Enhanced Learning Maps Project Year 1 Evaluation Report

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Executive Summary

The Enhanced Learning Maps (ELM) project is funded with a four-year U.S. Department of Education Enhanced Assessment Grant. The Center for Educational Testing and Evaluation at the University of Kansas coordinates the project and it is administered by the Kansas State Department of Education. Additionally, there are four other state education agencies (SEA) collaborating in the project. Those SEAs include the Alaska Department of Education, Iowa Department of Education, Missouri Department of Education, and the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction.

The overall goal of the ELM project is to produce learning maps for individual mathematics and English language arts standards and coherent groups of standards to help teachers plan instruction that is sensitive to cognitive development. McREL International was hired as a third-party evaluator to gather data and report on the project's implementation and outcomes. This Year 1 evaluation report encompasses the time period from October 2015 to September 2016 and focuses on the project's implementation and more specifically the perspectives of the partners and project staff. Seven key staff from participating states participated in interviews, and 10 ELM project staff members were interviewed.

The following are the conclusions and recommendations drawn from a comprehensive review of the findings.

Conclusions

- The ELM project is being implemented both as described in the grant application and in the timeline specified. This is noteworthy given there were several months of delay in signed contracts and all Year 1 activities occurred within a six-month period.
- Several mechanisms have been established to ensure effective communication between the state partners, advisory board, and project staff. With the geographic spread between the various individuals involved in the project, it has been important that there have been multiple modes of communication (e.g., web-based meetings, website, phone, in-person).
- Generally, the project staff and partners are pleased with the communication amongst and between each other. When communication issues have arisen, project staff have taken measures to debrief and implement strategies to rectify concerns.
- The partners have been presented with opportunities to offer input into the project in various areas including teacher recruitment and measures to increase administrator support. Consequently, project staff delivered a webinar targeting information needs of building-level administrators in Fall 2016.
- A major milestone achieved in Year 1 was training the first cohort of 43 teachers to implement the six instructional units for English language arts and mathematics. Although the project did not achieve its target of 50 teachers, there was representation from each of the partner states. The teachers are implementing the units throughout the 2016-17 year and ELM project staff have instituted several approaches to support implementation.

Recommendations

- Continue to monitor the implementation of the project activities and timeline to what was described in the proposal. Consider having quarterly or monthly staff meetings where the activity log is discussed and compared to what was included in the proposal. Not only will this aid in implementation fidelity, but will also keep project staff collectively informed on the various aspects of the project and focused on the overall project vision.
- Explore ways to engage the state partners in the quarterly or monthly web-based meetings in ways that will create more discussion of issues and require their input. In Year 1, the meetings tended to be information dissemination and there was minimal dialogue.
- Continue to keep the state partners fully informed of the expectations and responsibilities they have in the project's implementation as well as findings from the research as those become available. For example, explicitly communicate the types of support it is hoped (or expected) that the state partners will provide to the participating teachers and their roles in the collection of data from the teachers.
- Ensure that when input is received there is either action taken or an explanation of why a suggestion may not be utilized. For example, the Governance Board devoted considerable time to providing feedback on the project's research and evaluation components. Afterwards, the evaluators and project staff developed a question and response document for each of the issues that was raised and this document was shared by project staff with the Governance Board.
- Begin the recruitment process for Cohort 2 teachers earlier so as to increase the likelihood that target numbers indicated in the proposal will be achieved and to have balance in the subject areas and grade levels represented. It is realized that recruitment in Year 1 was delayed due to months of waiting for signed contracts. Related, find ways to help the state partners be more purposeful in the use of teachers' application information to select participants, and review the other specific suggestions offered in this report to enhance recruitment. Lastly, engage teachers who have experience in the project as a means to promote the project to future participants and increase the pool of applicants, and continue to offer them opportunities to share their testimonials during future trainings.

Overall, it has been a successful first year of implementing the ELM project. Instructional resources and learning map software have been developed. Cohort 1 teachers received training in the use of the technology, learning maps, and instructional units. The foundation for an effective collaborative relationship has been established with the five partner states.

Introduction

The Enhanced Learning Maps (ELM) project is funded with a four-year U.S. Department of Education Enhanced Assessment Grant. The Center for Educational Testing and Evaluation (CETE) at the University of Kansas coordinates the project and it is administered by the Kansas State Department of Education. Additionally, there are four other state education agencies (SEA) collaborating in the project. Those SEAs include the Alaska Department of Education, Iowa Department of Education, Missouri Department of Education, and the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction.

The overall goal of the ELM project is to produce learning maps for individual mathematics and English language arts standards and coherent groups of standards to help teachers plan instruction that is sensitive to cognitive development. During the first year of the project (October 1, 2015 through the current time), CETE staff have been developing resources for the learning maps. The development and refinement process will continue through the duration of the project. The learning maps will be accompanied by written and some (or selected) video recorded descriptions explaining the nodes and connections in each map. For each learning map, ELM project staff are generating an instructional activity and teacher's guide, providing a sample of how to draw out knowledge and target the nodes in the learning map. ELM project staff have or will also develop performance tasks and rubrics, as well as objective item sets, for teachers to administer as formative assessments to generate the individual student data they need to address student's individual learning needs. The rubrics and answer keys for these formative assessments will be accompanied by notes about how to interpret student responses in terms of the nodes and connections in the learning maps.

One of the major activities that occurred in Year 1 was the recruitment, selection, and training of teachers in the first Cohort. In Spring 2016, staff from the five SEAs recruited English language arts (ELA) and mathematics grades 2-8 teachers to participate in the project for the 2016-17 school year. A total of 43 teachers met the selection criteria and were invited to participate in Cohort 1 (25 ELA teachers and 18 mathematics teachers).[1] The first formal project activity for Cohort 1 participants was a three-day workshop in Kansas City held July 6-8. The teachers received training on how to access the online ELM materials and how to use the materials in instruction. The expectation is that following the training, the teachers will continue to explore the ELM online interface and its tools, implement those tools in instruction, and complete feedback surveys at the conclusion of each instructional unit. ELM staff will provide ongoing support through the school year as the teachers implement the ELM resources.

