



*Middle School Teachers' Perception
of Long-Term English Language
Learners*

Dr. Rachel Butiko

Objectives

- To share the findings of a study that I conducted to investigate middle school teachers' perceptions of the limited literacy skills among long-term English language learners (LTELLs)
- To make research-based recommendations that would improve literacy skills among LTELLs and increase student achievement if implemented.
- To initiate collaboration among the educators that will enhance pedagogical practices and programs to improve literacy skills among LTELLs.

Problem

- In 2014 – 2015, teachers reported that most LTELLs did not have literacy skills to handle grade level material and were not successful on state standardized tests. As a result, there has been an increase in the number of LTELLs. District records showed that 60% of ELLs were classified as LTELLs. Also, schools with high enrollment of ELLs in the district did not meet the adequate yearly progress (AYP) due to ELLs' poor performance

Rationale

- The literature review also revealed that limited literacy skills among LTELLs was a national issue (Olsen, 2010; Menken, 2013a; Stark & Noel, 2015; The National Center for Education Statistics Report, 2012).
- There is a link between English proficiency and students' academic performance (Slam, 2012).
- Literacy skills are critical for career and college readiness.

Purpose Statement

- *The purpose of this qualitative instrumental case study was to explore middle school teachers' perceptions of the limited literacy skills among LTELLs and how LTELLs influenced their classroom instruction.*

Research Questions

- *How do middle school teachers perceive the limited literacy skills among the LTELLs?*
- *How do middle school teachers perceive the impact of LTELLs on classroom instruction?*

Conceptual Framework

Cummins Concept of SLA

- Provided background information about LTELLs and SLA
- Explained the difference between BICS and CALP, why students' BICS level is misleading, why CALP is important

Vygotsky's Theory of ZPD

- Established teachers' role in the development of literacy skills and language acquisition among LTELLs
- Explained how teachers' knowledge of LTELLs impacted classroom instruction and students' achievement.

A stylized, colorful illustration of a landscape. In the foreground, there are rolling green hills. On the left, a purple and pink flower with a brown stem and leaves sits on a hill. The background consists of wavy, layered blue and white bands, suggesting a sky or water. The overall style is clean and modern.

Middle School Teachers' Perceptions of LTELLs

Findings

A lack of knowledge about LTELLs and SLA

- Most middle school teachers lack basic knowledge about LTELLs and are not aware of this group of students. Participants did not know the LTELLs in their classes.*
- Most mainstream teachers were not prepared or trained to teach LTELLs.*
- Professional development was provided but did not address the learning needs of LTELLs.*

ELLs were treated as a homogeneous group.

- LTELLs are not homogeneous; some remain emergent bilinguals while others made slow but steady progress toward English proficiency.*
- There was a degree of success among LTELLs, but their success was not noticed because the ELLs were treated as one group.*

Quality of classroom instruction affected student achievement.

- *Most teachers focused on teaching content vocabulary and not academic language and used strategies that did not enhance literacy development.*
- *Some teachers did not teach writing skills that students required to exit the ESL program.*
- *Teachers did not provide linguistic support to LTELLs.*
- *Teachers' positive attitudes and high expectations about ELLs had a positive impact on student achievement.*

There is student misplacement of LTELLs due to lack of knowledge and policies

- Teachers attributed students' lack of academic success or development of literacy skills to limited language proficiency and never considered a possibility of learning disability.*
- LTELLs who were placed in classes with behavioral special education classes did not perform well.*

Teachers have a lot of misconceptions about LTELLs due to lack of knowledge of SLA process

- Parents of ELLs cannot provide parental support due to the language barrier.
- ELLs who are fluent did not need support.
- ELLs are a homogeneous group.
- ELLs struggle academically because of language-related issues.
- ELA teachers are responsible for teaching literacy skills
- ELLs are the same as other students

Most LTELLs did not exit the ESL program due to discrepancies in the ESL exit program and administration of assessments used to determine students exit.

- Some LTELLs were linguistically functioning at grade level, but they were still classified as LEP because they had not met the ESL exit criteria.
- Some LTELLs did not exit the ESL program due to the poor administration of TELPAS writing and OLPT, and poor writing skills.

