



DEEPER LEARNING NETWORKS SERIES

# Internationals Network for Public Schools

A Deeper Learning Approach to  
Supporting English Learners

Martens Roc, Peter Ross, and Laura E. Hernández

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## Acknowledgments

The authors thank the many people with the Internationals Network for Public Schools without whom this case study would not have been possible. They appreciate the time and insights provided by the individuals who participated in this study and the teachers and leaders at San Francisco International High School and International High School for Health Sciences in New York City who opened their classrooms during site visits. The authors also extend a special thank-you to Joe Luft and Marguerite Lukes, who went above and beyond in sharing their time, resources, and thought partnership through the research and revision process.

The authors also thank our current and former LPI colleagues Linda Darling-Hammond, Charmain Mercer, Caitlin Scott, and Patrick Shields for their support, insights, and feedback. In addition, they thank Erin Chase and Aaron Reeves for their editing and design contributions to this project and the entire LPI communications team for its invaluable support in developing and disseminating this report. Without their generosity of time and spirit, this work would not have been possible.

This research was supported by the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative and the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation. Core operating support for the Learning Policy Institute is also provided by the Sandler Foundation and the Ford Foundation. We are grateful to them for their generous support. The ideas voiced here are those of the authors and not those of our funders.

### External Reviewers

This report benefited from the insights and expertise of two external reviewers: Jacqueline Ancess, the co-director of the National Center for Restructuring Education, Schools & Teaching at Teachers College, Columbia University; and Michelle Fine, a Distinguished Professor of Critical Psychology, Women's Studies, American Studies, and Urban Education at the Graduate Center at the City University of New York. We thank them for the care and attention they gave the report.

The appropriate citation for this report is Roc, M., Ross, P., & Hernández, L. E. (2019). *Internationals Network for Public Schools: A deeper learning approach to supporting English learners*. Palo Alto, CA: Learning Policy Institute.

This report can be found online at <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/deeper-learning-networks>.

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Report originally published October 21, 2019 | Document last revised October 6, 2021  
Revisions are noted here: <http://learningpolicyinstitute.org/inps-update>

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## Executive Summary

All too often in U.S. schools, English learners are segregated into classrooms that are on the margins of our educational system. In these learning spaces, English learners are often asked to engage with remedial content and face low expectations. In addition, some educators may perceive secondary students who are English learners as being too old to “catch up.”

Whereas some schools seemingly maintain limited goals and expectations for English learners, the Internationals Network for Public Schools sees potential and has high expectations. Internationals is a network of 27 schools situated within public school districts across the nation that serves secondary students who are recent immigrants and English learners. The network expects that all of its students will graduate ready for college, career, and life and that all students will be ready to pursue a meaningful postsecondary path.

To meet these expectations, Internationals has developed a school model that emphasizes rigorous academics, linguistic dignity, and bilingualism. Internationals schools integrate language development across content areas while engaging students in *deeper learning*—pedagogical approaches, including project-based learning, work-based learning, and performance assessments, that allow students to explore their interests and learn academic content in personalized and inquiry-based ways. Deeper learning approaches help students think critically and solve complex problems using mathematical, scientific, and creative reasoning. To this end, teachers engage students in learning experiences that require collaboration, effective communication, and self-directed inquiry, enabling students to “learn how to learn” and develop academic mindsets that increase perseverance and productive learning behaviors.

In addition to these pedagogical features, Internationals’ students are further supported by school structures that address their social and emotional needs, including regular access to social workers, counselors, and wraparound services. The inclusion of language and content integration, a deeper learning approach, and a focus on the whole student has allowed Internationals to provide a range of coordinated supports that produce strong outcomes for English learners.

This report highlights how Internationals has managed to re-create, sustain, and spread its complex and equity-oriented model across the country, even in the face of the challenges that arise when seeking to create substantive changes to teaching and learning. The report begins with a description of the network’s model and how it designs schools with structures—such as mixed-age classes, teaching looping, interdisciplinary team collaboration, and advisories—to bring its vision and commitments to life. In addition, it identifies the systems and structures that have enabled Internationals to re-create its model in a high-quality manner. The report suggests that:

### **1. Internationals works collaboratively with local practitioners to establish its schools, helping ensure that its deeper learning model is feasible and sustainable.**

With its clear vision for teaching and learning, Internationals instantiates its vision and values in schools through collaborative processes that ensure the model is feasible and responsive to the community. On one hand, the network maintains a set of conditions that it strives to secure so that its complex model can be implemented, including Internationals’ input on staffing,

flexibility on graduation timelines and requirements, and assurances that Internationals staff can incorporate language development into their core instruction.

At the same time, Internationals staff do not establish their schools in a top-down fashion. Instead, they engage in ongoing discussions with district leaders and local educators about student need and the feasibility and fit of the model to ensure that it is a welcomed and responsive addition to the local community.

**Implications for schools and districts:** Internationals' ongoing collaboration with local communities suggests that deeper learning models can be well supported when local stakeholders are involved in establishing deeper learning schools. Similarly, school and district leaders seeking to implement deeper learning approaches can develop a clear understanding of the policies and structures they need to instantiate their visions and then consider how they can intentionally and authentically partner with the local communities from the onset.

## **2. Internationals cultivates a culture of professional learning in which teachers and leaders learn about and experience Internationals' model and hone their abilities to implement the model in collaborative and ongoing ways.**

Because the Internationals model varies from traditional ways of educating English learners, the network deliberately engages teachers and leaders in immersive professional development so that teachers can effectively implement its approach.

The network invests early in its educators and leaders, onboarding them with a series of learning opportunities that allow them to experience the network's instructional model and to learn with and from their experienced colleagues. The network also engages its teachers in professional learning with their colleagues via structured collaboration time and through the network's characteristic open-door policy, wherein teachers visit each other's classrooms to provide feedback or to learn new techniques. This policy encourages transparency and mutual accountability. The network also hosts cross-network workshops that gather teachers and leaders around specific topics and build communities of practice. Taken collectively, these professional learning opportunities advance a culture of continuous learning in Internationals schools and provide a reinforcing system of support for educators as they implement the network's complex model.

**Implications for schools and districts:** Internationals' approach to supporting teachers and leaders can provide lessons for those seeking to implement deeper learning for English learners in their schools. Findings suggest the importance of experiential and immersive learning for educators and the need to build and maintain multifaceted systems for professional support that emphasize continuous improvement and collaboration.

### **3. Internationals partners with school districts and external partners to deepen and sustain local investment, to expand the network’s approach, and to further develop teacher capacity.**

Internationals schools engage the district and broader community after establishing their sites, which helps to sustain sites by securing important resources, building investment in their approach, and deepening staff capacity.

While challenges have emerged along the way, Internationals continues to partner with host districts and local unions to ensure adequate resources, such as facilities and funding, and to build knowledge about the school model. Some network schools have also partnered with third-party organizations to extend educator capacity. This includes engaging in external communities of practice, working with specialized professional development organizations, and collaborating with institutions to enhance their model through the provision of academic and social services. Ongoing engagement at the local level has also deepened knowledge of deeper learning for English learners within and beyond Internationals’ school walls. Internationals educators often engage in professional learning with their district counterparts and often open their classroom doors and professional development to non-network educators. Overall, these efforts help to improve and sustain Internationals schools and facilitate the spread of knowledge on deeper learning for English learners.

**Implications for schools and districts:** Internationals sees these partnerships as critical to sustaining high-quality and responsive instruction at Internationals sites and to producing graduation and postsecondary success rates for English learners. School and district leaders who want to expand their work around deeper learning could consider how they can leverage partnerships such as those seen in the Internationals network to help foster and sustain deeper learning practices for English learners.



## Introduction

The lesson of the day in a 9th- and 10th-grade biology class at San Francisco International High School (SFIHS) focuses on a central question: “Should soda have a tax?” Twenty-five students, roughly divided between 9th- and 10th-graders, include several students in both grade levels who are recent arrivals and have been in the United States for 6 months or less. Most of the class veterans have only been in the United States for 18 to 24 months.

Like other project-based learning environments, instruction for this heterogeneous class is connecting biology learning principles to real-world nutrition and policy. The veteran teacher, Patricia, has built extensive scaffolds into her lesson that were designed to meet students at their English language acquisition, content knowledge, and skill development levels. She moves through the classroom engaging individual students, small groups of students, and the whole class.

She intentionally leverages the assets that her students have brought to the classroom, particularly their native language fluency. The core question was written in English and in the five other languages spoken by the students in the class to give students an immediate starting point in their native languages that allows them to engage with the content questions even if their English language skills were not yet developed to the point of allowing them to do so fully in English.

The teacher uses other techniques that allow students to use their native languages to support themselves and one another in engaging with the rigorous content. For example, throughout the classroom, students use Google Translate to translate words from Spanish, Arabic, and other languages. In contrast to classrooms in which students’ native languages are minimized or seen through a deficit lens,<sup>1</sup> students leverage their home languages to make meaning of complex grade-level academic content. With students from multiple linguistic backgrounds, English is the common language and the language of formal academic discourse. Yet English is not positioned as the only valuable language. The assets-based classroom environment makes students comfortable taking risks to speak, read, and write in English, but they also use their native languages as a valuable tool to be harnessed and developed.

The teacher also takes steps to make instruction and content accessible and to further students’ vocabulary and writing development. For example, she prominently displays visuals from earlier lessons that students have labeled, and she has research articles and documents readily available so that students can access them through the inquiry process. In addition, each portion of the lesson is carefully chunked into discrete sections to allow students to understand the content and to apply their emerging English skills. For instance, students engage with pictures relevant to the soda tax debate and connect those pictures with academic English words they have learned in previous lessons (e.g., “glucose”). One chunked exercise includes the following stages:

- Each student chooses one picture and labels it in English with scientific terms that have previously been taught.
- In small groups, students discuss the pictures using English:
  - What did other people write?
  - What did it make you think?
- Next, using the labeled pictures from their groups, students individually write “a complex sentence—a big sentence” in English that can be used in their final essays.
- In doing so, students need to use the English words “but,” “because,” or “so.”
  - E.g., “When you don’t eat, the glucose decreases because your body uses the energy.”

During the lesson, the teacher walks throughout the room meeting individually with students to make sure that they are receiving the supports they need to successfully engage with the language and content. She also constantly moves her hands, draws pictures on the board, points to visual scaffolds on the walls, and makes motions that have meaning as if she is playing a 90-minute game of charades with the students. She also has developed a series of sounds that are not English words but that the students associate with an action (e.g., an action that encourages students to look at their peers who are speaking or an action that encourages students to use sentence starters that are on the walls). This simple yet effective method seems to help ease the cognitive load for her students who are doing far more than the typical native English speaker would be doing in such a class. She repeatedly reminds her students of her expectations for participation and reinforces participation and structural routines to keep students engaged.

Eventually, students build from these smaller tasks to craft thesis statements and ultimately write persuasive essays in English that support their position on the value of soda taxes. While the development of academic English related to the content is clearly scaffolded through these steps, the teacher also has an explicit focus on science, engaging the students on both the science behind how sugary drinks affect humans and the social science behind their impact on communities. Over the course of multiple weeks, students develop the content knowledge and the English literacy skills needed to engage orally and in writing on the topic in sophisticated ways.

All too often in U.S. schools, students who are English learners are segregated into classrooms that are on the margins of our educational system.<sup>2</sup> In these isolated learning spaces, English learners are often asked to engage with age-inappropriate and disconnected content in the process of developing their emerging language skills. They also often face low expectations, particularly at the secondary level, where some may perceive them as being too old to “catch up.” These compounding factors have detrimental effects on student learning and outcomes, particularly for high school students who are English learners, of whom only 63% graduate from high school nationally.<sup>3</sup>

Whereas some others seemingly maintain limited goals and expectations for these students, the Internationals Network for Public Schools sees potential and has high expectations. Internationals is a network of 27 schools situated within public school districts across the nation that serves secondary students who are recent immigrants and English learners. The network expects that all of its students will graduate ready for college, career, and life and that all students will be ready to attend an institution of higher education and/or pursue a meaningful postsecondary pathway.

To meet these expectations, Internationals aims to foster teaching and learning practices such as those above in all of its classrooms—instructional approaches that emphasize rigorous academics, linguistic dignity, and multilingualism. The Internationals approach is also embedded within a whole school design and structure that combine to support the academic and personal growth of students. Internationals schools are de-tracked (i.e., students are not separated by ability levels), with students grouped into academically heterogeneous cohorts taught by interdisciplinary teams of teachers who participate in ongoing, collaborative professional learning that is part of their regular school day. Students are further supported by structures that address their broader holistic needs as immigrant youth, including regular access to social workers, guidance counselor support

teams, and personalization structures that support students' academic and social and emotional needs. In its de-tracked, interdisciplinary, and holistic model, Internationals integrates language development across content areas, enabling its students to engage in rigorous, age-appropriate, and standards-based learning in the context of developing their language proficiency.

