about 10,000 students in 6th grade, so having that year to work the kinks out was invaluable.”

**When teachers or reading coaches saw their feedback shaping module revisions, it increased their buy-in to the initiative.** One science teacher described a process where district leaders gathered feedback about the modules from Subject Area Leaders, creating charts with participants' views on benefits and challenges of the modules. She noted:

*When I got into the meetings for writing the next module, those charts came out, and they actually used that information. I saw the input being used. It was about teachers 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. She was so excited about teaching this new lesson because it was right in her curriculum and she could see that the roadblocks we had the first time had been addressed.*

The districts' piloting framework enabled teachers, reading coaches, and other educators across the district to make informed decisions about the expansion of LDC implementation across schools and also work together to continually improve the quality of modules. This framework also helped district literacy leaders accomplish two important objectives: incorporate feedback from educators using the modules in the classroom and increase awareness of, and commitment to, the initiative among district educators at all levels.

The piloting framework illustrates district leaders' commitment to continually learn from and refine their implementation strategies. This framework enabled district leaders to engage multiple levels of educators in informing and working on solutions. Using a framework that aligned well with their overarching hybrid approach to LDC implementation - strong central management with gradual delegation of key implementation responsibilities – allowed district leaders to continue providing direction and clarity throughout the first three years of implementation while also building staff and systemic capacity to refine and strengthen LDC implementation across courses and improve the overall quality of modules.

District leaders' “centrally directed and educator-informed” piloting framework ultimately enabled them to significantly expand the breadth and depth of the LDC initiative and strengthen teachers' module use in the classroom. In a large district like Hillsborough, this framework, aligned with their overarching hybrid approach, has helped shape the consistency, quality, and likely sustainability of LDC.

## Strategy 2: Leverage Existing District and School-Level Staff Resources to Carry Out Hybrid Approach

Conditions Addressed:	Alignment	Effective Leadership	Professional Learning Opportunities
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### What did Hillsborough do?

District leaders deployed school-based staff, such as teachers and reading coaches, and district administrators to play a range of roles to implement and support LDC. As can be seen in Figure 6, the number and types of educators involved have increased throughout the course of the initiative.

District leaders created time for staff to focus on LDC in different ways. For reading coaches and district administrators, LDC work became part of their job responsibilities and also became a tool to help them carry out their roles. Teachers involved in more time-intensive activities, such as module development, were compensated for their time, though the stipend rarely covered all the time involved. Also, as teachers used LDC and saw its benefits, their motivation to participate in these activities increased.

Figure 6. Groups of Existing Staff Leveraged by District Leaders

YEAR ONE	YEAR TWO	YEAR THREE
		<p><b>D</b> Two district literacy leaders</p> <p><b>D</b> Science and social studies supervisors</p>
	<p><b>D</b> Two district literacy leaders</p> <p><b>D</b> Middle and high school English supervisors</p>	<p><b>D</b> Science district resource teachers</p> <p><b>S</b> Reading and science coaches at all middle schools and high schools</p>
<p><b>D</b> Two district literacy leaders</p>	<p><b>S</b> Reading coaches at all middle school sites</p>	<p><b>S</b> Middle school ELA, science, and social studies SALs</p>
<p><b>S</b> Nine reading coaches</p>	<p><b>S</b> ELA SALs at nine pilot sites</p>	<p><b>S</b> High school ELA and reading department chairs</p>
<p><b>S</b> 6th grade advanced reading teachers at nine pilot schools</p>	<p><b>S</b> 6th grade advanced reading teachers at all middle schools, 7th grade ELA teachers at nine pilot schools</p>	<p><b>S</b> Middle school and high school teachers in 10 courses</p>



## D DISTRICT LEVEL

- **DISTRICT LITERACY LEADERS** are the two key central office leaders responsible for rolling-out and overseeing the initiative in Hillsborough. They hold the positions of the district director of literacy and the resource
- **DISTRICT CONTENT SUPERVISORS** oversee content areas at specific levels in the district. There are usually separate content supervisors for the middle school and high school levels.
- **DISTRICT RESOURCE TEACHERS (DRT)** work with content supervisors to support curriculum implementation and development in specific content areas. Each is assigned to particular schools and has a programmatic responsibility. DRTs partnered with content supervisors in overseeing the development, professional development, and implementation of LDC modules.

## S SCHOOL LEVEL

- **COACHES** Reading coaches or school-based literacy experts, were the initial group of school-level implementation leaders and have continued to play this role as the LDC initiative has expanded to more schools. In addition, science coaches became involved in Year Three.
- **SUBJECT AREA LEADERS (SALs)** and department chairs provide content area leadership at the middle school and high school levels respectively. High school ELA and reading department chairs and middle school science, social studies, ELA and reading SALs participate in LDC trainings and eventually may lead professional development and PLC meetings at their schools.
- **TEACHERS** are implementing LDC and some with experience teaching modules have become involved in module development and revision and also sometimes facilitate professional development for teachers new to LDC.

Leaders carried out this strategy in the following phases:

### Building a Foundation

Year **1** **2** **3**

The first round of staff leveraging began with the two district literacy leaders, a group of reading coaches - or school-level literacy experts - from Year One's nine pilot schools, and 6<sup>th</sup> grade advanced reading teachers from these schools. During this first year, district literacy leaders and reading coaches developed four modules for the 6<sup>th</sup> grade advanced reading course, provided training for teachers about the LDC modules, and supported module implementation throughout the year.

During the spring of Year One, a district literacy leader explained the reason for using literacy experts to develop the initial group of modules:

*Instead of having teachers develop the first modules, we decided to provide completed modules as models, so that teachers could learn them and get a feel for student responses without having to worry about module development. Our plan was then to move slowly toward gradual release of the module development responsibility.*

District leadership anticipated that lessons from LDC implementation during Year One would inform the expansion of module use and leveraging of additional staff resources in Year Two.

During the summer between Years One and Two of LDC implementation, district literacy leaders and the initial group of reading coaches trained additional reading coaches beyond the initial nine schools and engaged experienced LDC teachers in providing professional development to teachers who would be implementing LDC for the first time during the upcoming school year.

### Modest Growth

Year	1	2	3
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During Year Two of the initiative, the number of reading coaches leading LDC implementation, and the number of LDC teachers using modules, significantly increased. Sixth grade advanced reading spread from the nine pilot schools to all 46 middle schools, and teachers at the nine pilot schools began implementing LDC in 7<sup>th</sup> grade English Language Arts. District literacy leaders also began engaging additional levels of educators, such as district content supervisors in module development and overall LDC implementation support.

### Rapid Growth

Year	1	2	3
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By the third year of the initiative, district leaders had leveraged five groups of existing district and school-based staff to support and strengthen LDC implementation. Figure 6 illustrates the growing numbers and types of staff involved in LDC, and also defines the different staff roles. It also illustrates the incremental process of leveraging these groups of existing staff across the three years of the LDC initiative.