McREL International was hired as a third-party evaluator to gather data and report on the project's implementation and outcomes. This Year 1 evaluation report encompasses the time period

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[1] The ELM proposal identified a target of 50 Cohort 1 teachers.

from October 2015 to September 2016 and focuses on the project's implementation and more specifically the perspectives of the partners and project staff.

During the first year, McREL also collected formative data from the Cohort 1 participants and produced short summary reports which were shared both with the project staff and partners. This included the findings from a survey, administered on the first day of the July training, designed to assess the teachers' formative assessment practices prior to training or participation in other project activities and an evaluation survey administered at the conclusion of the July training.

The next section of this report includes a description of the data collection methods and analysis (i.e., partner and project staff telephone interviews which were conducted by a McREL evaluator in September) followed by the findings from those interviews. The report concludes with conclusions and recommendations for ELM project staff to consider as they move forward with project implementation.

Methods and Analysis

Individual and group telephone interviews were conducted by a McREL evaluator with ELM project staff and state partners in September 2016. A total of thirteen interviews were conducted between September 6 and September 20, 2016; the average length was 32 minutes. Ten interviews were one-on-one interviews and three were small group interviews (i.e., two to three people). Nine key staff members from participating states were invited to participate in an interview. Seven key staff members participated, representing the states of Iowa (n=3), Kansas (n=1), Missouri (n=1), and Wisconsin (n=2).[2] A total of ten ELM project staff members were also invited to participate in an interview, and all ten accepted. Project staff members represented project leadership (n=2), administration (n=3), research (n=2), and technology (n=3).

The interview data were analyzed by question and by theme within each question. Themes were identified and summarized by salient and prevalent issues. Findings were reported as a theme if it came up in two or more comments. Additional findings were also reported, but not as themes. For each theme, representative comments from each participant group are provided. Additional comments were also included to encompass the breadth of feedback provided. Interview protocols are provided in the Appendix.

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[2] One staff member from Wisconsin was not on the original interview list but participated in an interview after being invited to attend by the other key staff member representing this state.

Findings

The findings presented in this report are based on data gathered from interviews of the state partners, ELM project staff, and project documentation. Findings are organized by evaluation categories: (1) implementation fidelity, (2) communication and collaboration, (3) Cohort 1 training and implementation of instructional units, (4) successes and challenges, and (5) other suggestions and comments.

Implementation Fidelity

Project Staff

Although the project was delayed in its start, all members of the ELM project team (the project team) agreed that the project, thus far, is being implemented as originally planned and proposed, and several noted that the team is "on track" with the project timeline of activities.[3] The project grant administrator tracks progress by specific objectives and tasks. Looking forward, staff reported being purposeful in their planning to ensure they are implementing the project plan with fidelity. As one staff member explained, "[W]e are at the point now where we are going to start changing our focus a little bit and looking at more intermediate and longer-term issues, and that, I think, is going to take a little bit more attention." No significant adjustments have been made to the current project plan; staff indicated they are addressing needs and issues as they arise, and are exploring possible improvements and/or expansions to the project plan. For example, staff have accelerated plans to develop video recordings of map usage and unit implementation, and added a collaboration tool for teachers within the software (i.e., a chat box).

State Partners

In general, key staff involved in the ELM project at the state level (state partners) believed that the project is being implemented as expected thus far. However, some felt that it is too early in the project to determine fidelity of implementation. A few explained that as the 2016-17 school year has just begun, the participating teachers are just beginning to "figure out how to work those lessons into what they are currently doing." One state partner noted that this aligns with the overall project plan, as teachers are currently "doing that analysis of what they have been taught. . . . To me that is a really good starting point where we would expect them to be at this point." However, another state partner indicated that she had not yet heard from any of the participating teachers about their unit implementation. One state partner noted that the project had a delayed start due to contract issues.

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[3] The grant was awarded in October 2015; however, contracts with the Kansas State Department of Education and the University of Kansas were not signed until April 2016.

Communication and Collaboration

Project Staff

To keep all members of the project team abreast of project activities, tasks, and accomplishments, bi-weekly meetings were established (the two offsite project staff members attend the meetings via phone or Skype as needed). Other team meetings occur on a regular basis, such as with the map development team and the English language arts and math teams (content teams). Staff also indicated that a recent office move has positively impacted the team's cohesiveness and communication, as all project staff at the University of Kansas are now located in one room. "Communication has been great," said one staff member; "the staff is a very cohesive unit." Others agreed, as shown by comments such as, "[A]nything that comes up, people talk immediately to each other about," and "I think that there is a high degree of respect in the group for each other, and the group is very professional." The addition of new staff and a recent change in leadership have made the team even more purposeful in its communication with one another and with the state partners and participating teachers. Staff have recently established additional formal communication protocols; for instance, bi-weekly all-staff meetings have been established and monthly progress reports are being provided to state partners to keep them apprised of project activities. As one staff member explained,

> *[W]e are continuing to meet and brainstorm where we are at, what we need to do to better be aware of . . . the information that is coming in, as teachers are doing what we trained them to do this summer. They are sending in feedback: who is getting it, what are you doing with that information? . . . [W]e continue to try to . . . make sure everyone is involved and everyone knows what is going to be the norm. . . . There is a lot that needs to be well-communicated, so we are trying to lay the basics this first year so that the other years [project staff] will have a routine that will be easy to follow and easier to identify new bumps in the road.*

When asked to rate their satisfaction with the project team's communication and collaboration on a 5-point scale (where 1 is not at all satisfied and 5 is very satisfied), ratings ranged from 3 to 5.[4] Comments from staff who gave a rating of 5 included: "I feel like everyone is pretty aware of what is going on and what the expectations are," and "Now being in the same room . . . everything is done very quickly in terms of communicating so that little issues do become big issues." Some staff members who gave ratings from 3 to 4 simply explained that communication and collaboration always has "room for improvement." Others commented:

> *If you were to interview me again in a few more months, my response might be different and it might be higher, and it would have been higher about 4 or 5 months ago as well, so I think it is a function of this transition [in leadership].*

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[4] Seven project staff provided a rating on the team's communication and collaboration; ratings were as follows: 3 (n=1), 3.5 (n=1), 4 (n=3), and 5 (n=2).