The Internationals approach is also grounded in a teaching and learning model called *deeper learning*. Deeper learning approaches, including project-based learning, work-based learning, and performance assessments, allow students to explore their interests and learn academic content in personalized and inquiry-based ways.<sup>4</sup> They help students think critically and solve complex problems using mathematical, scientific, and creative reasoning. To this end, teachers engage students in learning experiences that require collaboration, effective communication, and self-directed inquiry, enabling students to “learn how to learn” and develop academic mindsets that increase perseverance and productive learning behaviors.<sup>5</sup>

In implementing these pedagogical practices, deeper learning practitioners integrate the learning principles identified by researchers in the science of learning and development.<sup>6</sup> They enact personalized instructional strategies—strategies that assume that variability in learning is the norm rather than the exception and allow students to be active generators of knowledge. They emphasize the development of affirming relationships to catalyze learning, which support students in taking learning risks while mitigating the effects of adversity that many students face. They also openly attend to students' social-emotional skills, which can help them develop productive and pro-social lifelong behaviors. Taken together, deeper learning models, such as those at Internationals, advance a vision for whole-child education, which has been shown to produce strong outcomes for students.<sup>7</sup>

Despite the complexity of its multifaceted deeper learning approach that supports the needs of recently immigrated English learners, Internationals has transplanted these practices from one original school in New York City to 27 schools across the nation and sustained its model over time. The network has managed this feat despite a long history of education reforms that shows the difficulty in implementing and spreading deeper learning models. From John Dewey's progressive schools at the turn of the 20th century to Theodore Sizer's network of “essential” schools in the 1980s and 1990s, many have sought to transform schools and systems to allow more student-centered and inquiry-driven approaches to teaching and learning to flourish. Yet because these school environments include practices and systems that typically deviate from the norm, they have confronted institutional and normative barriers that have stunted the implementation of promising practices in traditional public schools and even undermined the degree to which access to learning experiences can break deep cycles of inequity that persist in U.S. schools.<sup>8</sup>

This report seeks to demystify how Internationals has managed to re-create, sustain, and spread its model in schools, even in the face of the challenges that arise when seeking to create substantive changes to teaching and learning. The case study begins with a description of the network's multifaceted and equity-oriented model and how it has designed schools so that Internationals' vision and commitment comes to life. In describing the model, we demonstrate how Internationals has remained focused on the holistic needs of its English learners and even adapted its school design to meet the needs of its most vulnerable populations, including unaccompanied minors, refugees from violence and war, high school students with little or no previous formal schooling, and students who arrive speaking indigenous languages that have no written form.

After describing the Internationals model, the report turns to describing the systems and structures that have enabled Internationals to re-create its model in a high-quality manner. Through interviews with Internationals personnel and observations at school and professional learning sites (see Appendix 1 for complete description of the study's methodology), the report suggests that Internationals:

- collaborates with districts and local practitioners to establish its schools, helping to ensure that its deeper learning model is implemented in a high-quality way and is a welcomed reform;
- cultivates a culture of professional learning that allows its teachers and leaders to learn about and experience Internationals' model and hone their ability to implement the model in collaborative and ongoing ways; and
- partners with school districts and external partners to deepen local investment, to expand the network's approach, and to further develop teacher and school leader capacity in supporting the instructional needs of English learners.

Through these processes, Internationals has instantiated its deeper learning practices for English learners into new contexts while also enabling the network to remain responsive to the needs of local communities. In elevating the network's approach to re-creating its deeper learning and equity-oriented model, this study aims to provide insights into the promising systems that key decision-makers can consider when seeking to implement deeper learning models to advance opportunities for English learners.

## The Internationals Way: An Integrated and Rigorous Approach to Teaching and Learning for English Learners

There's a myth that students have to learn English before they do more interesting work, but we engage students in learning through work that interests them, giving them a compelling reason to learn English.

—Claire E. Sylvan, Founder, Internationals Network for Public Schools<sup>9</sup>

Organizationally, we're both a school development and support organization.... The simplest and yet most “brass-ring” goal is really to ensure that all [immigrant youth and English learners] have an equitable education that prepares them adequately for what's next and what they choose to have next.

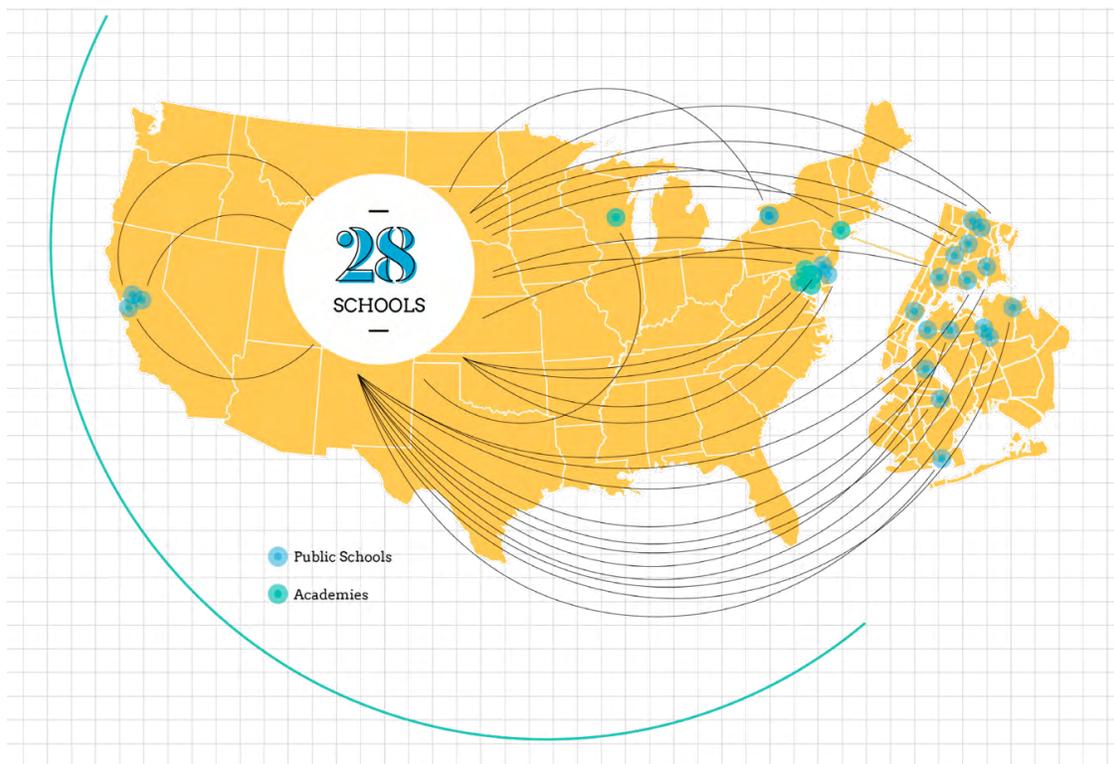
—Marguerite Lukes, Director of Research and Innovation,  
Internationals Network for Public Schools

In response to the many educational challenges faced by English learners who are recent immigrants and refugees within district schools across the nation, Internationals has intentionally designed schools that both challenge and support those students. The Internationals network started in 1985 as a single school, International High School at LaGuardia Community College in Queens, NY. Today, the network has 27 schools and academies in six states and the District of Columbia. While its largest region is New York City, where the network maintains 16 affiliates, Internationals also supports sites in Alexandria, VA; Prince George's County, MD; Buffalo, NY; Minneapolis, MN; Oakland, CA; San Francisco, CA; West Contra Costa, CA; and Washington, DC. Together, the schools serve 9,000 students who are recent immigrants from 131 countries and speak 102 languages.

While serving a large student population across the country, Internationals views each student as unique. While all Internationals students are recent immigrants or refugees to the United States and English learners, there is wide variation in their needs when they arrive for the first day of school. Students enter Internationals' schools collectively speaking over one hundred different languages at home. Some come having received substantial formal education in the language of their native countries, while others arrive at Internationals' high schools having had little, interrupted, or no formal education. Some come with literacy skills, while others do not. Some students speak native languages that do not have a written form. Some come with their families, while others arrive unaccompanied. While differing in these aspects, all arrive wanting to learn English, to build community and relationships, and to get an education to help them find their way in their new country.

To meet their widely varied needs, Internationals is deeply committed to forging the best path for each individual student while leveraging students' individual and collective strengths so they can attain success. Internationals' mission is “to provide quality education for recently arrived immigrants by growing and sustaining a strong national network of innovative International High Schools, while broadening our impact by sharing proven best practices and influencing policy for English learners on a national scale.”<sup>10</sup> In order to uphold that mission, the network aims to ensure all recent immigrant students have access to a quality public high school education that prepares them for college, career, and participation in democratic society.<sup>11</sup>

**Figure 1**  
**Map of the Internationals Network for Public Schools**



Source: Internationals Network for Public Schools. (n.d.). Schools and Academies. <http://internationalsnps.org/schools/> (accessed 12/13/18).

Internationals seeks an approach that has more flexibility than the traditional U.S. high school, wherein the expectation has typically been that all students take a similar 4-year path to graduation. Instead, there is a shared understanding that each student must follow his or her own trajectory and that sufficient time must be given to each student to reach Internationals' high expectations. While 4 years might be the right amount of time for some students, Internationals supports students who may need a 5th or 6th year to graduate ready for college, career, and life. As is described in detail below, throughout their time at Internationals, students are afforded flexibility, especially linguistic flexibility, in the learning process. This flexibility is coupled with Internationals' integrated approach to language development and the consistent use of English as the language of common and academic discourse in network schools.

### **The Internationals Way of Teaching: Integrated Language Development**

The expectation that every student will succeed if rigorously challenged, properly supported, and given sufficient time permeates the Internationals approach to instruction. That approach is further undergirded by an evidence-based and deeply held belief that the traditional U.S. method of delivering English language instruction in isolation from academic classes through English as a Second Language (ESL) classes and enforcing an English-only approach is deeply flawed.<sup>12</sup>

Rather than putting students in ESL classes where English language is taught in isolation, Internationals infuses language development—both of English and of students’ home languages—directly into content-area classes. For instance, students learn English while they are collaboratively engaging in scientific inquiry, exploring a mathematical concept, or examining a social science challenge.

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Common features of the Internationals comprehensive approach include:

- use of interdisciplinary, developmentally appropriate, and standards-based content to build knowledge;
- continuous emphasis on oral language development via formal and informal dialogue and exchanges;
- use and development of native language materials and translation tools to leverage and enhance students’ language assets;
- frequent and scaffolded reading and writing tasks across disciplines;
- collaborative approaches that encourage more experienced students to model and mentor less experienced ones; and
- active teacher support during all forms of student learning that is gradually released as students gain skills and experience.

In addition to these features, instruction at Internationals is primarily organized around project-based learning, a deeper learning approach that can further encourage the use and development of language (both English and home languages), and the application of academic skills and knowledge. As a pedagogical approach, project-based learning develops students’ knowledge and skills while they are investigating a meaningful problem or answering a complex question. Projects often center on real-world problems; incorporate interdisciplinary, standards-based tasks related to scientific inquiry, writing, and quantitative reasoning; and require that students work collaboratively and present their work publicly.<sup>15</sup>

Consistent with the research on language development, this active, engaged learning develops language proficiency by giving students frequent opportunities to hear, speak, read, and write English.<sup>14</sup> As they develop and implement their projects, students use their emerging academic and language skills to investigate meaningful problems and collaborate with and learn from peers. In this process, students are actively encouraged to speak and write English while using their native languages to support engagement with rigorous academic content. The use of tools such as Google Translate, texts in their home languages, and supports such as students collaborating and sometimes translating for one another are extensive at first and then gradually released over time.

As students gain experience, confidence, and skills, they are also given the opportunity in the 11th and 12th grades to engage in another deeper learning practice—real-world learning. By definition, real-world learning asks students to apply and build their content knowledge and skills in real-world settings through authentic work experiences and collaborations with peers, teachers, and workplace mentors.<sup>15</sup> At Internationals, this often takes the form of student internships with local community partners, through which students are able to apply their academic skills as well as practice their English and native language skills in authentic settings that mirror what will be expected of them in higher education and in their careers. As is the case with all that Internationals does, these internships are scaffolded and supported through regular interaction between Internationals school staff and staff at the internship placement site.

Overall, through its multifaceted pedagogical approach, Internationals is fostering deeper learning among its English learners. The network not only asks students to engage in deeper learning practices, such as project-based and real-world learning, but also continuously emphasizes deeper learning competencies, including critical thinking, collaboration, effective communication, and self-directed inquiry, through its integrated approach to language development and interdisciplinary study. In doing so, Internationals has found a way to implement deeper learning in ways that meet the individual needs of its students who are recent immigrants and English learners.

