Introduction

About LDC
The Literacy Design Collaborative (LDC) offers a set of literacy instructional and formative assessment tools. The tools were developed to help educators better prepare all students to meet the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and succeed beyond high school in college and careers. LDC’s goal is to provide supports for educators to implement the instructional shifts called for by the CCSS. LDC offers teachers a framework for individually or collaboratively building curricula in their content area. It connects the CCSS with secondary science, social studies and English/language arts.

About RFA’s Research on LDC
Research for Action (RFA), a non-profit education research organization, has been studying LDC since its inception in 2010. With the support of the Gates Foundation, RFA has been examining the implementation of LDC, as well as the context and conditions necessary for scaling up and sustaining LDC tool use, and for maximizing their impact on teacher effectiveness and student learning. The resulting research products aim to inform a wide audience including funders, intermediary organizations and LDC partners, districts, and the teachers and administrators using the tools. A complete set of products associated with this project can be found at http://www.researchforaction.org/rfa-study-of-tools-aligned-ccss/. This brief draws on a 2013 survey of 3,324 English Language Arts, Science, and Social Studies teachers in 21 states (response rate of 54%) and recent interview data from three case studies sites – two in separate school districts and an ESA (education service agency) with four districts providing interview data.

Purpose of this Brief
This brief examines the relationships between supportive school and district conditions and scale up of the LDC initiative. It also identifies practices that can strengthen these supporting conditions. This brief may be useful for:

- **School and district administrators experienced with LDC** who want to better understand factors that may be influencing LDC implementation and who would like to position their districts and schools to best support robust integration and growth of the LDC tools.

- **School and district administrators preparing to use LDC** in their districts and schools who want to create the environment most conducive to successful LDC implementation from the start.
- Teachers and teacher-leaders who want to engage in planning for how to strengthen conditions in their schools and districts that support LDC integration and growth.

**Supporting Conditions**

RFA identified three supporting conditions necessary for robust LDC implementation and scale up (see Figure 1):

1. **Alignment** with the Core Common State Standards (CCSS), state assessments and local curricula
2. Effective **leadership** at multiple levels
3. Meaningful, ongoing **professional learning opportunities**

![Figure 1. Conditions for Robust LDC Implementation](image)

**Breadth and Depth**

Robust implementation and scale up can be examined in terms of both breadth and depth. *Breadth* can be thought of as an increase in the number of teachers, classrooms, schools, and/or districts implementing a particular model, while *depth* refers to the degree to which a reform is embedded within a school and targets “core” educational practices.

Table 1 summarizes how RFA examined the breadth and depth of LDC scale up, both for individual teachers and school-wide.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>INDIVIDUAL TEACHER LEVEL</strong></th>
<th><strong>SCHOOL LEVEL</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>BREADTH</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Increase in tool use</td>
<td>• Teacher involvement is increasing within schools</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Plans for expansion of tool use</td>
<td>• Teachers are sharing tool-related content with non-participating educators</td>
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<td>• Plans for continued tool use</td>
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We used this rubric to identify the following relationships between supporting conditions and scale-up:

**Stronger evidence of scale-up exists when the supporting conditions are in place in their school or district location.**

- There is a strong, positive, relationship between LDC scale-up and **alignment** of LDC with the CCSS, school curriculum, and state assessments in terms of both breadth and depth.
- There is a positive relationship between LDC scale-up and **district and school leadership** in terms of both breadth and depth.
- There is a positive relationship between LDC scale-up and **formal professional development and scheduled planning time** (forms of **professional learning opportunities**) in terms depth.
- There is a strong, positive, relationship between LDC scale-up and **teacher collaboration** (a form of **professional learning opportunities**) in terms of both breadth and depth.

Below, we describe in more depth the relationships between the individual conditions and scale up, and also identify strategies to promote these supporting conditions. Strategies are drawn from RFA’s case studies of three LDC sites which experienced initial success in implementing the tools.¹

**Alignment: What does RFA’s research say about alignment and scale up?**

**There is strong and consistent evidence that alignment is robustly related to successful scale-up of the tools.** Across three dimensions of alignment (alignment with the Common Core State Standards, alignment with school curriculum, and alignment with state assessments), responding teachers who agreed that alignment was in place in their school/district location reported at higher percentages that they were broadening and deepening their tool use.

When teachers perceive strong alignment, they are more likely to:

- Have plans for sustained tool use;
- Have plans to improve upon their current practice related to tool use;

• Observe a rise in teacher involvement at their school;
• Use LDC strategies during non-LDC instruction;
• Report evidence that LDC ideas and practices are gaining traction in their schools; and
• Share their modules with teachers not participating in LDC.

Strategies to Promote Alignment with CCSS, Curricula and Assessments

Best practices to promote alignment include:
• Communicate alignment between LDC and the CCSS. Implementation leaders conveyed this alignment in a range of ways, including at principal meetings and trainings, at workshops about the CCSS, and by creating materials explaining the links.
• Align LDC with district curricula. Some leaders integrated LDC tools into existing curricula, while others used the LDC framework as a factor in choosing new curricula.
• Align LDC with teacher evaluation tools. Leaders used workshops, professional development sessions and written communication to illustrate how LDC can help teachers show proficiency according to their teacher effectiveness system.