Our team, however, is not very good necessarily at deciding when it needs to occur or what needs to occur. . . . I just feel like sometimes we seem to prefer to have big, all-hands-on-deck meetings to make decisions, even for pretty small decisions. Right now, I think, lately it has been because we were sort of between managers.

[T]here is still a lot of room for interpretation in terms of the proposal and prioritization and things like this. . . . I think we are going to have to start spending a little bit more time on that. So far, we have not but I think it is pretty well recognized . . . that that is a need right now.

Project staff also shared details of their communication and collaboration with state partners and their perceptions of these collaborations. In the months leading up to the first teacher cohort training and state partner meeting in July 2016, monthly phone calls were held with all state partners; following the training calls will be held on a quarterly basis. In addition, the team hosted a webinar with administrators and principals of participating teachers. Leadership staff became aware of this need to communicate directly with administrators when issues arose around some principals' concerns about their teachers' participation in the project. "[W]e decided it would be wise to have a webinar for the principals and bring them on board, which we should have ahead of time. It is a little after the fact, but nonetheless, it will still be timely," explained one staff member.

Communication with the state partners was described as both informal and formal, but project staff are conscientious about keeping communications purposeful and as streamlined as possible; "We purposely did not want to bother them or send out too many repeated e-mails. If we would know that there was an idea or two or three coming together, we would compose something to get their feedback." However, one staff member indicated there had been concerns that not all project staff were being kept apprised of all communications with the state partners. As a result, the project team recently established a more formal communication plan with the state partners that involves the staff member located at the Kansas State Department of Education. This staff member will be the primary point of contact between the project team and the participating states. Members of the project team who are not in a leadership or administrative position indicated they have less contact with state partners, noting that the meetings with the state partners is "usually a pretty high level of information . . . more logistical, and strategies." However, several staff did mention other opportunities for communication with state partners, including the ELM project website that provides information and resources to stakeholders, and a feature within the online learning maps interface in which state partners, principals, and teachers can provide feedback (that can then be viewed by all project staff).

When asked to rate their satisfaction with the team's communication and collaboration with state partners on a 5-point scale (where 1 is not at all satisfied and 5 is very satisfied), ratings ranged from 4 to 5.[5] Comments from staff who gave a rating of 5 included:

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[5] Eight project staff provided a rating on the team's communication and collaboration; ratings were as follows: 4 (n=6), and 5 (n=2).

I am extremely satisfied, which is not to say that we cannot always be looking to do better, but nothing comes to mind as to what we could be doing better at this time, and the feedback that we have received so far has been very positive. The only time that there was any lack of clarity for a while, states were a little bit confused about what they were going to get at the end of the project, and we just tried to be very clear that all materials that are developed as a part of this project, including the software, will be available to them, but . . . they are not available for commercial purposes.

I am pretty sure they [state partners] feel like they have some say in some of the decision making processes, but there are not too many people trying to stir the pot. I think they are kept apprised of all the important points that happen in the project, and [we] really ask for their input on decisions that can be adjusted to meet their needs . . . they are consulted, and they are consulting.

One staff member who gave a rating of 4 indicated a continuing need to ensure the quality and consistency of communication among the Kansas State Department of Education, the ELM project team at the University of Kansas, and the state partners. Other staff who gave a rating of 4 perceived that the communication with state partners tended to be sporadic, though some did not view this as a concern.

[I]t seems as though we do not often get a significant amount of response or timely response [from state partners]. It is more [us] reaching out to them.

My initial reaction was a 5 but I have rated it as a 4 out of 5. I guess I would say I am satisfied with ELM's communication with the state partners, however it seems that the state partners did not really reach out to collaborate with us as much as I thought they would. . . . some state partners were more involved and active than others. . . . It was not really until our most recent governance meeting here in July that I feel like state partners truly contributed much input, if that makes sense.

Regardless of who needs to send the communication, we need to make sure we are keeping each other in the loop, and sometimes that does not happen initially.

[F]rom what I have seen, the state partners are not at all bashful about letting their feelings be known, so that seems to be working very well, as far as I can tell.

[W]e do not communicate with them as often. I am not seeing any request from the state that we need to increase the communications. They may be happy with us. It feels pretty independent right now.

The first formal governance meeting in July 2016, involving both advisory board members and stakeholders from all five participating states, occurred simultaneously with the training for participating teachers. The concurrent meetings gave the governance board members and state partners the opportunity to observe the training, provided teachers with some professional development on formative assessment by Margaret Heritage (an advisory board member), and "allowed us to leverage the investment in those meetings so that we could get more out of it than if we had had separate meetings." Project staff reported that members of the advisory board provided substantive feedback about the standards included in the learning maps, provided ideas and

suggestions to improve the instructional units and resources for teachers, and offered deeper insight into the concept of assessment for learning. State partners were "given a lot of control" in the recruitment stage of the project, and each state provided input and was given freedom to choose how teachers were identified, recruited, and ultimately selected to participate. Several project staff mentioned states' concerns with the involvement and buy-in from administrators and school principals; as a result, a webinar was held providing information on the project's purpose and design. State partners are also given the opportunity to review any formal communications targeted to teachers prior to distribution by project staff, and have given feedback on appropriate methods of online communication (i.e., public versus internal discussion boards/chat rooms). (One staff member noted that the suggestion of an open, "unmonitored" discussion board/chat room for participating teachers would be inappropriate.) One project staff member also noted that feedback from stakeholders has primarily been "in response to the content and very little in response to the technology side of things."