### **Seeing the Internationals Way in Action: Government Class**

A heterogeneous 11th- and 12th-grade social studies government class provides a window into the Internationals approach. The class was studying federalism and its historic role in the U.S. governmental system. To explore this concept, the students engaged in a series of small-group research projects that examined federalism through the prism of major issues in the United States today. Topics included:

- marijuana legalization;
- climate change and vehicle emission standards;
- disaster relief with a particular focus on Hurricane Irma and Puerto Rico;
- wages with a particular focus on minimum wage laws;
- marine water protection with a focus on Bristol Bay near Alaska; and
- abortion.

As was the case with the soda tax unit, students in this class tackled complex subject matter collaboratively, used English as their common language, and leveraged their native languages to support learning. However, these students, who had been at the school for 3 or 4 years, had noticeably higher levels of English proficiency and content expertise than their younger peers.

Despite students' higher levels of academic and language development, their veteran teacher still provided scaffolds to support students in their learning, though less extensively than those provided by the 9th- and 10th-grade teacher. The lesson alternated between brief bursts of whole-group instruction and small groups in which students worked with their dedicated research groups (e.g., the disaster relief group) and in cross-group discussions (i.e., a discussion group with a representative from each research group) to confirm understanding and share ideas. The teacher used scaffolds in each of these settings. Some, such as skill reminders on the walls, were available

for use throughout and were referenced by both the teacher and students during the lesson. For instance, one such poster that was a focus during this lesson supported students in their ability to elaborate and clarify statements in written and oral language:

- What did you mean by ...?
- Can you be more specific?
- Can you clarify the part about?
- In other words ...
- My main idea is ...
- I believe that ...

In this lesson, the students spent most of their time in cross-topic small groups. Before delving into small groups, the teacher modeled what would be done in small groups. The teacher explained that each cross-group member had a job and modeled what each role would do:

- Reader—“Read the controversy out loud to the group.”
- Summarizer—“OK, so essentially this issue has two sides...”
- Question asker—“Ask each person in your group, which big idea from federalism connects to this issue?”
- Synthesizer—“Ask, which big ideas can we agree on?”
- All—“Write what you learn and report on what you learn from across the research topics.”

As he walked through these instructions, the teacher had students read aloud the prompts and subtly helped with more challenging English pronunciation. He reminded students (and, later, students repeatedly reminded each other) to make eye contact, to say each other’s names, and then to ask their questions. In doing so, the teacher was integrating English language instruction and cultural language norms (i.e., how to speak English with others in this community) while covering academic content. As was the case in all Internationals classes, he further reminded students that everyone must participate and encouraged students to take the risk to produce English responses. Throughout, the clear expectation was that participation in the academic content and discourse must be in English even while native language scaffolds were still strongly encouraged throughout: “In your groups, everyone is talking. Everyone is engaging with written work. Everyone is engaging with big ideas.”

Next, each of the six small groups convened and explored one aspect of federalism from the perspective of the six research topics (e.g., climate change, marijuana legalization): “How do the big ideas from federalism connect to your research topic?” As the small cross-groups convened, the teacher circulated, posing questions and re-engaging students who had veered off topic. As was the case in the 9th- and 10th-grade class, students used their native languages to unpack challenging vocabulary and support their understanding of the concepts. This scaffolding, however, was used to a significantly lesser extent as compared to the 9th- and 10th-grade class. In the end, each group completed the assignment in English, and all were prepared to reconvene in their topic-focused groups to refine their research based on what they had learned from cross-group conversations.

## Performance Assessments to Further Language and Content Development

The mix of support and high expectations in the Internationals instructional model is further enhanced by the use of performance assessments, which reinforces the network's emphasis on integrated language development and higher-order deeper learning skills. Performance assessments are assessments that go beyond sheer demonstrations of content knowledge to include demonstrations of knowledge, skills, and mastery across a variety of subject areas. They include student portfolios that systematically collect and present student work samples, records of observation, test results, and other artifacts collected over time and across disciplines to demonstrate growth and learning. Teachers at Internationals schools use performance assessment data in an ongoing fashion to inform instruction and practice. In addition, students in 15 New York City and 2 California Internationals high schools show proficiency through their portfolios to meet graduation requirements.

As is the case with the network's overall approach, considerable scaffolds are in place for the portfolio process. For instance, teachers support students in this process daily, helping students develop the skills and knowledge to successfully prepare and defend a portfolio of work. Furthermore, students remain encouraged to use language tools (e.g., Google Translate, dictionaries, thesauruses, sentence starters, and graphic organizers) to craft their oral and written presentation materials. Lastly, Internationals staff describe the portfolio process as an iterative one. Students are given considerable time to revise and practice their presentations, and in many cases, students will revise and re-present portfolios until the work is deemed proficient. This is a particularly helpful design feature of the portfolio process for English learners who, like other students, can improve if given the chance to practice and revise.

The value of this interconnected approach can be seen in the science portfolio students presented and defended recently at International High School for Health Sciences (IHSHS) in Queens, NY. A portion of the portfolios students built sought to demonstrate the content knowledge garnered from their biology course. In that class, students had studied DNA and learned that 96% of everyone's DNA was exactly the same. To understand more about the variation in the remaining 4%, students engaged in multiple-day lab classes that included activities such as extracting a sample of their own DNA, copying that sample, and sending a swab of their cheek cell tissue to a sequencing lab for analysis. While the DNA was being processed, students developed hypotheses on what differences might exist between their own DNA and that of their classmates who were from many countries across the world. When the lab results returned, students compared their own DNA with that of other students from their native countries or regions. They then did a cross-country analysis and compared their DNA to those from a country on a different continent. Students then wrote their findings in reports that followed the parameters and structure of scientific writing that researchers use when publishing their findings in research journals.

As a culminating task, students presented their findings in an oral defense to teachers, peers, and community members. In that defense, students engaged in a process similar to how doctoral students defend their dissertations in front of a committee of scholars. This included sharing a written report on their investigation and its findings, including sharing the data they collected, and a content-driven rationale for their conclusions. That content knowledge was further examined in a question and answer period with the panelists, in which students were expected to be able to answer direct, unrehearsed questions about the work they did as well as speculative questions that were informed by that work. Like a dissertation defense, these portfolio defenses reflect a learning

journey through which knowledge and skills are developed. Biology, like many other classes, is taught over a 2-year period, so students have a significant foundation of content knowledge. Throughout the 2-year biology sequence, they learn English, acquire knowledge of biology and the scientific process, and learn scientific writing skills through a process of repeated practice and revision. Through their defenses, Internationals students were expected to share and discuss their overall learning in these areas to demonstrate growth and to receive feedback on areas for improvement.

This performance assessment system is a key linchpin to the Internationals deeper learning approach. In developing and delivering these performance assessments across all of the discipline areas (e.g., mathematics, science, social studies, and English language arts), the network is fostering the development of a body of content knowledge. The process by which students gain this knowledge further develops their deeper learning skills as they learn to analyze data and draft written reports, as well as develop, deliver, and defend their findings. A continual emphasis on iteration further reinforces the development of these skills. The rigor of this approach sets a high bar for all students, but its flexibility also allows Internationals' recent immigrant youth English learners to meet the quality bar on different time paths (e.g., some in 4 years, and others in 5 or 6 years).

### **Internationals' Record of Success**

Despite the lack of causal studies exclusively examining student achievement in Internationals, several descriptive studies show that Internationals schools have generated strong outcomes for their English learner, recently immigrated students.<sup>16</sup> According to the network's internal analyses, students attending Internationals schools consistently outperform their English learner counterparts in schools that serve students facing similarly challenging circumstances.<sup>17</sup> External studies have corroborated these results, noting that Internationals' graduation, college acceptance, and matriculation rates were higher than those of its counterparts in New York City public schools.<sup>18</sup> Overall, data suggest that, in providing rich learning experiences for its English learner and recent immigrant students, Internationals is supporting their learning and advancing much-needed educational equity for this often-marginalized or misunderstood student population.

Because of Internationals' success and longevity in supporting English learners who are recent immigrants, other researchers have engaged in qualitative studies of the network to further understand its practices and how it manages to sustain its model in districts. Some reports have provided rich descriptions of the network's practices to elevate its approach to high-quality and culturally sustaining instruction for its student populations.<sup>19</sup> Other qualitative studies have focused on teacher learning structures or the ways Internationals supports the development of teachers' knowledge, skills, and dispositions and the sharing of knowledge across its network.<sup>20</sup> Some reports have also investigated how the network contends with external policy demands, demonstrating how the network leverages its institutional knowledge and long-standing presence in districts to secure its model in the midst of top-down pressures and policies.<sup>21</sup> This case study builds upon this body of research on the Internationals approach to identify the varied processes and structures that the network uses across the country to bring its deeper learning model to life in high-quality and community-responsive ways.

## Intentional School Design: How Internationals Schools Are Designed to Effectively Deliver the Internationals Way of Instruction

The instructional approach described above does not occur by happenstance or because of the particular strengths of individual teachers. Instead, it is fostered through an intentional approach that is supported by a web of mutually reinforcing school design features.

For instance, the network deliberately uses mixed-age, heterogeneous classes to support students' language, academic, and sociocultural development. Mixed-age grouping, which includes 9th- and 10th-graders or 11th- and 12th-graders, recognizes that students are multidimensional and are not a single "level" for all areas of knowledge, including life experience, content knowledge, and different language modalities. In addition, this heterogeneous structure allows students with more developed language and academic skills to support novice peers. This practice is particularly valuable for new students who are recent arrivals to the United States. In the 9th- and 10th-grade class described earlier, two 9th-graders had arrived in the United States and at the school just a few days before that observation. The teacher had intentionally grouped those students with 10th-graders who spoke their native languages (in this case, Spanish and Arabic) and who could act as mentors and provide academic, language, sociocultural, and emotional support to the newcomers.

In the 9th and 10th grades, these mixed-age classes also loop, or stay with the same set of interdisciplinary teachers, for 2 years, enabling the development of strong relationships between students and teachers. This continuity also generates academic benefits, as teachers can use their knowledge of students' strengths and struggles to meet their academic and linguistic needs over a longer period of time. Overall, the structures of mixed-age grouping and looping allow Internationals to support its students in deeper learning and are themselves scaffolds that support Internationals students in their academic and linguistic development.

### Teamwork Makes the Dream Work

To further support students, Internationals schools are designed so that teachers have considerable planning time together. While Internationals teachers have regular weekly planning time with colleagues in the same discipline to share content-specific ideas, interdisciplinary teaching teams are the backbone of Internationals schools and the primary mechanisms through which teachers generate and provide academic and social-emotional support. These

Interdisciplinary teaching teams are the backbone of Internationals schools and the primary mechanisms through which teachers generate and provide academic and social-emotional support.

teaching teams include educators who share small cohorts of students across disciplines and meet at least weekly as a teacher cohort (and with non-teacher advisors such as counselors) to discuss their common students. For example, 9th- and 10th-grade math, English, social studies, and science teachers share a common set of students and meet weekly as a team with a subset of other school personnel who serve as their students' advisors to discuss those students and their progress.

An interdisciplinary team meeting at IHSHS in Queens, NY, exemplifies the value of this approach. Five junior institute (i.e., 9th- and 10th-grade) teachers and a counselor gathered during a common prep time for an hour to discuss their shared few-dozen students. In the tightly orchestrated meeting, the educators discussed a variety of academic and social and emotional learning issues regarding their common students. They brought student data (in this case, anecdotes) to the meeting, shared their data, looked for patterns in order to understand student behavior, and developed solutions to address students' learning issues.

At one point, they focused on a specific student who was struggling to produce language in English or her native language, both written and orally. Each teacher spoke, and they looked for clues in each other's anecdotes on how to better engage the student and for strategies they might reinforce across classrooms. For example, the student's science teacher shared that she had asked for help once in the past week, and that was an encouraging sign. Her math teacher shared that the student had been asking for help more frequently in her classroom but still struggled to retain concepts and understanding. After each teacher shared, they discovered that the student had been doing better when paired with one other particular student, so the teachers agreed to encourage that pairing in the next week to see if it made a difference. The educators also discussed her home life, and the student's advisor said that she would be reaching out to the family. They also mentioned the likelihood that they would produce a referral for potential additional supports and agreed to consider this possibility again the following week.

Throughout the meeting, the teachers and counselor remained highly collegial with frequent laughter and a steady focus on the work at hand. This collegiality helped when they discussed the challenging issues their students were facing, including a cohort of students who had come to the school after being displaced by Hurricane Irma in Puerto Rico and a special education student who was struggling despite intensive supports. Throughout, the use of well-established meeting protocols, a mutual agreement to stay on a tight timeline, and the in-depth relationships that the educators had built with each other allowed the team to cover multiple topics.

This intentional, collaborative time together is critical to the Internationals way. It puts individual students at the center of adult conversations and allows educators to collaboratively refine their approach with each individual student so that they can contribute to the student's overall growth and well-being. It also creates a sense of mutual accountability. The regular collaboration encourages educators to continually improve their practice in conjunction with their colleagues and makes their peers aware of what is happening in one another's classes. Internationals' educators do not work behind closed doors, but instead hold a shared sense of responsibility for the success of all of the students in their school.