### Rationale

District leaders decided to operationalize the district’s hybrid “central management-gradual release” approach by identifying and incrementally drawing on existing staff resources at the central office, school-building, and classroom levels. They were able to capitalize on existing strong literacy leadership at the central office level to guide LDC and further develop expertise in schools. The strong relationship between the union and central office also supported developing a cooperative, productive relationship with teachers to implement LDC. Examples of district-union collaboration include the union’s input on committee member selection for district committees such as curriculum development and assessment and negotiation of time during the day for collaboration and planning in the district contract. District leaders recognized that incrementally leveraging existing staff resources had the potential to help grow and sustain the initiative in such a large district.

### What was the impact of this strategy?

**Strategically leveraging existing staff resources enabled the District to shift some leadership responsibilities from the original two district literacy leaders and nine reading coaches to a cadre of educators across all district schools.**

A shift in the roles of the two district literacy leaders over the three-year span of the initiative illustrates the benefits of incrementally leveraging staff resources. Though their role continues to be central, it has evolved to focus on broader implementation oversight. A Year One LDC teacher noted that the two literacy leaders were very involved in the initial process of creating modules and offering training, but that their current role has shifted to “overseeing everything and working on getting LDC into different content areas and grade levels.”

**Incrementally leveraging staff resources has resulted in the expansion of teachers' roles in LDC implementation over the course of the initiative.** Teachers from Year One have become especially active as module developers and facilitators of professional development. Some experienced LDC teachers also facilitated professional learning community (PLC) meetings on module use. A Year One reading coach described the growth of teacher involvement in supporting LDC implementation, "There are a lot more people involved now than three years ago. Three years ago, it was the nine reading coaches. Now there are teachers getting involved in training and writing modules. Our district literacy leader encourages this teacher involvement."

**As of Year Three of LDC implementation, a diverse group of educators was participating in module development, delivering professional learning opportunities, and providing peer and coaching support to teachers.** This diverse group included district content area supervisors for all four middle school content areas (ELA, reading, science and social studies) and for high school ELA and reading; school subject area leaders; district resource teachers; and additional reading coaches. In Year Three, content area supervisors - supported by the district literacy leaders – led the planning and introduction of modules in their content areas. One district literacy leader explained:

*Last year we were still very much district-centered in the development of the modules. Then, during the summer, we had multiple teams being managed and directed by their content supervisors, such as in Science and Social Studies. We are in the gradual release process, pushing out the direction and responsibility to the content supervisors.*

Hillsborough's incremental leveraging of staff resources has facilitated the creation of a cadre of LDC experts to help spread and support the initiative. Combined with the district's strong management role in the standard development and use of modules, incrementally leveraging staff resources has contributed to the consistency and scale-up of LDC implementation in Hillsborough.

### Strategy 3: Give Reading Coaches a Central Role Leading LDC in their Schools

Conditions Addressed:	Alignment	Effective Leadership	Professional Learning Opportunities
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#### What did Hillsborough do?

Years	1	2	3
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When LDC began, each Hillsborough school already had a reading coach. District literacy leaders selected these in-house literacy experts to shape and support module use in their schools. At the school building level, reading coaches provide support for LDC in a range of ways, including:

- Co-teaching and modeling lessons;
- Training teachers;
- Attending Professional Learning Community meetings;
- Relaying district information to teachers;
- Providing teacher feedback to district leaders;
- Supporting teachers with all aspects of module implementation, including the pacing of modules, and scoring and responding to student work;
- Answering questions related to LDC; and,

- Sharing LDC resource materials.

In interviews, reading coaches described how they supported teachers. According to a high school reading coach, “I have constant conversation with teachers. We have conversations about how module use is going, where they are in the process, and how the students are doing. And I have gone in and also modeled some of the lessons.”

### Rationale

District leaders’ staff leveraging strategy informed their decision to deploy reading coaches as school-level LDC implementation leaders. Reading coaches were naturally positioned to take on LDC implementation responsibilities because they had a pre-existing role as literacy experts in their individual schools, where they were already part of the school culture.

### What was the impact of this strategy?

**Teachers reported that reading coaches played a crucial role in supporting LDC classroom implementation.** This theme arose repeatedly in interviews, as illustrated by two teachers. An 8<sup>th</sup> grade social studies teacher said, “Our coach facilitates the implementation of each module and works very closely with us. She is very knowledgeable of the modules and is able to address any concerns that arise through the implementation,” while a 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> grade reading and ELA teacher said, “Any question I have, the coach is always available. I can email her. She’ll help me see the connections I’m missing.”

Year Three survey data also illustrates reading coaches’ contribution to supporting teachers in their classrooms: 48% of responding teachers<sup>21</sup> reported that a coach or department head had visited their classroom when they were teaching a module.

### Reading Coaches Served as successful “LDC connectors” Across District Levels, Schools, Content Areas and Educator Roles

Reading coaches also served as connectors between LDC implementation at the classroom level and broader school and district LDC efforts. They updated principals on LDC implementation in the classroom and helped principals link the teacher evaluation system with LDC. One district literacy leader highlighted the connector role of the reading coaches by saying that they served as the “voice of teachers.” A 6<sup>th</sup> grade advanced reading teacher illustrated this connector role: “Our reading coach plays a big communication role. She has done all the trainings with us and, any questions we have, she comes into our classrooms often and does a lesson. She also takes our concerns downtown and shares district information with us.”

In interviews, teachers also confirmed that the district communicated expectations through the reading coaches.

LDC has also provided a mechanism to better integrate the literacy work of reading coaches and the content focused work of many teachers. As the initiative has expanded to social studies and science in Year Three, the role of reading coaches has evolved to include the integration of LDC into science and social studies curricula. As one district literacy leader explained, “We’ve expanded the expertise

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<sup>21</sup> 288 teachers completed the Year Three LDC survey, administered in Spring 2013. This was a response rate of 40%. All survey data cited is from the Year Three survey.

and the capacity of our reading coaches. They are now able to step in and be part of that connective tissue that supports the integration of LDC into other content areas.”

Before LDC, the level of interaction between reading coaches and science teachers varied by school. The district literacy director described improved integration between LDC and science: “The process of LDC has given literacy and content teachers a common language. It provides a shared format and process of thinking about instruction that both coaches and teachers are familiar with. It honors both literacy and science content.”

Reading coaches’ role as both literacy experts and connectors has enhanced the availability of LDC expertise at the school level and facilitated the regular flow of LDC-related information, concerns, and ideas between teachers, principals, and district leadership. This dual, and critical, implementation role has strongly influenced the early success of the LDC initiative in Hillsborough.