State Partners

In general, the state partners viewed the communication and collaboration with project staff as adequate in their method and frequency. State partners attend monthly webinars hosted by project staff, receive email communications, and use the ELM website for resources and project updates. One state partner also indicated that project staff have been helpful in communicating directly with teachers when needed, "so that takes a little bit of that extra load off of us." Another indicated that more frequent meetings with project staff would be beneficial, and, noting that communicating via conference call and webinars is "sometimes challenging," and would also like more in-person meetings. When asked to rate their satisfaction with the team's communication and collaboration with project staff on a 5-point scale (where 1 is not at all satisfied and 5 is very satisfied), ratings ranged from 2 to 5.[6] The state partner who gave a rating of 5 remarked, "There is not anything I want to know that I do not know." Another who did not provide a rating nonetheless indicated her satisfaction with the communication and collaboration with project staff thus far, stating,

> *[F]rom a state perspective; it was . . . laid out nicely. I mean we understood the project dimensions. We understood the goals and the intended outcomes. I think though with any new grant . . . we are still building it and we are learning from each other and I think that was communicated as well.*

One state partner indicated her team was unaware of the targeted grade levels for the July 2016 training and thus did not send teachers representing the appropriate grades. Others reported they are unclear as to their project role and responsibilities. For some, it was too early in the project to give a definitive rating on the quality of the communication and collaboration.

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[6] Three project staff provided a rating on the team's communication and collaboration; ratings were as follows: 3 (n=1), "3 or 4" (n=1), and 5 (n=1). In addition, one state partner rated communication and collaboration separately: "2 or 3" for collaboration, and "4 or 5" for communication.

[S]ome of the materials that were available did not necessarily match the grade levels of the teachers that we sent down, and we were not aware of that, because of the way they were being rolled out. . . . [I]t will mess up our ability to support some of the math components.

[I]t was and kind of still remains a bit unclear to me about what my role is or should be with the teachers in my state on this project. I came in with the idea that I would default to KU because it is their project and it is a massive project. Especially for the governance meeting and some of the communications leading up to that, I got the sense that maybe my role as a collaborator they thought would be a bit more involved. That was never really identified or spelled out for me in a way that I understood.

I would assume educators are communicating directly with KU in terms of questions about the projects. When administrators contact us we were kind of at a loss of what to say sometimes because we do not know the particular situation and/or the circumstances surrounding that. We have to default to the ELM project staff to respond.

I think that as we dig deeper into the activities and as we get feedback from our monthly webinars, and we do our touch-ins, and we figure out touch base again about where we are at in the project, it will be set to see how they [project staff] are able to support . . . the state.

[I]t is hard to gauge that partnership at this time, because the teachers are just trying to figure it out. I think the work that was done this summer was really good and the teachers came back really excited. . . . [A]nd now they are trying to get into their pacing guides. Now the work really starts.

The types of input state partners reported providing to project staff included information on recruitment and selection of teachers, as well as suggestions for sharing data and other information with stakeholders, and a suggestion for future teacher trainings. During the recruitment process several state partners offered information and guidance in working within their school district calendars and timeframes, provided a "rank order" of applicants from which to select, as well as applicants' contact and background information (e.g., grade level and subjects taught). Other input that was provided included the suggestion that administrators be informed of project plans and expectations and that materials be provided to teachers on the first day of training in order to "engage them a little sooner." Another state partner suggested that teacher survey data on their implementation of instructional units be shared with their state. Finally, one state partner reported informing project staff about her state's "messaging surrounding formative assessment," and another provided information about their current state standards work.

Cohort 1 Training and Implementation of Instructional Units

Project Staff

All project staff who attended all or part of the July 2016 training agreed that, overall, the first cohort of teachers is prepared to implement the ELM instructional units. However, staff's perceptions on the degree to which teachers are prepared varied. For instance, one staff member

said the teachers were "adequately trained" in the learning map software and implementing instructional units, but were more limited in their comprehension of formative assessment concepts and strategies. Other staff believed that teachers' level of preparation will be revealed more fully as the school year progresses, indicated by comments such as:

In one sense, no one could possibly be fully prepared, that is part of why we take the agile and iterative processes for everything we do, including teacher implementation. Until they take these materials and actually use them ... Reading them and thinking about them is, my opinion, insufficient. No amount of training is going to be sufficient until you try to implement.

I think the challenge will be making the time once they are back in school to figure out how to fit it in. That is kind of where I see the biggest struggle is depending on how strict their principal is, it may be easier or more challenging to work in our materials.

I received one [a question from a teacher] today, [asking], "When are we going to find out which one unit we will be teaching?" That just says so much right there. They do not recall or remember that they can teach up to six and we are not telling them what to teach—they can choose. There are others that are [asking], "Okay, where am I going to submit my feedback?" They are all over it.

Further, some staff noted that, at the time of the training, math teachers benefitted from having access to fully developed math instructional units, whereas the instructional units for ELA teachers did not. Despite this, one staff member indicated the ELA teachers were provided drafts of the ELA instructional units and expressed confidence that they "know generally how to implement units regardless of what they look like." Other staff agreed; one commented that "it appeared that both groups of teachers were asking similar questions and experiencing the same kind of learning."

When asked how teachers will be supported in their implementation of the instructional units, project staff shared discussed several approaches. Teachers have opportunities to provide feedback directly to project staff via the online software's feedback feature, the ELM project website, as well as more formally via surveys. Staff have emphasized to teachers that they encourage teachers' feedback and are available to respond to their questions, comments, and suggestions, as explained by one project staff member:

They can email us or call us, and then they implement the unit as best they can. The point of the project is not fidelity to the unit or the content. It is relying on the teacher to tell us whether or not the unit worked. . . . They know that they are research partners in this project because we made it very, very clear during the training . . . we are providing this content and we hope that they will tell us how it needs to be improved. That is the whole point.

The map development team reported developing a tracking system to collect, disseminate, and address teacher feedback on the learning map software on an ongoing basis. Staff sort teachers' comments into two primary categories: content questions and technical/software questions. Questions about the learning map content are forwarded on to the content teams. When teachers are experiencing technical issues or have a question about the use of the software, staff input the

feedback into an online issue tracking application that allows them to track the development and resolution of an issue.