A teacher at IHSHS described the value of the team structure, the "ability for six [or] seven minds to delve into an issue and come up with a solution."

It's a lens. You look at issues from different perspectives that you wouldn't otherwise. If I were just one teacher, solitary in a room by myself, I could not imagine myself teaching for 30, 40 years. [But] I can envision [it] in this type of structure.... I love solving problems, but if I had to solve 100 problems, everyone's? Not feasible. The support that my team provides, I can't measure. Priceless.

## Supporting the Whole Student

Interdisciplinary teaching teams provide the foundation for supporting the whole student—wherein educators collaborate to nurture students’ academic, social, and emotional growth. Internationals schools also use personalization structures, including the use of advisories, to support student growth and holistic development. Advisories, or regular meetings between an advisor and a student or a group of students to provide academic and social support, are intentionally included so that every student and family in the school is known deeply by an adult in the school. At most Internationals schools, each 9th-grader is assigned an advisor, usually a teacher, but it can also be a school leader or other school staff (e.g., counselors). Nearly every adult in the school acts as an advisor, so the entire adult community is invested in student success. Advisors meet with their advisees two or more times a week and work with the students for 2 years before they transition that responsibility to new advisors who will work with the students for 11th and/or 12th grade.

Advisors are the key personalization support and primary advocates for students at Internationals schools. Through their individual work and through collaborations with their interdisciplinary teaching teams, they also provide academic support, helping students prepare for portfolio defenses and with the college application process. To illustrate, at San Francisco International High School (SFIHS), advisories are structured as Junior and Senior Institutes. In Junior Institute, students are taught the skills and information needed to complete portfolios. That can include learning how to compile a portfolio and how to present in public. In Senior Institute, the meetings are more about mentoring. During these meetings, students are immersed in college preparatory conversations, how to navigate the end of their high school experience, and other conversations that help meet the social-emotional and health needs of students.

In addition to advisories, Internationals schools provide extensive holistic supports for students. Internationals schools have dedicated staff (e.g., social workers, counselors, etc.) who work closely with teachers and students to provide academic and social-emotional supports. Internationals school staff also provide access to services and programs as part of typical day-to-day school operations, which helps minimize peer attention and scrutiny to accessing and using these services. For instance, schools have come up with age-appropriate approaches to providing students with meals so that little public attention is called to their needs. At SFIHS, there are before- and after-school clubs where full meals are included, as a significant number of students eat all of their meals at school.

The schools also have strategies to address a number of other issues that immigrant youth face, including support for:

- addressing mental health issues;
- providing education and support regarding immigration rights;
- accessing food stamps, health care, and other social services;
- accessing housing;
- accessing part-time employment; and
- obtaining college access.

Taken together, each of the design features articulated above combine to create a strong web of support for students to learn and grow. As one Internationals alumnus expressed:

My experience at Internationals as a student did not only provide me with the knowledge necessary for my success in college, but it provided me with the skills and flexibility to become an independent thinker and to be aware that, yes, I am going to face obstacles and barriers, but I am the captain of my ship. I can make it.

## Building a Network: Transplanting the Internationals Way to New Schools Across a Network

The deeper learning and equity-centered school model at the heart of the Internationals network is a comprehensive and holistic way to engage recently immigrated English learners in rich learning. This section will go back to the beginning to describe how the network has grown. It explains the network's origin story, articulates how the model of the network's original school has evolved, and describes how the network has supported the development of strong district schools that are using this model across the country.

### Network Origin Story: A Modest Beginning

Internationals' origin dates back to 1985 with the opening of the first International High School on LaGuardia Community College's campus in partnership with City University of New York and the New York City Department of Education. The opening of the LaGuardia high school came at a time when district schools were experiencing difficulties providing English learners with a rigorous and engaging education. The original LaGuardia staff sought to take a different approach, one that would eventually become the foundation of the Internationals model in coming years. This piloted approach by staff members in one school began to spread to other network schools. Within 16 years of the first school, three more high schools opened in Brooklyn and Manhattan, and the first Bronx school opened in 2001.

To foster better collaboration among the schools, network leaders developed the International Schools Partnership in 1995, setting the groundwork for the establishment of Internationals Network for Public Schools as a nonprofit organization. In 2004, Internationals came under the leadership of Dr. Claire E. Sylvan. At that time, school leaders and teachers began to think about how to formalize and systematize the pedagogy that eventually became the Internationals way. Joe Luft, Internationals' Executive Director, explained:

We all came together across what existed as a network of the first seven or eight schools and essentially reverse engineered what we were doing. We sat down and we said, "All right, what do we share in common that makes us Internationals high schools? What's the approach that we all espouse, and how does it look across our schools? What are the common elements of that?"

The result of those discussions was Internationals' five core principles that have persisted as the network has grown and are deeply embedded in the school design and pedagogical practices. The five core principles are:

1. **"Heterogeneity and collaboration: schools and classrooms are heterogeneous and collaborative structures that build on the strengths of each member of the school community to optimize learning."** Internationals students come from various ethnic and language backgrounds, different grade levels, and varying levels of English language acquisition. These differences among students are viewed as assets in fostering a global perspective and supporting one another's growth and academic success.
2. **"Experiential learning: expansion of the 21st-century schools beyond the four walls of the building motivates adolescents and enhances their capacity to successfully participate in modern society."** The Internationals deeper learning approach emphasizes

relevant, rigorous, and experiential learning at every turn. By engaging students in project-based, real-world learning that focuses on the local community and pressing issues, students have opportunities to connect their learning to real-world contexts.

3. **“Language and content integration: strong language skills develop most effectively in context and emerge most naturally in a purposeful, language-rich, interdisciplinary, and experiential program.”** As illustrated from the pedagogical descriptions above, Internationals’ teachers are language and content teachers that integrate the two so that students can learn English through class projects, teachers, and their peers. The synthesis of the two areas for learning is foundational to Internationals and its commitment to reimagining what meaningful teaching and learning can look like for recently immigrated English learners.
4. **“Localized autonomy and responsibility: linking autonomy and responsibility at every level within a learning community allows all members to contribute to their fullest potential.”** Each Internationals school is intentional about creating a school culture and structure that works for its student body and the community at large. Internationals’ approach to establishing and sustaining its schools, described below, embodies this commitment to community responsiveness.
5. **“One learning model for all: every member of our school community experiences the same learning model, maximizing an environment of mutual academic support. Thus, all members of our school community work in diverse, collaborative groups on hands-on projects; put another way, the model for adult learning and student learning mirror each other.”** Students and teachers at Internationals are actively engaged in ongoing learning through meaningful interactions and supports all in an effort to feed a culture of collaboration and deeper learning. This is evident in how teachers support each other through co-teaching, advising a shared study group, and supporting effective pedagogy. Similarly, student collaboration and supports are seen through informal translation for more novice English learners to working together on team-based research projects.<sup>22</sup>

With these foundational principles, the nonprofit has grown to 27 district public schools across the nation, mostly in response to demand from those school districts and communities. The next section will articulate how the network has intentionally grown in a way that has fostered this approach, encouraged flexibility to adapt to local context, and strengthened the model over time through the give and take between newer and older schools in the network.

## **Establishing Internationals Schools: Finding Ways to Serve More Students**

From its origins in New York City over 30 years ago, Internationals now serves immigrant youth farther south, out west, and in Midwestern states. In its initial growth, Internationals utilized an organic approach to opening new schools, which facilitated the re-creation of its school model from New York City to other locations. Network leaders indicated that community organizations, local educators, and districts had often approached the network with an interest in opening a school to meet their students’ learning needs. Joe Luft, the Internationals Executive Director, explained:

I would say all of the growth up until fairly recently has largely been through people who have come to us. As we’ve grown and as word has gotten around about our work, people call us, email us; we meet people in conferences or meetings, and they ask about working with us.

Internationals is still approached by interested school districts and communities, but in recent years, it has developed a more intentional approach to re-creating its model at different sites, focusing on developing regional hubs or clusters of schools close to each other. In its 30-year history, Internationals staff and school leaders have valued having a sister school or schools nearby for reciprocal support and learning—a proximity that has further supported schools in understanding how to best meet the needs of English learners in a given area, including those that attend other district schools. Nancy Rosas, Regional Director of Network Support at Internationals, explained the benefit of this approach through a recent example:

I think more broadly as I start to think about how to expand; the two schools in Maryland ... were specifically opened with the idea [of] how those practices could be codified and applied so that those two schools would become learning centers for other high schools in the district.

Despite changes in how the network establishes new sites, Internationals has maintained a collaborative approach to growth. While it has primarily engaged those interested in establishing a school that meets the needs of immigrant youth who are English learners, Internationals has remained committed to working with local stakeholders who share its values and vision, making its model a welcomed rather than imposed reform.

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At the same time, the network has identified conditions that need to be met in order to successfully implement its school model in districts. At a minimum, when opening a school, the district needs to agree with the Internationals vision that all recent immigrant students have access to a quality high school education that prepares them for college, career, and full participation in democratic society. In addition, and as is described further below, one of the most crucial elements in ensuring a new school is able to deliver the network's model is seasoned and effective educators and leaders. While teachers and leaders at Internationals schools are district employees with a range of experience, Internationals prefers to tap school leaders and teachers who have experience in supporting English learners or those from established Internationals schools who can transplant rigorous teaching and learning practices for English learners into new sites. To this end, Internationals works with district partners to identify leaders and staff who have relevant experience with English learners and the right mindsets to learn the Internationals approach.

As district public schools, Internationals schools are subject to and compliant with district, state, and federal policies. Internationals schools also look for areas of flexibility in order to provide rigorous and engaging academic opportunities for English learners and codify these in Memos of Understanding with district partners. For instance, because its model integrates academic content with language instruction, Internationals must be able to incorporate language development in its core academic programming rather than in ways that engage students in remedial and age-inappropriate instruction to help them “catch up” in their English skills. Internationals also looks for flexibility in its master scheduling and school organization to allow for teacher collaboration and personalization structures, such as advisories and multi-age grouping.

Internationals schools also look for flexibility in graduation requirements. While remaining subject to broader accountability measures, network sites have worked to ensure that graduation timelines beyond the traditional 4-year trajectory are possible for all students who need additional time to develop academic and language proficiency. In some places, such as New York City and California, Internationals schools have also secured waivers that allow schools to use performance assessments in lieu of taking certain statewide examinations.<sup>25</sup>

Once the network and district have agreed to these necessary conditions for Internationals' core principles to thrive, Internationals collaborates with districts and community partners to identify additional supports that can be put in place to meet the needs of students and to ensure the school's sustainability and success. For instance, schools with high percentages of unaccompanied minors or students who enter with little or no previous formal schooling may be designed to provide additional social and academic supports in those areas. In addition, in urban areas, school locations are sought near transportation hubs, as students often rely on public transit to reach the school from their neighborhoods throughout a city.

With its clear vision for teaching and learning, Internationals instantiates its schools through collaborative processes that ensure the model is feasible and responsive to the community. While maintaining a clear vision for the conditions that best fit its model, Internationals staff engage in ongoing discussions with district leaders and local educators about student needs and the feasibility and fit of the model to ensure that it is a welcomed and responsive addition to the local community.

### **Funding Internationals Schools**

All Internationals schools are district schools and, thus, are funded in the same way. All Internationals schools are subject to the same federal, state, and district funding statutes as other district schools and use these allocations to support their daily operations.

The Internationals network does not allocate the money it secures from grants or district contracts to its schools for their daily operation. Yet in some cases, it may use this money to pay for the cost of services the network provides to school and district partners during the early stages of opening a school or for professional development.

For example, when establishing an Internationals school, the network engages its partners in school planning or pre-opening activities, including leadership mentoring and intra-network visitations wherein new school leaders shadow leaders at existing network schools (described below). While district contracts typically allocate funds to compensate the network for this support, network leaders indicated that they have, at times, used between \$30,000 and \$60,000 of grant funding to support sites during the pre-opening design phase.

As schools move into a more mature phase, the network may occasionally provide grant funding for summer professional development or other professional learning outside of regular work hours but does so in a manner that is specific to the needs of the school.

## Building a Culture of Professional Learning: Educator Professional Development

It is important to identify alignments, in mindset and philosophy, of the leader and the teachers to deeper learning practices. Ideally, they have that, and experience with English learners. But because our model is unique in the way that we ask all teachers to be language teachers as well as content teachers, a critical part in supporting the school and supporting the teachers is that onboarding process to help teachers develop the capacity to do this work.

—Liliana Vargas, Senior Director, Programs

To instantiate its model, Internationals works collaboratively with local stakeholders and districts to establish its sites. At the same time, the network complements these efforts with myriad professional learning supports that continuously develop staff to bring the network's school vision to life.