## Strategy 4: Develop LDC Teacher Leaders

Conditions Addressed:

Alignment

Effective Leadership

Professional Learning Opportunities

### What did Hillsborough do?

Consistent with the strategy of leveraging staff knowledge and skills, district literacy leaders and reading coaches engaged teachers in two activities to build both teacher leadership and overall teacher capacity to effectively use the LDC framework:

- Team module development
- Facilitation of professional learning opportunities

Module development took place outside of the school day and district-wide formal professional development sessions took place during the summer or during the school day. For the latter, teachers were able to leave their schools and the district provided substitute teachers to cover their classes.

### Team Module Development

Team-based module development evolved in the following ways in Hillsborough.

Year 1 2 3

District leaders established module development teams comprised of district literacy leaders and reading coaches. During the summer between Years One and Two, a group of pilot-school LDC teachers joined with coaches to revise existing modules and create a new module for 6<sup>th</sup> grade advanced reading. Also during this summer, the district’s language arts content supervisor selected middle school language arts department chairs and teachers to develop a new 7<sup>th</sup> grade ELA module that would be implemented in Year Two. A reading coach guided this team through the module development process.

Years 1 2 3

District literacy leaders collaborated with reading coaches, content area supervisors, and department heads to form additional module-development and revision teams. All teams included teachers from the relevant content area.

Module development teams facilitated the continuity of central guidance and consistency in module development, while also launching the district’s efforts to build teacher-level leadership and capacity. One reading coach described the evolving team module development process as a way of “pulling in classroom teachers in order to have the ‘teacher eye’.”

### Teacher Delivery of Professional Learning Opportunities

District literacy leaders and reading coaches also engaged experienced LDC teachers in providing group and classroom level professional development for teachers who would be using modules for the first time.

Year	1	2	3
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During the summer between Years One and Two, teachers who had implemented LDC in the sixth grade advanced reading course began facilitating professional development for reading teachers from the larger group of 46 middle schools. Teachers worked with reading coaches and district leaders to lead sessions about the tools, facilitate discussion and also shared suggestions and answered questions based using the modules.

Years	1	2	3
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In Year Two, teachers with experience using LDC modules and working in module development teams began serving as resources for LDC support at their schools. Often this support was informal, including hallway conversations and teachers working together during PLC meetings. Sometimes reading coaches, like the one below, asked teachers to provide support for a specific piece of LDC implementation: “My one reading teacher agreed to do a demo lesson in her classroom. I asked her to do this so that other teachers could come in and see what exactly goes on in LDC.”

Experienced LDC teachers have also continued to be involved in district and school-level professional development.

The number of teachers involved in delivering professional development sessions and working in module development teams has continued to increase within and across content areas over the course of the initiative. Now, teachers are involved from the beginning with developing each module. When LDC is implemented in any new course, this also increases the number of teacher leaders in the initiative. Just as significantly, the cadre of LDC teacher leaders has broadened to include science and social studies teachers.

### Rationale

Involving teachers in module development and in facilitating professional learning opportunities allowed the strategic delegation of responsibility. District literacy leaders and reading coaches could shape and guide module development and professional learning opportunities, while also engaging teachers’ implementation experiences and insights in a meaningful way. This approach helped build teachers’ leadership skills and enhanced their capacity to implement LDC. It also positioned the teacher leaders to support their teacher colleagues in developing their own capacity to implement LDC.

## What was the impact of this strategy?

**One-third of LDC teachers have taken on leadership roles.** In Year Three surveys, 34% of responding teachers reported being involved in at least one of these leadership activities: working on a module development team, coaching colleagues on module use or facilitating LDC professional development sessions. Delegating specific aspects of LDC implementation responsibility to teachers has enabled district literacy leaders and administrators to build LDC implementation capacity at the school, course, and grade levels and to scale-up the initiative across a large district.

**Teachers valued having their peers as school-level implementation leaders.** In interviews, teachers reported that they valued their peers' contributions to module creation and professional development, and that school-based support from peers was useful for LDC implementation. Eighty-nine percent (89%) of teachers responding to RFA's survey who worked with an experienced LDC colleague said that doing so helped them to teach modules. A 6<sup>th</sup> grade advanced reading teacher described teacher-led training as the most helpful form of LDC professional development: "You could get the binder and teach it, but going to the trainings really helps because the experienced LDC teachers give you examples. They show you what works versus what hasn't worked. They show you how you can use higher-order questions."

District leaders further expanded opportunities for teachers to take on implementation responsibilities during Year Three of the initiative. As part of the module introduction process for science courses during Year Three, each school selected one teacher representative at each grade level to attend LDC professional development. These teachers then returned to their school to train their peers during PLC meetings. A district literacy leader expressed that teachers were generally supportive of this peer learning process: "For the most part, I've heard nothing but positive comments about this professional learning process. It has given principals the chance to give leadership roles to teachers who don't always have the opportunity to be in leadership positions."

The presence of leadership opportunities for science teachers is borne out by survey data. Almost a third (30%) of science teachers who took RFA's survey reported that they had coached their colleagues about modules. This compared to between 10 and 17% of teachers in other content areas.

District literacy leaders recognized that teachers highly value the LDC expertise and experience of their peers. They have continued to build teacher leadership capacity through module development teams and by providing opportunities for teachers to train and coach their peers. Having teachers serve as LDC leaders has enabled the steady expansion of LDC across Hillsborough.

**Recruiting teacher leaders happened organically as teachers experienced the benefits of LDC.** District leaders believed that the scaffolded gradual release process helped build motivation for teacher leadership. One district leader said:

*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, with scaffolded support through coaching and peer support through professional learning communities, many teachers want to be involved in the review and revision of existing modules and, eventually, the creation of new modules. We don't have to recruit teachers to review, revise, and develop after they have the opportunity to deliver the instructional framework in their classrooms and examine their student work.*

Strategy 6 describes this collaborative peer support and the work in professional learning communities in more depth.

## Using teacher leaders across content areas is still a work in progress.

Hillsborough district leaders and administrators originally intended to create a support system within schools where experienced LDC reading and language arts teachers would connect and support the implementation of LDC by other content area teachers. One district literacy leader explained, “The goal is to seed some work with LDC in our literacy classroom so that when we tackle the content areas, teachers who have already used LDC can be a peer partner to social studies and science.”

As of Year Three, these cross-content connections were not taking place on a consistent basis. For this cross-content collaboration to flourish, teachers need to be able to identify the experienced LDC teachers in their school and have time and space to interact with them.

In surveys and interviews, some teachers reported that they were not aware of teachers with LDC expertise in their schools or across the district. For example, 30% of middle school teachers responding to RFA’s survey expressed the belief that no teachers were using LDC modules in their district last year, yet teachers in all district middle schools had implemented modules the previous year. Part of the challenge with making cross-content connections was structural; many schools across the district did not have common planning time or Professional Learning Communities across content areas.

