

**English Language Learners in Public Schools:  
A Challenging Environment and a Path to Improvement**

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## **Executive Summary**

English language learners (ELLs) constitute a significant proportion of the students in U.S. public schools, particularly in California. This paper is an exploration of the challenges faced by ELLs in public schools and the issues that affect the ability of teachers and principals to address the needs of these students. In addition, it seeks to identify school reform strategies that can provide better support for ELL students and the ways in which these reforms can be implemented. A compilation of effective strategies and reforms was acquired through a literature review of studies and reports investigating the academic needs of ELLs. Schools in the community of Boyle Heights in East Los Angeles were investigated as a case study to determine specific successes and challenges experienced by teachers and principals. The Boyle Heights Learning Collaborative, an organization that supports these schools, was studied to identify the prospects for implementing school reform to improve the education of ELLs. This research highlights the urgency of providing more support for the academic achievement of ELLs, and identifies strategies for the realization of this goal.

## Introduction

The nation's student population is in the midst of extraordinary demographic changes. Non-native English speakers are the fastest growing population within the U.S.'s student body. A considerable proportion of these students reside in California (33%)<sup>1</sup>. As a whole, English language learners (ELLs), students who are not proficient in English, attain levels of achievement that are significantly lower than their native English speaking peers. This disparity in achievement is directly related to the ways in which schools address the particular needs of ELL students. Some school districts in California have significantly large populations of students who are not proficient in English. In the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), the nation's second largest school district, 41% of the student body is comprised of ELLs.<sup>2</sup> Certain communities in Los Angeles have even higher percentages of ELL students, such as Boyle Heights in East Los Angeles. In this community, 19 thousand students attend Roosevelt High School and the 16 elementary and middle schools that feed into it. During the 2005-06 school year, 57.2% of these students were English language learners.<sup>3</sup> This group of schools, the Roosevelt Cluster, presents a case study of the challenges that ELL students face in school, the barriers that schools face in providing effective support for ELLs, and the efforts of a community based organization (the Boyle Heights Learning Collaborative) focused on improving the academic achievement of this cluster's students.

The specific situation in the Roosevelt Cluster, and California as a whole, demands immediate attention from policy makers, school leaders and educators. When determining the best ways to address this issue, it is important to analyze the research that investigates the strategies and methods available to support ELL students. To understand the ways in which such strategies can be applied in schools, a comprehensive view of the all the influencing factors is necessary. These include: the ways in which ELLs are disadvantaged; the circumstances that have influenced how ELL's needs are addressed; and the challenges schools face in trying to support their ELLs, from the perspective of educators and administrators.

The English language learner population in the U.S. has grown significantly: during the 1990s, ELL enrollment in U.S. public schools increased by over 104%, while total enrollment grew by only 13%.<sup>4</sup> ELLs represented 10% of the United States' student population during the 2000-2001 academic school year, 33% of whom reside in California. Compared to all the other states, California has the largest proportion of the U.S.'s ELL student population, followed by Texas with 12% of the U.S.'s ELL population. In California's public schools, one in every four students is an English

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<sup>1</sup> Jepsen, Christopher., de Alth, Shelley. "English Learners in California Schools". San Francisco: Public Policy Institute of California, 2005

<sup>2</sup> Abedi, J.; Courtney, M.; Leon, J.K.; Azzam, T. "English Language Learners and Math Achievement: A study of Opportunity to Learn and Language Accommodation" National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing (CRESST) 2006.

<sup>3</sup> LAUSDnet <<http://notebook.lausd.net/schoolsearch/selecter.jsp>>

<sup>4</sup> Callahan, Rebecca M. "Tracking and High School English Learners: Limiting Opportunity to Learn" American Educational Research Journal. 42.2 (2005): 305-328, pg. 1

language learner. Equally noteworthy: 42% of California's public school students speak a language other than English at home. An overwhelming majority of ELLs in the U.S. and particularly in California are native Spanish speakers (79% and 85.5% respectively).<sup>5 6</sup>

The percentage of ELL students in the Los Angeles Unified School District (41%) is almost twice as high as the percentage in the state's student ELL population as a whole (25%). In addition, it is interesting to note that only 32% of LAUSD students are classified as English only students; thus, the majority of its students speak a language other than English. ELLs comprise a near majority of the student population at each of the Roosevelt Cluster schools. During the 2005-06 school year, the ELL population at the 14 elementary schools in the Roosevelt Cluster ranged between 61.3% and 80.5%. The two middle schools, Hollenbeck and Stevenson, had ELL populations of 48% and 53.9% respectively, and 43% of Roosevelt High school students were classified as ELLs.<sup>7</sup> Much of the decline in the ELL population from elementary school to high school is due to the reclassification of students as English proficient, as well as a high dropout rate among ELL high school students.

The community of Boyle Heights has a significantly large immigrant population: 53% of the residents are immigrants, of which only 12% are naturalized citizens, according to the 2000 Census.<sup>8</sup> Students in Boyle Heights face many challenges, such as a high concentration of gang activity, high rates of poverty (according to the 2000 Census, 32.5% of the population was living below the poverty line<sup>9</sup>), and, as described above, a significant percentage of students are English language learners. Many of the Roosevelt Cluster schools are struggling with low achievement levels among their students. All but two of these schools have not met the appropriate performance levels on standardized tests, as mandated by the federal No Child Left Behind Act. Three of these schools have received significantly low standardized test scores for the past five years. Considering their large concentrations of ELLs, it is not surprising that the subject area in which all of the low performing schools are struggling with is English Language Arts. Improving the overall performance of the Roosevelt Cluster schools is contingent on ensuring that these schools are effectively meeting the particular needs of ELL students.

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<sup>5</sup> Gándara, Patricia., Rumberger, Russell., Maxwell-Jolly, Julie., and Callahan, Rebecca. "English Learners in California Schools: Unequal resources, unequal outcomes". Education Policy Analysis Archives, 11.36 (2003), pg. 2

<sup>6</sup> Language Policy and Leadership Office, California Department of Education. "English Learners and Immigrant Students: 2004-05 Demographic Information" California Department of Education, 2006

<sup>7</sup> LAUSDnet <<http://notebook.lausd.net/schoolsearch/selector.jsp>>

<sup>8</sup> LAUSD Board of Education, Educational Equity Committee. "School Profile: Roosevelt High School". Educational Policy Unit. Draft 2007, pg 4

<sup>9</sup> Los Angeles Almanac: Poverty Statistics for City of Los Angeles Communities <<http://www.laalmanac.com/LA/la11c.htm>>

## Chapter I: The Achievement Gap

The English language learner population as a whole, which constitutes a significant portion of California's students, is facing grave challenges in academic achievement. There is a significant achievement gap that exists between ELLs and native English speakers. This disparity is evident when comparing the Stanford Achievement Test, Version 9 (SAT-9, California's standardized achievement test used from 1998-2002) English reading assessment scores of the two student populations. In 2001, ELLs had low reading scores at every grade level. Non-native English speakers classified as English proficient, titled Fluent English Proficient (FEP), had comparable reading scores to their English only peers in the lower grades. However, once these students reached the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade level, performance levels began to decline. For the remaining grade levels, the achievement levels of FEPs never again equated the scores of English only students. This is a significant finding because non-native English speakers who have attained proficiency in English are assumed to be academically comparable to their English only peers, and thus do not receive supplemental language development support. ELLs who are reclassified as English proficient begin with similar scores to English only and FEP students, but at the 5<sup>th</sup> grade level their scores begin to decline, and at the 7<sup>th</sup> grade level they attain even lower scores. Based on these SAT-9 reading scores, the achievement gap widens as the grades get higher. These findings suggest that the attainment of English proficiency alone is not sufficient to narrow the achievement gap between English language learners and English-only students.<sup>10</sup>

Significant disparities between English speakers and ELLs are further exemplified in student achievement scores on the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE), a mandatory test that students are required to pass in order to graduate. The material tested is designed to correlate to high school sophomore year standards. In general, ELL students are less than half as likely to pass the exit exam as English speakers. For example, the graduating class of 2004, by their sophomore year, had only 48% of their students pass the CAHEE, while only 19% of their ELL students had passed.<sup>11</sup> In 2004, 81% of English speakers, including English only and English proficient students, passed the English Language Arts section of the CAHEE. However, only 39% of ELLs passed the English Language Arts section. The math section of the CAHSEE was passed by 78% of English speakers while only 49% of ELLs passed. Drop out rates are extremely high for ELL students as well: according to the LAUSD board of education, "only 29% of EL [ELL] students in Los Angeles high schools are still in school four years after entering the 9<sup>th</sup> grade"<sup>12</sup>

This achievement gap can be attributed to numerous inequities in the way that ELLs are educated within the U.S.'s public school system. According to various researchers who have studied the existence of this achievement gap, ELL students,

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<sup>10</sup> Gándara 2003, pg. 4

<sup>11</sup> Gándara 2003, pg. 7

<sup>12</sup> Gandara, Patricia; Maxwell-Jolly, Julie; Driscoll, Anne. "Listening to Teachers of English Language Learners: A Survey of California Teachers' Challenges, Experiences, and Professional Development Needs". Policy Analysis of California Education. The Regents of the University of California, 2005. pg. 2

compared to native English speakers, tend to receive less opportunity to learn in the classroom, lack access to qualified teachers, receive less instructional time, and have limited access to instructional material.

Researchers conducted a study to determine the opportunity that ELL students were given in the classroom to learn mathematics, titled: “English Language Learners and Math Achievement: A study of Opportunity to Learn and Language Accommodation”. Three criteria were used to measure the Opportunity to Learn (OTL) of students in a rural high school in northern California: content covered, teacher knowledge of content, and the prior math ability of students and their class as a whole. The results of this study found that ELL students generally were in classes which had “less content coverage, with teachers who demonstrated less content knowledge, and with classmates whose prior math ability was low”<sup>13</sup>. The OTL that presented the largest discrepancy between ELL and non-ELL students was the level of prior math ability of the class. They found that “the ability level of a class has more than twice the effect on performance on math outcome than either content coverage or teacher content knowledge”<sup>14</sup>.

The researchers developed a test, TIMER, which measured English reading proficiency. In conjunction with the aforementioned finding, the students who scored lower on the TIMER test, a.k.a. students with low English proficiency, tended to be in classes with lower math ability levels than those who scored higher on the TIMER test. Low TIMER test scorers also tended to report a lower level of class content coverage, compared to higher scorers. The same relationship of class ability level and level of content covered was observed regarding California Achievement Test, Sixth Edition (CAT/6) reading scores.<sup>15</sup>

These findings show that ELLs tend to be placed in lower-performing classes, and that the class level of ability has a significant impact on individual performance. This raises the issue of class placement based on ability level, also known as tracking. Often, student placements that are made based on ability level are strongly correlated to a student’s race and social class. Ethnic minorities and lower-income students are disproportionately placed in low-level courses while white, affluent students are over-represented in high-level courses. The critics of tracking argue that this system “serves to perpetuate and reinforce inequities along race and class lines”<sup>16</sup>. They argue that children who are placed in lower-level courses often receive a lower quality of education, such as “lower teacher expectations, a watered-down curriculum, and inferior instructional materials”<sup>17</sup>. Higher level courses tend to be taught by more knowledgeable and experienced teachers. The system also provides the students placed in lower tracks with less opportunity for upward mobility.

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<sup>13</sup> Abedi, 2006. pg. 59

<sup>14</sup> Abedi, 2006, pg. 71

<sup>15</sup> Abedi, 2006

<sup>16</sup> Rubin, Beth C.; Noguera, Pedro A. “Tracking Detracking Sorting Through the Dilemmas and Possibilities of Detracking in Practice”. *Equity & Excellence in Education*. (2004) 37: 92-101. pg. 93

<sup>17</sup> Rubin 2004, pg. 93

Tracking is of particular concern for ELLs, who tend to get placed into classes based on standardized test scores. These assessments, however, fail to accurately measure ELL students' academic abilities because they do not account for language barriers. Students who receive low scores on these assessments, regardless of whether due to academic achievement level or English language proficiency, are then placed in low-level, remedial courses. This type of placement is not likely to help ELLs excel in their academic achievement and narrow the gap with English only students.<sup>18</sup>

An important aspect of the achievement capabilities of ELLs resides in their instructor's ability to effectively support their academic needs. In order to evaluate ELL students' access to teachers holding the appropriate qualifications, LAUSD conducted a study of the correlation between ELL achievement gains and the credential held by their teacher. They found that the authorization of the teacher, based on state and district qualifications, had an impact on the performance levels of ELLs: “students of teachers holding no state or district authorization achieved largely negative or very small positive...adjusted gains in reading and language”; and that “students of credentialed teachers out-performed students of emergency permitted teachers”(Hayes, Salazar & Vukovic, 2002, pg 90)<sup>19</sup>.

According to the study conducted by LAUSD, the credential a teacher holds affects the achievement of ELL students. In this context, it is important to note that California ELL students, compared to the whole student body, are more likely to be instructed by teachers who are not fully credentialed. Among California teachers, 14% of teachers are not fully credentialed, while 25% of teachers who instruct ELL students are not fully credentialed. This finding is surprising given the fact that in California, the ratio of ELL students to teachers who are specifically authorized to teach them is actually greater than the state's general ratio of students to teachers. However, when looking at the teachers who actually *teach* ELL students, the opposite is true: compared to the state's general ratio of 5 teachers per 100 students, there is a “statewide average of only 4.2 CTC authorized EL teachers [Commission on Teacher Credentialing designates such teachers as those who are authorized to teach bilingual, ESL or SDAIE classes] per 100 English language learners (California Department of Education, Education Demographics Office, Spring 1999 Language Census)”<sup>20</sup>. Furthermore, according to the Urban Teacher Challenge Report (Recruiting New Teachers, Inc. 2002) “73% of the urban districts surveyed had an immediate demand for bilingual education teachers, while 68% had an immediate demand for English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers”<sup>21</sup>. This indicates that the issue at hand is a matter of unequal distribution of authorized ELL teachers, not a lack of teachers with this qualification. This distribution may be the result of the higher probability of poor working conditions in schools with high percentages of ELL students.

When looking at the amount of time in which students receive instruction in school, ELLs disproportionately experience less instruction compared to English only students. ELLs in California are more likely to be enrolled in a multi-track year round

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<sup>18</sup> Gandara 2003, pg. 8

<sup>19</sup> Gandara 2003, pg. 9

<sup>20</sup> Gandara 2003, pg. 13

<sup>21</sup> Antunez, Beth “Preparation and Professional Development of Teachers of English Language Learners” ERIC Clearinghouse on Teaching and Teacher Education Washington DC. September, 2002, pg 2

school than English only students. This particular type of year round track has 163 school days, while state law mandates a 180 day school year. Students are in school for two periods of four months with two month breaks in between. Roosevelt High is on this type of a year round schedule, which tends to be implemented in overcrowded schools. According to the California Department of Education, Policy and Evaluation Division, fifty percent of the students who are enrolled in this type of school are ELLs. Such a schedule is particularly harmful to ELLs because the two extended breaks in the year put them at a greater risk for loss in learning.

In addition to the increased likelihood of enrollment in a multi-track year round school, ELL students also tend to receive less instruction while in class. According to teachers surveyed in a study initiated by the California Department of Education, titled: “Effects of the Implementation of Proposition 227 on the Education of English Learners, K-12”, only 40.9% said they were “able to cover as much material with EL students as with EO [English only] students”<sup>22</sup>. This puts ELLs at a disadvantage because, as shown in a significant amount of research, “when students cover less material than their peers, their skills decline relative to other students and they are prone to be placed in low academic groupings or tracks where educational opportunities are limited (Barr & Dreeben, 1983; Oakes, 1985; Goodlad, 1984; Gamoran, 1992)”<sup>23</sup>.

ELL students have been found to have less access to instructional materials than English only students. In the aforementioned study of the implementation of Proposition 227, “researchers report that 75% of the teachers surveyed said they ‘used the same textbooks for my English learner and English only student’ and fewer than half (46%) reported using any supplementary materials for EL students”<sup>24</sup>. English learners have academic needs that differ from those of native English speakers. Therefore, they need materials that are geared towards supporting their specific achievement. When teachers use the same textbooks for both ELLs and native English speakers, it is crucial that they provide ELLs with additional support in order to make the material comprehensible; failing to do so, like 46% of the surveyed teachers, puts ELLs at a disadvantage in the classroom.