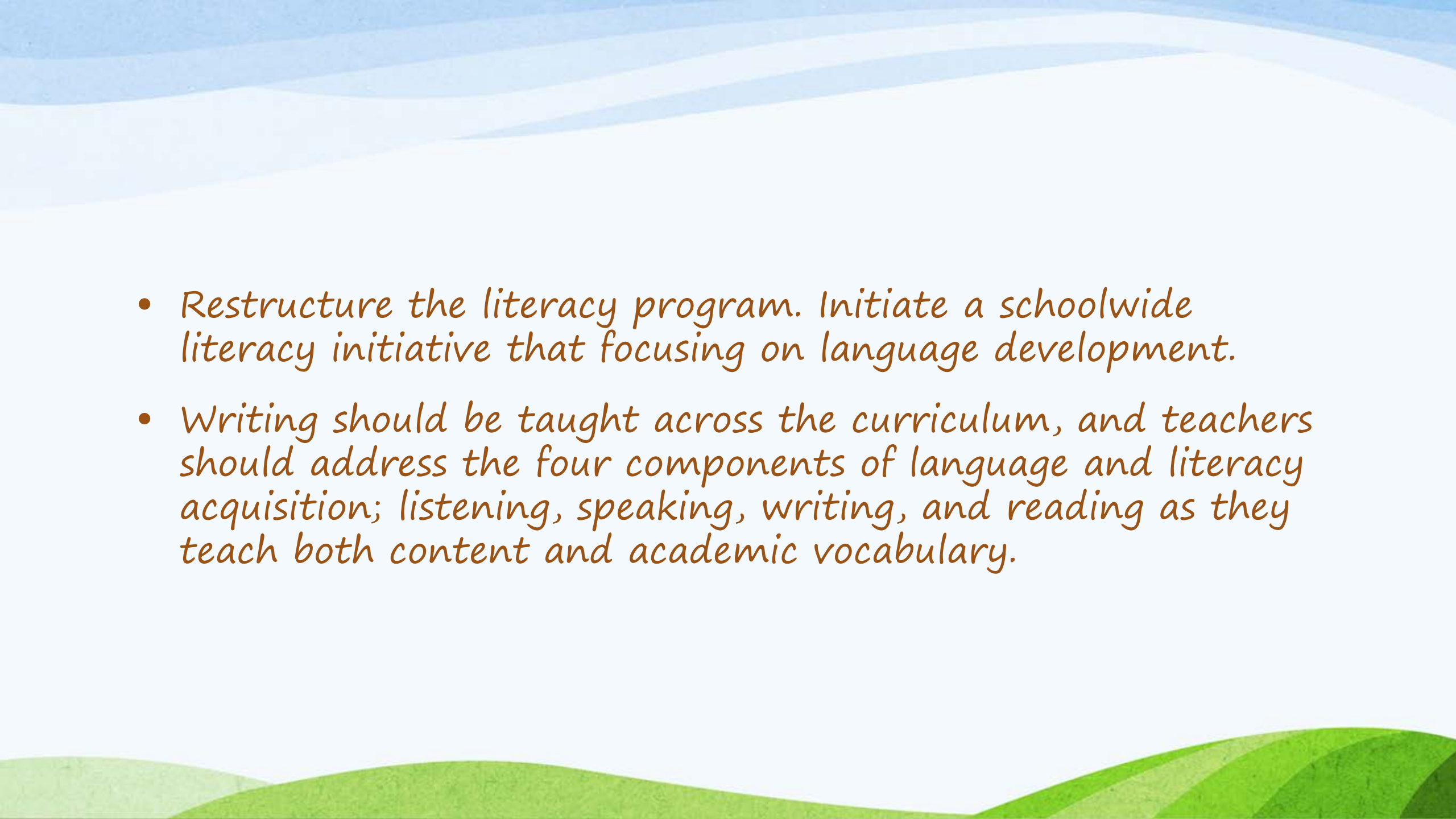
Note

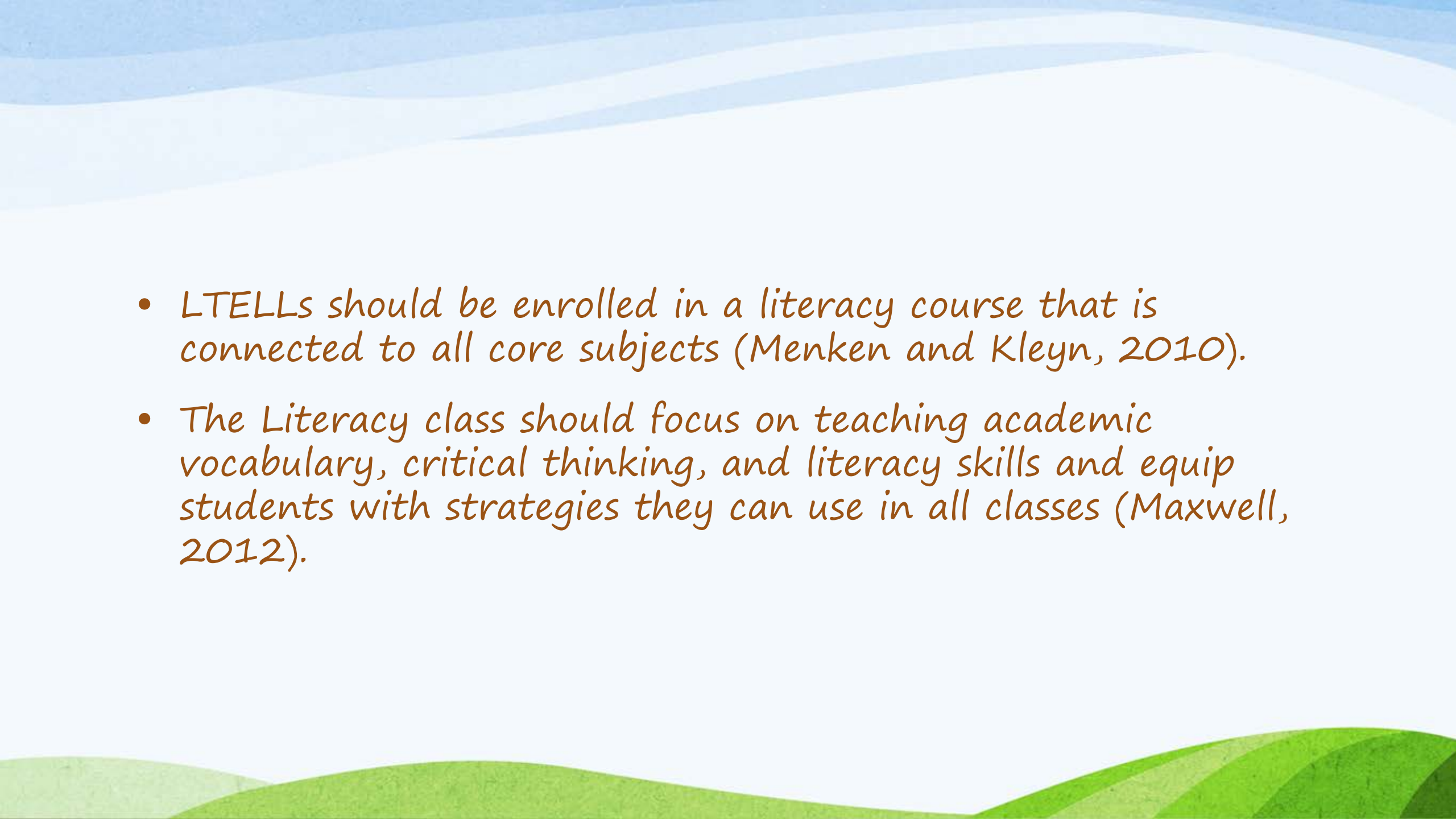
- *ESL students have been associated with lack of success.*
- *The findings of this study show that with appropriate intervention, proper student placement, identification of students' learning needs, and quality classroom instruction, most LTELLs are capable of being successful, meeting the ESL exit criteria, and graduating from high school.*
- *Most LTELLs are within the SLA continuum and performed on grade level compared to the non-LEP peers.*