Additional plans to support teachers include developing supplemental resources for teachers (e.g., materials that convey math and ELA concepts), video recordings of map usage and unit implementation, and additional webinars. Members of the map development team are designing more interactive communication tools, such as a discussion board/chat room feature within the software, because, "teachers might feel like they are a bit on their own right now. . . . the most important thing for the teachers is to be able to collaborate with one another and communicate with us." Other staff took a more holistic view, explaining that providing support means making personal connections and keeping in close contact with teachers and other project stakeholders, and ensuring that project staff are available to promptly respond to their questions and concerns:

> *In some ways just being available, just the personal camaraderie, the connection between the staff and the teachers, I felt like we made great connections with them [during the training] to where they will feel comfortable e-mailing us and asking questions.*

Another project staff member gave a different perspective, noting the importance of the support given to teachers by their principals and districts, stating,

> *I think there does need to be buy-in [from principals and other stakeholders], and they [state partners] do need to be the ones helping to put some support around this for teachers. . . . [some states] have designed a university credit course for teachers . . . they have structured some quarterly or more frequent meetings with teachers to touch base with them and make sure they are implementing the units. . . . That is the kind of help that I think the teachers are going to need in order to keep them motivated, keep them on track to use the units, and keep the states knowledgeable about how teachers are using this.*

Several project staff shared their experiences with the recruitment and selection process for the first teacher cohort, and also shared ideas and suggestions for enhancing the process for the next cohort. At the outset, information about the project and the application process was given to the state partners, who were then responsible for publicizing the project to prospective applicants. State partners were subsequently provided applicant data collected by project staff and were given control over the selection of teachers. One staff member was unsure whether states took advantage of all the information the applicants provided, stating, "I wish they would use the complete file that we give them with all the information about the candidates to make their selection"; other staff reported being uncertain as to the criteria by which each state ultimately selected participants, though for some, this was not a concern. Another staff member suggested more robust recruitment efforts would further increase the pool of applicants:

> *I guess you could say we just simply passed along their applicant information that we received. It appeared that some states were rather selective and they rated every applicant. Other states had much fewer applicants total so there was not much of a selection. I was thinking that perhaps better overall advertising or recruitment to get the word out in general could be done to maybe obtain a greater*

selection of interested individuals. It makes me wonder how many were not aware or how many other good teachers would be interested in this.

Several project staff recommended that recruitment for Cohort 2 begin earlier in the year (e.g., January 2017), or even during the fall semester of the current 2016-17 school year. (One staff member noted that timing of the project's approval and funding pushed back the timing of the recruitment efforts for Cohort 1.) Early recruitment, some suggested, may mitigate lower-than-expected participation rates. Others mentioned the need to ensure that the appropriate grade levels are represented[7] for each cohort, and that there is a balanced distribution of grade levels and math and ELA. Peer recruitment was mentioned by several staff members as a way to help promote the project to prospective participants and would serve as an additional support for teachers, as "it would be really helpful," one staff member noted, "to have another person that is in the building that they can collaborate with." One staff member also suggested that for each participant, an administrator contact be provided to ensure their concurrence with their teacher's participation.

State Partners

State partners who attended part or all of teacher training expressed some conflictions as to whether they believed the teachers were well-prepared to implement the instructional units in their classrooms. While all suggested that the training adequately prepared the teachers, some state partners mentioned that not all the ELA instructional units were available to share with teachers during the training, and therefore were not as well prepared as the math teachers. As explained by one state partner,

> *[W]ithout the lessons there for them to look at and work through, I think that it is going to be a lot tougher for the ELA. It has tougher for us when we go out as an agency and try to promote some of this stuff to not have the lessons there too.*

One state partner suggested that in future trainings teachers would benefit from receiving guidance in aligning district master pacing guides with the instructional units. Others mentioned issues around the time that has lapsed since the training. As one state partner commented,

> *They [teachers] have had a lot happen between July and this point in the school year. They have been inundated with their beginning of the year assessments, . . . intervention groups, and all of that other stuff that goes along with the start of the school year. So to come back around now and remind them of their ELM piloting, it is just going to be a reminder and it is going to take them some time to get back into that.*

Another valued the experiences shared by teachers who previously had used learning maps and how their instruction changed "as they became more and more familiar with using the maps . . .

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[7] Cohort 1 ELA teachers represent grades 2-5; math teachers represent 5-8. Recruitment efforts for Cohort 2 will focus on ELA teachers in grades 6-8 and math teachers in grades 2-4.

was very powerful." Lastly, one state partner who had not attended the training indicated she had received "little feedback" from participants, but understood the value of the opportunity for teachers from across the state to collaborate with one another and noted that "It is more unusual that they have the opportunity to talk with folks outside the state . . . and get that perspective. That came through as being unique and appreciated."

As the first cohort of teachers begins to implement the instruction units in their classrooms, states are offering their support in different ways. One state's "unique and powerful situation" in which all participating teachers are from one district will "really support successful teacher implementation." Another state is using ELA and math consultants as a resource for teachers, and is considering holding group discussions around each content area as teachers begin to fully implement the units. In one state, where districts have local control over their curriculum and materials and the state education department "tends to be about compliance and high-level input," the state partner indicated that the ELM project staff has the responsibility to "properly, effectively, and efficiently help them [teachers] . . . when it gets down to the specificity of the language of the maps and the program itself." The final state partner indicated that there are "periodic check-ins" with teachers, who are also encouraged to participate in panel discussions and presentations on their experiences in the project and "how this is influencing their professional practice."

Additional supports state partners identified that would further help teachers to implement the instructional units included those at the peer, school, district, and ELM project team level. For instance, some state partners valued the opportunity for teacher collaboration during the July training, commenting that teachers were "excited to set themselves up to communicate with each other if they worked in the same school." Another found the experiences of teachers who have previously used the learning maps was helpful in providing further perspective and insight. Another noted that keeping administrators informed of the project will help to strengthen the support of the participating teachers. Others indicated that providing teachers additional guidance or training in aligning the instructional units with their district's pacing guides and their state's new academic standards would be "incredibly valuable." Additionally, one state partner indicated that teachers' "access to the appropriate ELM staff would be the strongest support that they can have, that they will need, throughout the school year."