Students who are not proficient in English face heightened demands in school, having to develop both English language skills as well as core subject knowledge. In order to ensure ELL students’ academic progress, teachers must be prepared to address the dual task that ELLs undertake in school. Research shows that the low performance of ELL students as a whole is attributed to circumstances beyond their control. ELL students tend to have less opportunity to learn in the classroom due to placements in classes with high concentrations of students at lower levels of achievement. Additionally, the distribution of teachers qualified to address the particular needs of ELL students is skewed in a way that hinders their access to such teachers. Research has found that ELLs are more likely to receive less instructional time in the classroom and have less access to appropriate instructional materials, factors which have been found to correlate to a student’s ability to succeed. Such disparities are unacceptable for any student and demand attention. This issue is particularly pressing given that one in every four students in California is likely to face these inequitable conditions.

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<sup>22</sup> Gandara 2003, pg. 27

<sup>23</sup> Gandara 2003, pg. 27

<sup>24</sup> Gandara 2003, pg. 27

## Chapter II: The Policy Context

Several policies, both state and federal, are responsible for shaping the ways in which English language learners are educated in California's public schools. These include 1.) California's Proposition 227, 2.) President George Bush's No Child Left Behind Act, and 3.) the California High School Exit Exam. Each of these policies have created situations that disadvantage ELL students by undermining the efficacy and validity of the education they receive.

### 1.) Proposition 227

Proposition 227, titled "English for the Students", completely restructured the system of educational programs used to instruct ELL students. Passed in 1998 with 61% of the vote, Proposition 227 dismantled California's bilingual education programs and replaced them with an instructional program called Structured English Immersion (SEI). This legislature undermined the use of an ELL student's primary language in public schools and created a program that focused on developing English proficiency in ELL students through the primary use of English. ELL students receive up to a year of SEI, where instruction is in English, but is designed in a way that makes the material comprehensible to students who are not yet English proficient. The issues raised by the implementation of this proposition's provisions are further discussed in the following section.<sup>25</sup>

### 2.) No Child Left Behind Act

In 2002, President Bush signed into law the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), which reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Act of 1965. NCLB required any state receiving federal funds to conduct annual academic assessments of their students. These assessments, at a minimum, address the subject areas of reading, English language arts, science and math. Every state must then evaluate the adequate yearly progress (AYP) of their students based on the annual measurable objectives (AMO) which they determine. California's AMOs are defined as progress goals for proficiency on standardized tests and the high school exit exam. The AYP is calculated for the state as a whole, by school districts, and by individual schools.<sup>26</sup>

This act was meant to address the achievement levels of certain student populations that have tended to receive lower scores on proficiency assessments. These groups are defined as students who are economically disadvantaged, from ethnic or racial minority groups, who have limited English proficiency (LEP) also defined as ELLs, and students with cognitive disabilities. The achievement levels of these subgroups are evaluated as separate populations in order to monitor their progress.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Parrish, Thomas B.; et al. "Effects of the Implementation of Proposition 227 on the Education of English Learners, K-12: Findings from a Five-Year Evaluation". American Institutes for Research, 2006

<sup>26</sup> Abedi, Jamal. "The No Child Left Behind Act and English Language Learners: Assessment and Accountability Issues". *Educational Researcher*. (2003) 33.1: 4-14

<sup>27</sup> Abedi 2003

The NCLB act has established several requirements for the instruction and achievement of ELLs. To ensure that ELLs will be adequately prepared for mainstream content courses, the law mandates that state English Language Development standards be aligned to state's English language arts, math, and science standards.<sup>28</sup> In order to meet NCLB's required gains among ELLs in English proficiency, California requires that the number of ELLs who make at least one gain in proficiency level on the California English Language Development Test (CELDT, the standardized English language development assessment) increase annually. The act also puts pressure on school districts to demonstrate increases in the percentages of ELLs who reclassify as English proficient.<sup>29</sup> The mandates that NCLB has for ELL students have created a situation which puts them at a disadvantage due to inaccurate assessments of achievement and a lack of appropriate test accommodations, based on their limited English proficiency. Both of these incongruities lead to an inaccurate evaluation of their academic achievement.

When applying adequate yearly progress (AYP) assessments to ELL students, it must be taken into consideration that both the level of content comprehension and the level of test language comprehension affect their outcomes. The relationship that these two variables have on the overall level of an ELL's progress makes it difficult to evaluate improvements made in content knowledge as opposed to increases in language proficiency. As stated by the National Research Council: "if a student is not proficient in the language of the test, her performance is likely to be affected by construct-irrelevant variance – that is, her test score is likely to underestimate her knowledge of the subject being tested" (NRC, 1999, p. 225)<sup>30</sup>. This also indicates that ELL improvement may only be made once the level of English comprehension increases. Based on these realities, the interpretation of achievement levels on these assessments are bound to be skewed. Gains in achievement level could imply an increase in content comprehension, when it really may be due to increased English language proficiency. This type of misinterpretation may lead a school to assume it is providing ELLs with adequate core content instruction, when in fact this may not be the case. Alternatively, low achievement scores among ELLs may be misinterpreted as the need to place more ELLs in remedial content courses, when these students may actually need more intense English language development courses.<sup>31</sup>

The assessment of the ELL subgroup is problematic for several reasons, including the classification of ELLs, which varies among states and fails to account for fundamental differences within this subgroup. ELL students, as defined by NCLB, are "a) 3 to 21 years of age, (b) enrolled or preparing to enroll in elementary or secondary school, (c) either not born in the United States or speaking a language other than English, and (d) owing to difficulty in speaking, reading, writing, or understanding English, not meeting the state's proficient level of achievement to successfully achieve in English-only classrooms"<sup>32</sup>. Individual states, however, are allowed to establish their own definitions, based on this federal definition, and left to determine their own classification

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<sup>28</sup> Spaulding, Shelly., Carolino, Barbara., Amen, Kali-Ahset. "Immigrant Students and Secondary School Reform: Compendium of Best Practices". Washington: Council of Chief of School Officers, 2004, pg. 27

<sup>29</sup> Jepsen 2005, pg. 3-4

<sup>30</sup> Gandara 2003, pg. 21

<sup>31</sup> Gandara 2003

<sup>32</sup> Abedi 2003, pg. 5

criteria. Variations even exist among different school districts in some states. This creates problems when, for example, a district determines the status of a nonnative English speaker through information obtained from a “home language survey”. The validity of such a survey is questionable due to influences such as a parent’s concern over their child’s loss of opportunity, issues regarding citizenship, and/or the literacy level of parents. A study conducted in 1997, by researchers Abedi, Lord, and Plummer, found that the number of students who reported speaking a language besides English at home was actually considerably larger than the number the school had in their records.<sup>33</sup>

The filtering of all English language learners into one category undermines the significant variations within this group that lead to differing educational achievement levels. Factors which contribute to an ELL’s proficiency include the parent’s education level, cultural background, amount of formal education, family characteristics, and language background. A study conducted on 4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade ELL and non ELL students found that parental education level was a significant factor in an ELL’s proficiency. The researchers discovered that ELLs whose parents had obtained a postgraduate education scored significantly higher on reading proficiency than ELLs whose parents had obtained less than a high school education. They also found that parental education levels affected proficiency when comparing ELLs to non-ELLs: ELLs whose parents had received a postgraduate education scored higher on reading proficiency than non-ELLs whose parents had received less than a high school education. This study shows how levels of achievement for ELLs, as with other students, are influenced by factors other than their English language proficiency. Therefore, the current system of ELL classification needs to take this into consideration when determining adequate yearly progress (AYP) evaluations and procedures.<sup>34</sup>

Another factor that influences the evaluation of ELLs on a national scale is their varying ranges of population levels among each state. The range spans from 1% of the total student population in Vermont, to 25% of the total student population in California. The majority of states (31%) have less than 5% of their student populations comprised of ELLs, and 13 states have less than 1%. A school is only required to separately report the progress of ELLs when this subgroup constitutes a size which will provide statistically reliable data (i.e. data with an insignificant amount of standard error). However, this creates a situation where ELLs in smaller concentrations or smaller schools are underrepresented in the AYP, and ELLs in larger concentrations may be over-generalized.<sup>35</sup>

Additionally important to consider when assessing ELLs’ achievement is the unstable nature of this subgroup. Of the four subgroups outlined by NCLB, ELLs are the least stable. The reclassification of ELLs as English proficient, when they progress in math and reading proficiency levels, removes them from the subgroup. The students that are left to make up the subgroup are those who are not progressing, or who are low-performing. This undermines the ability of the ELL subgroup to improve as a whole. Once reclassified as English proficient, improvements in achievement are continually made, while achievement of ELLs remains relatively static or decreases. A study conducted to measure the gap between the performance of ELL and reclassified ELL

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<sup>33</sup> Abedi 2003, pg. 5

<sup>34</sup> Abedi 2003

<sup>35</sup> Abedi 2003, pg. 6

students found that while “both LEP [ELL] and FEP [reclassified a English Proficient] students performed well below their native English-speaking peers, the gap between LEP and FEP students remained high”<sup>36</sup>. In order to address the impact that this instability has on proficiency levels, some states include the reclassified ELLs in the subgroup.

All schools are required to reach the same level of proficiency within the same timeline; however, individual schools start at very different levels of achievement. Achievement test taken during the 2001-2 school year were used to determine a school’s baseline for their AYP. This baseline is affected by various factors such as the amount of resources a school has, the opportunity given to students to learn, the socioeconomic status of the student population, and the parents’ levels of education. The schools with lower baselines are forced to exert more time and effort to reach the overall proficiency level than a school that starts out at a higher baseline. The problem is that schools at lower baselines tend to be those that have less access to resources, and thus increases the already existing burden they must face. When a school fails to make adequate yearly progress (AYP), which is more difficult for such schools with fewer resources, they are then labeled as “in need of improvement” (or “Program Improvement”). This label creates a situation where that school may be forced to change their curriculum, reorganize their staff, and offer additional services to their students.<sup>37</sup> If a school continues to not make AYP for three years following their designation as “school improvement”, they “can be reopened as a charter school, turned over to a private management company, or be subject to a state takeover”<sup>38</sup>.

This legislation has caused schools to direct more attention towards the achievement of English language learners, which is a positive outcome. At the same time, however, the ways in which it assesses the achievement of ELLs are flawed and unrepresentative of the academic abilities of ELLs and/or their areas of need. Measures should be taken to ensure accuracy of the achievement assessments, such as providing test accommodations. Evaluations of the performance levels of ELLs as a subgroup must take into consideration the variations within this population that affect achievement levels. In addition, the outside factors that influence their overall performance levels, those which contribute to the achievement gap, must be recognized in the assessment evaluation process.

### 3.) California High School Exit Exam

As of June 2006, all of California’s public school students are required to pass the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE) in order to graduate and receive a high school diploma. This requirement extends to English learners, who do not qualify for test accommodations based on language proficiency issues. California state law allows districts to defer required passage of this exam for ELLs until a student has completed six months of English instruction of reading, writing, and comprehension.<sup>39</sup>

There are legal issues regarding an ELL’s mandated passage of the CAHSEE. This test is required by law to have “‘Curricular validity’ [which] means that the

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<sup>36</sup> Abedi 2003, pg. 7

<sup>37</sup> Abedi 2003

<sup>38</sup> Lazarín, Melissa. “Improving Assessment and Accountability for English Language Learners in the No Child Left Behind Act” Issue Brief. National Council of La Raza., 2006, pg. 6

<sup>39</sup> Gándara 2003, pg. 23

examination tests for content found in the instructional textbooks”<sup>40</sup> and “‘instructional validity’ [which] means that the examination is consistent with what is expected to be taught”<sup>41</sup>. Yet, as previously discussed, ELL students have less access to academic content due to their tendency to be placed in low-level courses. Studies have shown that the completion of Algebra I was significantly correlated to the passage of the math section of the exam. However, the placement of ELL students in ESL and remedial courses decreases their likelihood of receiving algebra instruction specifically, as well as instruction of other material found on the exam <sup>42</sup>. State and school district administrators must evaluate whether ELL students have equal access to the material on the CAHSEE; from there they must determine the validity of subjecting ELLs to the same required passage of the CAHSEE as native English speakers.

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<sup>40</sup> Gándara 2003, pg. 23

<sup>41</sup> Gándara 2003, pg. 23

<sup>42</sup> Gándara 2003, pg. 24

### Chapter III: Program Models and the Bilingual Education Debate

In order to close the achievement gap between ELLs and native English speakers, it is important to identify the instructional methods that are most effective with ELL students. Bilingual education has been the subject of much debate in terms of its efficacy for English language learners. When evaluating the discussion of bilingual vs. English instruction, regarding the best method for addressing the academic needs of ELLs, there are several components to consider. It is important to: 1.) review the research conducted about the process of second language acquisition, 2.) examine the research that compares different models used to instruct English language learners and 3.) evaluate the effects of policies that interpret this debate, namely Proposition 227 in California.

#### 1.) Second Language Acquisition

Ample research has investigated the relationship between proficiency in a primary language and the acquisition of a secondary language. Researchers Fitzgerald (1995), Thomas & Collier (2002) and Yamashita (2002) have studied secondary language proficiency academic achievement, and found that “the stronger the proficiency in the L1 [primary language], the higher the academic achievement in the L2 [secondary language]”<sup>43</sup>. Researchers have also found that skills obtained in a primary language, such as literacy, are transferable to a secondary language. According to experts on secondary-language acquisition, “developing student’s first language gives them subject-matter knowledge that enables them to comprehend what they read and hear in English (Krashen, 2000)”<sup>44</sup>. Thus, students who have learned how to read in their native language will be able to apply their literacy skills when acquiring a second language. Such findings should be applied when developing programs to effectively instruct English language learners, regardless of whether or not the program incorporates a bilingual component.

#### 2.) Research on Educational Programs

Throughout public schools in the U.S., there are various educational programs offered to ELLs, including bilingual education. As outlined in the report “Strategies and Resources for Mainstream Teachers of English Language Learners” published by the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, the multiple programs of instruction offered are defined as follows:

-Transitional Bilingual: A bilingual program with the ultimate goal of integrating ELL students into the mainstream English curriculum. An ELL’s primary language is used to support their acquisition of grade-level content, and decreases in use as a student gets closer to integration in the mainstream curriculum.

-Developmental Bilingual: A bilingual program in which an ELL’s primary language plays a significant role in their instruction. Typically, this program continues throughout elementary school, after which a student may still receive a significant amount of instruction in their primary language.

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<sup>43</sup> Rodriguez-Laija, Wilda; Ochoa, Salvador Hector; Parker, Richard. “The Crosslinguistic Role of Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency on Reading Growth in Spanish and English” Bilingual Research Journal. 30.1 (2006) 87-106, pg 90

<sup>44</sup> Wu, Jill. “A View from the Classroom” Educational Leadership. 2004-2005. , pg. 43

-Two-way bilingual, Dual Language, or Bilingual Immersion: This bilingual program is focused on the acquisition of proficiency in a student's primary and secondary language. The program may begin with 90% of instruction in the primary language and 10% of instruction in English, increasing English instruction throughout grade levels until it reaches 50%; or, it can begin with 50-50 instruction in the two languages.

-Content ESL: This program develops English language proficiency while integrating aspects of content level material as a way to prepare students for mainstream classrooms. The primary focus is language development.

-Structured/Sheltered English Immersion (SEI) or Specially Designed Academic Instruction in English (SDAIE): Instruction which is focused on providing ELLs with grade-level content material in a comprehensible manner.

-English Language Development (ELD): As defined in the study "English Learners in CA Schools: Unequal resources, unequal outcomes", "It is 'systematic' instruction of English language that is designed to (1) promote the acquisition of English-listening, speaking and reading and writing skills—by students whose primary language is other than English, and (2) provide English language skills at a level that will enable equitable access to the core curriculum for English learners once they are presented with academic content"<sup>45</sup>.

With the goal of evaluating the impacts these different programs have on the achievement levels of ELLs, researchers conducted a longitudinal study of ELL performance in five districts and school sites throughout the U.S. The study, titled: "A National Study of School Effectiveness for Language Minority Student's Long-Term Academic Achievement" collected data from 1985 to 2001. The researchers analyzed the long-term academic achievement of ELLs located in the northeast, northwest, south-central, and southeast regions of the U.S. The education programs evaluated in these school sites include: English mainstream, transitional and developmental bilingual, dual language, and ESL academic content instruction. Overall, the researchers found that ELLs enrolled in bilingual programs had attained a higher level of achievement than ELL students enrolled in ESL academic content programs. They also found a significantly lower level of attained achievement for ELLs enrolled in the mainstream curriculum without any form of bilingual or ESL support.<sup>46</sup>

One of the school districts whose programs they evaluated was the Houston Independent School District in Texas. This is the fifth largest school district in the U.S. in which 56.9% of the students are language minorities, or non-native English speakers, who are proficient in English as well as those who are not. 28% of the student body is comprised of ELLs and 75.4% of the students receive free or reduced price lunch<sup>47</sup>.