The pedagogy enacted in Internationals schools calls for teachers to create meaningful tasks that ask students to make sense of content;<sup>24</sup> build on what students know;<sup>25</sup> use tools and routines that support collaboration and communication;<sup>26</sup> offer authentic forms of assessments;<sup>27</sup> and emphasize productive struggle.<sup>28</sup> It also requires that educators be well versed in language development and its integration across the disciplinary spectrum. These practices are not the norm in most school settings—partly because teachers themselves have not experienced these forms of learning, and preparation programs rarely provide them opportunities to do so.<sup>29</sup> In addition, these practices often run counter to many of the entrenched norms around social interactions in schools and beliefs in student ability, which enable more traditional forms of teaching and learning to persist.<sup>30</sup>

Consequently, Internationals has developed systems to hone educator and leader capacity to ensure the high-quality implementation of its deeper learning and equity vision. These professional development efforts at the network and school levels include opportunities for teachers to learn the instructional strategies and structures associated with deeper learning practices and to develop the mindsets and orientations necessary for sustaining and growing the approaches.

### Key Attributes of Internationals Teachers

To implement its complex approach, Internationals aims to develop and hone a variety of skills and competencies among its teachers and leaders through its professional learning supports. For teachers, the Internationals approach necessitates hiring and supporting a teaching faculty who can develop a core set of skills:

**Equity and growth mindset.** Internationals teachers must maintain the mindset that all students, and in particular, immigrant youth who are English learners, can achieve despite language barriers, limited formal education, and/or English proficiency and that all students will graduate and continue on to postsecondary education. In action, this includes teachers maintaining a social-justice commitment and having cultural competency skills to work with immigrant youth from many different countries and cultures. It also means that teachers take the long view that prioritizes all students achieving and graduating, which requires flexibility and patience in the short term (e.g.,

supporting students over 5 or 6 or even 7 years). Finally, Internationals needs to remain vigilant in its practice and consistently “polish the stone” to ensure that equity is advanced. It must push the edge on equity so that it is productively supporting all students (e.g., students who are in transition to higher education, are unaccompanied, must work, have no background in written language, etc.).

**Language development.** With its instructional approach, Internationals teachers must know how to infuse language development into their teaching while maintaining an emphasis on robust content. This includes knowing how to integrate oral, written, and reading instruction across disciplines or subject areas. In addition, it requires that teachers are familiar with and versatile in implementing best practices to support English learners, including leveraging students’ native languages to support language and content learning, explicit vocabulary instruction, the use of sentence and speaking stems, and ample opportunities for oral and written communication. These literacy supports operate as necessary scaffolds that meet students at their proficiency levels to advance their learning while making rigorous academic content accessible.

**Differentiation and scaffolding.** Teachers at Internationals must also be skilled differentiators. They differentiate instruction for students of different ages in their mixed-age classrooms and for students with varying academic and linguistic abilities. With the latter, they employ a range of scaffolds that specifically support language development for their students, who collectively speak over one hundred languages and range in formal education and academic fluency of their native languages. Internationals teachers use these differentiation skills daily, providing appropriate levels of scaffolding and knowing how to gradually taper them over time as students build skills and capacity.

**Instruction for deeper learning.** Internationals teachers must be knowledgeable and skilled in implementing student-centered learning strategies, including project-based learning and performance assessments. They must be able to organize instruction around collaborative projects through which students develop their linguistic and academic skills. In addition, they must embed performance assessments into their ongoing curriculum and instruction, manage a performance assessment process for their students, and participate as a reviewer in performance assessment defenses in multiple disciplines for students of other teachers. In addition to these skills related to deeper learning practices, they also continuously develop deeper learning competencies (e.g., effective communication, critical thinking, self-directed learning, development of productive academic mindsets, etc.) within students throughout the course of their learning.

**Focus on the whole student.** While implementing their complex instructional model, Internationals teachers must also remain focused on students’ holistic needs. Educators are called to demonstrate these skills daily in their instruction and when collaborating with educators to discuss students’ ongoing strengths and struggles. Discussion of student supports also extends to their work with counselors and other personnel who provide wraparound services for students who may be from low-income families, undocumented, unaccompanied, and/or dealing with emotional and social issues, including significant trauma as a result of immigration or other issues. In addition, Internationals teachers must be skilled advisors. They must foster positive student-student and teacher-student relationships and create an inclusive advisory culture that addresses students’ academic and social-emotional needs and encourages productive critique and conflict resolution to mend relationships when needed.

**Collaborative and mutually accountable.** Internationals schools are environments that emphasize collaboration at every turn. On one hand, educators must be willing and eager to collaborate with their colleagues in many ways. For example, Internationals teachers co-develop projects with other teachers within and across disciplines and collaborate with other teachers with whom they share a common group of students to assess and address students' needs. Collaboration for teachers at Internationals sites also extends beyond school walls. As teachers support real-world learning and work to improve their capacity, they work with districts, external organizations, and local higher education institutions to enhance student learning as well as their own professional learning. They also share expertise and their challenges with colleagues in schools across the network, including taking advantage of opportunities to disseminate knowledge across the network by delivering trainings at network events and participating in network committees.

Collaboration also manifests itself in a culture of mutual accountability at Internationals sites, where teachers are open to making their work public and to providing feedback as a productive source of learning and support. To this end, teachers must be willing and eager to discuss ongoing problems of practice during their collaboration time and to routinely visit each other's classrooms in an effort to provide learning opportunities and learn how to do the same for other teachers.

### **Key Attributes of Internationals Leaders**

While Internationals teachers require a specific set of skills and attributes, so, too, do Internationals leaders. First and foremost, Internationals principals must be instructional leaders who are knowledgeable of or able to learn the network's deeper learning and language development approach and how to implement it in effective ways. With this knowledge, they support teachers' ongoing professional learning, differentiating professional supports and using their insights to develop the above teacher competencies to improve teaching and learning at their sites. Beyond providing key instructional supports, Internationals school leaders also need many of the same skills required of any k–12 school leader, including the ability to lead a team, manage operations and finances, interface with the district, communicate with families, and problem solve on a regular basis.

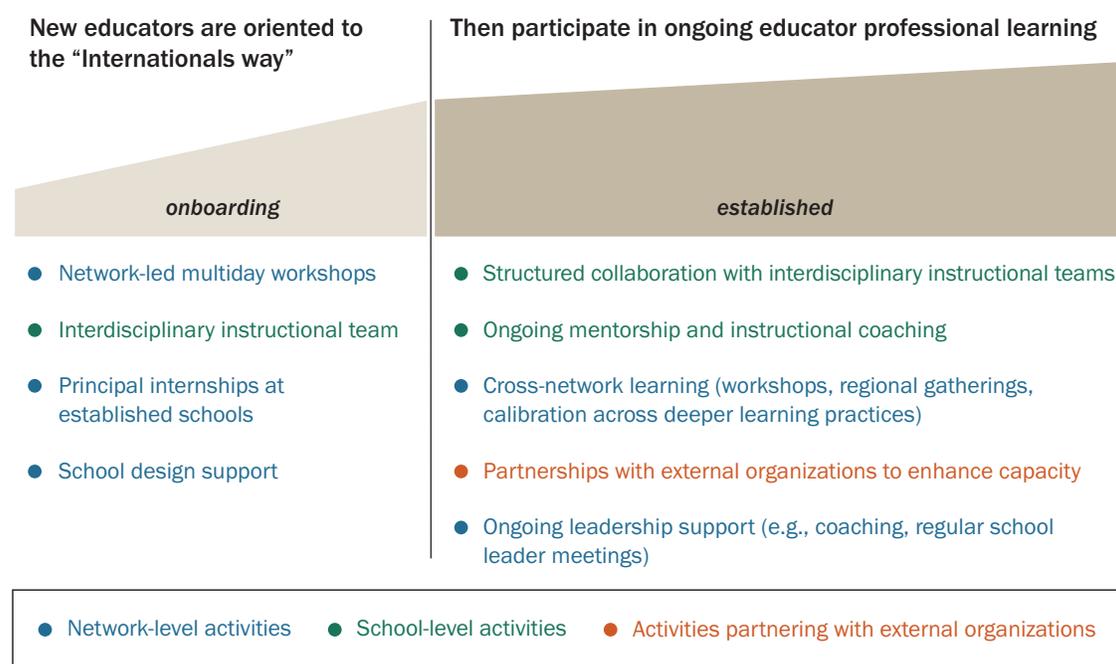
Yet the Internationals approach requires an additional set of attributes that contributes to its schools' culture of collaboration and mutual accountability. For example, Internationals school leaders must be committed to and well versed in **distributed leadership**. While Internationals principals formally lead schools and attend to administrative duties, they must also be skilled in operating their schools in a democratic fashion. This includes authentically incorporating and empowering teachers to participate in school governance decisions and creating and sustaining systems and opportunities that allow multiple stakeholders to be integrated as meaningful partners in school environments. Through these structures and systems, Internationals school leaders are able to foster the sense of shared or mutual accountability that permeates Internationals schools.

Network school leaders must also have the ability to nurture environments that **value transparency and collaboration**. Teaching in Internationals schools is made highly public through extensive collaboration structures, frequent peer observations, and public student defenses of work. With collaboration and transparency permeating school culture and Internationals' pedagogy, school leaders must consistently elevate these values for teaching and learning and the improvement of outcomes for Internationals students.

## How Are These Competencies or Skills Acquired or Nurtured?

To develop these competencies among their teachers and leaders, Internationals maintains a system of professional learning supports to instantiate its practices across its various sites. Figure 2 shows the network’s reinforcing structures and how professional learning is strategically conducted both to onboard new staff and to provide ongoing supports to experienced or established personnel. As the figure indicates, these professional learning activities can be facilitated by the network itself, at school sites, and/or by external organizations who partner with Internationals to extend organizational capacity. Each of these learning activities is described in turn below.

**Figure 2**  
**How the Internationals Network for Public Schools Supports Professional Learning**



Source: Interviews with Internationals leaders and staff.

### Onboarding teachers and leaders

Because the Internationals model varies from traditional ways of educating English learners, the network deliberately engages teachers and leaders in professional development that introduces staff to the Internationals approach in immersive and instructive ways.

**Internationals’ Summer Institute.** The network welcomes incoming teachers with a 2-day summer institute to learn about the model and its inquiry-driven, project-based learning approach. At the Summer Institute, new teachers experience the Internationals approach through a workshop that answers the essential question: How do we help our English learner students to access rigorous content, skills, and academic language? This 2-hour workshop is the foundational learning experience at the Summer Institute and provides educators an understanding of how the more traditional approach to teaching English learners contrasts with the Internationals approach to teaching.

The session, a pivotal rite of passage for new Internationals educators, unfolds as follows:

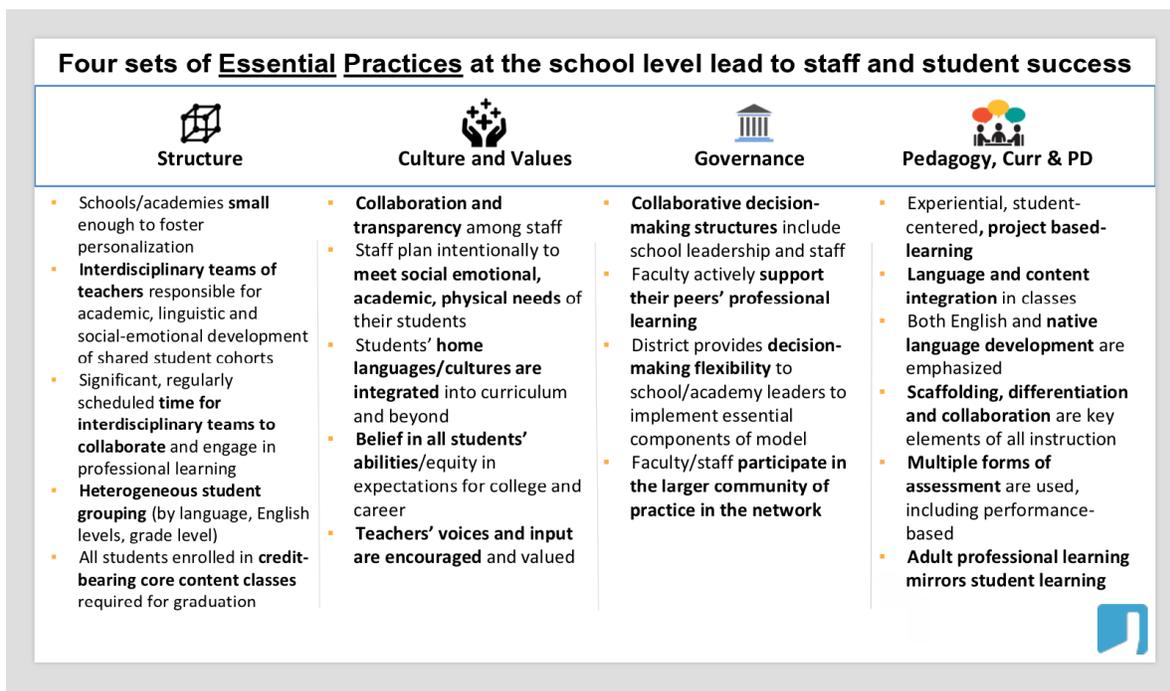
Imagine being an adolescent student leaving the United States for Germany having never heard or spoken German. It is your first day, and you are sitting in a history class in your new school in Germany. The teacher starts the class with what sounds like a welcome. He notices that you are his new student and seemingly welcomes you with a long greeting and waits for your response. You have no idea what the teacher has just said, and you nod and smile. The class then begins with a lecture from the teacher, and all you can deduce from the presentation is that the class is studying the Berlin Wall. You are feeling lost, confused, worried, and defeated while wondering how you will ever catch up. This scenario is modeled in the first portion of the workshop, in which a lesson is taught entirely in a foreign language (i.e., German) with no scaffolding and no supports. Through this lesson, Internationals suggests that this learning experience is typical for many English learners new to schools in the United States. In turn, this experiential learning opportunity allows new Internationals teachers to grapple with the challenges of learning in a foreign language and to develop empathy for how English learners may feel in classrooms.