State partners were also asked for any suggestions regarding the teacher recruitment and selection process for the next cohort of participants. There were some recommendations regarding recruitment timelines, including a suggestion that the recruitment process begin "no later than January," to allow enough time for the entire process and to ensure that teachers can be reached for information and updates (recruitment of the first cohort lasted into the summer, making it difficult, as one state partner noted, to get into contact with teachers). Establishing set timelines and protocols for communication and recruitment activities early on, as well as including state partners on all correspondence to teachers, was suggested by a state partner who had observed "a great deal of confusion around the crafting of messages" during the recruitment of the first cohort. Some made suggestions on ways to increase recruitment in the coming years, such as gathering Cohort 1 teacher testimonials and encouraging teacher networking with colleagues. As one state partner explained,

It would be less of an educator consultant from the state department of education sending out a message and hoping, versus actual people who can talk with confidence about what it is, how they used it.

Two final suggestions included having a plan to fill any vacant spots in the event a teacher is unable to attend the summer training, and requiring administrator approval as part of the application process.

Successes and Challenges

Project Staff

Project staff were asked what types of supports they need to successfully undertake their roles and responsibilities in the ELM project. For two staff members, it was the need to maintain open, consistent, and frequent communication among all project staff to ensure "everyone is on the same page, making sure we are moving in the right direction." For another, it was the need to stay focused on the "intermediate and longer term design goals. . . . and have a good, solid collaborative design process across the content development folks and the software development folks." This staff member also stressed the importance of "balancing the need for doing research versus the need to deliver useful teaching resources." Other identified needs included more guidance and direction—specifically on the part of project leadership, and information on Federal reporting requirements. Finally, several participants reported feeling felt well-supported, expressed confidence in their colleagues, and did not express a need for additional supports to successfully accomplish their work.

Project staff also shared the successes they have experienced thus far, including the creation of the learning map software and the instructional resources, the recruitment and training for the first cohort of teachers, the governance board meeting, participants' engagement during the training, and the client-focused work of the project team. Staff expressed satisfaction with the development and refinement of a "large and sophisticated" learning map software that is "easy to use and intuitive." Along with this, several staff were pleased with the quality of the instructional resources which complement each node in the learning maps. One staff member commented that the resources are designed "so that the teachers who are in the classroom can read them a lot more quickly and then trust that what they are teaching is backed by research." Many considered the teacher training and governance meeting held in July 2016 particularly successful, noting the positive feedback from teachers and members of the governance board. Staff described the teacher response as "very enthusiastic," "very excited," that it was "worth their time," and that they "went away feeling good about their participation." "We formed great partnerships with many people," said another. Others reported that the training and governance meeting were well-planned and participants' travel and accommodations were well-managed, which will "lay the groundwork for recruitment in the next year." Participant feedback continues to be a priority for staff, as explained by one staff member, "[W]e've done a relatively good job being responsive to teachers. . . . We heard comments and suggestions at the training that we have worked really hard to implement."

Along with the many successes of the ELM project have come certain challenges. The transition in leadership was, for some, a challenging time, as the team had to "quickly learn to adapt." One staff member commented that "[The previous project director] took care of a lot of things that we did not know she was taking care of. . . . [I]t posed a challenge for a 6-week period. It did not affect our ability to get the work done. . . . It just kind of caused some discomfort." For some staff, the transition period led to "too much indecision" and resulted in lengthy meetings, but one described it as a "temporary problem." Another area of challenge was the amount of work needed to ensure the ELA curriculum for the learning maps are completed in a timely manner and has the "same level of rigor" as the math curriculum. The "sheer enormity" of the learning map software keeps staff mindful of the importance of working together to ensure the integrity of the software and its content, and that, as it grows, it remains usable for teachers, as evidenced by staff's comments:

> *[W]e do not want the teachers to go in and try and do something and find out it is not working. It is kind of a complicated code so one little change might have an impact somewhere else. So it is just making sure we are catching them first on our end before they get pushed to the teachers copy.*

> *[H]ow are we going to get people to get on and learn it and try it? How do I make it user friendly enough? There has to be a certain level of complexity to do everything we want it to do. It has to be friendly enough that people can get on it and learn it pretty quickly, because they are not going to take the time to learn a complex piece of software.*

Looking forward, staff members discussed issues they anticipate will require more attention as the project progresses. For one staff member, it is ensuring the team has "clear, long-term plans" to meet project goals. Issues around scale-up were another concern for a few staff, who remarked that with multiple states participating and yearly scale-ups planned, maintaining open lines of communication and remaining transparent with all project staff and external stakeholders will be imperative. Another questioned how additional teachers would continue to be trained on and use the software once the in-person training sessions are phased out toward the end of the grant. This staff member also expressed concern about the sustainability of the project—specifically maintaining the software to ensure its usability and relevancy—once the grant period has ended.

State partners also reflected on the successes they and their teachers have experienced thus far. For some, the training was particularly successful in its approach to training teachers on a complex tool. One state partner found that "the [teachers'] enthusiasm was pretty amazing. You do not always go through a couple of days of training, get to the third day, and still have that excitement." Margaret Heritage's participation was another highlight; "[S]he was talking their [the teachers'] language, and she gave them permission to dream big for their kids in a way that they have never heard." Others commended the project design, which allows teachers the freedom to use the materials in ways that best serve their students, and valued how ELM project staff have given "license and trust to educators in all of these different states," in using and adjusting the materials to meet their needs and their students' needs. State partners from one state described having a strong collaborative partnership among their project staff, which "sets the stage for future scale-up." Finally, overall successes that were mentioned included the funding of the project and the progress made to date: the creation of a complex software product, the establishment of a teacher cohort, and the commencement of data collection.

State partners also discussed challenges they are currently facing or are anticipating as the project progresses, including communication issues and lack of materials. One state partner noted the challenge—but also the need—to maintain purposeful communication and collaboration between project staff and all stakeholders in every state in order to "maximize the benefit" of the project. Another acknowledged the "disconnect" between her state's education agency and the ELM project team, and suggested that a summary or progress report would help to keep administrators informed. For another, the challenge is ensuring project activities are well-timed with district calendars and that the ELM project team has an "understanding of the rhythm of implementation at the school district level and how critical things need to [happen] at certain times. . . . if it is not there sometimes it just gets lost." Some state partners also expressed concern about the delay in receiving ELA materials. For instance, one state partner indicated that the delay might hinder teachers' opportunity to implement all six instructional units before the end of the 2016-17 school year.