District literacy leaders continue to work with school level administrators and educators to create and institutionalize opportunities for experienced LDC teachers to support colleagues in other content areas who are using modules for the first time. District leaders have also developed instructional leadership teams (ILTs) as a way to increase collaboration and leadership development across content areas. ILTs were piloted in three schools during 2012-13, in order to support literacy instruction in all subjects. ILTs bring together teachers from the core content areas and other areas, as well as counselors, administrators and the reading coach. They use National School Reform protocols to examine student work and assess how this work reflects on school reading and writing goals.

## Strategy 5: Create Collaboration Opportunities for Teachers, Reading Coaches, and District Leaders

Conditions Addressed:

Alignment

Effective Leadership

Professional Learning Opportunities

### What did Hillsborough do?

District administrators have developed and encouraged multiple avenues for LDC collaboration, both within and across schools. **Collaboration within schools** primarily takes place through Professional Learning Community (PLC) meetings and informal peer support and guidance. **Collaboration across schools** happens mostly through district-wide training sessions, module development teams, and online communities.

### Collaboration within Schools

Years 1 2 3

- **School-based professional learning communities.** Time to collaborate is built into teachers’ schedules through their Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), which meet



during common planning periods. Teachers who teach the same grade and subject matter convene once a week in PLCs to discuss instruction-related matters, including LDC. PLCs have become a venue for teachers to talk to their LDC colleagues about what is going well, reflect on the information from trainings, look at student work, and raise questions about module use.

- **Informal, school-based collaboration.** This teacher-initiated collaboration was often not formally scheduled. It might take place between classes, before or after school, or over email. In interviews, many reading coaches and teachers spoke of this informal collaboration among LDC colleagues. One 6<sup>th</sup> grade advanced reading teacher said: “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.”

### Collaboration across Schools and District

Years	1	2	3
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- **District-wide trainings.** Teachers and coaches have had the opportunity to collaborate with colleagues from other schools at formal professional development sessions organized by the district. The structure of district-wide trainings for teachers new to LDC varied according to what course they taught. Trainings, which often lasted a full day, tended to occur one to four times per year, including summer. At these trainings, teachers learned about the LDC framework and about the modules they would be implementing. In some cases, they reflected on module implementation after it took place and shared student work.
- **Module development teams.** The most intensive type of cross-district collaboration involved small groups of teachers, reading coaches, and sometimes content supervisors working together on module development and revision. These groups engage in in-depth work over time to create a teaching task, identify texts and other materials and create the mini-tasks that make up the module.
- **Virtual collaboration.** The District website is configured to provide opportunities for staff to communicate and collaborate. Reading coaches have a coaches’ corner on the district website where they communicate and post questions. Similarly, teachers have a site where they can ask LDC questions and access modules and additional LDC materials that others have uploaded. Teachers teaching the same curricula have their own conference sites on the web and some schools have their own group spaces.

This collaboration strategy combines direction and structure provided by district literacy leaders with a release of leadership and responsibility to reading coaches and teachers to deepen collaboration at the school level. In Hillsborough, teachers and coaches took the initiative to facilitate and plan PLC meetings and created ways of collaborating informally and using the district website with others teaching the same module.

### Rationale

District leaders recognized that collaboration was an additional avenue for building leadership and capacity to implement and sustain the LDC initiative. Hillsborough’s existing organizational and staff infrastructure and hybrid implementation approach shaped collaboration in the district. For example, having established Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) meant that the vast majority of teachers could use PLCs as one forum to collaborate with colleagues around LDC implementation. Moreover, the district’s commitment to common curricula and common

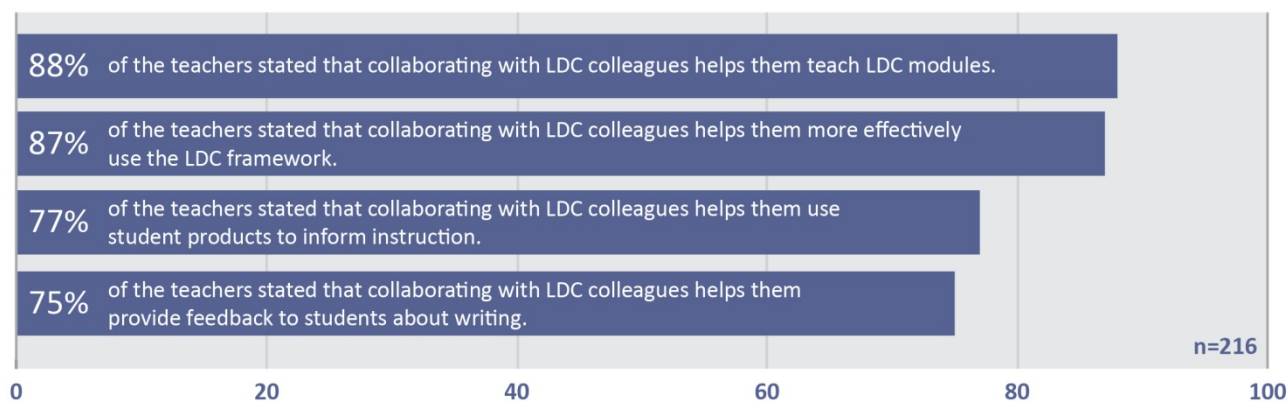
implementation of LDC modules provided teachers with shared experiences, content, and assignments within schools and across the district. The creation of teams for module development and revision also created the possibility of collaborating with a range of educators outside of one's school community. Finally, the infrastructure of the district website provided opportunities for virtual collaboration.

### What was the impact of this strategy?

**Survey data indicated that LDC-related collaboration was widespread in Hillsborough.** Eighty-eight percent of LDC teachers responding to RFA's spring 2013 survey agreed that their colleagues are collaborative. Three-quarters (74%) reported that they have taught modules with the support of a colleague in 2012-13. In addition, collaboration on LDC seems to involve teaching peers not yet implementing LDC. Twenty-nine percent of responding teachers reported that they have shared an LDC module with a teacher who is not implementing LDC.

**Across schools, teachers repeatedly cited collaborating with peers as significant support for their LDC implementation.** This finding emerged from both survey data and interviews. As Figure 7 indicates, the vast majority of teachers responding to RFA's survey indicated that collaborating with LDC colleagues assisted them with key areas of LDC implementation.

Figure 7. How Collaboration Facilitated LDC Implementation



One middle school advanced reading teacher described the benefits of working with her peers on LDC implementation: “I like being able to get together with my peers to talk about these units, share what I am doing, and hear what my colleagues are doing differently to make the LDC implementation process smoother, faster, better.”