The state of Texas in general values multilingualism, which is reflected in their public education system. State law mandates that all elementary schools offer a bilingual program for ELLs in pre-kindergarten through 5<sup>th</sup> grade if there are 20 or more students who speak the same primary language in a grade level throughout the whole district. ELLs in grades without at least 19 fellow primary language speakers receive support

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<sup>45</sup> Gándara 2003, pg. 10

<sup>46</sup> Thomas, Wayne P., Collier, Virginia P. "A National Study of School Effectiveness for Language Minority Students' Long-Term Academic Achievement" Center for Research on Education, Diversity and Excellence, University of California, Santa Cruz. 2002

<sup>47</sup> Thomas 2002, pg. 112

from other programs such as ESL. Most elementary schools have transitional bilingual programs for native Spanish speaking ELLs: in 1998, 23.4% of students in the district were enrolled in enrichment or transitional bilingual programs<sup>48</sup>. Secondary schools must provide ESL Content and Sheltered Content programs for ELLs.

The Houston Independent School District offers developmental, transitional and two-way (dual language) bilingual programs. All programs have the same format from Kindergarten through 3<sup>rd</sup> grade to provide continuity within the district: 90% of the instruction is provided in the primary language, and 10% in English. English instruction increases until 4<sup>th</sup> grade, at which point transitional bilingual programs head towards English only instruction and developmental and two-way bilingual programs head towards 50% English and 50% primary language instruction.<sup>49</sup>

The schools receive continual support from the district's Multilingual Programs Department. This entity assesses and amends the bilingual and ESL program models, disseminates information about effective models and strategies through staff development programs, evaluates the programs based on researched efficacy, and demonstrates concerted efforts to implement reforms.<sup>50</sup>

Teachers instruct using only one language at a time, to avoid translating. The general instructional strategies used are visual aids, multicultural literature, thematic units that integrate content and language instruction, cooperative learning, as well as an "emphasis on cognitive development and developmentally appropriate practices, and incorporation of students' bilingual/bicultural knowledge into the curriculum"<sup>51</sup>.

The Houston Independent School District exemplifies the benefits of creating a statewide environment that respects bilingualism. Their bilingual programs are supported by the state which helps them provide such effective instructional programs. The model that produced the highest levels of achievement for both native and ELL students was the two-way bilingual program: based on standardized achievement scores, by fifth grade both of these students had "reached at least the 70th percentile in Spanish reading, math, and language arts; and the 60<sup>th</sup> to 66<sup>th</sup> percentile in English language arts and math"<sup>52</sup>. The ELL students in all of the three bilingual programs outperformed ELLs who were enrolled in ESL programs. The ELLs in both bilingual and ESL programs reached levels of achievement that were significantly higher than ELLs who did not receive any bilingual or ESL support. By 11<sup>th</sup> grade, the achievement levels of ELL students who were not enrolled in bilingual or ESL courses were at the "12th percentile in English reading and [at] the 22<sup>nd</sup> percentile in math"<sup>53</sup>.

The researchers evaluated a 50-50 dual language program (50% instruction in English, 50% in Spanish) in Grant Community School in Salem, Oregon. This inner city school has a 71% mobility rate, with 93.6% of the students receiving free or reduced price lunch, and a 9.9% ELL population. While high rates of poverty and mobility tend to correlate with low performance levels, Grant Community School developed a dual language program in which all students have shown significant success. Upon completion

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<sup>48</sup> Thomas 2002, pg. 114

<sup>49</sup> Thomas 2002

<sup>50</sup> Thomas 2002

<sup>51</sup> Thomas 2002, pg. 118

<sup>52</sup> Thomas 2002, pg. 132

<sup>53</sup> Thomas 2002, pg. 133

of 3<sup>rd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grades, 58% of ELL students either met or exceeded the English reading state standards of Oregon. The efficacy of the program is further exemplified in the fact that: “The more years that both the native English and native-Spanish speakers attend this school, the less influence poverty has on their performance on second language acquisition measures as well as on the academic tests of the Oregon Statewide Assessments”<sup>54</sup>. While providing beneficial support to ELL students, the native English speakers who have been enrolled in the program have seen increases in achievement levels without compromising their academic development in English.

The inclusive design of the program is a key element of its efficacy. They implemented a curriculum that incorporates “the bilingual and bicultural resources and knowledge of the community in all classes”<sup>55</sup>, their vision statement is focused on creating a school “that encourages students, staff, parents and other community members to be creative, lifelong learners”<sup>56</sup>. The community and the district school board are supportive and committed to the bilingual focus of the school. The principal attributed their success, not to the fact that they “hit on the right formula at first shot, but because the participants have examined well researched effective instructional practices, engaged in dialogue, thought things out, and believed it to be so”<sup>57</sup>. The program integrates students’ culture and community into the curriculum, which makes it relevant to their lives. The instructional methods are similar to those used in Houston: “cooperative learning, whole language, multicultural literature, hands-on instructional materials, discovery learning, authentic assessment, stimulation of multiple intelligences, and the use of art, music, and drama”<sup>58</sup>.

A mid-sized urban school district in the Southeastern part of the nation, which chose not to identify itself in the study, has 40% of its student body receiving free or reduced price lunch, and 25% of student body are ELLs. Many of their ELL students enter with limited former schooling experience in their native country.<sup>59</sup>

The programs offered to ELL students are ESL pullout instruction, ESL content instruction, one-way bilingual programs for Spanish speakers, and two-way bilingual instruction. The bilingual programs for ELL students were newly implemented during the time of the study, thus the ESL programs were the only ones that had their achievement records recorded and analyzed by the researchers. The ESL pullout program is the original ELL support program used by the district, and it is still implemented in some elementary schools with limited ELL populations. This program incorporates partial core content instruction, and some schools offer ESL support in mainstream classes. The ESL content instruction integrates language development with content development using thematic units. At the secondary level, ELLs at low and intermediate English proficiency levels receive full-day ESL content instruction; those at the elementary level receive half-day ESL content instruction. These ELLs are integrated with English speakers during music, art and physical education classes.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Thomas 2002, pg. 209

<sup>55</sup> Thomas 2002, pg. 192

<sup>56</sup> Thomas 2002, pg. 197

<sup>57</sup> Thomas 2002, pg. 199 (quoted from Foster, G. (1999) Comprehensive school improvement plan for 1999-2000. Salem, OR: Grant Community School, p. 1)

<sup>58</sup> Thomas 2002, pg. 196

<sup>59</sup> Thomas 2002

<sup>60</sup> Thomas 2002

The ESL content program at this district is particularly successful with ELL students in comparison to other ESL content programs. This is due to the fact that it is “a carefully conceived program, taught by highly experienced, certified teachers”<sup>61</sup>. Additionally, “staff development and planning time provided for the teachers helps the ESL Content teachers to maximize their opportunities to assist students with their academic English development”<sup>62</sup>. However, once these students are fully integrated into the mainstream curriculum, they are only able to close about half of the achievement gap with native English speakers. The advancements made while in the ESL content program decline once they no longer have this support.

The final sites evaluated in the study were two rural school districts in Northern Maine, where there is a historically large population of native French speakers. ELLs in these districts have a relatively high level of English proficiency compared to other districts. The French-English bilingual program begins with 90% French instruction and 10% English instruction in kindergarten through 1<sup>st</sup> grade. The amount of English instruction increases until it is 50-50 by 4<sup>th</sup> grade. The majority of the bilingual teachers use strategies similar to the aforementioned programs: “thematic lessons, cooperative learning, hands-on instructional materials with lots of visuals and manipulatives, use of microcomputers, multicultural literature, journal writing, and authentic assessment”<sup>63</sup>, they make connections to student’s experiences, and most incorporate bicultural knowledge. As in the other school sites, the bilingual program increased the achievement levels of the students. The bilingually educated students outperformed monolingually educated students in every grade level.

The researchers identified the following general conclusions after comparing the attained achievement levels of ELLs in all of the researched programs:

ELL students who did not receive any bilingual or ELS services, because their parents had requested to not enroll them in either bilingual or ESL content courses, had considerably lower achievement levels than those who were. While these students initially showed levels of higher achievement compared to recently mainstreamed ELL students who did receive bilingual education, the previously bilingually educated ELLs reached a comparable level of achievement by middle school, and attained even higher achievement levels by high school. The researchers concluded from these findings that parents of ELL students who do not want them to receive bilingual or ESL services should be informed that doing so could put their child at a high risk for low academic achievement.<sup>64</sup>

The study found that the only programs which effectively supported ELL students to attain levels of achievement in their primary and secondary language at or above the 50<sup>th</sup> percentile were enrichment (vs. remedial) 90-10 and 50-50 one and two-way bilingual programs. Through these programs ELLs had the highest levels of achievement and the lowest dropout rates. This information should direct the structure of bilingual programs to insure that all ELLs are able to attain the highest possible levels of achievement.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Thomas 2002, pg. 262

<sup>62</sup> Thomas 2002, pg. 262

<sup>63</sup> Thomas 2002, pg. 50

<sup>64</sup> Thomas 2002

<sup>65</sup> Thomas 2002

In addition, the benefits of bilingual education extend to both English learners as well as English only students. Four to seven years of education in a dual language program results in higher achievement levels across all subjects in comparison to students receiving a monolingual education.<sup>66</sup>

Through their evaluation, the researchers discovered that the most influential factor in determining an ELL's attainable level of achievement is the amount of formal schooling experienced in their primary language. Achievement in the secondary language increases as the amount of primary language schooling increases. Furthermore, students who do not receive any schooling in their primary language are unable to attain grade-level achievement in their secondary language. This reinforces the necessity of bilingual education programs that develop an ELLs' primary language achievement along with secondary language instruction.<sup>67</sup>

The length of time that a program provides secondary language development support is another factor that affects an ELL's attainable level of achievement. Multiple studies, the present included, have found that a minimum of four years is needed for ELLs to reach full proficiency in English. In reality, the four year minimum for English language proficiency is only attainable for ELLs who have had at least 4 years of schooling in their native language. Therefore, it is essential that ELLs with no English proficiency be enrolled in English language development programs that exceed four years. Additionally, it would be beneficial for all ELLs to receive support for more than four years.<sup>68</sup>

The findings of this study provide evidence for the efficacy that enrichment bilingual education programs have for the achievement of ELLs in particular, as well as for native English speakers. It emphasizes the detrimental effects that a lack of support for English language development, whether through primary instruction or through ESL content instruction, has for ELLs. The conclusions made by this study can be interpreted as the verification for why California should reinstate bilingual education, which is a highly politicized issue that is not likely to be reversed in the near future. Alternatively, this research can be regarded as evidence for the important role that primary language support plays in the long-term achievement of ELLs. It highlights significant elements that must be incorporated into programs to sufficiently address the needs of ELL students. These include: program length of at least four years, specified support based on educational background, and instructional methods that support ELL's access to content material.<sup>69</sup>

The importance of primary language instruction for the long-term achievement of ELLs is further supported by the National Literacy Panel on Language Minority Children and Youth's 2006 report titled "Developing Literacy in Second Language Learners". This research concluded:

Instructional programs work when they provide opportunities for students to develop proficiency in their first language. Studies that compare bilingual instruction with English-Only instruction demonstrate that language minority students instructed in their native language as well as in English perform better,

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<sup>66</sup> Thomas 2002

<sup>67</sup> Thomas 2002

<sup>68</sup> Thomas 2002

<sup>69</sup> Thomas 2002

on average, on measures of English reading proficiency than language minority students instructed only in English<sup>70</sup>

These conclusions, drawn from two extensive studies, contribute to the bilingual education debate by emphasizing the critical role that primary-language instruction plays in an ELL's ability to attain high levels of academic achievement. However, a definitive conclusion to this debate is not easily identified: the efficacy of different educational programs for ELLs is influenced by factors other than its structural basis in either bilingual or English only instruction. As stated by author H.D. Adamson, in Minority Students in American Schools: An Education in English, through a synthesis of several different studies of bilingual and other programs for ELLs: "conclusions about the effectiveness of a BE [bilingual education] program can only be generalized to other programs that have similar resources and students. It follows, then, that decisions about how to educate ELL students should be made by districts, not states, with plenty of input from individual schools"<sup>71</sup>. The structure of an educational program implemented in schools by the state or district must take into consideration the individual characteristics of each school structure, the available resources, and the identity of the school's attendees, their families and the staff members.<sup>72</sup>

### 3.) Provisions of Proposition 227

Exemplified by the passage of Proposition 227, more than half of California voters (61%), in 1998, did not believe bilingual education to be a beneficial program for English language learners. Proposition 227 mandates that all children in California public schools "shall be taught English by being taught in English"<sup>73</sup>. Under this law, ELLs receive up to one year of Sheltered English Immersion instruction, which is defined as "an English language acquisition process for young children in which nearly all classroom instruction is in English but with the curriculum and presentation designed for children who are learning the language"<sup>74</sup>. The law does allow parents to petition for an "Alternative Course of Study" for their children. This is defined as a program in which ELLs "are taught English and other subjects through bilingual education techniques or other generally recognized educational methodologies permitted by law"<sup>75</sup>, although this option is not widely used.

The Proposition 227 campaign stemmed from a 1996 protest of the bilingual program at a Los Angeles elementary school, led by Latino immigrant parents who felt the program disadvantaged their children by impeding their acquisition of English. Ron Unz, a wealthy Californian businessman who was inspired by this event, initiated the "English for the Children" campaign in 1998 to dismantle California's bilingual education system<sup>76</sup>. According to the California Voter Guide, supporters of the

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<sup>70</sup> Olsen, Laurie. "Ensuring Academic Success for English Learners". University of California Linguistic Minority Research Institute Newsletter (2006) 15.4, pg. 3

<sup>71</sup> Adamson, H.D. Language Minority Students in American Schools: An Education in English. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates (2005), pg 232

<sup>72</sup> Adamson 2005, pg. 232

<sup>73</sup> CA Education code section 305-306

<sup>74</sup> CA Education code section 305-306

<sup>75</sup> Parrish 2006, pg. I-18

<sup>76</sup> Baltodano, Marta P. "Latino Immigrant Parents and the Hegemony of Proposition 227" Latino Studies. (2004) 2.2: 246-253, pg 246

proposition believed the bilingual education system was failing ELL students and that sheltered English immersion was a more effective strategy to teach ELLs. Opponents of the proposition argued that bilingual programs were effective for ELLs, and should not be replaced by an un-tested program. The passage of Proposition 227 created the framework that now determines how California ELLs are to be instructed. It also demonstrated a predominant mindset among California voters that instruction in English, rather than bilingual instruction, is the most effective model for ELLs.

To determine the impact that these changes in the education structure had on ELL students, the California Department of Education contracted the American Institutes for Research and WestEd to conduct a five year evaluation of Proposition 227. In 2000, they began their study, titled “Effects of the Implementation of Proposition 227 on the Education of English Learners, K-12”. The researchers interviewed and surveyed teachers, principals and district staff members, compared ELL student achievement scores, and visited school sites to investigate the implementation of the proposition, determine the efficacy of the programs offered to ELLs, and to identify other impacts created by the proposition.

The programs that ELL students participated in drastically changed with the passage of the new law. The proportion of ELLs enrolled in bilingual education programs decreased from 30% to 8% after 1998.<sup>77</sup> To document the structural changes, the researchers compared the services offered to ELLs during the school year 1997-98, pre-Proposition 227, to those offered in 2003-04, post-Proposition 227. They found that the number of ELLs receiving English Language Development (ELD) and primary language instruction of academic subjects had dropped 69.1% between the two school years. They saw an increase of 149.8% in the number of ELLs receiving ELD and Specially Designed Academic Instruction in English, a form of Structured English Immersion instruction.<sup>78</sup>

In order to evaluate the process of implementing the provisions, they compared instructional programs used during 1999-2000, the first year that Proposition 227 was enacted, and those used during the 2003-04 school year. They identified a decrease by 26.6% in the population of ELLs enrolled in an “Alternative Course of Study” (typically bilingual education), and an increase of 29.7% in the numbers of ELLs enrolled in English Language Mainstream classes. As mandated by the proposition, ELLs are enrolled in mainstream classes once they have “met local criteria for having achieved ‘reasonable fluency’ in English”<sup>79</sup>, and receive additional instructional services as needed. The researchers acknowledged that the increase in the numbers of ELLs in mainstream classes is “likely due to the introduction of the state’s standardized ELD assessment (the CELDT), which many districts have used to define ‘reasonable fluency’ criteria”<sup>80</sup>.