Suggestions and Concluding Comments

Lastly, some state partners provided additional reflections about their experiences with the ELM project. These included a lack of clarity about future training opportunities for teachers, and a request to include formal introductions in the Cohort 2 teacher training.

[I]f we need additional coaching and support around the learning maps and implementation of the unit lesson plans, what is the role and what could we expect from ELM [staff], and should there be project staff from ELM that reaches out or has dedicated time to work as a coach with this content?

[I]t was not until I went to the partner meeting that I totally understood that all of lessons were being written by CETE and that we were not recruiting people to help do that. Initially my understanding was that these teachers who were training and they were going to use the ones and learn how to use maps, we would get more lessons out of it. I guess that is my disappointment with

the project is that CETE has limited resources for developing all this material. When the project ends, we will not have trained any people to continue developing this material. . . . Maybe that is coming. I thought that was whole intent of the project. . . . I was hoping that all these people we are recruiting, that we would be building capacity to have more. I mean 6 lessons per grade—it does not do a whole lot for a teacher that has got a whole year. I find it so limiting and restricting.

[At the training] I think it would be beneficial . . . [to have] a way of identifying who is coming from which states, because I spent an inordinate amount of time . . . trying to track down all of the teachers from my state so that I could meet them and introduce myself and check in with them, see how things were going or if they needed anything. It took well into the second day that I finally found everyone. Once I figured out that two teachers were missing. I wish I would have known that right off the bat.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This evaluation report focuses on Year 1 of the *Enhanced Learning Maps* project. The following are the conclusions and recommendations drawn from a comprehensive review of the findings.

Conclusions

- The ELM project is being implemented both as described in the grant application and in the timeline specified. This is noteworthy given there were several months of delay in signed contracts and all Year 1 activities occurred within a six-month period.
- Several mechanisms have been established to ensure effective communication between the state partners, advisory board, and project staff. With the geographic spread between the various individuals involved in the project, it has been important that there have been multiple modes of communication (e.g., web-based meetings, website, phone, in-person).
- Generally, the project staff and partners are pleased with the communication amongst and between each other. When communication issues have arisen, project staff have taken measures to debrief and implement strategies to rectify concerns.
- The partners have been presented with opportunities to offer input into the project in various areas including teacher recruitment and measures to increase administrator support. Consequently, project staff delivered a webinar targeting information needs of building-level administrators in Fall 2016.
- A major milestone achieved in Year 1 was training the first cohort of 43 teachers to implement the six instructional units for English language arts and mathematics. Although the project did not achieve its target of 50 teachers, there was representation from each of the partner states. The teachers are implementing the units throughout the 2016-17 year and ELM project staff have instituted several approaches to support implementation.

Recommendations

- Continue to monitor the implementation of the project activities and timeline to what was described in the proposal. Consider having quarterly or monthly staff meetings where the activity log is discussed and compared to what was included in the proposal. Not only will this aid in implementation fidelity, but will also keep project staff collectively informed on the various aspects of the project and focused on the overall project vision.
- Explore ways to engage the state partners in the quarterly or monthly web-based meetings in ways that will create more discussion of issues and require their input. In Year 1, the meetings tended to be information dissemination and there was minimal dialogue.
- Continue to keep the state partners fully informed of the expectations and responsibilities they have in the project's implementation as well as findings from the research as those become available. For example, explicitly communicate the types of support it is hoped (or

expected) that the state partners will provide to the participating teachers and their roles in the collection of data from the teachers.

- Ensure that when input is received there is either action taken or an explanation of why a suggestion may not be utilized. For example, the Governance Board devoted considerable time to providing feedback on the project's research and evaluation components. Afterwards, the evaluators and project staff developed a question and response document for each of the issues that was raised and this document was shared by project staff with the Governance Board.

- Begin the recruitment process for Cohort 2 teachers earlier so as to increase the likelihood that target numbers indicated in the proposal will be achieved and to have balance in the subject areas and grade levels represented. It is realized that recruitment in Year 1 was delayed due to months of waiting for signed contracts. Related, find ways to help the state partners be more purposeful in the use of teachers' application information to select participants, and review the other specific suggestions offered in this report to enhance recruitment. Lastly, engage teachers who have experience in the project as a means to promote the project to future participants and increase the pool of applicants, and continue to offer them opportunities to share their testimonials during future trainings.

Overall, it has been a successful first year of implementing the ELM project. Instructional resources and learning map software have been developed. Cohort 1 teachers received training in the use of the technology, learning maps, and instructional units. The foundation for an effective collaborative relationship has been established with the five partner states.

Appendix: Interview Protocols

Enhanced Learning Maps (ELM)
Project Staff Year 1 Evaluation Interview Questions
September 2016

INTERVIEW INTRODUCTION:

[Introduce yourself and explain that you work for McREL, the external evaluator of the Accessibility for Technology-Enhanced Assessments (ELM) Enhanced Assessment Grant (EAG).]

I'm talking to you today to gather your feedback and insights about the ELM project and its implementation thus far. I will report these findings at the project level, so everything you say will be analyzed and reported with responses from other project staff. Please be assured that your anonymity is protected and your name will never be linked to your responses.

I will be audio recording our discussion today to assist me with note taking. McREL evaluators will be the only individuals with access to the recording. Once we have the report completed, we will erase the recording. [*IRB consent forms will be distributed and signed consent forms received back by McREL evaluator prior to conducting an interview.]*

I anticipate the interview to take about 30 to 45 minutes to complete. Do you have any questions before we start the interview? *If yes, answer questions, then proceed with interview.*

1. Describe your involvement with the ELM project. What is your role?

2. To what extent is the ELM project being implemented as proposed? If the project is not being implemented as proposed, what adjustments have been made in the project plan?

3. Describe the communication and collaboration among ELM project staff and the state partners. (Probe for nature, frequency, and mode of communication.)
   Note: ELM project staff and state partners have had webinars approximately monthly (February – June 2016) as well as various e-mail communications.