**District leaders reported that LDC has provided greater focus for Professional Learning Community meetings.** District-wide trainings were crucial in helping teachers understand the overall purpose of the initiative, but PLCs provided an opportunity for teachers to reflect on the information from trainings, raise questions, and problem-solve together as they were implementing LDC in their classrooms. One district literacy leader described a renewed PLC focus:

*The PLCs were there and functioning. 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. PLC meetings could go in a dozen different directions depending on who was facilitating. LDC has given those sites and teams a very clear focus and purpose for their time together.*

Working in PLCs, teachers and their reading coaches were able to share strategies and examine student work stemming from their common assignments.

### **Educators described new types of collaboration and connections across grade levels.**

LDC implementation has enabled teachers to share a common language and framework when discussing student learning and progress. One reading coach explained that LDC was serving as a catalyst for better vertical communication across grade levels within a content area: “LDC implementation is also forcing those vertical conversations, which my teachers now love because it makes their life easier. They can ask, what did you do last year with this group of students? And then they know more about what they should do in their class.”

LDC has facilitated smoother grade transitions for teachers in the same content area. It has provided them with tools to work more effectively together in understanding what experiences and knowledge students bring with them and to plan what they need to do to prepare students for the next grade level.

### **Building robust communities for online collaboration is still a work in progress.**

Though on-line collaboration avenues were available, many teachers were not utilizing them. District literacy leaders reported that participation in on-line exchange varied by course. Teachers that participated tended to find this method of collaboration useful. An English 4 teacher reported the following: “There is an online place to ask questions. I’ve used it a couple times when I have wondered how some piece of LDC is going to work. I’ll ask if anyone has gotten to it and I’ve received some responses.”

However, in interviews, the majority of teachers did not report that they were collaborating on-line and some seemed unaware of it as an option. Even some reading coaches were not aware of it as an option for their teachers. District literacy leaders have identified the development of a stronger on-line LDC community as one of their goals as the initiative matures. They hope that the planned roll out of a new user interface in 2013-14 will support this effort.

## **Strategy 6: Consistently Communicate to All Stakeholders that LDC is a Central Vehicle for Reaching District Goals**

**Conditions Addressed:**

**Alignment**

Effective Leadership

Professional Learning Opportunities

### **What did Hillsborough do?**

District leaders clearly and consistently conveyed the message to all levels of educators that LDC aligned with two critical district priorities: the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and the district’s teacher evaluation system, Empowering Effective Teachers (EET). In trainings throughout the first three years of LDC implementation, district leaders presented LDC as a tool to address the CCSS and articulated how LDC could help teachers receive positive evaluations through Empowering Effective Teachers.

### **District Communication about LDC Alignment with CCSS**

**Years** | 1 | 2 | 3

Though the state of Florida is still transitioning to the CCSS, district leaders have communicated from the beginning of the initiative that because LDC is aligned to the CCSS, it would prepare Hillsborough teachers for the conversion. For example, when presenting the CCSS at district

workshops, district leaders intentionally presented LDC alongside CCSS. One district leader described this integration of LDC into all communication about CCSS: “LDC is becoming a part of the vocabulary in our CCSS work, workshops, and orientations. LDC is the first tool we talk about.”

Further, district leaders outlined how LDC dovetails with other district initiatives that also align with the CCSS – such as, Springboard, which is the 7<sup>th</sup> grade ELA district-wide curriculum.

### District Communication about LDC Alignment with Teacher Evaluation System

From the outset, district leaders communicated that LDC would help teachers meet the criteria of the EET. The district used various forms of professional development to emphasize the alignment:

Year	1	2	3
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District leaders worked with the pilot 6<sup>th</sup> grade advanced reading teachers to analyze LDC lessons using the EET teacher evaluation rubric.

Years	1	2	3
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In subsequent years, district leaders, as well as facilitators of professional development, continued to articulate links between LDC and EET at trainings and workshops. At the school-level, principals and reading coaches reiterated that LDC focuses on key areas central to EET such as complex texts, writing and discussion, and student engagement.

District leaders sought to educate administrators about links between the CCSS, LDC and EET by using the following process in professional development sessions. They (1) engaged district and site administrators in scoring student work from LDC classrooms to help them understand and identify exemplary work that is linked to the CCSS; (2) provided professional development on what teacher behaviors drive that level of student work and connected those behaviors to the teacher evaluation rubric.

Overall, while the central office managed this strategy throughout the initiative, principals and reading coaches shared responsibility by adopting, supporting, and sharing messages about LDC and CCSS alignment at the school level.

### Rationale

District literacy leaders and administrators wanted district staff to understand how the three initiatives, LDC, EET, and CCSS, worked together to support district priorities. Trainings provided a venue to ensure that these messages would reach most district educators over time. District leaders recognized that a clear articulation of the links between LDC and district and state priorities had a strong potential to increase teacher buy-in and increase the likelihood of the early adoption and long-term sustainability of the LDC initiative.

### What was the impact of this strategy?

#### **A large majority of stakeholders understand the alignment between LDC and CCSS.**

Ninety-one percent of teachers responding to RFA’s survey agreed that the LDC framework aligns with the CCSS and 83% of responding teachers reported that using the modules helped them implement the CCSS. In interviews, most teachers and principals expressed that the district will be in good shape for the upcoming CCSS-aligned PARCC assessment because of LDC. A principal emphasized the alignment between LDC and CCSS: “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 Common Core 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.”

Since the CCSS will eventually replace the current state standards and influence future state assessments, conveying the message of LDC’s centrality to the Common Core helped elevate LDC’s importance across all levels of school and district leaders and educators.

**In interviews, teachers, principals and reading coaches also expressed that LDC aligns well with the EET.** A middle school principal explained,

*I saw right off the bat that LDC aligns with our EET rubric. Specifically, in domain one it aligns with planning and in domain two, with culture, student engagement, and relationships. And in domain three, it aligns with instruction, objectives, rigor, and higher order questioning. In walk-throughs and evaluations, I see teachers working to make the curriculum come to life. This LDC model definitely lends itself to good teaching strategies.*

Teachers appreciated LDC’s emphasis on group work and student engagement - key components of the EET. The majority of the teachers interviewed reported that LDC helped them in EET evaluations because it emphasizes student ownership, student engagement, and higher order thinking. Two teachers explained the connection as follows:

*LDC aligns very well with EET. What the evaluation tool rubric is looking for, it’s in there. The evaluation tool is all about planning. You can have the lesson, but you have to plan the structure around what is expected. (Middle school remedial reading teacher)*

*I think LDC does align with EET. It’s backward planning. You really focus on your learning objective. LDC has good scaffolding and good examples to show kids. You’re getting lots of feedback from kids. You’re doing all the things they’re asking for in EET. (7th grade ELA teacher)*

**Teachers and building leaders - especially those with greater LDC experience - saw how multiple initiatives reinforced each other.** One middle school reading coach described how district messaging about LDC’s alignment with CCSS and EET facilitated a broader understanding of the initiative. The coach explained: “We don’t see it as one more thing; it’s all part of the big picture.”