Additional areas of opportunity related to alignment include:
• Providing support for teachers around curriculum alignment. For many teachers, and often especially for science and social studies teachers, LDC and the CCSS represent an enormous shift in instructional approach.
• Accounting for the shifting nature of state assessments. It is important for teachers to understand how LDC fits into their state’s student assessment system. However, several sites were in the process of transition from one set of assessments to another, raising concerns for teachers about how LDC would fit into their efforts to prepare students to succeed on the assessments.

Leadership: What does the research say about leadership and scale up?

There is clear evidence that strong leadership is noticeably related to successful scale-up of the tools. High percentages of teachers reporting strong leadership in their schools and districts also report broadening and deepening their tool use.

When teachers perceived strong leadership, they are more likely to:
• Plan for sustained or greater tool use;
• Observe a rise in teacher involvement at their school;
• Use LDC to inform ideas and practice outside of tool use;
• Use LDC strategies during non-LDC instruction;
• Share tools with those not in the initiative.
Strategies for Effective Leadership

Leaders’ common responsibilities include:

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

Best practices for effective LDC leadership:

- **Identify strong LDC district-level implementation leaders.** Leaders had content expertise and also spent time building relationships with teachers.
- **Build school-level leadership capacity.** School leaders--often principals or coaches--helped connect teachers and the district office. It is important to provide school leaders with clear expectations about their roles.
- **Over time, release responsibility to teacher leaders.** Across sites, teachers were involved in leadership activities such as:
  - Developing modules;
  - Revising modules developed by others;
  - Coaching others on how to use the modules; and/or,
  - Presenting at LDC professional development sessions.
- **Create processes to facilitate module development and revision.**
- **Leverage strategic partnerships.**

Additional area of opportunity to strengthen leadership:

- **Promoting strong leadership at both district and school levels.** Ensuring that strong leadership exists at both levels and that the lines of communication between the district and school buildings remain open is critical to the long-term success of LDC. Some sites were still working to create robust LDC leadership at both levels.

Professional Learning Opportunities: What does RFA’s research say about PLOs and scale up?

There is evidence that the availability of Professional Learning Opportunities supports aspects of scale-up in targeted ways. Collaboration was the mode of PLO most consistently and strongly related to indicators of increased breadth of tool use by individual teachers.

All types of PLO appear to influence teacher instructional practice more broadly. Many of the teachers who had access to PLOs reported:
• They used LDC strategies during non-LDC instruction.

Many teachers who agreed that they had time for collaboration reported:

• An increase in the number of tools used in the past year; and
• Their desire to continue and expand tool use.

Strategies to Support Meaningful, Ongoing Professional Learning Opportunities
Professional Learning Opportunities (PLOs) can help to bridge the gap between existing classroom practice and the new approaches demanded by LDC and the Common Core.

Best Practices include:

• Pursue collaborative approaches to professional development. Implementation leaders structured formal collaboration opportunities for LDC participants and encouraged informal collaboration as well. Frequent collaboration foci included: working together to develop or revise modules, observing experienced colleagues implement modules in their classrooms, scoring student work.

• Engage instructional support teachers as resources. Sites engaged instructional support teachers such as librarians, reading coaches, special education teachers, teachers of English language learners and technology coaches to support LDC implementation in a range of ways including, facilitating professional development, assisting with module development, providing classroom support, or working with teachers one-on-one or in a small group to reflect on implementation.

• Use student work. Sites used student work to guide reflection on LDC implementation, to structure teacher collaboration, or as an accountability and professional development tool.

Areas of opportunity related to PLOs:

• Facilitating more effective collaboration. Some teachers faced barriers to collaboration, including lack of time to collaborate with teachers teaching the same module or within their professional learning community and difficulties collaborating across content area.

• Facilitating LDC online learning environments. Implementation leaders in some sites were experimenting with promoting online learning and collaboration for LDC, however these had not yet become robust forums for interaction and learning.

• Differentiating LDC tools for diverse student needs. Teacher across all three case study sites reported the need for more training on differentiating the tools for different types of learners.

Conclusion
This research took place in 261 districts that were new to LDC as well as districts with several years of experience. Across these districts, some administrators and teachers had minimal experience with the LDC tools and others had already developed significant expertise.
Approximately 43% of respondents to the teacher survey were in their first year of LDC implementation and 57% had more experience with the LDC tools. All participating districts were still in the process of scaling up their LDC implementation, with none having yet reached the breadth and depth that was their ultimate goal. Much remains to be learned about facilitating and sustaining broad and deep implementation of LDC over time. However, early research points to the importance of strong alignment, effective leadership and robust, ongoing professional learning opportunities which facilitate teacher collaboration, for the integration and growth of LDC.