They identified several challenges that schools and teachers faced when carrying out the provisions: “1) the short timeline and insufficient guidance for implementing regulations in the law initially, 2) confusion over what the law requires and allows, and 3) the lack of clear operational definitions for the various instructional approaches to the

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<sup>77</sup> Parrish, 2006, pg. vii

<sup>78</sup> Parrish 2006, pg. I-17

<sup>79</sup> Parrish 2006, pg. I-18

<sup>80</sup> Parrish 2006, pg. I-18

education of English learners”<sup>81</sup>. These barriers resulted in the proposition’s irregular implementation across schools and school districts. In the second year of the study (2002), they found that “only 56% of schools reported that the [ELL instructional] plan was coordinated with feeder and/or receiver school in their district, suggesting some disagreement about this level of articulation”<sup>82</sup>.

The proposition’s provision that limits Structured English Immersion (SEI) instruction to one year was identified as a common concern among school and district staff members. Many believed the maximum of one year of SEI instruction to be an unrealistic time restraint: “Only 14% of schools reported that all or almost all of their EL [ELL] students made this transition after one year”<sup>83</sup>. This was particularly problematic with newly immigrated students and those with low English proficiency levels, based on the known statistic that a period of 4-7 years is needed to acquire academic English proficiency.

Another issue identified during the five years of the study was the extent to which parents were informed about their option to request waivers for bilingual education, and whether or not such waivers were accepted. They found that this often was contingent on the “prior practice and the predisposition of providers toward particular instructional programs”<sup>84</sup>. During site visits in the third year of the study, the researchers recognized that schools with extensive primary language programs for ELLs tended to more thoroughly inform parents about alternative education options. Schools with smaller, or non-existent bilingual programs tended to have less defined or unclear guidelines for the waiver process. This significant evidence implies a disparity within parental rights to request bilingual education programs for their kids.

The study also evaluated the achievement levels of ELLs in relation to the passage of the proposition. They found that the performance of ELLs as a whole had improved since Proposition 227 was implemented. It is important to acknowledge that all students made gains in achievement since the proposition, and that ELL gains were likely influenced by the implementation of a class-size reduction initiative and the establishment of new English Language Development standards. The achievement gap between native English speakers and ELLs did decrease slightly, however “it has remained virtually constant in most subject areas for most grades”<sup>85</sup>. District administrators reported that barriers to the academic achievement of ELL still remained. They felt, on average, “that 73 percent of EL [ELL] students had the same academic opportunities as EO [English only] students, that half (50 percent) of all English learners were meeting academic performance standards, and that 63 percent of ELs [ELLs] eventually became proficient in English”<sup>86</sup>. This demonstrates the need for further actions to support ELLs and more measures to close the achievement gap.

Given these findings, the authors compiled a list of recommendations to the state and school districts for how to better implement Proposition 227, and thus improve conditions for ELL students. They called on the state to clarify the waiver process, ensure

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<sup>81</sup> Parrish 2006, pg. viii

<sup>82</sup> Parrish 2006, pg. II-19

<sup>83</sup> Parrish 2006, pg. II-14

<sup>84</sup> Parrish 2006, pg. viii

<sup>85</sup> Parrish 2006, pg. viii

<sup>86</sup> Parrish 2006, pg. II-20

that ELLs have access to core content, compile data on ELL achievement that will direct policy and instructional decision making, fund professional development to strengthen the instructional capacity of teachers regarding their ELL students, and to identify schools with effective programs to serve as models. They suggest that districts should clearly define the instructional plans to be used with ELL students and that schools should focus on increasing interactions between ELLs and native English speakers.<sup>87</sup>

The researchers concluded that Proposition 227 has, in general, not had a negative impact on ELLs in California. However, they argued that the impetus for the reform, the debate between bilingual education and English-only instruction, is flawed. They found that factors other than the model of instruction or its specific title have a greater influence on the efficacy of a particular program. Such factors include: the instructional capabilities of teachers regarding ELL students, a shared focus on ELL achievement throughout a school, and data-based decision making. A more relevant discussion, they argued, is one that focuses on elements or strategies which have demonstrated efficacy in supporting the achievement of ELLs. Thus, it is essential to synthesize the researched instructional practices that have shown to be effective for ELL students.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Parrish 2006

<sup>88</sup> Parrish 2006

## Chapter IV: Strategies and Reforms

The following section is a compilation of strategies and reform models that can be implemented in schools to better support ELLs. The most effective school reforms are those which are designed to the particular needs of a school community. It is important to consider the particular characteristics of the school, the community, the teachers, and the parents, to determine what is feasible and what will be most effective. This catalog of strategies and models is not meant to be interpreted as a “to-do” list that all schools should implement. Rather, it is meant to provide school leaders and educators with a broad spectrum of the elements in a school and in instructional practices that help support the needs of ELLs.

When embarking on the process of implementing school reforms with the goal of better supporting ELL students, there are several key elements that a school should incorporate. It is essential that there is widespread support and investment in the plan from instructors. They must have a defined role in the decision making process during the development of the plan. A school should make sure that the teachers fully understand and are in agreement with the plan’s benefits for their students. In order for a reform to be most effective for ELL students, their needs must be taken into consideration during the development of the plan. It is important to create awareness among the school staff regarding the particular needs of ELLs so they will understand how to best incorporate supports for these students into the plan.<sup>89</sup>

There are four main areas in which improvements can be made, as identified through information gathered from a literature review of reports and studies, and interviews with school staff members in the Roosevelt Cluster. These include: 1.) Capacity of Teachers, 2.) Instruction/Curriculum, 3.) School Structure, and 4.) Parent Involvement. In a school environment, teachers provide the most direct form of support to ELLs. Thus, a primary objective when focusing on the advancement of ELL achievement is developing the capacity of teachers to effectively instruct ELL students. Secondly, it is crucial for a school’s instructional and curricular programs to be conducive to the implementation of methods geared toward the achievement of ELLs. Thirdly, there are ways in which the structure of a school can be reformed to allow for enhanced teacher capacity, instructional practices, and curricular implementation that are focused on addressing the needs of ELLs. Lastly, as mentioned before, there are factors outside of the school that influence the capabilities of ELL achievement, such as a parent’s involvement in their education and school environment.

Several studies were reviewed to identify instructional practices and school reforms that can help improve the education of ELLs. A report published in 1996, titled “A view from the Bottom Up: School-Based Systemic Reform in California” clearly outlines different strategies for restructuring schools, focusing specifically on the needs of ELL students. This document, co-authored by Jorge A. Cuevas and Rose Marie Garcia Fontana, constitutes a helpful reference when considering the ways in which schools can

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<sup>89</sup> Cuevas, Jorge A., Fontana, Rose Marie Garcia. “A view from the Bottom Up: School-Based Systemic Reform in California; Volume III: Restructuring Ideas for Schools with Limited-English Proficient Students” Office of Educational Research and Improvement. San Francisco: Far West Laboratory, 1996.

be reformed to better support their ELL student populations. In a comprehensive report published in 2004 by The Council of Chief State School Officers, the authors compiled a collection of effective strategies for secondary schools striving to implement reforms that will better serve their ELL student population. The report is titled, “Immigrant Students and Secondary School Reform: Compendium of Best Practices”. And lastly, an article written by Laurie Olsen, “Ensuring Academic Success for English Learners”, synthesizes effective programs and instructional strategies that have been researched over the past 30 years. In addition, interviews with administrators in the Roosevelt Cluster schools provided key insights regarding specific strategies implemented in the case study schools, which are incorporated into this section.

#### 1.) Capacity of Teachers:

When a school is planning reform efforts to better support their ELL students, one of the most important aspects to incorporate in the plan is strengthening the instructional abilities of teachers. A survey conducted by the Council of Chief State School Officers found that: “states and districts listed ‘improving teacher practice’ as a consistently high source of concern in serving high school ELL populations”<sup>90</sup>. This factor was echoed by an LAUSD elementary school principal who stated that one of the most important factors to better serving ELLs is making teachers experts at effectively instructing their ELL students.

Capacity building among teachers can be carried out in the form of professional development (PD) workshops led by district administrators, pedagogy educators, and educational researchers. As a guide to how to most successfully provide PD programs to teachers, the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Bilingual Education and Minority Language Affairs (OBEMLA), conducted a study in 1999 from which they identified six effective elements of PD programs:

- 1) clearly established and maintained objectives;
- 2) implementation of standards set at the national/state and/or local levels;
- 3) needs analysis survey provided prior to beginning professional development;
- 4) activities aligned with the mission of the department and/or district;
- 5) collaborative partnerships within the district, including parents, consultants, universities, businesses and the community;
- 6) utilization and sharing of expertise among teachers, program directors and administrators<sup>91</sup>

Elements that enhance the capacity of teachers to support ELLs include: a.) ability to integrate language and content instruction, b.) awareness and respect for ELLs’ languages and cultures, c.) receiving continual developmental support, and d.) collaboration among educators.

#### a.) Ability to integrate language and content instruction

Through professional development, teachers can learn how to provide content material instruction to their ELL students through methods of sheltered instruction, also known as Specially Designed Academic Instruction in English (SDAIE). Sheltered

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<sup>90</sup> Spaulding 2004. pg. 61

<sup>91</sup> Spaulding 2004. pg. 63

content instruction creates a framework for the content material that makes the information more accessible to ELLs. Some of the strategies of SDAIE include using graphic-organizers, visual aids, previewing vocabulary before a unit, demonstrating and modeling activities, and cooperative learning. Additional strategies to make content material comprehensible for ELLs are the use of culturally pertinent materials, providing native language support, group work, and training peers as tutors.<sup>92</sup> These strategies are very similar to those used by the teachers in the researched program models in the study “A National Study of School Effectiveness for Language Minority Student’s Long-Term Academic Achievement”, described in the previous section. The implementation of such strategies, and specifically the SDAIE method, as identified by Olsen, is most effective when ELLs are grouped together based on their level of English language development. In this way, the language development needs based on their level of proficiency can be more directly addressed.<sup>93</sup>

b.) Awareness and respect

It is important for teachers to receive professional development that is focused on raising their consciousness about the significance of the cultures and languages that ELL students bring to the classrooms. Teachers should learn to be supportive of ELL students’ maintenance of their native language and the use of it at home. Aspects of ELL students’ cultures can be incorporated into educational activities in the classroom. Teachers should develop units around multiculturalism and diversity, provide opportunities for students to share their culture and cultural experiences with the class, create an open and accepting class environment so they feel welcome, and value their primary language and cultural knowledge as foundations for academic achievement<sup>94</sup>. ELL students are likely to be more engaged and motivated in a classroom where they feel comfortable and respected.<sup>95</sup>

As highlighted in the interviews, it is important to raise teachers’ and principals’ awareness that ELL students can and should be challenged by high expectations. To help educators accept and understand the capabilities of ELLs, it is helpful to have them observe teachers and schools that are successfully challenging their ELL students. It is also important for educators to acknowledge that ELLs, as a subgroup of students, require additional support. Once this aspect is accepted, educators may become more willing to go to professional development workshops to learn how to provide this specialized support.<sup>96</sup>

c.) Continual developmental support

Providing professional development workshops and materials to educators is an important duty held by school and district administrators. This support must be continual in order to have lasting impacts on instructional practices. One of the main concerns expressed by educators in the Roosevelt Cluster was a lack of support from the district for the effective instruction of ELL students. The Los Angeles Unified School District,

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<sup>92</sup> Spaulding 2004

<sup>93</sup> Olsen 2006

<sup>94</sup> Spaulding 2004

<sup>95</sup> Reed, Bracken., Railsback, Jennifer. “Strategies and Resources for Mainstream Teachers” Portland: Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, 2003, pg. 21

<sup>96</sup> Interviews with Roosevelt Cluster administrators February and March 2007

while having such a large population of ELL students, has been slow to provide schools and teachers with the appropriate materials and professional development to support ELLs. The curricula used for English language development (ELD) were adopted before California had established ELD standards. Thus, teachers were left without guidance for how to implement the ELD program into their instructional practices. California adopted English language development standards several years later, yet did not inform schools and instructors as to how they should apply the new ELD standards to the set ELD program. Recently, the district developed the ELD Practicum for elementary schools. This is an augmentation to the elementary level ELD curriculum, *Into English*, which aligns it to the state's ELD standards. Some of the strategies within the Practicum include: task based language instruction, graphic organizing (visual representations), and cooperative learning. All of these correlate with the effective strategies previously discussed. An administrator from LAUSD's Language Acquisition Branch expressed plans to finish the current training by 2008, when they will begin implementing an ELD Practicum for middle schools in a similar fashion.<sup>97</sup>

The district is providing professional development trainings to elementary school teachers, but, they are using a process where one teacher receives the training and returns to their school to disseminate the information. This creates a risk for loss of vital information in the process of dissemination. Educators in the Roosevelt cluster expressed that the ELD practicum was a good start; they have seen positive impacts from the trainings. Yet, there is always room for more support.<sup>98</sup>

#### d.) Collaboration among educators

Schools should provide opportunities for mainstream teachers to collaborate with ESL teachers and bilingual coordinators. These instructors are great sources of knowledge and can help mainstream teachers develop their ability to support ELL students. Increased collaboration between these different educators is beneficial because it promotes sharing among coworkers, especially valuable when this includes staff members that have been trained in ELL instructional practices.<sup>99</sup>

As described in "A view from the Bottom Up", one reform strategy to enhance the collaboration among teachers involves developing a system of grade level collaboration. At the elementary level, the purpose of the reform is to develop a common curriculum to implement, and at the secondary level it is to develop units that integrate the various disciplines across the grade levels. Organized, routine collaboration among teachers provides them with valuable opportunities to discuss instructional methods, share resources and knowledge, and offer peer feedback. This increased collaboration and sharing of information can help teachers improve their instructional methods used with ELL students and provides a space to discuss a specific ELL student's progress and academic needs.

Fern Bacon Middle school in Sacramento, CA created teams of teachers based on grade level. The school organized weekly planning meetings for the teams and gave the teachers in the teams the same preparation periods during the school day. The teams

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<sup>97</sup> Interview with LAUSD Language Acquisition Branch administrator, February 2007

<sup>98</sup> Interview with Breed Street Elementary administrator, February 2007

<sup>99</sup> Spaulding 2004

created thematic projects and units, and were able to develop a greater system of communication.<sup>100</sup>

In order to implement a successful system of collaboration, the teachers must be provided with time to meet with each other and plan a curriculum. They must have access to materials to develop a curriculum and professional development that they have determined to be necessary. The level of instruction a teacher has received about curriculum development may vary; thus, some grade-level groups may need more professional development support than others. It is also important to be sure all teachers have an understanding of how to deliver support to ELL students and incorporate such aspects into the developed curriculum.<sup>101</sup>

A similar reform suggests forming teams of teachers across disciplines to focus on creating a specific instructional unit. These teams would be composed of teachers who are interested in the unit and/or those who have specialized knowledge on the subject. The innovative curriculum developed is likely to be more engaging and challenging for the students because it is of particular interest or expertise of the teachers involved in its creation. This reform has the same benefits of increased collaboration among teachers as the aforementioned reform.<sup>102</sup>

Carr Intermediate School in Santa Ana, CA implemented a five year reform process to create interdisciplinary teams to teach a heterogeneous group of students across grade levels. This process was divided into three stages: developing the teams, developing the thematic units and eliminating dividers between content areas, and collaborating among the teams and assessing the programs efficacy.<sup>103</sup>

This reform requires a school environment that is open to experimentation. Additionally, access to sufficient resources to develop the teams is necessary, such as providing staff development days without the students. It is important to have a long-term focus for the plan, as was needed at Carr. A school must remain focused on the specific needs of ELLs when implementing this reform strategy.<sup>104</sup>

## 2.) Instruction/Curriculum

A school's instructional models and curricula are essential elements to address when carrying out reform efforts. These mechanisms structure a teacher's ability to apply effective practices for ELL students. A school can incorporate specific aspects into their instructional models and curricula to support ELL achievement. Instructional strategies that address the needs of ELLs are: a.) providing primary language support, b.) integrating language and academic content instruction, c.) focusing on academic literacy, and d.) cooperative learning. Significant criteria for a school's curriculum include: e.) identifying the particular academic needs of ELLs, f.) providing a rigorous curriculum, g.) thematic instruction/curriculum, h.) focusing on the culture and community of ELLs and i.) administering appropriate assessments.