A high school reading coach described how district leaders’ communication about alignment enabled educators to see the mutual reinforcement between various initiatives: “District leaders have taken a great deal of time to align LDC to CCSS and to the EET rubric. They want to ensure that you know why you’re doing it, prior to saying ‘do it.’ This is the reason why LDC is a positive development.”

Through multiple and consistent alignment messages given by district leaders, educators at all levels gained clarity on the purpose of the initiative, its fit within the larger picture in Hillsborough, and its utility in their own practice.

## Strategy 7: To Anchor LDC in District Curricula, Create All-Module Curricula or Integrate Modules into Existing Curricula

Conditions Addressed:	Alignment	Effective Leadership	Professional Learning Opportunities
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### What did Hillsborough do?

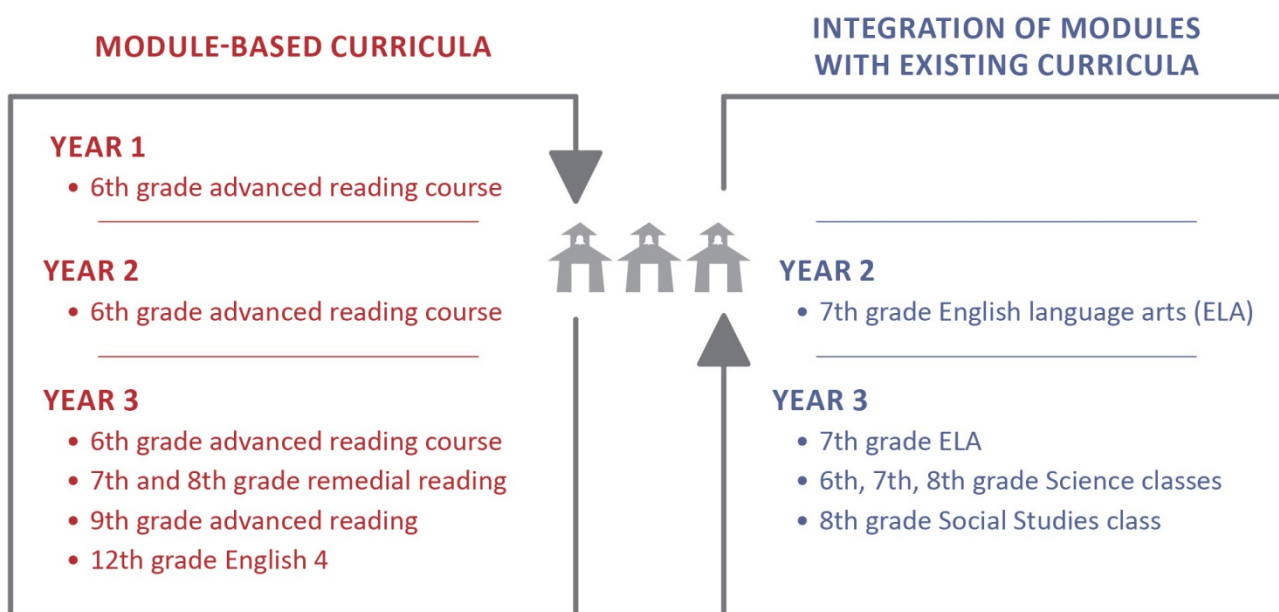
District leaders decided to create and use designated modules in every course using LDC. They identified their course-based approach as something that distinguished them from other pilot districts. One district literacy leader explained this unique approach in this way: “We’ve used a different LDC implementation process than other districts. We’re targeting whole courses for implementation, instead of selecting individual teachers in multiple courses.”

Leaders created the following two primary approaches to connect modules with curricula:

- Creation of module-based (or all-module) curricula; and,
- Integration of modules with existing curricula.

Figure 8 illustrates the district’s two-pronged approach to anchoring LDC in curricula.

Figure 8. Hillsborough’s Two-Pronged Approach to Anchoring LDC in Curricula



### Creation of Module-Based Curricula

Years	1	2	3
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District literacy leaders guided the creation of module-based curricula for the **6<sup>th</sup> grade advanced reading course** in Year One. This course did not have a standard curriculum and Hillsborough district administrators had been in the process of designing a more rigorous course. A district literacy leader described one of the reasons why the district decided to start LDC implementation with this course: “The 6<sup>th</sup> grade advanced reading was where we started because we needed the

curriculum revised anyway. Re-writing this curriculum along with the introduction of the CCSS-aligned LDC framework was like a ‘perfect storm.’”<sup>22</sup>

Creating module-based LDC curricula provided district leaders with an opportunity to rethink an existing course or respond to emerging needs. By Year Three, as Figure 8 indicates, Hillsborough teachers were implementing five module-based curricula.

### Integration of Modules with Existing Curricula

Years	1	2	3
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For courses with established curricula, district leaders chose to integrate LDC-based instruction as a way to strengthen the curriculum while also facilitating the transition to the Common Core. During Year Two, they began implementing LDC in 7<sup>th</sup> grade English language arts, which used the Springboard curriculum. District literacy leaders expected that inserting two modules into the course would increase its rigor.

As illustrated in Figure 8, modules were introduced into existing curricula for three science classes and one social studies class during Year Three. Reading coaches indicated that the new social studies textbook lacked primary source documents, which could be added to the curricula through LDC modules. For science, district administrators believed that LDC could help make the content more engaging for students.

Part of Hillsborough’s strategy from the first year of implementation was to concurrently scale up LDC horizontally across courses within a grade and vertically up the grades. One district literacy leader described this concurrent strategy: “The intention was to roll out LDC from the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> grades and on up to the upper grades so that it could get integrated into all curricula—not just staying in the reading course, but influencing instruction in other content areas.”

This spread of LDC across courses and up through the grade levels in Hillsborough meant that all middle and high school students would be exposed to LDC-based teaching and learning in multiple grades and content areas.

### Rationale

District leaders’ decision to implement modules at the course level fit with their larger district-led approach to managing curriculum. They believed these course-based curricular changes would encourage more consistent implementation of high-quality modules across the large district and would also more effectively support the district’s shift toward the CCSS.

### What was the impact of this strategy?

**This dual approach to LDC curricula integration, creating module-based curricula in some courses and integrating modules into other courses, helped to substantially increase the breadth of module use across grade levels and subject areas.** Hillsborough’s district-managed curriculum planning made this strategy possible. As illustrated in the previous

<sup>22</sup> This link connects to the first module of the 6<sup>th</sup> grade advanced reading course. <http://ccss.mysdhc.org/Modules/TemplateTaskIntroduction.pdf>. The module introduces students to the different genres of writing they will use in the course and engages them in analyzing text and in producing an informational text drawing on the readings. Under the heading, “Template Tasks/Modules,” this link provides access to three other modules in the same course: <http://ccss.mysdhc.org/Content>

section, by Year Three LDC was present in five grade levels and ten courses in middle and high school. Each individual course implemented from two to five modules during the school year.