4. On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is not at all satisfied and 5 is very satisfied, how satisfied were you with the communication and collaboration? Why did you give it this rating? (Probe for what aspects of the communication and collaboration have been most/least satisfactory.)

5. What type of input was provided by the state partners and Governance Board? In what ways was input provided by the state partners and Governance Board members taken into consideration?

6. As a result of the training provided to Cohort 1 teachers, how well prepared are they to implement the six ELM instructional units in 2016-17? (Probe for whether differences between ELA and mathematics teachers.)

7. What additional supports and/or preparation do you believe would help the teachers implement the instructional units?

8. How will the ELM project staff be supporting the Cohort 1 teachers' implementation of the ELM project activities in their classrooms?

9. What changes, if any, would you suggest for recruitment and selection of the second Cohort of teachers for the ELM project?

10. *Question for Technology Project Staff:* Have you been tracking the questions that have been coming in from the Cohort 1 teachers? If yes, how are you using the data received?

11. What type of support do you need to successfully undertake your roles and responsibilities as it relates to the ELM project?

12. What have been the successes of the ELM project to date?

13. What have been the challenges of the ELM project to date? How have the challenges been addressed?

14. What additional comments or suggestions about the implementation of the ELM project do you have?

Enhanced Learning Maps (ELM)
Project Grant Administrator Year 1 Evaluation Interview Questions
September 2016

INTERVIEW INTRODUCTION:

[Introduce yourself and explain that you work for McREL, the external evaluator of the Accessibility for Technology-Enhanced Assessments (ELM) Enhanced Assessment Grant (EAG).]

I'm talking to you today to gather your feedback and insights about the ELM project and its implementation thus far. I will report these findings at the project level, so everything you say will be analyzed and reported with responses from other project staff. Please be assured that your anonymity is protected and your name will never be linked to your responses.

I will be audio recording our discussion today to assist me with note taking. McREL evaluators will be the only individuals with access to the recording. Once we have the report completed, we will erase the recording. [*IRB consent forms will be distributed and signed consent forms received back by McREL evaluator prior to conducting an interview.*]

I anticipate the interview to take about 30 to 45 minutes to complete. Do you have any questions before we start the interview? *If yes, answer questions, then proceed with interview.*

1. Describe your involvement with the ELM project. What is your role?

2. To what extent is the ELM project being implemented as proposed? If the project is not being implemented as proposed, what adjustments have been made in the project plan?

3. Describe the communication and collaboration among ELM project staff and the state partners. (Probe for nature, frequency, and mode of communication.)
    Note: ELM project staff and state partners have had webinars approximately monthly (February – June 2016) as well as various e-mail communications.

4. On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is not at all satisfied and 5 is very satisfied, how satisfied were you with the communication and collaboration? Why did you give it this rating? (Probe for what aspects of the communication and collaboration have been most/least satisfactory.)

5. What type of input was provided by the state partners and Governance Board? In what ways was input provided by the state partners and Governance Board members taken into consideration?

6. What changes, if any, would you suggest for recruitment and selection of the second Cohort of teachers for the ELM project?

7. What type of support do you need to successfully undertake your roles and responsibilities as it relates to the ELM project?

8. What have been the successes of the ELM project to date?

9. What have been the challenges of the ELM project to date? How have the challenges been addressed?

10. What additional comments or suggestions about the implementation of the ELM project do you have?

Enhanced Learning Maps (ELM)
State Partners Year 1 Evaluation Interview Questions
September 2016

INTERVIEW INTRODUCTION:

[Introduce yourself and explain that you work for McREL, the external evaluator of the Enhanced Learning Maps (ELM) Enhanced Assessment Grant (EAG).]

I'm talking to you today to gather your feedback and insights about the ELM project. ELM staff plan to use findings from this interview to inform any adjustments that may be needed and to help describe the implementation of the project.

I will report these findings at the project level, so everything you say will be analyzed and reported with other state partners. Please be assured that your anonymity is protected and your name will never be linked to your responses.

I will be audio recording our discussion today to assist me with note taking. McREL evaluators will be the only individuals having access to the recording. Once we have the report completed, we will erase the recording. [*IRB consent forms will be distributed and signed consent forms received back by McREL evaluator prior to conducting an interview.*]

I anticipate the interview to take about 30 minutes to complete. Do you have any questions before we start the interview? *If yes, answer questions, then proceed with interview.*

1. Describe your involvement with the ELM project. What is your role?

2. To what extent is the ELM project being implemented as originally described to partners? If the project is not being implemented as proposed, what adjustments have been made in the project plan?

3. Describe the communication and collaboration among ELM project staff and the state partners. (Probe for nature, frequency, and mode of communication.)

   Note: ELM project staff and state partners have had webinars approximately monthly (February – June 2016) as well as various e-mail communications. One area the state partners were specifically requested to assist was in the recruitment of English language arts and mathematics Cohort 1 teacher participants.

4. On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is not at all satisfied and 5 is very satisfied, how satisfied were you with the communication and collaboration? (Probe for a rating from each interviewee if a group interview.) Why did you give it this rating? (Probe for what aspects of the communication and collaboration have been most/least satisfactory.)

5. What types of input did you provide to the ELM project staff?

6. Did you review the summary from the Cohort 1 Training Evaluation Survey? If yes, what did you find particularly informative?

7. As a result of the training provided to Cohort 1 teachers, how well prepared are they to implement the six ELM instructional units in 2016-17? (Probe for whether differences between ELA and mathematics teachers.)

8. What additional supports and/or preparation do you believe would help the teachers implement the instructional units?

9. Please describe how you or others within your state will be supporting the Cohort 1 teachers' implementation of the ELM instructional units in their classrooms. (*Note:* For example, Alaska and Iowa are facilitating a course for the Cohort 1 teachers, probe on specifics and find out how the other three states are supporting the Cohort 1 teachers.)

10. What changes, if any, would you suggest for recruitment and selection of the second Cohort of teachers for the ELM project?

11. What have been the successes of the ELM project to date?

12. What have been the challenges of the ELM project to date? How have the challenges been addressed?

13. What additional comments or suggestions about the implementation of the ELM project do you have?