### a.) Providing primary language support:

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<sup>100</sup> Cuevas 1996, pg. 27

<sup>101</sup> Cuevas 1996, pg. 27-8

<sup>102</sup> Cuevas 1996, pg. 25-6

<sup>103</sup> Cuevas 1996, pg. 25

<sup>104</sup> Cuevas 1996

As discussed in the previous section, instruction and support in an ELL's primary language aids their academic achievement without detracting from their English language proficiency. A school can provide primary language support in several different forms: English as a Second Language (ESL), transitional bilingual, developmental bilingual and dual language programs. Additionally, primary language support can be offered in the mainstream classrooms through bilingual paraprofessionals. The report referred to above, "A National Study of School Effectiveness for Language Minority Student's Long-Term Academic Achievement", describes some bilingual programs that were highly effective in providing primary language support to English learners.

An important aspect of effective primary support is making it available whenever possible. Even schools without bilingual programs should provide this form of support in English-only mainstream classes. Researchers Lucas and Katz (1994) found that incorporating primary language support into the practices of mainstream instructors "gave teachers a way to show their respect and value for students' languages and cultures, acted as a medium for social interaction and establishment of rapport; fostered family involvement, and fostered students' development of, knowledge of, and pride in their native languages and cultures"<sup>105</sup>. All of these factors have the potential to positively influence the overall achievement of an ELL student.

Some strategies for mainstream teachers to incorporate primary language support include the use of multilingual texts and creating lessons involving ELL students' cultures. They can also encourage ELLs to use their primary language when they are struggling to identify the English translation of words<sup>106</sup>.

#### b.) Integrating language and academic content instruction

As mentioned earlier, a curriculum that integrates content and language instruction is essential to the academic achievement of ELL students. Language development and academic development must not be regarded as two independent subjects to be instructed in isolation from one another. The integration of content instruction and language instruction, as well as the alignment of content standards and assessments to language development standards and assessments are two important elements for the achievement of ELLs. As mentioned in the previous section (Capacity of Teachers), content instruction can be made more accessible to ELL students through sheltered instruction methods, such as Specially Designed Academic Instruction in English (SDAIE). Language development instruction can better support ELLs' achievement in mainstream academic courses if it is aligned to core curriculum standards. Additionally, exposure to the standards-based curriculum will better prepare ELL students for standards-based assessments, and thus more accurately measure their academic abilities. In fact, under the No Child Left Behind act, state English Language Development standard are required to be aligned to English language arts, math and science standards.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Reed 2003, pg. 29, quoted from: Lucas, Tamara; Katz, Anne "Reframing the Debate: The Roles of Native Languages in English-Only Programs for Language Minority Students", TESOL Quarterly, v28 n3 p537-61 Fall 1994

<sup>106</sup> Reed 2003, pg. 29

<sup>107</sup> Spaulding 2004

c.) Focusing on academic literacy

The academic achievement of an ELL student relies heavily on the development of their academic literacy, and not merely on English communicative skills. One method for developing ELLs' academic literacy abilities includes providing dynamic literacy instruction and teaching them learning strategies. Diversifying a student's exposure to literacy development activities allows them to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the material. Several strategies outlined in the report "Immigrant Students and Secondary School Reform: Compendium of Best Practices" include: "reading and writing workshops, literature discussions and participation in cooperative learning groups"<sup>108</sup>. Teaching literacy in real-world contexts increases the relevance and purpose for secondary level ELLs. Another way to increase academic literacy is by instructing learning strategies, which empower ELLs to lead their own development.<sup>109</sup>

d.) Cooperative learning

Providing opportunities for ELLs to interact with native English speakers is essential to their English language development. Educators should make sure that their instructional plans allow time for ELL and native speaking students to interact as much as possible. Cooperative learning is one strategy that instructors can use to promote interaction. It entails having small groups of students working together on an educational activity. In this setting, students can share their own learning strategies and observe those of their classmates.<sup>110</sup>

e.) Identifying the particular academic needs of ELLs

When addressing the language development of ELLs, it is important to recognize that there are different subgroups of ELLs who have varying academic and linguistic needs. For example, ELLs who have been in U.S. schools for the majority of their schooling years will need different types of language supports than recent immigrants who have not had many years of formal schooling. In this regard, a school should have differing ELD curricula that address the diverse language needs of the ELL student population, rather enrolling all ELLs in the same type of program.

Central Union High School in Fresno, CA has developed such a model for their ELL students. This high school has an ELL population of 41%, with 51% of their students receiving free or reduced price lunch. They created three different programs for their ELL students, with the understanding that not all ELLs have the same instructional needs for English language development. Their programs are described as follows:

(1) *The Alternative Program* is a two-year program for new immigrants. It provides a combination of courses that include ELD, SEI [Structured English Immersion], bilingual and mainstream courses. Students can be enrolled in at least three bilingual courses.

(2) *The structured English Immersion Program* provides students with explicit instruction in English language development and instruction in core content areas.

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<sup>108</sup> Spaulding 2004, 28

<sup>109</sup> Spaulding 2004

<sup>110</sup> Reed 2003, pg. 27

(3) *The Mainstream Program* exposes students to English support in the context of their regular classes.<sup>111</sup>

An additional highlight of this school's practices is their focus on tracking the progress ELLs make in English language development. They use this data to make decisions regarding the different services offered to ELLs.

ELL students who arrive in the U.S. at the secondary level having had limited exposure to formal schooling in their native country, constitute an ELL population that requires a particular form of support. One type of intervention for these students is a Newcomer Center, in which recent immigrants can enroll for a specified amount of time, generally up to one year, before they matriculate into a secondary school. A Newcomer Center should offer academic and language preparation courses to introduce students to the U.S.'s education system. Additionally these centers should include language development courses and sheltered English content courses that fulfill high school credit. Centers should also be equipped to provide support for non-academic needs, such as the social, cultural and psychological aspects of adjusting to a new country.

Olsen identified important aspects of a newcomer center that coincide with the aforementioned elements. An additional component she identified was the use of extensive assessments of a student's primary language, academic achievement level, and English proficiency, in order to provide the most suitable supports. She further suggests that a district should create one central newcomer center or establish centers in schools that experience high volumes of newly immigrated students.<sup>112</sup>

An example of a model program identified in the report "Immigrant Students and Secondary School Reform: Compendium of Best Practices" is the Belmont Newcomer Center in LAUSD. This center offers courses in English language arts, science, math, health, career and education planning in Spanish and Mandarin. For native speakers of other languages, the center provides sheltered courses in these subject areas. All of the courses taught at the center are either preparatory courses for required classes or fulfill high school graduation requirements. Collaboration with community organizations provides the students with access to social and health services, as well as education services for their parents. The center offers activities before and after school such as tutoring and extracurricular clubs in a similar fashion as the high school, to further help students adjust to the education system.<sup>113</sup>

#### f.) Providing a rigorous curriculum

Hollenbeck Middle School, one of the two middle schools in the Roosevelt cluster, aims to provide all of their ELL students with access to a rigorous core curriculum. They have created their own course placement criteria for ELLs, which they believe is more comprehensive than the criteria used by the district. Their goal is to enroll as few ELL students in ESL classes as possible because of the unchallenging and remedial ESL curriculum. The school administrators feel that ELL students will be more prepared to reach the benchmarks for reclassification when placed into core level English

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<sup>111</sup> California Best Practices Study: Central Union High School, Central Union High School District. Summer 2005. Presented by Springboard Schools under contract with National Center for Educational Accountability and Just for the Kids – California, pg. 16

<sup>112</sup> Olsen 2006

<sup>113</sup> Spaulding 2004

language arts (ELA) classes. The rigor of the core curriculum, they believe, is beneficial for the advancement of their ELLs. They offer ESL courses for ELLs at lower levels of English language development, a two hour block of sheltered English for ELL students who are struggling with comprehension rather than fluency, core English courses, and gifted English courses for students who are performing above grade level.<sup>114</sup>

Hollenbeck ELLs have made significant gains since the development of the new course placement criteria three years ago. The number of students classified as ELLs decreased from around 60% in 2004 to about 36% at the beginning of 2007, which implies a significant rate of reclassification. They have around 20% of their ELL students enrolled in grade-level ELA classes and a significant 2% of their ELLs enrolled in gifted ELA classes. They are enrolling fewer and fewer ELLs in ESL classes: at the beginning of 2003, they had 760 ELLs enrolled in ESL classes, in the beginning of 2006 they only had 100 ELLs enrolled in ESL. Although the school as a whole still has a low performance scores on the state's standardized assessments, in 2006 their ELL subpopulation met their targeted growth in performance on the state standardized assessments (API growth target). Hollenbeck administrators attribute their success with ELL students to their "detailed articulation process, monitoring of LEPs [ELLs] eligible to reclassify, Strategic CELDT testing, functioning language Appraisal Team, and Collaboration with community based organizations"<sup>115</sup>.

#### g.) Thematic Instruction/Curriculum

One reform strategy for restructuring a school's curriculum entails developing a curriculum or project based on a specific theme that is taught across multiple core disciplines. It is important for this curriculum to be formatted to state standards. The instruction of one extensive topic throughout several core courses exposes students to the different aspects of a pertaining topic, and at the same time it creates connections between core subjects. This method is beneficial for ELLs because they are able to attain a comprehensive understanding of a topic and have varied exposure to academic vocabulary in natural contexts. Instructional units within a thematic curriculum tend to extend over a longer period of time than normal units. This gives ELLs a greater opportunity to gain an understanding of and apply the academic vocabulary of the unit.<sup>116</sup>

The development of an effective thematic curriculum requires: appropriate professional development; collaboration across disciplines; materials for the comprehensive topics; opportunities for school staff to create the curriculum, such as student-free days; and ongoing evaluation and adjustment of the curriculum, by both the teachers and the students.<sup>117</sup> An example of a school's effective implementation of a theme-based curriculum is Almeria Middle School in Fontana, CA. This school uses "in-

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<sup>114</sup> Interview with Hollenbeck Middle School administrator, March 2007

<sup>115</sup> The Bilingual Program at Hollenbeck Middle School PowerPoint, 2007

<sup>116</sup> Freeman, David E., Freeman Yvonne S. "Teaching Language Through Content Themes: Viewing Our World as a Global Village" Supporting the Literacy Development of English Learners: Increasing Success in all Classrooms Ed. Terrell A. Young and Nancy L. Hadaway. Newark: International Reading Association, 2006. 61-78, pg. 61-64

<sup>117</sup> Cuevas 1996, pg. 19-20

class historical/geographical simulations and models”<sup>118</sup>, and has a focus on writing which is incorporated throughout the curriculum.

Some of the barriers that a school may face when implementing this reform is an inability to provide enough time for the staff to develop the new curriculum. It may also be a challenge to find instructors who are able to dedicate the necessary time and effort to develop the curriculum. Additional challenges include: a fear that integrating the curriculum across disciplines may reduce the instruction of standards-based content; inability to ensure comparable implementation of the new curriculum throughout the school; and insuring that ELL needs are sufficiently addressed in the new curriculum, which may require additional language development resources.<sup>119</sup>

#### h.) Focusing on the culture and community of ELLs

In an effort to make content material instruction more relevant, understandable and engaging for ELL students, a school can design instructional programs based around aspects of their ELL students’ culture and community. Reforming curriculum in this manner displays a school and/or teacher’s respect for the cultures of their ELL students. Part of the reform strategy entails engaging community members and organizations in the instructional program. Building such relationships may increase a school’s access to the valuable resources potentially held by these entities. Drawing connections between a student’s home and their school creates an environment in which parents may want to become involved in their child’s education. Parent involvement is always beneficial for the schools as well as the education of the child.<sup>120</sup>

An effective curriculum with a community and culture focus requires research, parent and community outreach efforts, an open-mindedness of school staff towards cultural diversity, and professional development focused on the culture, history or primary language of the school’s ELL students. Schools also need materials pertaining to the cultures and communities addressed in the curriculum, time for staff collaboration to determine what and how cultural and community aspects should be integrated into instructional programs, and staff development days without students to design the curriculum.<sup>121</sup>

The creation of this type of curriculum may be a difficult process for a few reasons. Incorporating parent participation could be impeded because some parents might not feel comfortable becoming involved in their children’s education due to cultural customs. Some parents may be apprehensive of an education program that focuses on their native culture because they believe it would be more beneficial to focus on U.S. culture. Additionally, it may be challenging to develop this type of curriculum while still keeping it aligned to state standards. In order to insure efficacy of the program, it must be routinely evaluated, which may require the creation of additional assessments.<sup>122</sup>

#### i.) Administering appropriate assessments

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<sup>118</sup> Cuevas 1996, pg. 19

<sup>119</sup> Cuevas 1996

<sup>120</sup> Cuevas 1996, pg. 21-2

<sup>121</sup> Cuevas 1996, pg. 21-2

<sup>122</sup> Cuevas 1996, pg. 21-2

As mentioned before, standardized achievement tests hinder ELLs' ability to accurately demonstrate their level of content comprehension, due to difficulties in language comprehension. Various studies have evaluated the efficacy of different test accommodations, yet more extensive research must be done to come to any definitive conclusions about the most effective accommodations.

Previous studies have concluded the most effective accommodation in decreasing the performance gap of ELLs and non-ELLs was making linguistic modifications to the test language. Researchers have found that: "reducing the unnecessary linguistic complexity of test items helps improve the performance of ELL students without compromising the validity of the assessment (Abedi & Lord, 2001; Abedi, Lord, Hofstetter, & Baker, 2000; Kiplinger, Haug, & Abedi, 2000; Maihoff, 2002)"<sup>123</sup>. Studies of other accommodations have found that translating standardized tests into the primary language of an English learner did not improve achievement level when they had not received instruction of the tested content in their primary language. When English dictionaries were used as an accommodation, the results were disputed due to the potential advantage created by the access to content-related terms. The use of a glossary of non-content terms increased performance levels when ELL students were also given an extended amount of time. ELL proficiency levels also increased when accommodated with customized dictionaries which contained the definitions of non-content terms.

The study of ELLs' Opportunity to Learn (Abedi, Leon, Azzam, 2006) evaluated two types of test accommodations in math assessments: dual-language test versions and making linguistic modifications. They found the effects that linguistic modification had on performance levels were inconclusive due to validity factors: many of the math test questions contained little or not English language complexity, and when about a third of the questions were linguistically modified, both ELLs and non-ELLs benefited. The dual language test versions did not significantly improve ELLs' performance. It is important to continue researching effective ways to provide accommodations for ELLs in standardized testing. This will allow the tests to more accurately measure ELLs' content comprehension without having language comprehension act as a confounding variable.

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### 3.) School Structure

The structure of a school can be reformed to enhance a teacher's ability to provide instructional support for ELLs and to allow the implementation of effective instructional and curricular programs that focus on supporting ELLs. The following elements help a school better address the needs of their ELL students: a.) creating a school-wide focus on ELL achievement, b.) creating a school-wide focus on diversity, multiculturalism and acceptance, c.) implementing continual assessments of ELL achievement d.) organizing ELLs into separate groups based on their ELD level or primary language, e.) restructuring school time schedules, f.) forming small school communities, g.) and providing enriching summer school programs.

#### a.) Creating a school-wide focus on ELL achievement

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<sup>123</sup> Abedi 2006, pg. 12

<sup>124</sup> Abedi 2006

An accepted focus on ELL achievement throughout a school is crucial to the implementation of effective programs that will support their needs. Teacher and school administrators who responded to surveys conducted through the California Department of Education's study of the impact of Proposition 227 expressed that: "a set of common goals for EL [ELL] students' linguistic and academic success is one of the most essential elements characterizing schools where ELs [ELLs] perform well"<sup>125</sup>. In concurrence with the views expressed during interviews with Roosevelt Cluster administrators, the respondents to the surveys emphasized the importance of scheduling a block of time designated to English Language Development instruction. Setting this block at the same time for every class would allow the principal to ensure that ELD instruction was being practiced by simply visiting all classes during the designated period.

The respondents who believed in the importance of a school-wide focus on ELL achievement expressed that the focus should include "a set of core teaching strategies that are implemented by all staff across all grade levels or departments"<sup>126</sup>. Beneficial strategies would "reinforce language acquisition, encourage teamwork, and be structured so that students make connections with personal experience and prior knowledge"<sup>127</sup>. Another aspect of this focus includes "Shared expectations and priorities in regard to educating ELs [ELLs]"<sup>128</sup>. It is important that every teacher and principal have high expectations for their ELL students and provide them with academic challenges to allow to make advancements in achievement. This ideology is key to the success that Hollenbeck Middle School is experiencing with their ELL students' progress.