The workshop then transitions into the Internationals approach to teaching immigrant youth who are English learners. The teacher greets you by pointing to himself and saying his name, “Ich heisse Herr Muller.” He repeats this two more times and then points to you waiting for your response. You understand he’s asking for you to state your name and you say, “Leslie.” He shakes your hand and begins the class. This time, the teacher begins by teaching the class the word “wall” by saying it (“die Mauer”) and providing visuals of the word and pictures of walls. He also passes out worksheets that include helpful words in German and English to give more understanding and context to a lesson on the Berlin Wall. The German words for “war,” “conflict,” “military,” “protest,” and others are provided. Eventually, the teacher has students work through materials in German, with text, visuals, photos, maps, and timelines summarizing the events leading up to the fall of the Berlin Wall. The class is broken into several groups of four, and the group is given time to engage with the content using the vocabulary they have learned, Google Translate, their own background knowledge, and their problem-solving skills. While the students are learning and using their new language (in this case German), they are drawing heavily on their home languages and their background knowledge. Overall, this professional learning approach engaged new teachers in the content and provided ample scaffolds for them to learn new content, even in the midst of an unfamiliar language.<sup>31</sup>

Participants then have the opportunity to reflect on the experience of the two different lessons and to look closely at the techniques the “teacher” used that were effective for them. Informal conversations with new teachers suggest that this workshop is a useful introduction to the Internationals approach, as they experience instruction and learning through the eyes of their students. They expressed that it gave them confidence that the Internationals approach can work, enabling all students to overcome the challenges of learning a new language in congress with rigorous content through the use of strong differentiation and scaffolding techniques.

Grounded in this shared experience, Internationals educators engage in additional orientation sessions at the Summer Institute, including workshops on language and content integration, collaboration, and the network’s general instructional strategies (i.e., Internationals 101). Each of these onboarding learning sessions are grounded in sets of essential practices that the network views as contributing to educator and student success. These essential practices are articulated in Figure 3 and serve as the framework for the professional supports that are described in the next section.

**Figure 3**  
**Internationals' Essential Practices**



Source: Graphic provided to the Learning Policy Institute by the Internationals Network for Public Schools.

**School leader onboarding.** Immersive and experiential learning experiences that onboard new staff are not just for Internationals teachers, but also extend to new school leaders. To support them in instantiating the Internationals model to new sites and communities, all new leaders are onboarded by Internationals staff with formal training and targeted school design support. Leaders also learn with their counterparts at established network schools. New leaders may participate in an immersive (i.e., multiple weeks to months) apprenticeship with an Internationals principal at an existing Internationals school or conduct a series of structured site visits to learn from experienced leaders and to see the model in action. During that apprenticeship, apprentice leaders shadow their mentors, studying how to effectively lead an Internationals school, and spend time developing plans for opening their new school. As the new school nears opening, the network also provides an experienced coach to support the new principal with the school launch.

### Ongoing supports and professional development

Studies show that ongoing supports and effective professional development have positive effects on teachers and their students.<sup>32</sup> At Internationals, network staff and schools ensure that ongoing supports are stitched into the fabric of the Internationals approach.

**Collaborative learning.** Internationals teachers continually work with their peers to refine the techniques of the Internationals way. They most frequently and notably do this in their structured collaboration time, during which teachers work with their disciplinary and interdisciplinary teams to discuss problems of practice, including appropriate and effective scaffolds for students, the strategic and gradual release of learning supports, and differentiation tools that are effective in specific content areas.

Topics discussed during collaboration are further explored and reinforced in whole-school professional development. In order to meet the specific needs of students in real time, each school structures its own professional development for teachers. For instance, Julie Kessler, the principal at SFIHS, explained the school's approach:

In our adult learning structure, we have 2 hours of professional development every Wednesday, that is whole staff time, and overwhelmingly, that time is dedicated to talking about language and content integration, talking about differentiation and collaboration, and in the last couple of years, talking about race, identity, and equity as a group of white educators.

In addition to structured collaboration time and professional development, teachers also learn collaboratively through the frequent practice of classroom observations. With Internationals' open-door policy, Internationals teachers frequently visit each other's classrooms to provide feedback or to learn new techniques. Observations are followed by collective debriefs in which educators share their insights and questions to help them iterate on and improve their practice. One Internationals teacher explained the classroom visit process and its impact:

We are free to visit each other's classrooms. It's just the culture that we have, so if I have a struggle with this one specific student or specific group, I can visit another classroom. I pretty much just walk in; they do the same to my classroom. They come in; they observe the students—what [pedagogical approaches] I'm using. They report back to me. I think for me, that's just freeing. I can just ask a co-worker, "Hey, do you have 5 minutes? Can you walk in? Can you just observe for 5 minutes? Can you tell me if this is going to work?"

**In-house mentoring and coaching.** In addition to learning with their teaching teams, Internationals teachers often work with knowledgeable coaches to effectively implement the network's approach. For example, teachers often receive coaching from Internationals network coaches, who provide targeted support to personnel at school sites.

At some schools, new teachers are paired with in-house mentors who are seasoned teachers and often members of their interdisciplinary teaching team. The engagement is not overly structured, but the mentors provide relevant and timely feedback through meetings and classroom observations. After the first couple of weeks, the nature of the mentoring relationship is less robust, but the pairs meaningfully engage in a formal capacity for 2 years. Through this experience, new teachers are better able to incorporate student-centered and project-based learning opportunities. Their mentor coaches provide feedback on their pedagogy and on how to collaborate with other teachers and staff to deliver a rigorous and engaging experience for students. An Internationals teacher described her first meeting with her mentor, a 10-year veteran teacher:

She was with me for the first 2 weeks, pretty much every period. We would talk after every lesson; we would plan together, hash out ideas, things that went well, things that did not go well. The New York City Teaching Fellows [program that I participated in] trains you to teach in a regular public school, majority English speakers, maybe 10% English learners, but this [school] is [entirely] English learners, so I had to adapt my lessons to reflect [that] environment.

She noted that when she first started, she developed lessons that resembled those for college, which were not feasible for Internationals high school students who are all at different learning levels and have different abilities. But with her mentor’s support, things changed:

She would come to observe me three times a week and then we’d meet twice to discuss the observations. We’d talk about what could be done to improve the lessons—how to deliver them better, how to scaffold the activities, how to think about if this is what we want them to know. Then, we’d talk about how to do this for three different types of learners: somebody with no previous academic education, somebody with no previous English ability, and somebody at the higher level. This experience with my coach gave me a lot of support.

New school leaders also work with assigned network coaches to further their professional learning and to address emerging challenges in implementing or sustaining the model. These coaches, who provide new leaders with critical onboarding support when developing their schools, provide ongoing guidance that is gradually released over the course of a 3- to 4-year period.

**Cross-network learning.** Internationals also facilitates professional learning through network-wide professional development that allows its teachers and leaders to build communities of practice and learn from other educators at different Internationals schools. The Internationals network does this by organizing gatherings for its teachers and leaders throughout the year.

For example, Internationals hosts its National Leadership Retreat, a gathering for its administrators and teacher leaders that allows them to learn collectively

through school visits and workshops led by their peers in other Internationals schools.

The network’s Fall Professional Development Conference, which offers an array of learning opportunities to deepen teacher understanding of the network’s core principles, is another example. At the conference, teachers can attend workshops on topics such as how to support students who have just arrived in the United States; how to develop English language writing and verbal skills in math and science classes; how to lead an advisory; and how to support recent immigrant students’ other needs, such as immigration and housing. Notably, these workshops are primarily led by Internationals educators that model features of the Internationals approach to provide participants with strategies and tools that they can apply in their practice. There is also time for teachers to present student work and to calibrate their assessments of its quality, which sharpens teachers’ abilities to maintain the rigor of the network’s instructional practices and performance assessment system.

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In addition to coming together as a whole network, Internationals schools gather in smaller learning communities to learn collaboratively around specific topics. When the network was smaller, professional development events in New York City, the network's home base, attracted teachers from across the national sites. But with the growth of Internationals, regional professional development events have emerged in the California and the Maryland–Virginia–Washington, DC, hubs to provide opportunities for schools in closer proximity to learn together. These in-person conferences are designed to deepen the understanding of the network's core principles and offer opportunities for teachers across the network to lead:

1. **Workshops:** These interactive, hands-on presentations (ideally modeling an Internationals classroom) are led by Internationals educators and provide participants with concrete strategies and tools that they can apply in their practice.
2. **Working Groups:** These facilitated work sessions led by Internationals educators focus on a specific topic of interest and may be discipline based or focused on issues and topics that cut across disciplines.
3. **Success Share:** These panel presentations and exhibits led by Internationals educators showcase innovative or successful practices and structures from across the network.<sup>33</sup>

Finally, Internationals has hosted an online curriculum-resource-sharing platform for the past 10 years called ISHARE, which supports the spread of best practices throughout its network and provides resources to teachers with questions or challenges. ISHARE contains over 850 exemplary curriculum units and videos that can provide teachers with ideas and tools for use or adaptation in their own classrooms. The platform also allows teachers to contribute their own resources (e.g., projects, web links, etc.) and to collaborate with others across the network, thus fostering a broader community of practice.

**Culture of continuous learning and improvement.** Taken collectively, these professional learning opportunities advance a culture of continuous learning and improvement in Internationals schools. Network-wide, there is a culture among school leaders, teachers, support staff, and students that encourages all to engage meaningfully in reflection, dialogue, and collaboration to grow in their practice and as a community. This culture is developed through regular and often-immersive professional development workshops, classroom visits, and mentorship relationships within schools. Yet this culture of continuous learning exists not only between educators and staff within a given school building, but also between new and older schools through the exchange of practice and innovation. The effectiveness of these continuous learning opportunities is supported by school housing experts who can share their knowledge, whether it is content specific or ways of ensuring equity and wraparound supports. Through this reinforcing system of professional learning supports, Internationals is able to instantiate its complex model across the country, providing its educators and leaders with a range of learning opportunities that can address pedagogical strengths and struggles.

While instrumental in helping teachers improve their instruction, the network's professional learning structures are also forums in which educators hone their equity orientations and mindsets. Collectively, teachers identify the academic, social, and emotional obstacles that their students face and consider possible interventions and solutions in collaboration with one another. Internationals also designs and facilitates workshops on a range of topics that

grapple with the obstacles their unique student population faces in the current moment. In these learning communities, network and school personnel also engage in immigration and policy conversations and trainings with students and families to consider how they can best advocate for, teach, and protect their students. Overall, Internationals' forums for professional learning are spaces where Internationals teachers and leaders explore the multiple dimensions of teaching and students' holistic needs.

We're trying to [provide] inclusive educational programming, which means no matter where you're at, we can welcome you here. We're fundamentally dealing with young people who are facing problems that are much bigger than schooling.

— Mr. Kyle, San Francisco International High School

## Partnering to Deepen Capacity and Sustainability

Internationals uses its collaborative approach to establishing sites and its system of reinforcing professional learning supports to instantiate its pedagogical model across the country. While these processes help the network re-create its model in high-quality and community-responsive ways, ongoing work is needed to sustain and enrich its schools in local communities.

To this end, Internationals works with local stakeholders and districts to build investment in the model, to secure resources, and to extend its organizational and instructional capacity. While these processes have not been without their challenges, the network has continuously sought to partner with districts and local organizations to sustain its schools and grow its local impact.

### Working With Districts and Unions to Secure Resources

All Internationals schools are district schools, which creates both challenges and opportunities for the schools with re-creating the Internationals model in new sites and with spreading its deeper learning practices. Many network staff and school leaders described how Internationals' ongoing work in districts focused on securing access to critical resources to sustain its schools. Advocating for adequate facilities is a case in point. For instance, while SFIHS in San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD) is now in an adequate facility after the school's efforts and advocacy, the school has had to move out of two previous facilities that were insufficient. One faced environmental issues, and the other was a former elementary school that could not adequately serve the needs of high school students.