**LDC also supported the teaching of literacy skills by providing teachers with common language and assignments across classes, grades and subject areas.** In middle school science and social studies classes, LDC modules prompted the use of common writing tasks and assessments, which had not previously existed. In reading courses using or integrating LDC modules, the culminating writing assignment in the module required students across all district schools to address the same writing prompt using the knowledge that they gleaned from LDC texts and instruction. Having a common writing assessment enabled teachers to use the same language when talking about student work. It also allowed reading coaches and school and district administrators to examine literacy learning across multiple classes and schools.

**Teachers and coaches indicated that using LDC modules made some courses more effective by addressing curricular gaps and sharpening course focus.** One reading coach explained how this happened in social studies after the district adopted new content standards and textbooks:

*One of the reasons LDC came into social studies is because the new textbook curriculum had consolidated 200 years of history in such a way that the information might only take up one paragraph. So there were not enough primary source documents included in the new social studies curriculum. This was one of the reasons LDC was integrated.*

The social studies module development team created LDC modules that involved students in intensive work with primary source documents.

Some teachers also reported that LDC brought a sharper focus to their courses. One teacher of 9<sup>th</sup> grade advanced reading explained,

*In the past, advanced reading was like an SAT prep class. But students didn't see the connection to other classes or content areas. Now, writing has its proper place in a reading class. Hopefully, as the kids come in and LDC continues, we'll have kids that can bridge reading and writing more effectively across content areas.*

LDC allowed teachers to bridge curricular gaps and bring a sharper focus to various subjects by explicitly connecting reading and writing tasks.

**Many teachers stated that LDC increased the rigor of teaching and learning.** Seventy-five percent of teachers responding to RFA's survey agreed that LDC increased the rigor of writing assignments. A 9<sup>th</sup> grade advanced reading teacher said: *"I love this curriculum because it's much more challenging."*

**Teachers reported that LDC was positively affecting students' literacy skills.** Eighty-six percent of teachers responding to RFA's survey said that the LDC framework was effective in improving students' literacy skills. A middle school ELA teacher described some of the ways LDC is helping students improve their reading and writing skills:

*You are trying to teach students to read critically and comprehend what they are reading. The better writer you are, the better reader you become. I really think that LDC is going to get students to become better readers by teaching them to use the sources, to read those articles critically and think critically about them, and to engage in those higher-order thinking questions and insightful discussion.*

**Most teachers and other stakeholders perceived LDC to be a good fit for courses into which modules were integrated.** Eighty-three percent of teachers responding to RFA's survey reported that the LDC framework aligned well with their school's curriculum. During Year Three,



the content of the LDC modules in science and social studies aligned well with curricula and enabled teachers to cover the topics that were addressed on mid-term exams. One reading coach indicated that the social studies module development team included all the benchmarks for the 8<sup>th</sup> grade course that would appear on the district’s semester exams. She explained, “The module development team used everything that could possibly show up on the mid-term exam. Everything they had in that module was going to be on the exam.”

Central to LDC alignment with science was the embedding of modules into the science department’s 5E instructional cycle, i.e., engagement, exploration, explanation, exploration/extension, and evaluation. A district administrator for science illustrated this alignment between LDC and the district’s 5E approach:

*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 5E approach and selected content with difficult concepts that naturally fit with LDC modules. I have gotten lots of feedback from teachers who say that this integration and alignment of LDC modules has really opened their eyes to making the literacy connection to science.*

Hillsborough’s two-pronged approach of creating some all-module courses and integrating common modules in other courses has resulted in a high degree of consistency in LDC implementation. It has also led to the deep integration of modules into curricula. This consistency and depth of implementation characterizes LDC’s early success in Hillsborough.

### Balancing curriculum pacing and time demands is still a work in progress.

During LDC roll out across multiple courses, teachers, reading coaches, and district leaders learned how various aspects of the modules worked in the classroom and where they needed to make adjustments. Pacing emerged as a prevalent concern among teachers new to LDC.

During Year Three, more than half (57%) of teachers responding to RFA’s survey reported that teaching modules took too much time away from covering required curriculum topics. This was especially true for many science and social studies teachers who initially perceived LDC as an add-on instead of an embedded feature of their curriculum. In the Year Three survey, higher percentages of science and social studies responding teachers (68% and 78% respectively) indicated that modules took too much time away from required curriculum topics than did English and reading teachers (50% and 34% respectively.)

District literacy leaders are addressing this challenge by soliciting feedback from teachers and reading coaches and working collaboratively to revise modules and refine their pacing in curricula.

## Strategy 8: Use LDC as a Vehicle for Differentiating Instruction and Improving the Literacy Skills of All Students

Conditions Addressed:

Alignment

Effective Leadership

Professional Learning Opportunities

### What did Hillsborough do?

Over the span of the initiative, district leaders have expanded the initial use of LDC with advanced or at-grade level students to the larger population of students in order to broaden and deepen the

benefits of LDC. District leaders have worked with LDC consultants to design modules tailored to below grade-level readers. As of Year Three, district leaders and educators were implementing two primary models of LDC instruction to address the diverse literacy needs of Hillsborough students: LDC for advanced or average readers and LDC-Accelerated (LDC-A) for below-grade level readers. Each strategy is described below.

### LDC for Advanced or Average Readers

Years	1	2	3
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In Hillsborough, courses in LDC content areas (reading, ELA, science, social studies) are all grouped by ability level, using FCAT scores as primary criteria. District literacy leaders used this organizing framework to make initial decisions about LDC implementation. They originally viewed LDC as a way to support higher achievement among on-level and advanced students to address the concern reported by teachers of a 9<sup>th</sup> grade Advanced Placement course that students were unprepared for higher order thinking and writing demands. One district literacy leader explained, “Our target was to build capacity in middle school for a 9<sup>th</sup> grade advanced placement class. So the 6<sup>th</sup> grade advanced reading was where we started. From there, we followed that cohort of students to roll out to the 7<sup>th</sup> grade English language arts so that those kids could continue with the work.”

The initial intent was that LDC courses would support students’ preparation for upper level classes in high school. During the first two years of the initiative, LDC implementation took place primarily in reading and ELA classes serving students working at average or advanced literacy levels.

### LDC for Below Grade-Level Readers or “LDC-A” (LDC Accelerated)

Years	1	2	3
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As implementation spread and deepened to multiple grades and content areas and as teachers and reading coaches began sharing their feedback and experiences with LDC, district literacy leaders began broadening their original vision for LDC implementation. Pleased with the initial effect that LDC was having on the quality of student reading and writing, district literacy leaders began working on tailoring LDC modules to meet the needs of students with a wider range of literacy skill levels.