This type of focus should extend beyond the actual school sites up to the school district. Springboard Schools, a nonprofit, non-partisan organization that does research to help narrow the achievement gap, conducted a study of the role that the district played in high and low-performing CA school districts. They found that the districts which had the most success with their ELLs reported that "their district offices were active in supporting teacher training for teachers with ELL students, in ensuring principals know which students are English learners, in developing an intake system that meets the needs of ELL students, and in using assessment data to track these students"<sup>129</sup>. The Los Angeles Unified School District does not play such an active role: a common grief expressed by the Roosevelt Cluster administrators interviewed was a lack of support for ELL student instruction from LAUSD.

#### b.) Creating a school-wide focus on diversity, multiculturalism and acceptance

It is important that all aspects of a school community are devoted to creating an environment of acceptance and respect for diversity and multiculturalism. This is an important element to foster both inside and outside of the classrooms. There are different actions that schools can take to create a respectful atmosphere: "schools actively impart the value of diversity through mission and values statements; by creating a faculty that

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<sup>125</sup> Parrish 2006, pg IV-25/6

<sup>126</sup> Parrish 2006, pg IV-26

<sup>127</sup> Parrish 2006, pg IV-26

<sup>128</sup> Parrish 2006, pg IV-30

<sup>129</sup> "Minding the Gap: New Roles for School Districts in the Age of Accountability". Springboard Schools, 2006, pg 5

reflects the communities of the students; through activities that bring students together across differences; by being aware of how location on campus communicates who is on the margin and who is not; establishing clear, bottom-line, zero-tolerance policies about harassment, prejudiced remarks, and discrimination”<sup>130</sup>. The climate of a school community has a large impact on the success and growth of both staff members and students. When members of a school community feel accepted and respected, they are more likely to become dedicated participants in the achievement of the school as a whole.

c.) Implementing continual assessments of ELL achievement

Schools should incorporate routine assessments of their ELL students to monitor their progress and identify areas where more support is needed. Creating a continual system of assessments will ensure that struggling students do not fall behind and excelling students are not held back from advancement. Schools should use these assessments to make data-based decisions regarding instructional programs for ELL students to provide the most appropriate support. The responses to surveys conducted by the California Department of Education’s study of the impact of Proposition 227 found that “having an organized process in place for monitoring student outcomes to plan instruction was also among the most commonly cited elements facilitating their [school administrators who responded] EL [ELL] students’ academic achievement”<sup>131</sup>. This study also conducted interviews with principals who had created successful assessment systems. These principals identified five key elements for carrying out effective processes: 1. Create a system to monitor progress, 2. Establish a regular block of time for assessments, 3. Be sure the system is manageable, 4. Identify and focus on the areas in which students are struggling, and 5. Make assessments personal, have dialogues with students. Data from thorough assessments should also be used to determine the classes that ELLs should be placed into.<sup>132</sup>

d.) Organizing ELLs into separate groups based on their ELD level or primary language

As expressed by an administrator at a Roosevelt Cluster elementary school, having ELL students of different English proficiency levels in their classroom often presents a challenge to teachers. It becomes hard for teachers to designate specific activities that are appropriate for ELLs at each of their different ELD levels. This creates a situation where ELLs may not receive instruction that is adequate for their particular stage of language development.<sup>133</sup>

One way to address this issue is to organize ELLs into groups based on their primary language or their level of English proficiency. ELLs would receive core content instruction through these groups, which would either remain within the mainstream classroom or would form separate classes. This model allows English Language Development instruction and resources to be more narrowly focused on the specific language needs of ELLs, and it allows content instruction to be more comprehensible for ELLs.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> Olsen 2006, pg. 5

<sup>131</sup> Parrish 2006, pg IV-31

<sup>132</sup> Parrish 2006

<sup>133</sup> Interview with Evergreen Elementary School administrator, April 2007

<sup>134</sup> Cuevas 1996, pg 17

Ideally, the teachers instructing these separate groups would fully support and understand the program and have the appropriate credentials, professional development, and/or a proficiency in the ELLs' native language. It would be beneficial for the ELLs to receive primary language support in these separate groups, possibly in a bilingual setting. Providing some degree of language instruction in a student's primary language allows that student to maintain connections to this language. It also provides the student's parents, who may not be proficient in English, an opportunity to remain connected to their child's education. Bilingual education would have to be requested by the parents, as mandated under Proposition 227.<sup>135</sup>

In order for this type of program to be most effective for ELL student achievement, it must be accompanied by sufficient periods of integration with students in the mainstream program. As mentioned in the description of the cooperative learning instructional strategy, an ELL's interaction with native English speakers provides crucial opportunities for them to practice their English and learn from their peers.

LAUSD's Woodlawn Elementary School, located in Bell, CA, has this type of transitional bilingual program for their ELL students. Within each grade level, the students at Woodlawn who participate in the bilingual program are divided into groups based on their respective ELD level for their core content classes. They are integrated into mainstream classes for music, physical education, and art instruction. A former teacher at Woodlawn believed this program to be very effective for the ELL students. There was intense professional development for all of the instructors, which helped them become experts on instructing ELLs. The school had a goal for all of the ELLs who entered the school in Kindergarten, to transfer to the mainstream curriculum in third grade. By the third grade, the students who participated in the bilingual program were outscoring ELL students, and even some of the English only students, in the mainstream curriculum program.<sup>136</sup>

Another example of a school's implementation of this type of reform is Glassbrook Elementary in Hayward, CA. For language arts and reading instruction, this school grouped their students based on ELD level and primary language. Students were integrated into mainstream classes for the remaining subjects.<sup>137</sup>

#### e.) Restructuring school time schedules

Another structural reform strategy explained in "A view from the Bottom Up" involves reorganizing school schedules to create year-round schools, block scheduling, or staggered schedules. Year-round school schedules have specific benefits for ELL students: over long vacation periods such as summer break, ELLs who live in homes or communities where English is used infrequently are at risk for a loss in English proficiency. A year-round school would eliminate long periods of vacation time and thus reduce this risk. It is important to note that this form of year-round schedule differs from the multi-track year round schedule discussed above, in which students are actually in school for fewer days than required by the state, and where there are two long break periods in the school year. The form of year-round schedule currently being discussed is actually a positive structure for the development of ELL students.

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<sup>135</sup> Cuevas 1996, pg 17-18

<sup>136</sup> Interview with Utah Elementary School administrator, March 2007

<sup>137</sup> Cuevas 1996, pg 17

Block scheduling creates longer segments of class time for each subject. This allows teachers more time to interact individually with their ELL students and monitor their progress. Staggered scheduling divides up normal class time into sections where specified groups of students are assigned to come at different times. Having smaller groups of students for content instruction gives teachers the opportunity to pay more individualized attention to each student's needs, which is especially beneficial for ELLs.<sup>138</sup>

Such reforms require full support from the staff, parents and students. A school must be sure to obtain the approval of the teachers union regarding changes made to teachers' schedules. Nontraditional school schedules are likely encounter various familial scheduling conflicts, which makes it challenging to gain full support from the school community. A school may need to provide extra support for students who do not have child care during staggered scheduling when they would have been in class with the original schedule.<sup>139</sup>

An example of a school that reformed their schedule is the previously mentioned Glassbrook Elementary in Hayward, CA. They created a staggered schedule for reading where the first hour of the morning is designated as literacy instruction for ELLs without native English speakers present. At the end of the day, ELLs leave an hour early and native English speakers receive literacy instruction during this time. The school also created a two hour block period before the lunch break.<sup>140</sup>

Once at the school, a significant number of these students may have the additional responsibility of maintaining a job: "a recent study of U.S. Census statistics conducted by the Pew Hispanic Center highlighted the high rates of employment for secondary-school-aged Hispanic youth, many of whom were not attending school"<sup>141</sup>. While this finding does not specify between recent immigrants and U.S. born students, it presents a significant point that includes the student population at hand. In order to support these students, a school should create flexible schedules that allow students to attend both school and work. Such a schedule would provide opportunities to earn credits outside of the traditional school day and/or year, and may extend the number of years a student can matriculate/be enrolled to fulfill graduation requirements.

#### f.) Forming small school communities

Another structural reform strategy that large urban school district have begun to implement in Los Angeles, New York, and Boston is the formation of smaller schools within the larger school structure. This reform is a strategy to address issues of overcrowding that many of these districts' schools are facing. These separate school groups have an assigned team of teachers who remain with that group over an extended period of time. This reform is particularly beneficial for ELL students because they would be designated to a school group based on their level of language development, thus their specific needs could more directly be met. These students can build a closer relationship with the team of teachers, which will provide them with a greater sense of

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<sup>138</sup> Cuevas 1996, pg 23

<sup>139</sup> Cuevas 1996, pg 23-24

<sup>140</sup> Cuevas 1996, pg 23

<sup>141</sup> Spaulding 2004, pg. 13

individualized support. Schools can more efficiently allocate limited resources for ELL students by directing them into the appropriate school groups.<sup>142</sup>

The LAUSD Board of Education passed a decision in 2004 to transform 131 secondary school campuses into smaller schools composed of up to 500 students by the year 2009. Their initiative, called Small Learning Communities (SLCs) aimed to provide a more intimate setting at overcrowded schools. The implementation of this reform has been slow and absent of much guidance from the district. Roosevelt high became the first LAUSD high school to employ the SLC model. Some teachers, however, have expressed concern over the implementation of the reform. The administrator interviewed from Roosevelt High School expressed that the system of Small Learning Communities at Roosevelt High was ultimately ineffective.<sup>143</sup> Additionally, Maricela Ramirez who teaches at Roosevelt High's technology-themed community stated in an LA Times article in 2005, "We're stuck building a new program within an old bureaucracy,"<sup>144</sup>. In another LA Times article in 2005, Roosevelt English teacher Ron Kendrick, a member of the Performing arts community, expressed that the district has spent a lot of time on solidifying the structure. But, as stated by Tom Vander Ark, the executive director of education for the Gates Foundation, the district needs to also focus on reforming the instruction and curriculum.<sup>145</sup>

There is a difference in opinion regarding the effects SLCs have had at Roosevelt high school. According to the report written up by the district, the SLC's at Roosevelt High have "been beneficial and led to more collaboration between teachers"<sup>146</sup>.

Steve Barr, the director of Green Dot Charter Schools, feels that "In order for school reform to be successful, . . . the district must grant school sites more control over their budgets, have higher expectations for students, help teachers feel motivated and make parental involvement a premium". He feels the district's reform is just "creating smaller versions of what exist"<sup>147</sup>. The reform plan that he has developed for his charter schools includes a similar focus of creating "Small, safe, personalized schools"; however, this is just one of the six elements he believes are essential for effective schools.<sup>148</sup>

g.) Providing enriching summer school programs.

The report "Immigrant Students and Secondary School Reform: Compendium of Best Practices" identified that long breaks from school, such as summer vacation, put many ELLs at risk for a loss in achievement attained during the school year. The researchers referenced a meta-analysis conducted by Cooper et al. of studies that evaluated the effect summer break had on standardized achievement scores. The meta-analysis concluded that "on average, children's test scores were at least one month lower, as measured by grade-level equivalents, when they returned to school in the fall than

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<sup>142</sup> Cuevas 1996, pg. 15-16

<sup>143</sup> Interview with Roosevelt High School administrator, March 2007

<sup>144</sup> Rubin, Joel. "Some Lessons in Frustration; L.A.'s high schools struggle to divide crowded campuses into small learning centers. Critics cite a lack of district support" Los Angeles Times. Sep 25, 2005 pg B.1

<sup>145</sup> DiMassa, Cara Mia. "Schools' Dropout Remedy: Get Small; L.A. Unified aims to lift graduation rates by dividing campuses into more cohesive units" Los Angeles Times. Mar 26, 2005. pg B.1

<sup>146</sup> LAUSD Board of Education, Educational Equity Committee. "School Profile: Roosevelt High School". Educational Policy Unit. Draft 2007, pg 15

<sup>147</sup> Rubin 2005

<sup>148</sup> [www.greendot.org](http://www.greendot.org)

when students left in the spring”<sup>149</sup>. Such a loss has graver effects for ELLs, who experience more obstacles to attaining achievement than grade-level native English speakers. One way to address this issue, as described above, is through the creation of a year round school. Another way to mediate the loss is by developing enrichment summer school programs. Elements of a summer school program that is effective for ELLs include: preparation for the transition to high school and the transition to the mainstream curriculum, opportunities to fulfill graduation requirements, and increasing ELL's access to the core curriculum material. The coursework should be rigorous, engaging and aligned to the standards of the core curriculum. The program should be continually evaluated to ensure efficacy.<sup>150</sup>

It is important that the program have reliable funding so that it remains a permanent aspect of the school and can create lasting improvements. This can be ensured by including the program in the school's annual budget. The program must be affordable to all students through the offering of full or partial fee waivers. Various funding opportunities are available within Title I grants, 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers grants, Sage and Drug Free Schools grants, migrant education funds and support from private foundations.<sup>151</sup>

One of the areas identified for improvement in the Roosevelt Cluster schools, as later described in further detail, is the need for more rigorous and innovative summer school programs. Thus, the Roosevelt Cluster schools can reference this section when working towards developing an effective summer school program to benefit their ELL students in particular.

#### 4.) Parent Involvement

Parents constitute an integral part of a child's educational experience. Yet, due to linguistic and/or cultural barriers, the parents of English language learners are often hindered from becoming involved in their child's education. Schools must make additional efforts to appropriately extend their outreach to ELLs' parents. Schools can increase communication with ELL students' parents and encourage their participation in the school community through the following strategies: a.) ensuring that they are adequately informed b.) building their capacity to support their child's achievement, c.) collaborating with community organizations and d.) developing their capacity to advocate for their children's education.

##### a.) Ensuring parents are adequately informed

Schools can support the involvement of the parents of ELL students by providing them with linguistically and culturally appropriate information about the school system, alternative education program options, the reclassification process and criteria, standardized testing, graduation requirements, and higher education opportunities and requirements. Schools can enhance their abilities to communicate with the parents of ELL students by providing translators when needed, scheduling meetings after work

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<sup>149</sup> Spaulding 2004 pg. 52

<sup>150</sup> Spaulding 2004

<sup>151</sup> Spaulding 2004

hours and/or on the weekends, and increasing the availability of teachers and counselors to the parents.<sup>152</sup>

The study that evaluated of the impacts of Proposition 227 demonstrated that not all ELL parents are equally informed about their child's education and the instructional options available to them. This is a serious infringement on the rights of parents; schools must take active roles in ensuring that all parents have access to this information.

The process of informing parents about the different instructional programs offered may include educating parents about the benefits of primary language literacy. This could help clarify the misconception that development of the primary language or using the primary language in schools will hinder their child's English language development. As discovered in the previously discussed study on educational programs for ELL students, primary language development actually helps an ELL student attain high levels of long-term academic achievement.<sup>153</sup>

#### b.) Building their capacity to support their child's achievement

One of the things that often frustrates ELLs' parents is their inability to participate in the child's education or assist them with their academic work due to language barriers. A school can act as a vital resource for parents by providing them with opportunities to develop their linguistic and academic skills. Through the offering of English language development courses and adult education courses, schools not only help to develop parents' educational capacities, but get them involved in the school's environment as well.

It is important that such efforts made by schools are driven by the particular needs that parents themselves have identified. Programs that are focused on supporting parents must consider the specific characteristics of the parents being served, including their strengths and limitations. With this understanding, a school can provide the most effective support.<sup>154</sup>

#### c.) Collaborating with community organizations

Schools can partner with community organizations and social services to help the parents of ELL student's access services that would benefit themselves and their families. One such organization is the Boyle Heights Learning Collaborative (BHCL), a non-profit education reform organization based in the Boyle Heights community. This organization is a vital resource for the Roosevelt Cluster schools. They have an extensive outreach program to the parents of students in these schools to keep them informed and prepared to advocate for their child's education. They also provide a space for parents to organize and take action on issues that their students are facing in school. They provide specific support directed at the parents of ELL students, which they call "ELL Tools for Parents". This program consists of three workshops that are two hours long. The workshops inform parents about the reclassification process of ELL students, provides them with the opportunity to develop a "deeper understanding of how report cards and test scores are used in the reclassification process" by giving them "the opportunity to works hands-on

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<sup>152</sup> Spaulding 2004, pg. 39-42

<sup>153</sup> Wiltz, Sue Miller. "Bringing Parents on Board: Building Strong Home-School Connections with Immigrant Families". Teaching Immigrant and Second-Language Students: Strategies for Success Ed. Michael Sadowski. Cambridge: Harvard Education Press, 2004 95-106, pg 103

<sup>154</sup> Spaulding 2004, pg. 39-42

with the reclassification criteria”(bhlc.net), introduces them to the English Language Development Portfolios that are used to monitor the reclassification process of ELLs, and provides them with “strategies that can help children build English language skills at home”<sup>155</sup>.