Another facilities-related challenge that Internationals schools have faced is placement within larger buildings or complexes that operate as comprehensive high schools. For instance, academies (i.e., programs within larger schools) often face the challenge of conforming to larger school policies on teacher collaboration time and bell schedules. As was the case with the facilities issues described above, Internationals staff have persisted, working with districts and their neighboring schools to find a way to navigate those policies in ways that allow the network model to flourish.

Funding is another area of ongoing engagement between districts and the network. To illustrate, when SFIHS was founded, SFUSD applied the same funding policies to the school as it did to other district schools—a level that was based on the average daily attendance on October 1 of each year. While this may work as a proxy for annual attendance at many SFUSD schools, it was problematic for SFIHS, with its immigrant population, and other schools serving large numbers of new English learners. As recent immigrant students continued to arrive throughout the academic year, SFIHS was initially forced to operate with significantly less funding relative to its growing student body. District leaders therefore worked with SFIHS and the network so that the school's funding reflected student attendance by the late spring.

While Internationals staff have engaged districts to secure critical tangible resources, such as funding and facilities, they indicated that their ongoing local engagement has built knowledge and investment in the network's approach to supporting English learners who are recent immigrants. In San Francisco, for instance, Internationals was originally thought to

be like other traditional ESL options across the district. Over time, the network engaged the district and its families, teaching them about Internationals schools and demonstrating their contributions to student learning. Internationals staff and school leaders expressed that these efforts have changed perceptions of the school and have spurred many to inquire about securing placements there.

These efforts to build collaboration have also extended to the network's interactions with teacher unions. Network and school leaders indicated that Internationals schools have played a pivotal role, collaborating with districts and teachers unions to build consensus around policies that are more supportive of the Internationals approach and deeper learning-aligned practices. For instance, International High School at LaGuardia Community College was one of a set of schools in New York City to seek a waiver from the union contract and district rules to allow for the use of peer review, a process by which teachers assess performance and provide supports for their fellow teachers at a given school as part of a modified review process in which principals do not solely assess the performance of teachers. Today, other schools throughout New York City, including Internationals schools, have followed suit, with a supermajority of teachers voting to include a peer review system rather than a traditional administrator-only review system.

The network and individual schools have also worked closely with districts and unions to enable teachers to teach advisories, share students and have common planning time, and participate in performance assessment systems within the parameters of the local collective bargaining agreement. Through these ongoing efforts, the network has built a supportive and diverse coalition that has helped it sustain its approach while increasing investment in the model and robust approaches to supporting teaching and learning for English learners.

### **Working Within Districts to Grow Deeper Learning Practices**

Internationals' ongoing efforts to engage districts have not solely focused on securing resources. Internationals has also collaborated and built relationships with others in different school and district settings who are working with English learners and immigrant students. Through these efforts, Internationals has aimed to build expertise in deeper learning practices for English learners so that these practices might be adopted more widely.

This collaborative work with other practitioners has often taken the form of professional development. For instance, in San Francisco, SFIHS leaders and teachers regularly participate in district-led professional development with the other schools in the district serving English learners and immigrant students. This has helped SFIHS to deepen its connections in the community and share pedagogical strategies with colleagues in schools across the district.

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In addition, Internationals has been approached by districts, including those the network already has schools in, to learn more about the network's approach. Joe Luft, the Internationals Executive Director, described the nature of this engagement:

Our partnerships with districts have grown beyond just one school or academy based on the success of our work. The deepening of these district partnerships has grown out of the district's desire to spread the work we're doing beyond one building and to impact the district's practices more broadly. This was true earlier on in New York City, as we've grown up to 15—soon to be 16—schools here.... We do host visits for educators from other schools and districts as well. We have included non-network educators in some of our professional development conferences and institutes. We have also collaborated with the teachers union in New York City to offer joint professional development for New York City teachers outside our network.

Overall, Internationals' open-door policy has extended beyond its school walls to provide interested educators with opportunities to extend their professional learning to deeper learning pedagogy for English learners. Through these collaborations, the network has aimed to re-create its practices in alternative ways—those that allow its integrated, interdisciplinary, and deeper learning approaches to be adopted and implemented in classrooms outside of Internationals schools.

### **Deepening Capacity Through External Partnerships**

To instantiate its model, Internationals also partners with external organizations to deepen its ability to implement its approach and to extend its capacity.

On one level, these efforts have helped the organization to continuously hone its own practice and understanding of deeper learning through collaborations with peer organizations and education experts. During the creation of the Internationals network, network leaders learned from other successful peer networks, including Big Picture Learning and the New Tech Network. More recently, Internationals co-leads the national initiative Deeper Learning Equity Fellows, which seeks to foster the development of school and systems leaders across the nation seeking to advance deeper learning and equity. The network also has regional partnerships with organizations such as The New York Immigration Coalition, Make the Road New York, the Hispanic Federation, and We Are CASA, as well as institutions of higher education, such as New York University, Bank Street College of Education, and The City University of New York, and research partners, such as American Institutes for Research. Through these partnerships, Internationals continues its dialogue with other education thought leaders to explore the possibilities and best practices for deeper learning and its spread.

Internationals has also successfully engaged in communities of practice that focus on particular practices to improve its model and to spread deeper learning. One example of this is Internationals' longtime work on performance assessments in New York City. All 15 New York City high schools use graduation portfolios in addition to English Language Arts Regents exams (and in 10 of the 15 New York City high schools, Mathematics Regents exams). Five of its New York City high schools are in the New York Performance Standards Consortium (NYPSC). Schools that use performance assessment as a graduation eligibility require that students demonstrate the skills needed to graduate in each of the content areas in a rigorous portfolio process in which they complete and

defend their work. This is particularly important for Internationals' English learners who find success in meticulously building a set of deeper learning skills that are more evident in the iterative production and defense of a portfolio than with a standardized test. Engaging with the NYPSC has also allowed Internationals and its New York City schools to share their expertise in working with English learners and developing their English learner portfolio system while creating opportunities for schools to share practices with other performance assessment schools in New York City.

A similar example can be found in California, where SFIHS and Oakland International High School were founding members of the California Performance Assessment Collaborative (CPAC). This statewide collaborative, managed by the Learning Policy Institute, was the brainchild of SFIHS Principal Julie Kessler and has grown to include more than 60 schools from across the state, as well as representatives from the Fresno, Jefferson Union, Long Beach, Los Angeles, Oakland, Pasadena, and San Francisco school districts. In addition to Internationals, Big Picture Learning, Envision Schools, High Tech High, and New Tech Network are also participating in the collaborative. CPAC “represents educators, policymakers, and researchers who are working to study and advance the use of authentic approaches to assessment, such as presentations, projects, and portfolios, which require students to demonstrate applied knowledge of content and use of 21st-century skills. The lessons captured and documented from this work will inform educators seeking to implement performance assessments as well as policymakers who are developing next-generation assessment and accountability policies.”<sup>34</sup> Participation in collaboratives such as NYPSC and CPAC extends the network's influence beyond individual schools and into districts and states while deepening the capacity of Internationals' own staff to support student learning through performance assessments.

Some Internationals schools also partner with external organizations to deepen their capacity. An example can be seen at IHS in New York City through the school's long-standing partnership with the New York City Writing Project (NYCWP). An affiliate of the National Writing Project, NYCWP is a professional development organization that uses its “teachers teaching teachers” model to improve literacy instruction.<sup>35</sup> In partnering with NYCWP, the Internationals site aimed to improve educators' abilities to be skilled language instructors—the linchpin of its integrated and rigorous approach to language development.

To this end, an NYCWP coach typically spends multiple days a week at IHS. Building on shared understandings of teaching and learning between Internationals and NYCWP (i.e., the importance of recognizing who the learner is, providing appropriate scaffolding, and using data to understand and address challenges), the coach mentors and supports teachers. With some teachers, the coach collaborates on a short-term project, such as supporting the teacher in integrating writing into the culminating exercise of a unit or helping to adapt a piece of instruction for a student who is struggling. For others, support is longer term. This could include co-planning over the summer (e.g., What are your essential questions? What student outcomes are you hoping to achieve? What texts might you use?). Once school begins, the coach may observe the teacher's instruction and model strategies and make suggestions for ways to further integrate writing into that instruction. As the year goes on, the coach may also share his or her approach and learning with other Internationals educators at network professional development sessions. Through this approach, the school is building its capacity to teach writing, leveraging the expertise of a coach with deep experience, and accessing a larger professional development network.

## Partnering to Meet Students' Holistic Needs

The network and its schools recognize that culturally responsive education is fundamental in supporting immigrant students and their families. To extend their knowledge and capacity in this area, the network partners with various third-party organizations and institutions of higher education to meet the academic and holistic needs of its student population.

For example, to support recent immigrant students, schools build relationships with local social service providers for mental health, housing, food, and immigration services, as well as arts organizations. Advisors also work with teachers and counselors to make sure that students have necessary supports in place so that they have the stability needed to succeed within Internationals' rigorous approach. Overall, Internationals schools extend their capacity through intentional, long-term relationships with third-party organizations whose staff often become deeply integrated into the school community.

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The SFIHS partnership with San Francisco City College (SFCC) is an example of how network-affiliated schools work with institutions of higher education to meet students' needs. In looking at data on college matriculation and persistence, SFIHS leaders recognized that their graduates were struggling to excel in community colleges and university programs that were heavily oriented toward lecture and did not incorporate deeper learning or language development practices. To address this challenge, SFIHS approached SFCC with a multipronged proposal. It included SFCC hiring Internationals teachers to act as part-time instructors at SFCC to support students as they bridged from high school to postsecondary education. It also included SFIHS hiring SFCC faculty as part-time teachers to create strong pathways into SFCC that began in 11th grade for students. SFIHS also agreed to mentor SFCC faculty on how best to work with English learners and how to adapt their instructional approach so that it better reflected deeper learning. The program is in its early days still, but initial signs show that it is making a difference for SFIHS students and alumni who are at SFCC.

Through the collaborations such as those described above, Internationals leverages the resources and capacity of community and university partners to meet the academic and holistic needs of its distinct student population. In doing so, the network is better able to instantiate its model in high-quality and responsive ways and in ways that extend the capacity of its school staff.

## Conclusion and Implications

The Internationals Network for Public Schools has created an asset-driven, deeper learning model that supports immigrant English learners, develops their language proficiency, and provides access to knowledge they need to succeed in college, career, and life. Over decades of polishing its approach and instantiating it in new contexts, Internationals has built a culture that is supportive for both students and educators. The network has leveraged its educators' knowledge and created an expectation that students and practitioners will engage in individual and collective educational experiences that advance deeper learning and student success.

Through this, the network has grown from one school to 27 schools across the nation that are serving more than 9,000 students, showing that it is possible to spread pedagogical practices that propel deeper learning and equity. In addition, it has done so by remaining attuned to the needs of some of our nation's most vulnerable students. The United States is, and continues to be, a nation of immigrants, who often face social and economic challenges. The Internationals network shows what is possible in schools for recently immigrated English learners and holds lessons for leaders who seek to improve learning opportunities for this student population.

The network's belief that students who are recent immigrants and English learners can succeed if more is expected of them guides all aspects of school design and implementation.

To re-create its vision for student learning across the country, Internationals maintains a commitment to its well-defined, research-based, and equity-oriented model for its English learner population. The synthesis of integrated language development and deeper learning practices engages students in rich learning experiences around relevant and developmentally appropriate content. In doing so, the network provides a counterexample to more common forms of supporting English learners. It demonstrates that multifaceted, student-centered teaching and learning approaches—those that maintain high expectations for recently immigrated English learners—produce promising results and engagement. Furthermore, the network demonstrates how higher expectations can be nurtured and met through an extensive system of supports—those that seek to build strong relationships, validate students' identities and assets, and connect students with critical academic and social services all work to advance a whole-child approach to learning.

This vision for student learning is not just aspirational at Internationals. Instead, it drives how the network designs its schools. To bring its deeper learning approach to life, Internationals structures its schools so that academic and social-emotional supports are embedded in school practice. Through mixed-age classes, teacher looping, and

extended graduation timelines, students are provided with structures that reinforce the critical academic scaffolds that characterize Internationals' classrooms and are sent the message that they can develop skills, language, and content knowledge in personalized ways. These structures work in conjunction with advisory structures and teacher collaboration times, enabling Internationals students to be holistically supported on their learning trajectories. Overall, in maintaining a distinct deeper learning and equity vision, Internationals has sought to build high-quality learning environments throughout the country, helping the network re-create its distinct approach in local contexts.

This vision for student learning is not just aspirational at Internationals. Instead, it drives how the network designs its schools.