Recommendations

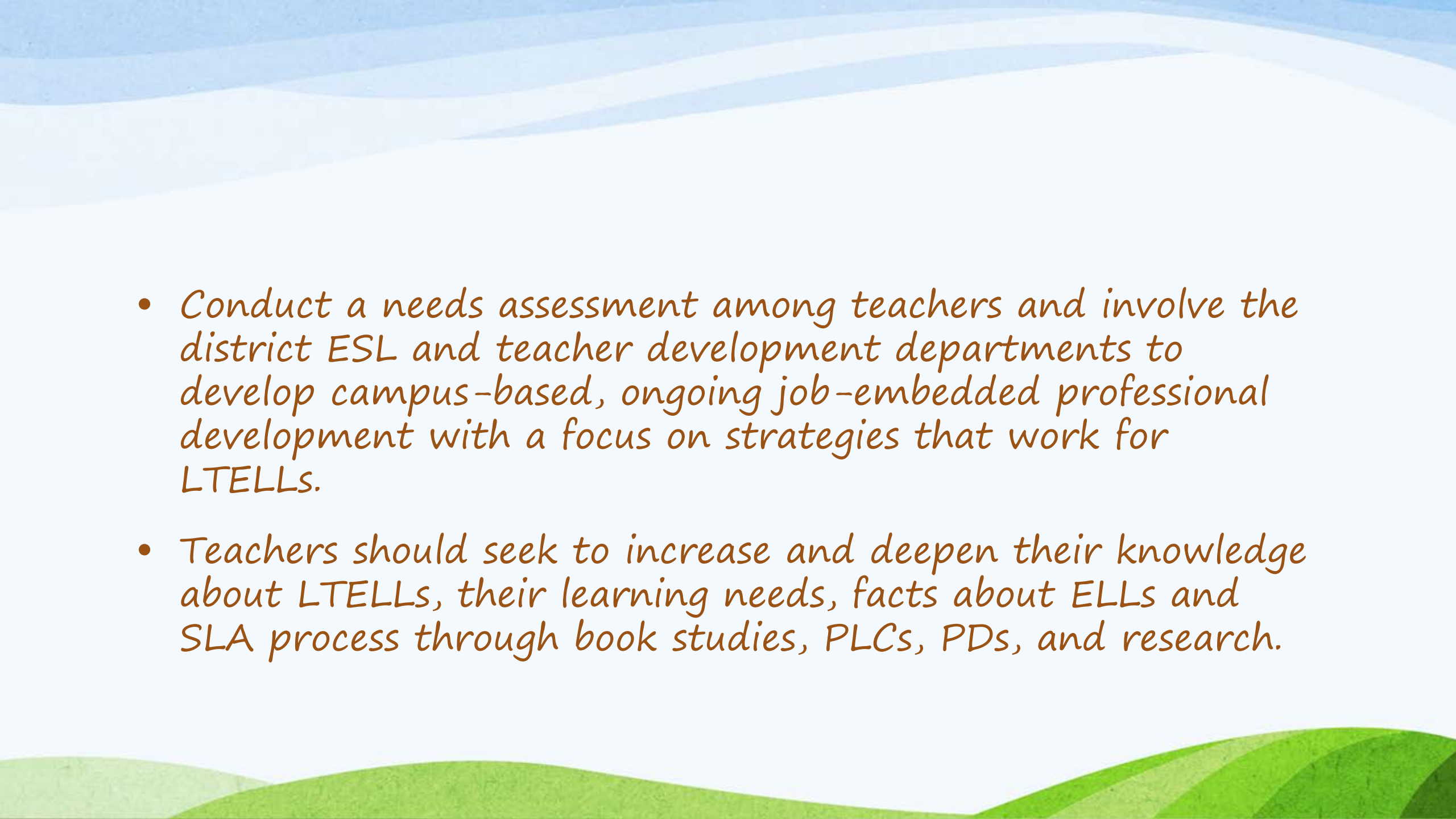
- *School-based professional development to equip teachers with the basic knowledge about LTELLs and SLA. Teachers cannot provide effective classroom instruction for LTELLs when they lack knowledge about LTELLs and SLA*

- *Creating awareness among LTELLs is critical. LPAC representative should hold regular meetings with LTELLs to discuss the exit criteria and what they should do to exit the ESL program, and explain the implication of their LTELL status on their academic progress (Ascension-Moreno et al., 2013; Maxwell, 2012).*

- 
- *Restructure the literacy program. Initiate a schoolwide literacy initiative that focusing on language development.*
 - *Writing should be taught across the curriculum, and teachers should address the four components of language and literacy acquisition; listening, speaking, writing, and reading as they teach both content and academic vocabulary.*

- 
- LTELLs should be enrolled in a literacy course that is connected to all core subjects (Menken and Kleyn, 2010).
 - The Literacy class should focus on teaching academic vocabulary, critical thinking, and literacy skills and equip students with strategies they can use in all classes (Maxwell, 2012).

- *Create a school-based task force to assess and evaluate the needs of LTELs,*
- *Administrators should ensure that teachers provide quality classroom instruction and linguistic support to LTELs, use strategies that enhance the development of academic vocabulary and literacy skills (Harvey & Teemant, 2012) and increase student achievement, and monitor students' progress.*

- 
- *Conduct a needs assessment among teachers and involve the district ESL and teacher development departments to develop campus-based, ongoing job-embedded professional development with a focus on strategies that work for LTELLs.*
 - *Teachers should seek to increase and deepen their knowledge about LTELLs, their learning needs, facts about ELLs and SLA process through book studies, PLCs, PDs, and research.*

- *School administrators can initiate ELL-focused book studies and encourage core content area teachers to attend ELL-focused PDs (Irvin, Meltzer, Dean, & Mickler, 2010).*
- *The best way to address LTELLs' learning needs involves regular conversation within the building by bringing together core content area teachers to explore and share best practices (Walker & Edstam, 2013).*

- Train teachers on how to administer oral language proficiency test (OLPT).
- OLPT should be conducted in an environment that allows students to focus
- Students should be given enough time to respond to TELPAS writing prompts, and school administrators should oversee OLPT testing and TELPAS writing.
- Provide in-class support for teachers who are not well equipped to teach LTELLs.

- ELLs should be scheduled in small-size classes, and if possible, they should not be placed in the same class with special education students with behavior issues.
- LTELLs that score advanced on listening and speaking skills, but continue to score beginning or intermediate level on TELPAS reading and writing for two consecutive years should be referred to Rtl committee.
- Develop a school culture that is inclusive of all parents and involves parents of ELLs in decision-making process (Irvin et al., 2010).

- *For detailed explanation and references information for the studies cited in the presentation see the Proposition paper.*
- *Please contact me if you have any question.*
- Rachel.butiko@fortbendisd.com