Another community organization that is focused on providing support to the parents of English language learners is AVANCE. This non-profit organization was founded in 1973 “to prepare poor and primarily Latino kids for academic success by focusing on their earliest and most influential teachers—parents”<sup>156</sup>. They have established chapters throughout Texas and one in California. AVANCE provides educational programs for parents and promotes a partnership of student and parent education. They emphasize the importance of literacy and of parental involvement in a child’s learning process.<sup>157</sup>

d.) Developing their capacity to advocate for their children’s education

Schools can provide parents with opportunities to develop leadership skills, in order to become advocates for their child’s education. An example of such efforts can be seen in Los Angeles’ Green Dot Charter Schools. This organization has developed a Los Angeles Parent Union, which is a coalition of parents focused on bringing about positive reforms to LAUSD schools. They strive to organize parents throughout the city in order to achieve their goal of the “transformation of LAUSD within the next 10 years” using the reform model implemented in Green Dot schools.<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> [www.bhlc.net](http://www.bhlc.net)

<sup>156</sup> Wiltz 2004, pg. 95

<sup>157</sup> Wiltz 2004

<sup>158</sup> [www.greendot.org](http://www.greendot.org)

## Chapter V: The Roosevelt Cluster Case Study

The challenges that ELL students face in California's public schools, as well as the challenges schools face when trying to address their needs, can be observed in the Roosevelt Cluster in East Los Angeles. While there is a plethora of research on educational programs, effective instructional strategies, and plausible reform models that can help support the achievement of ELL students, each must be interpreted in accordance with the specific characteristics of school communities. In order to gain a better understanding of how this knowledge can be applied to the schools in the Roosevelt Cluster, it is important to identify the strengths and challenges within these schools from the perspectives of their instructors and administrators. Through interviews conducted with educators from five Roosevelt Cluster schools, various successes and barriers to effectively supporting ELLs were highlighted.

One of the effective measures taken by all three of the Roosevelt Cluster's elementary schools that were evaluated is the establishment of a scheduled block of time designated for English language development instruction. It is carried out daily at the same time throughout the entire school, and in two of the schools this occurs in the morning. As expressed by an administrator at Utah Elementary School, prior to their decision to schedule a set ELD block of instruction, it was left up to the teachers to allot time for English language development. Often, teachers were unaware of the importance of ELD instruction for ELL students, so they would leave it until the end of the day. Sometimes, while trying to cover all the other mandated instructional blocks, teachers would not get to it at all. This was exemplified in a study conducted three years ago by LAUSD's Language Acquisition Branch, which found that only 22% of teachers were instructing English language development in their classrooms, an extremely low percentage considering large proportion of ELL students in LAUSD<sup>159</sup>. Utah Elementary has identified ELD instruction as a priority for their school, given that 71% of their students are ELLs<sup>160</sup>; thus, they set the ELD instruction block early in the morning to ensure that teachers will carry it out.<sup>161</sup>

In addition to the creation of a scheduled period of time for English language development instruction, effective efforts have been carried out by schools to improve their teachers' abilities to instruct ELL students, such as hiring an ELD coach. A coach is an educator whose role in the school is to provide instructional support to teachers and principals regarding their specific topic of expertise. ELD coaches help staff members develop their capacity to effectively instruct English language development. They also facilitate collaboration among teachers to share effective strategies and to work together on addressing identified challenges.

Utah Elementary has been labeled a "Program Improvement" school for the past five years, due to low performance levels on state standardized tests. When assessing the areas which needed more attention, the school identified quality English language development instruction as a necessity for their improvement. Realizing the importance of addressing this issue, and the unlikelihood of receiving the necessary ELD aid from

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<sup>159</sup> Interview with LAUSD Language Acquisition Branch administrator, March 2007

<sup>160</sup> LAUSDnet <<http://notebook.lausd.net/schoolsearch/selectors.jsp>>

<sup>161</sup> Interview with Utah Elementary School administrator, March 2007

the district, they reallocated their school's categorical funds to hire an ELD coach. In the process of hiring an ELD coach, Utah had to give up other school staff positions, such as a full time nurse, but they knew it was a pressing priority. Every grade level meets with the coach once a month to plan lessons and evaluate the progress of their students. Teachers have found that the ELD coach is a crucial resource. The increased staff collaboration led by the coach has helped teachers develop stronger practices and the students benefit from receiving quality ELD instruction.<sup>162</sup>

The administrator expressed that Utah Elementary has identified ELD as a priority; yet, the district still needs to do the same. After realizing how significant a resource the ELD coach has been at Utah, she believes that the district should provide every school with an ELD coach. Additionally, the district should offer more training in ELD instruction so that every teacher can develop expertise.<sup>163</sup>

An administrator at Breed Street Elementary School agrees that the district should provide schools with more support geared towards ELL students. The English Language Development Practicum, which is being disseminated to LAUSD elementary schools, is a starting point for the district's efforts to address the needs of ELL students. This Practicum is helping teachers understand how to provide their ELL students with access to the core curriculum. However, the training sessions could be made more effective. Currently, one teacher from each school receives the ELD Practicum training. This teacher is in charge of disseminating information from the training to the rest of their school's staff. This creates a risk for loss of information during the dissemination process. Thus, the district should provide the training for more, if not all, of the teachers.<sup>164</sup>

Apart from this training, the district does not provide further support; it is left up to each school to provide assistance in the subject area of English language development. The Breed Street administrator believes that it would benefit the schools if the district provided more personnel support, such as an English language development coach, similar to the district providing a math and a literacy coach. LAUSD has placed a significant amount of focus on the English reading programs in schools and has provided teacher training to improve ELA instruction. The reality is that English language learners comprise the majority (56.7% in 2004-05)<sup>165</sup> of students in this particular local district (Local District 5) of LAUSD. Therefore, the Breed Street Elementary administrator believes that at least as much attention should be placed on supporting their student's ELD needs.<sup>166</sup>

Another issue identified by the Breed Street administrator was an inadequacy in the communication between the district and the principals. The district does administer principal meetings within the school clusters; however, these tend to be facilitated as a one-way discussion where the district speaks to the principals, but rarely gives the principals an opportunity to express their needs or concerns. This could be amended by

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<sup>162</sup> Interview with Utah Elementary School administrator, March 2007

<sup>163</sup> Interview with Utah Elementary School administrator, March 2007

<sup>164</sup> Interview with Breed Street Elementary School administrator, March 2007

<sup>165</sup> LAUSD Profile: Local District 5 Profile

<[http://www.lausd.k12.ca.us/District\\_5/data/LAUSD%20District%20%205%20Profile.pdf](http://www.lausd.k12.ca.us/District_5/data/LAUSD%20District%20%205%20Profile.pdf)>

<sup>166</sup> Interview with Breed Street Elementary School administrator, March 2007

designating a specific time and place for the principals to give input to the district regarding their needs.<sup>167</sup>

Evergreen Elementary School, one of the few schools in the Roosevelt Cluster that has a bilingual program, identified a lack of district support for their bilingual program. The materials that LAUSD provides for the bilingual program are insufficient, according to the administrator interviewed. The district is primarily focused on the English literacy program and they expend many efforts in support of this curriculum. Yet, there is not the same focus within the district regarding Spanish literacy. Most of the professional development provided by LAUSD for the math and English language arts curricula are designed for English instruction, which cannot be easily incorporated in the bilingual programs.<sup>168</sup>

A Roosevelt High School administrator identified a decline in support from the local district, which has hindered their ability to address the needs of ELL students. In the past, the local district office had provided teachers with trainings on English language development strategies and helped schools review ELL reclassification portfolios. Unfortunately, the office that used to supply this support has switched to paperwork and compliance duties; as a result, all of this support has virtually disappeared. The schools' bilingual coordinators are now the ones who provide instructional training and review the reclassification portfolios.<sup>169</sup>

In the past five years, Local District 5 has seen three different local superintendents, and Roosevelt High has had five different directors. When administrators come into office, they tend to introduce new instructional programs into the schools. This has caused the implementation of many reforms and program changes in the recent past, making it hard for teachers to become experts in the programs, and for effective program strategies to take root in the schools. According to the Roosevelt High administrator, the local district should support continuity of effective programs regardless of changes in the site administration.<sup>170</sup>

In addition to issues raised regarding a lack of support from the district, efforts must also focus on fostering support for the particular needs of ELL students among the school's staff members. One pressing issue identified by the Breed Street administrator is a lack of high expectations for ELL students among various teachers. In some cases, teachers make excuses for their ELL students, not recognizing their full capabilities. It is important to challenge ELLs to provide them the opportunity to attain higher levels of achievement. Exposure to rigorous coursework will allow ELLs to excel in their performance, exemplified by the success of the system used at Hollenbeck Middle School.<sup>171</sup>

In order to address this issue, teachers' mindsets must be developed to understand that ELL students can excel through challenging coursework. This can be carried out through professional development and providing instructors with demonstrations of how to give ELL students access to rigorous coursework. One strategy would be to take

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<sup>167</sup> Interview with Breed Street Elementary School administrator, March 2007

<sup>168</sup> Interview with Evergreen Elementary School administrator, April 2007

<sup>169</sup> Interview with Roosevelt High School administrator, March 2007

<sup>170</sup> Interview with Roosevelt High School administrator, March 2007

<sup>171</sup> Interview with Breed Street Elementary School administrator, March 2007

teachers to other schools where teachers are effectively teaching rigorous coursework to their ELLs.<sup>172</sup>

Another challenge identified by those interviewed is a lack of collaboration and support among the different schools in the Roosevelt Cluster. Hollenbeck Middle School strives to offer their ELLs the most rigorous courses possible, and they have seen great improvements since they began this effort three years ago. However, their program struggles with a lack of continuity at Roosevelt High School. Hollenbeck has redefined the placement criteria used to assign ELLs to classes. Compared to the general system used by the district, their method encompasses a more comprehensive view of a student's achievement level, rather than just looking at standardized test scores. In this way, they end up placing their students in more challenging course levels.<sup>173</sup>

Problems arise once Hollenbeck students move on to the high school because Roosevelt High uses the district's placement criteria. Consequently, students who were placed in core content classes at the middle school are often backtracked into the remedial ESL classes once they enroll at Roosevelt High. This is detrimental to a student's academic achievement as well as their motivation to succeed. The placements made at the high school are influenced by the need to prepare students for the exit exam (CAHSEE). At times, this entails having a student repeat ESL or enrolling in a two hour block of structured English language arts instruction to gain the necessary skills to succeed in the CAHSEE. In order to address this issue, more communication is needed among the secondary schools to facilitate better cooperation geared toward the success of all ELLs.<sup>174</sup>

The administrator at Roosevelt High School highlighted a particular problem with the reclassification process that many ELLs face. In order to reclassify as English proficient, students must attain at least a basic level on the California Standards Test (CST), pass the CELDT, and receive a grade C or better in their English class. Many ELLs who pass the CELDT do not get an appropriate score on the CST to allow them to reclassify. Every year they attempt to reclassify they must retake the CELDT, even if they have already passed it in previous years. At Roosevelt, for example, a few years ago close to 700 students passed the CELDT but only 100 were reclassified. The large majority of the 600 students who did not reclassify were unable to reach the required performance level on the CST.<sup>175</sup>

After having to retake this exam multiple times, students become discouraged about their reclassification process and they lose motivation to perform well on the exam. Thus, students should be exempt from having to retake the CELDT after passing it once. This type of reform would likely be carried out at the state level rather than the district level. The district can, once becoming aware that this is an important reform to implement, take actions to lobby the state to change this policy.<sup>176</sup>

The issues identified by the Roosevelt Cluster administrators provide insightful information which should be used to direct school improvements and/or changes. The elementary school administrators were positive about the effects of the district's efforts

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<sup>172</sup> Interview with Breed Street Elementary School administrator, March 2007

<sup>173</sup> Interview with Hollenbeck Middle School administrator, March 2007

<sup>174</sup> Interview with Hollenbeck Middle School administrator, March 2007

<sup>175</sup> Interview with Roosevelt High School administrator, March 2007

<sup>176</sup> Interview with Roosevelt High School administrator, March 2007

with the ELD Practicum trainings. Yet, there are ways in which the training could be improved. There was a general demand for the district to focus more attention on supporting ELL students, through providing more professional development for teachers, funding ELD coaches, and supplying appropriate materials. Within each school and across different schools there is a need to create a common focus on supporting ELLs. Teachers must become aware of the need to challenge ELLs in order to improve their achievement. Additionally, schools with effective programs must be able to collaborate with fellow schools to foster the continuity of their programs and to share beneficial strategies. Continuity of the instructional programs introduced in schools by the local district is also important. Finally, details within the reclassification process, such as the need to pass the CELDT with every attempt to reclassify, should be amended. Such information provided by the school administrators is vital; as mentioned before, the most effective school reform efforts are those based on the particular challenges and needs identified by individuals within the school community at hand.

## Chapter VI: Boyle Heights Learning Collaborative (BHLC)

The Boyle Heights Learning Collaborative is based in the Boyle Heights community in Los Angeles, housed on the campus of one of the Roosevelt Cluster's elementary schools. Their mission is to support the academic achievement of all students in the Boyle Heights area. The BHLC works towards this goal through several different channels: "Strengthening parent capacity, developing student leadership, operating across the Roosevelt School Family, and fostering a supportive civic environment"<sup>177</sup>. They provide a space for all the different members of the school community to take part in discussions regarding ways to improve their schools. They organize parents, students, teachers, principals, district administrators, and government officials to become active participants in implementing school reforms. The BHLC has been a critical force in the development of a collaborative community among the Roosevelt Cluster schools. They facilitate communication across school levels, raising awareness of the roles that elementary and secondary schools play in the lives of students, thus encouraging mutual support.

The BHLC recognizes that ELL students in the schools of the Roosevelt Cluster are challenged by a lack of support; the organization believes that addressing this inequity is a priority for their community. Thus, they are in the primary stages of a school reform campaign to implement changes that will improve the education provided to ELL students. They have identified many issues that should be addressed in order to achieve this goal, which fall under the following categories: 1.) instruction and curriculum, 2.) assessments, 3.) the reclassification process, and 4.) parent outreach. Some of the issues this organization raises concur with those expressed by the interviewed Roosevelt Cluster school administrators.

### 1.) Instruction and Curriculum

The district provides every school with an English language arts coach, to assist teachers in effectively instructing ELA to their students. The BHLC believes that the characteristics of the Roosevelt Cluster demonstrate the additional need for an English language development coach within each school. This position would help teachers develop effective strategies to address the needs of their ELL students and it would enhance their ability to make the core content instruction accessible to ELLs.