The network's commitment to its vision holds lessons for district and school leaders seeking to implement deeper learning among English learners and recently immigrated students. Findings from this report suggest that with proper support and high expectations, English learners can succeed in district high schools and graduate prepared for college, career, and life when given both high expectations and whole-child supports. Decision-makers seeking to reimagine their approaches for supporting this student population can consider developing a well-articulated and integrated vision for supporting deeper learning among English learners and explore school redesign so that research-based and equity-oriented teaching and learning can flourish.

**Internationals partners with local stakeholders when establishing its sites, allowing the network to implement its approach in high-quality ways while being responsive to the local context.** It instantiates its vision and model through collaborative processes that ensure the model is responsive to the community. In order to found a network school, Internationals has a set of conditions that must be secured for its model to be implemented. These include integration of language development and core academic content, flexibility in master scheduling to accommodate longer learning blocks and advisories, and network input on founding school staffing.

Despite advocating for these conditions, Internationals does not establish its sites unilaterally. Rather, the network re-creates its schools in partnership with district leaders, local educators, and/or community organizations, helping to ensure that the school is designed to meet the distinct needs of the English learner and immigrant population in the respective community. The early collaboration and ongoing dialogue between Internationals staff and local leaders also ensure that establishing a network school is a feasible and welcomed addition to the district landscape rather than an imposed model.

Internationals' ongoing collaboration with local communities suggests that deeper learning models can be well supported when local stakeholders are involved in establishing deeper learning schools. While school and district leaders seeking to implement deeper learning approaches should have a clear understanding of the policies and structures they need to instantiate their visions, they can also consider how they can intentionally and authentically partner with the local communities from the onset.

**Internationals also partners with local stakeholders and agencies to deepen investment in deeper learning for English learners and to extend capacity so that student needs are met.** This collaboration is not limited to the process of establishing a site. Rather, Internationals site leaders engage in ongoing efforts to work with the community, external agencies, and district officials to secure resources, to increase investment in their approach, and to deepen their capacity to bring their deeper learning approach to life.

While challenges have emerged along the way, Internationals continues to partner with its host districts and education leaders to ensure that it has adequate resources and policies that help sustain Internationals schools and the rigorous pedagogical model its sites implement. Ongoing engagement at the local level also builds knowledge of deeper learning for English learners within and beyond Internationals' school walls. Internationals educators often engage in professional learning with their district counterparts and often open their classroom doors and professional development to non-network educators. Through this collective learning, Internationals re-creates its approach by sharing and spreading its expertise with interested educators while honing its own practices.

Strategic partnerships with third-party organizations also extend school capacity and enhance its instructional approach. To deepen their own learning, network staff engage in communities of innovative leaders, scholars, and thought partners to facilitate their own professional growth. Network schools also maintain long-standing relationships with teacher-led professional development organizations that help their teachers improve their instruction and language development supports. Beyond enhancing their professional knowledge, Internationals schools also actively seek partnerships with community organizations and institutions of higher education to enhance their model by providing academic and social services. In these pursuits, Internationals reveals its commitment to organizational learning and the ongoing improvement of its practices to holistically support English learner, immigrant students.

While these strategies have been critical to sustaining the high-quality and responsive instruction at Internationals sites, others, too, can seek out and enter partnerships that extend capacity and meet the deeper learning needs for English learners. No two schools are identical, and each school must carefully examine its needs to find the right partners to address those distinct needs. Leaders implementing similar efforts can learn from how Internationals leverages partnerships to foster the spread of deeper learning practices for English learners.

The Internationals' pedagogical approach requires specialized knowledge and skills—those that many educators and leaders feel underprepared to enact. For this reason, **Internationals has developed and implemented ongoing, multifaceted, and immersive professional learning supports to build the professional capacity of leaders and educators to implement deeper learning for English learners.** The network has built robust structures and processes to nurture educator capacity in ways that empower educators while collectively supporting their success.

The network invests early in its educators and leaders, onboarding them with a series of learning opportunities that allow them to experience the network's instructional approach and to learn with and from their experienced colleagues. Once Internationals onboards staff, professional learning is ongoing. At Internationals schools, teachers engage in professional learning with their colleagues via structured collaboration time and through the network's characteristic open-door policy, which encourages the exchange of peer feedback through classroom observations and the peer review process. The network also facilitates a series of learning experiences. In these events, Internationals leaders gather teachers and leaders around specific topics and build communities of practice that span the network or a given geographic region. Taken collectively, these professional learning opportunities advance a culture of continuous learning in Internationals schools and provide a reinforcing system of support for educators as they implement the network's model.

Internationals' approach to supporting teachers and leaders can provide lessons for those seeking to implement deeper learning for English learners in their schools. Findings suggest that experiential, multifaceted, and ongoing professional development on deeper learning for English learners can provide foundational knowledge and continuously hone expertise as practitioners develop their practice. In addition, the Internationals case study reveals the importance of collaboration and how leveraging educator and school leader expertise can support the implementation of these practices. With ongoing exchange among colleagues, educators and leaders can grapple with challenges as they emerge in real time and iterate upon their practice under the guidance of those with expertise in deeper learning for English learners.

## Appendix A: Methodology

This single case study was conducted as part of a multisite investigation of networks that have partnered with traditional public school districts to disseminate deeper learning pedagogies to serve the needs of underserved students. The purpose of this research was to identify the systems and structures that have enabled these educational organizations to replicate their sophisticated and equity-oriented learning approach in a high-quality manner. To this end, this investigation sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are the pedagogical and school design features that develop students' deeper learning competencies in Internationals schools?
2. What changes to school structures, policies, and operations have Internationals' pedagogical practices required or triggered? How are changes in school structures, policies, and operations enabled and supported?
3. What professional learning structures and practices does Internationals use to support high-quality teaching and learning across the network?
4. How do networks partner with districts, external organizations, and local communities to implement their models in ways that meet students' holistic and learning needs?
5. What challenges has the network faced in spreading its approach to different sites? How has it overcome these obstacles to ensure that students have equitable access to deeper learning experiences?

Because the study sought to surface best practices related to high-quality implementation and dissemination of deeper learning, researchers used purposeful sampling to identify networks that could be “information-rich cases.”<sup>36</sup> Rather than designing a study that could provide generalizable findings or demonstrate variation between and among schools, the research team sought to learn from networks that have demonstrated success in scaling up deeper learning practices in partnership with school districts to support their students' academic, social, and emotional growth, particularly among students who face adverse circumstances and/or have been historically underserved by public schools. Identifying the structures that have facilitated the success of these exemplar cases provides insights into the promising systems that can enable a sophisticated deeper learning approach to take hold, thereby highlighting lessons that can inform policy and practice.

Internationals is an example of an information-rich case and was thus selected as one of three networks for this investigation. The network has an exemplary track record for partnering with school districts to expand deeper learning, as evidenced by its large geographic presence and span. Furthermore, evidence suggests that students attending Internationals schools—most of whom are furthest from social and economic opportunity—are excelling academically and in noncognitive domains. Given its vast presence and promising results, investigating Internationals allowed researchers to understand how the network has successfully instantiated its deeper learning and equity-oriented practices in unique and disparate contexts.

To answer the study's research questions, investigators conducted an in-depth case study, allowing them to generate a holistic understanding of Internationals' practices and Internationals' interplay with the local environment.<sup>37</sup> This case study methodology also enabled researchers to analyze

a variety of data sources, which allowed them to assess the network as it was, rather than exert control over the research sites.<sup>38</sup> Because case studies are sensitive to context and allow researchers to capture multiple processes and data sources, this research design was an appropriate and ideal method to elucidate the dynamic and complex ways that Internationals disseminates its practices.

## Data Collection

Data were collected from July 2017 to May 2018. Primary data sources for this study include interviews, observations, and documents.

### Interviews

The research team conducted 16 interviews with key stakeholders, including network founders, network senior leaders, principals, teachers, and district officials in cities with Internationals schools. (See Table 1 for a complete list of the study's participants.) Interviews were conducted in multiple rounds. For the initial wave of interviews, the team used purposive sampling to identify network founders and senior leaders who could speak to the network's history, its evolving practices and approaches to growth, and the challenges and successes it has faced in spreading its deeper learning models in unique locales. After this first set of interviews, researchers used snowball sampling<sup>39</sup> to identify additional study participants, asking network leaders to recommend individuals at the network or school level who could fill in knowledge gaps and further address the study's research questions. This strategy used the knowledge and experience of Internationals staff to identify respondents who could best speak to systems and structures that the network develops and implements to disseminate its teaching and learning practices across the country.

Interviews were semi-structured and lasted 45–90 minutes. Interview prompts asked participants to describe the network's key pedagogical and equity practices, its replication and onboarding processes, its approach to collaborating with districts and communities, and its professional learning structures. Interviewees were also asked to discuss challenges that have emerged in the development and implementation of network systems and how the network has addressed and overcome emerging concerns. At times, the researchers tailored the protocol based on the role of the interviewee and his or her tenure with the network. This differentiation ensured that particular questions could be explored in more depth with the respondents who were most likely to hold relevant knowledge on the topic. Each interview was audio recorded for transcription purposes if the respondent agreed to be recorded.

**Table A1**  
**Internationals Network for Public Schools Interviewees**

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <b>Network Founders</b><br><i>(n = 2)</i>                            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Joe Luft, Executive Director</li> <li>• Claire Sylvan, Founder and Senior Strategic Adviser</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Network Leaders</b><br><i>(n = 3)</i>                             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Marguerite Lukes, Director of Research and Innovation</li> <li>• Nancy Rosas, Regional Director of Network Support</li> <li>• Liliana Vargas, Senior Director of Programs</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Principals</b><br><i>(n = 3)</i>                                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Carl Anthony Finney, Principal at International High School for Health Sciences</li> <li>• Jacqueline Fix, Interim Principal at San Francisco International High School</li> <li>• Julie Kessler, Principal at San Francisco International High School</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Teachers and Teacher Leaders</b><br><i>(n = 6)</i>                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pooja Bhaskar, International High School for Health Sciences</li> <li>• Sarah Cunningham, International High School for Health Sciences</li> <li>• Andre Gomes Machado, International High School for Health Sciences</li> <li>• Kelly Taggart Scavullo, San Francisco International High School</li> <li>• Vlada Teper, San Francisco International High School</li> <li>• Casey Ulrich, San Francisco International High School</li> </ul> |
| <b>District and Third-Party Organization Staff</b><br><i>(n = 2)</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Kyle Halle-Erby, San Francisco Unified School District, Office of College and Career Readiness</li> <li>• Lona Jack Vilmar, New York City Writing Project</li> </ul>   |

## Observations

Observations comprise the second primary data source. The research team attended two professional trainings and network meetings in New York City. This included the summer and fall professional development trainings for New York City teachers and teachers from other Internationals sites. Attendance at these events provided insight into the network’s approach to professional development and model dissemination and allowed researchers to triangulate data retrieved from interviews and documents on Internationals’ professional learning supports.

The team also conducted two site visits to Internationals schools. The team visited an established network school (i.e., SFIHS) and one that had recently opened using the model (i.e., IHSHS) to observe practices and to interview school leaders and teachers in more convenient locations. Visiting network sites at different stages of implementation also allowed researchers to garner a range of perspectives and insights from individuals that varied in their affiliations with the

organization and/or their familiarity with its deeper learning model. These visits were not intended to provide generalizable evidence of the network's approach to implementation and scale but rather to see different manifestations of the network's vision and the degree to which shared principles and systems guided the work at the local level.

## Documents

The research team collected and reviewed 21 organizational documents, including:

- **Administrative documents:** Internationals policy statements, Memos of Understanding (MOUs), organization charts, web pages, presentation slides, strategic plans, and evaluation and performance reports
- **Curriculum and assessments:** training materials, curriculum overviews, classroom visuals, and rubrics for teacher feedback and performance assessment

Researchers reviewed these documents to understand the network's history, its mission, its evidence of promise, and its programmatic approach for advisor and student learning. Curriculum and assessment materials also helped researchers triangulate data with regard to the continued implementation of the network's deeper learning approach and its system of professional learning supports.

## Analysis

To analyze the data, the researchers engaged in a multistep process. First, they created a preliminary code list based on the ideas present in the semi-structured interview protocol. They then refined the codebook after site visits to include themes, structures, and practices that emerged from the data around the network's deeper learning and diffusion approach. In this process, researchers clarified, added, or deleted codes from the initial list to improve code definitions, minimize redundancy, and capture district dynamics.

Once the codes were refined, researchers applied them to interview transcripts, field notes, and documents using Dedoose qualitative analysis software, a web-based application for qualitative analysis. To increase inter-rater reliability, researchers met weekly or biweekly to discuss and compare their code applications in order to refine their analyses and their findings' consistency. Once coding was completed, researchers triangulated findings across multiple data sources, seeking confirmatory and disconfirmatory evidence, and developed memos describing the well-substantiated points that emerged from the evidence.

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