Hillsborough is one of two sites nationally trying out LDC-A. Starting with a very small pilot of two teachers in Year Two, the district began using LDC with struggling students by implementing modules in 7<sup>th</sup> grade remedial reading classes, which serve the students who score lowest on the FCAT. In Year Three, LDC-A expanded to 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade in nine schools.

The district worked closely with two LDC consultants who assisted with initial development of modules and offered support for LDC-A. LDC-A modules use the standard teaching tasks. They differentiate in terms of providing more scaffolding instruction of skills, may use more mini-tasks and may include additional leveled texts for independent reading, so can take longer to teach than similar modules implemented in other classes. LDC-A modules also include a behavior component, geared to helping students set goals related to academic behaviors and strategies and, ultimately, to take ownership of those behaviors. LDC-A was written to support struggling students, teachers who teach struggling students and/or teachers new to the profession.

## LDC and LDC-A

For both LDC and LDC-A modules, district literacy leaders and reading coaches have communicated that teachers can make instructional adjustments to meet the needs of their students. One experienced reading coach described what she tells her teachers:

*It's OK to make those instructional decisions. You are in there every day. You know your kids. Stay true to that module objective. But if you have something else supplemental that supports the objective, that's OK. This has always been the message that we put out there and it's supported by district leadership.*

Over time and as teachers gained experience with the modules, many realized that they could adjust the modules to fit student needs.

As with other alignment strategies, district leaders have maintained central management of how LDC is integrated with curricular offerings for all levels of students. As teachers and reading coaches have gotten involved in LDC-A, district leaders have released some aspects of module development to them.

### Rationale

Hillsborough's strategy for differentiating LDC instruction was shaped by the district's grouping of content area classes by students' ability level. The initial rationale for implementation was to address a need for more rigorous instruction for average and advanced middle school students. After seeing LDC in action, leaders wanted to use it to support the literacy learning of struggling students. And within the framework of the district-developed modules, leaders encouraged teacher adaptations in order to draw on teacher expertise to enhance student learning.

### What was the impact of this strategy?

**Teachers and coaches reported that LDC helped increase their expectations for what all students, including struggling students, could achieve academically.** In the Year Three survey, 70% of responding teachers said that the use of modules had raised their expectations for students' writing. In interviews, teachers and coaches said that working with modules helped teachers see their students differently. A sixth grade science teacher said she "was surprised" by what her students were able to accomplish. She added: "I found out they were more capable than I thought."

A high school reading coach confirmed this experience among teachers: "I think my LDC teacher realizes now that students can do it if they're pushed. And originally it was like, 'Oh, this is going to be too difficult.' And she was amazed at how much they've accomplished and were able to do."

In a few cases, the same LDC modules were being implemented in classes for both below level and average or advanced students. This meant that the lower level students were working with the same materials or writing assignment as their peers for the first time in reading or English Language Arts class. One teacher noted: "It's a way for me to give them grade level material." A reading coach added, "My teachers can now tell their lowest kids that they're doing the same things as other kids. Some of the kids are starting to make that connection."

**Educators also reported seeing improvement in the quality of student products.** Sixty percent (60%) of teachers responding to RFA's survey in Year Three said that modules had resulted in higher quality student writing. A science teacher described this quality improvement: "My kids'

writing has improved so much from their first to their second module that I can't wait to see their third."

A reading coach at a Title I school described significant improvement at her school: "We've raised the bar so high in terms of reading and writing, and some of them are already hitting it. And the ones that aren't, they're so much closer than they were before."

Another coach reported that one of her biggest successes was seeing "LDC-A students transform into great thinkers and learners."

### **Differentiating instruction for varying skill levels within a class and for struggling students is still a work in progress.**

Some teachers and coaches reported that there is more need for differentiation, especially within classes rather than at the course level. Overall, teachers were more positive about using modules with high-achieving students, and were less positive about using modules to teach struggling students.

According to the Year Three survey, while three-quarters (76%) of responding teachers said that modules helped them differentiate for students with advanced abilities, only about half (53%) said that they helped them differentiate for students reading and writing below grade level. One teacher compared the needs of students with the highest (5) and lowest (1) FCAT scores: "I don't see how a level 5 reader is going to be engaged the whole time if you're allocating the amount of time that a level 1 would need. I need more strategies for level 1. I don't have a lot in my toolbox. I need more scaffolding." Teachers want more strategies to help their lowest level students meet the increased rigor of LDC and address different student needs within the same class.

Refining and adapting LDC to effectively support learning for a wide range of students is a work in progress. Recognizing the need for more support in this area, district leaders created a bank of mini-tasks in Year Three. It provides additional ways that teachers can support students in developing proficiency within a particular skill cluster and enables teachers to provide additional scaffolding as needed. The district is creating frameworks for more rigorous teaching and learning at all levels. The district is also encouraging teachers to make course-level adaptations within that framework to fit their classroom context. And teachers and coaches continue to identify growth areas where more work is needed.

## Questions to Consider

This case study was designed to provide a concrete example of how one school district adopted and scaled the use of the LDC instructional tools. As your school or district considers how to adopt or scale the use of the tools, we suggest you consider the following questions:

1. In what ways is the LDC initiative aligned with your district's curricula and your state's standardized assessments?
2. What kind of messages does your district communicate about the LDC initiative? Is the message consistent and clearly communicated over time? Are there areas of confusion about how LDC fits in with district priorities?
3. Who are the literacy experts in your district and in your schools? How can you leverage their expertise to support the implementation of LDC?
4. Does your school district employ the use of project leaders to coordinate and support tool implementation? In what ways have other staff taken on leadership roles as the work develops?
5. What kinds of professional learning opportunities does your school district provide? Do these opportunities reinforce strategies needed to implement LDC?
6. What kind of opportunities do teachers in your district have to collaborate around LDC? What other kinds of collaboration might be useful?
7. How do teachers in your district provide feedback about the initiative and about module implementation? Do you have suggestions for how those feedback loops could be strengthened?
8. How have your LDC implementation strategies changed over time? Have they changed in response to lessons learned?
9. What suggestions do you have for sustaining LDC in your district?
10. In which ways is your district similar and different to Hillsborough County and how does this inform the potential utility of the above strategies in your district?
  - a. What additional reforms is your district currently implementing and how do they relate to LDC?
  - b. What kind of relationships does your district have with teachers/the teachers' union and how does this influence a major curricula initiative such as LDC?

## About 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/>.

Look for additional publications, including a Year Three report and an additional case study later this year.

## **Appendix A. Data/Methodology**

Forthcoming

## **Appendix B. Special Thanks**

Forthcoming