There are several curricular improvements that should be made to more adequately instruct ELL students. The writing component of the English language development curriculum should be enhanced. Apart from supporting an ELL's general writing comprehension, this will better prepare students for the CST (California Standards Test), in which writing skills are essential for success. This is an important issue because high performance on the CST is a key element in an ELL's reclassification process, and reclassification is crucial for an ELL's overall academic achievement. The writing component could be improved by incorporating the writing rubric of the California English Language Development Test (CELDT, the standardized English language development assessment) into classroom writing activities.<sup>178</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> [www.bhlc.net](http://www.bhlc.net)

<sup>178</sup> Boyle Heights Learning Collaborative. Policy Brief Draft. January 2007

An additional improvement to be made in the English language development curriculum includes providing more rigorous coursework in the secondary level sheltered ELD classes. These classes do not prepare ELL students for the core curriculum. This, in turn, puts ELLs at a great disadvantage because it decreases their access to graduation requirements as well as the eligibility requirements for enrollment in a four-year university (A-G requirements).<sup>179</sup>

Furthermore, the ELD curriculum should be integrated into the English language arts curriculum. Schools are required to carry out two and a half hours of English language arts instruction and at least a half an hour of ELD instruction. In order for this significant period of ELA instruction to be beneficial for ELL students, it is important that ELLs are able to comprehend the instruction. Integrating the two curricula will allow ELLs to develop both English language proficiency skills and English reading and writing skills. One way the state could achieve this is by designing an English reading program that is geared towards students with lower English proficiency levels.<sup>180</sup>

Curricular improvements should also be implemented in the summer school programs offered to ELL students. In many of the school sites, the summer program is not an effective intervention to improve the academic abilities of ELLs. The curriculum used during the summer program is the same curriculum used during the school year. Thus, the instruction becomes repetitive for the students, and likely decreases their motivation to try hard since they have already worked with the material. In order for summer school to be an effective intervention for ELL students, an innovative and rigorous curriculum must be developed for this program.<sup>181</sup>

## 2.) Assessments

The California English Language Development Test is the state's standardized assessment that annually measures English proficiency, as required by the federal No Child Left Behind Act. This test is a key factor in the reclassification process of ELLs, and also influences an ELL's course placement. There are several aspects of the administration of the CELDT that create disadvantageous circumstances for ELL students. The timing of the test, the delayed results, and the sole use of this test for ELL assessments are issues that demand attention.<sup>182</sup>

The CELDT is administered at the beginning of each school year. This creates a significant disadvantage for ELLs because, as previously discussed, long breaks from school put ELLs at risk for a loss in English proficiency. Taking their English proficiency assessment at the beginning of the year, after being out of school for a whole summer, will not measure an ELL's highest English language ability. Thus, the CELDT should be administered at the end of the year.<sup>183</sup>

An additional problem with the CELDT is the long period of time it takes for the results to be returned to schools. Test results that are six to eight months delayed no longer accurately portray a student's level of proficiency. The lack of an accurate CELDT score potentially puts ELLs at risk for delays in their reclassification process as well as

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<sup>179</sup> Boyle Heights Learning Collaborative. Policy Brief Draft. January 2007

<sup>180</sup> Boyle Heights Learning Collaborative. Policy Brief Draft. January 2007

<sup>181</sup> Boyle Heights Learning Collaborative. Policy Brief Draft. January 2007

<sup>182</sup> Boyle Heights Learning Collaborative. Policy Brief Draft. January 2007

<sup>183</sup> Boyle Heights Learning Collaborative. Policy Brief Draft. January 2007

misguided course placements. The BHLC suggests that LAUSD ask the state for a quicker process to score the test, such as the use of an electronic scanning system.<sup>184</sup>

The annual CELDT assessment should not be the only evaluation of ELL's English proficiency. Schools should implement periodic assessments to help teachers determine a student's ELD level and the areas where intervention is needed.<sup>185</sup>

### 3.) The Reclassification Process

It is imperative, for the long-term achievement of an ELL student, that they reclassify prior to entering middle school. An ELL student's prospects for fulfilling graduation requirements and accessing the A-G requirements decrease dramatically if they have to enroll in the ELD or ESL curriculum upon entering middle school. The Diagnosis and Placement Inventory (DPI) is the assessment used to determine the English course that an ELL will be placed in. This exam, the BHLC believes, does not accurately assess an ELL's true level of English proficiency, and should therefore be reevaluated.<sup>186</sup>

### 4.) Parent Outreach

As formerly described, parents play an important role in the academic achievement of students; therefore, they must be adequately informed about all aspects of their child's education. The BHLC has identified that outreach efforts to parents of ELL students regarding the instructional program options and the reclassification process must be improved. It would be most effective to have teachers inform the parents, as they tend to have the most direct and personal contact with them.<sup>187</sup>

The BHLC conducted a survey of the parents of fifth graders enrolled in eight of the Roosevelt Cluster schools. They found that 20.5% of the parents who responded did not know what instructional program (Structured English Immersion, Bilingual, Dual Language, or English Only) their child was enrolled in. This implies that a significant proportion of parents were not actively involved in deciding which program their child would be enrolled in, were not informed about the different options available to them, and/or were not actively participating in their child's education. This demonstrates the need for more outreach to parents to ensure they are aware of their child's educational process and that they are informed about the different instructional options available in schools.<sup>188</sup>

The survey also showed that about 12% of the parents responded that they had never been informed about the options of educational programs for their children, which is in violation of California's Education Code. This percentage provides more evidence of the infringement on parental rights that was previously identified in the study of the implementation of Proposition 227. These findings demonstrate an urgent need to improve outreach efforts to parents.<sup>189</sup>

As their "ELL Tools for Parents" program demonstrates, the BHLC believes that parents should become active participants in the reclassification process of their children.

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<sup>184</sup> Boyle Heights Learning Collaborative. Policy Brief Draft. January 2007

<sup>185</sup> Boyle Heights Learning Collaborative. Policy Brief Draft. January 2007

<sup>186</sup> Boyle Heights Learning Collaborative. Policy Brief Draft. January 2007

<sup>187</sup> Boyle Heights Learning Collaborative. Policy Brief Draft. January 2007

<sup>188</sup> Boyle Heights Learning Collaborative. BHLC/ELACC ELL Parent Survey Results, July 2006

<sup>189</sup> Boyle Heights Learning Collaborative. BHLC/ELACC ELL Parent Survey Results, July 2006

Every ELL has an ELD Portfolio which documents their progress in English proficiency. This portfolio is evaluated during the reclassification process. The BHLC suggests that parents should have access to these portfolios and should be trained in how to evaluate them. This would allow parents to become familiar with the portfolios and learn how to use them in order to advocate on behalf of their child's education.<sup>190</sup>

The BHLC will initiate their campaign by presenting their movement and reform goals to the community and school staff members. They want to ensure that they are addressing the issues deemed most important by members of the school and community. It is important that they do not simply ask for a resolution from the school board, but that they make specific demands that are the most effective, imperative, and feasible improvements that could be made. Along with their demands, they must include a strategic plan for implementing the reforms. This will clarify for the district the specific actions they need to take in order to obtain their desired outcomes.

One of the issues that their campaign may face is gaining support from the district, due to the fact that the reforms goals would only benefit a certain population of students. Whether it is among their goals or not, this issue may impede their ability to obtain full support for their campaign from the LAUSD community at large. It is possible that other communities that are also facing achievement gap issues may not support the campaign because the reforms would allocate more of the district's scarce funds towards improvements that they would not directly benefit from.

For this reason, they may need to keep their campaign on a more locally-based scale to increase the probability that changes will actually be made. Demanding changes in schools for the district as a whole may not be feasible, because it would require a lot more support and funding. This is positive in the sense that the reforms will be most effective for the Roosevelt Cluster since they were based on the specific needs identified in this school community. However, there are ELL students throughout the whole district who could greatly benefit from such reforms, but who would not be impacted by the improvements made for the Roosevelt Cluster. On the other hand, this reform campaign could possibly function as a model for other communities that are struggling with similar issues. In this way, the campaign could be contributing to systemic change.

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<sup>190</sup> Boyle Heights Learning Collaborative. Policy Brief Draft. January 2007

## Chapter VII: Recommendations

After reviewing the research conducted on effective strategies and reform models directed towards supporting the needs of English language learners, interpreting the challenges and successes expressed by administrators in the Roosevelt Cluster schools, evaluating the disadvantages created by policies that shape the environment in which ELLs are educated, the following recommendations have been identified.

### 1.) Implementation of an English Language Development Coach

The case study schools in the Roosevelt Cluster that have ELD coaches are experiencing great benefits from this extra support. This intervention was funded by the individual school's budget, which required the reallocation of funds used for other crucial elements within a school. At Utah Elementary School, this meant sacrificing their full-time school nurse. Yet, such actions were deemed necessary after recognizing that the support provided by an ELD coach was vital for the achievement of the school's students.

Schools with high percentages of ELL students should not have to use funds from their own school budgets to provide their students and teachers with the beneficial resource of an English language development coach. LAUSD acknowledges that coaches provide vital curricular and instructional support for schools, exemplified by their implementation of English language arts and math coaches in every school. The district needs to recognize the significant percentage of their student body that is comprised of English language learners and acknowledge that ELD is an individual discipline that requires specialized expertise. In doing so, the district should fund the position of an ELD coach within every school that has a significantly high percentage of ELL students.

A district administrator from LAUSD's Language Acquisition Branch expressed that providing a coach for every school site would require a tremendous amount of funding. According to this administrator, the district is already spending about 50 million dollars to provide every school with English language arts and math coaches. Hiring another coach would require a significant amount of additional funding. The district's proposal to alleviate the fiscal demands of a separate ELD coach for every school is to train the existing ELA and math coaches in English language development techniques. In this way, the coaches already in the schools would then be prepared to train teachers in how to deliver English literacy instruction and English math instruction in ways that make the material accessible to ELLs.<sup>191</sup>

This would be a beneficial way to develop the teachers' abilities to integrate English language development strategies into their core content instruction. This, as previously discussed, is an important instructional strategy that aids an ELL's academic comprehension. However, the district's proposal does not address the fact that English language acquisition is a complex process. Thus, the district must recognize that English language development requires particular knowledge and training, which should be accessible through the specialized position of an ELD coach.

### 2.) Provide professional development focused on the needs of ELLs

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<sup>191</sup> Interview with LAUSD Language Acquisition Branch administrator, March 2007

In response to the common challenge identified by all of the Roosevelt Cluster school educators that were interviewed, LAUSD should provide more professional development for educators regarding the specific instruction of ELLs. The district needs to recognize that supporting ELL student achievement is a priority due to the extremely high percentage of ELL students in LAUSD, their low performance levels, and their need for specialized support in addition to mainstream instructional support.

Along with offering this type of professional development, the district must focus on raising the awareness of both principals and teachers regarding the necessity of such professional development. The district must inform all educators that ELLs have needs that exceed those of native English speakers. This will facilitate an understanding among school staff members that professional development geared towards supporting ELL students is crucial. Principals must recognize the importance of sending their teachers to participate in the training, and teachers must recognize the importance of participating in the training and becoming fully committed to improving their ability to instruct ELLs.

The trainings provided by the district should be based on researched methods that have shown to be effective. They should also incorporate the expertise of teachers themselves who have developed instructional practices that are effective with ELL students. The district should facilitate collaboration among teachers to share knowledge and promote cooperative learning. The professional development should be focused on the specific needs and challenges of the particular schools for which it is provided. When teachers and principals are trained in techniques that are relevant to their specific schools, and can thus be easily applied to their practices, it is more likely that they will implement the knowledge obtained through the trainings.

### 3.) Parent access to information

It is vital that parents are fully informed about all of the educational program options available to their children. As identified in the evaluative study of the implementation of Proposition 227 and in the parent survey conducted by the Boyle Heights Learning Collaborative, schools are failing to inform all parents about their educational program options. Not only is this a violation of the law, but it hinders a parent's ability to make the most educated and beneficial decisions about their child's education.

Information about all of the available education programs (English only, Structured English Immersion, Bilingual and Dual language) must be adequately disseminated to all parents thorough appropriate outreach efforts. This may require additional measures to fully inform the parents of ELL students, such as proper translations and culturally appropriate material. Additionally, efforts should be made to clarify misconceptions among the parents of ELL students, regarding the use and development of primary language. Primary language development has been shown through research to benefit the long term academic achievement capabilities of ELLs, without jeopardizing their secondary language achievement.

### 4.) Develop appropriate assessments

The standardized assessments that are implemented in schools to comply with the No Child Left Behind Act must be reevaluated. It is inaccurate and unfair to evaluate the assessments of academic achievement, administered in English, of ELL students in

comparison to native English speakers. There are many factors, such as linguistic complexity, which hinder an ELL's true expression of their academic achievement. These factors are not acknowledged in such comparisons. Detrimental circumstances arise when schools use scores on such standardized assessments to determine course placements and ELL students' areas of need. A low assessment score can be misinterpreted as an indicated need for remedial content instruction, when it may be due to linguistic barriers; alternatively, a high score can be misinterpreted as an indicated need for advanced content instruction, when it is really due to high English proficiency or familiarity with the test.

Appropriate accommodations should be integrated into the assessment process to allow ELLs to demonstrate their true academic abilities without being hindered by a lack of English language proficiency. Further research needs to be conducted to determine the most effective accommodations for ELL students.

## **Conclusion**

Among English language learners, there is a significant disparity in academic achievement levels compared to English only students. This achievement gap is induced by the dual responsibility held by ELLs to both acquire English proficiency and learn academic content, as well as factors that cause ELLs to experience a lower quality of public education than their English only peers. As discussed earlier, ELL students constitute a significant percentage of the student body in California as a whole, an even larger percentage in LAUSD, and a still larger percentage in communities such as the Roosevelt Cluster in Boyle Heights. The low achievement levels and disadvantages faced by ELL students demand immediate attention. District administrators, principals and teachers must be charged with, and supported in improving the education provided to ELL students.

There is a wide variety of measures that can be taken to effectively support the specific needs of ELL students, which involve developing teachers' skills, improving instructional practices and curricular models, reforming school structures, and engaging parent involvement. When schools and/or community organizations explore measures to improve the education of ELLs, it is important that the potential reforms are evaluated within the context of the specific characteristics of the communities that will be affected. When implementing the reforms, it is important to obtain widespread support within the school community to ensure thorough implementation. Mechanisms must be established to continually assess the efficacy of the reforms. Reliable funding is needed to guarantee the permanence of improvements.

The Boyle Heights Learning Collaborative presents great potential for making vital improvements to the education provided to English language learners. Based on the concerns and needs of the Roosevelt Cluster community, they have identified education reform goals and are developing a campaign for their implementation. They plan to present these goals to the Roosevelt Cluster community members. This is an essential component which will ensure that their demands are focused on the issues regarded as most important, thereby solidifying the community's support for their campaign efforts. To realize these improvements, their goals and demands must remain specific and include defined implementation plans. In light of all the challenges that ELL students face in public schools, it is encouraging to see the steps taken by the BHLC to bring about positive change. Hopefully, their campaign will act as a mechanism to raise awareness of the issues ELLs face and inspire further actions to support ELL students.

## Glossary

-California High School Exit Exam: As of June 2006, all of California's public school students are required to pass this exam in order to graduate and receive a high school diploma.

-California Proposition 227: Passed in 1998 with 61% of the vote. It ultimately replaced California's bilingual education programs with an instructional program called Structured English Immersion (SEI), where English proficiency is developed through instruction in English.

-Content English as a Second Language Program: Develops English language proficiency while integrating aspects of content level material as a way to prepare students for mainstream classrooms. The primary focus is language development.

-Developmental Bilingual Program: A bilingual program in which an ELL's primary language plays a significant role in their instruction. Typically, this program continues throughout elementary school, after which a student may still receive a significant amount of instruction in their primary language.

-English Language Development (ELD): As defined in the study: "English Learners in CA Schools: Unequal resources, unequal outcomes": "It is 'systematic' instruction of English language that is designed to (1) promote the acquisition of English-listening, speaking and reading and writing skills—by students whose primary language is other than English, and (2) provide English language skills at a level that will enable equitable access to the core curriculum for English learners once they are presented with academic content"<sup>192</sup>.

-English Language Development Coach: A school staff member who helps teachers develop their capacity to effectively instruct English language development. They facilitate collaboration among teachers to share effective strategies and to work together on addressing identified challenges. This position is not funded by the Los Angeles Unified School District.

-English Language Learner (ELL)/ English Learner (EL)/ Limited English Proficient (LEP): A student identified through the initial assessment process as having insufficient academic English language skills to successfully participate in a mainstream English program. For the purpose of this study, English language learner (ELL) will be the term used to represent this student population.

-English only (EO): A student identified as monolingual English-speaking based on parent responses to the Home Language Survey.

-Fluent-English-Proficient (FEP): A student speaking a language other than English as

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<sup>192</sup> Gándara 2003, pg. 10

indicated on the Home Language Survey and identified through assessment processes as having sufficient academic English language skills to successfully participate in a mainstream English program. This group of students is divided into two subgroups:

-Initially Identified Fluent-English-Proficient (IFEP): A student initially identified as FEP at the time of enrollment.

- Reclassified Fluent-English-Proficient (RFEP): A student who acquired sufficient English in school and subsequently passed required assessments to reclassify as FEP.

-Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD): Located in Los Angeles County, California, it is the U.S.'s second largest school district. There are around 700,000 students who attend LAUSD's 1,724 schools; 41% of the students are ELLs.

-No Child Left Behind Act: Passed in 2002, it requires any state receiving federal funds to conduct annual academic assessments of their students. These assessments, at a minimum, address the subject areas of reading, English language arts, science and math.

-Structured/Sheltered English Immersion (SEI) or Specially Designed Academic Instruction in English (SDAIE): Instruction which is focused on providing ELLs with grade-level content material in a comprehensible manner.

-Transitional Bilingual Program: A bilingual program with the ultimate goal of integrating ELL students into the mainstream English curriculum. An ELL's primary language is used to support their acquisition of grade-level content, and decreases in use as a student gets closer to becoming mainstreamed.

-Two-way bilingual, Dual Language, or Bilingual Immersion Program: This bilingual program is focused on the acquisition of proficiency in a student's primary and secondary language. The program can begin with 90% of instruction in the primary language and 10% instruction in English, increasing English instruction throughout grade levels until it reaches 50%, or it can begin with 50-50 instruction in the two languages.

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