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## **EdSource Report Reveals How High-Performing Elementary Schools Succeed with English Learner Students**

*Similar English Learner Students, Different Results:  
Why Do Some Schools Do Better?*

**Identifies Four Key Practices Associated with Higher Student Performance**

Los Angeles, CA—A major new analysis of California elementary school performance data has identified four educational practices associated with higher performance among elementary English Learner (EL) students. According to the study released today at the Education Writers Association annual meeting in Los Angeles, schools that engage in all four practices have, on average, the highest academic achievement among English Learner students.

- ✓ **Using student assessment data extensively**  
Higher performing schools reported using a wide variety of assessment tools, including standardized tests. Principals at higher performing schools analyze assessment data personally, using results to improve teacher practice and to identify struggling students and develop strategies to address their academic needs.
- ✓ **Ensuring access to good teachers and instructional resources**  
Principals at higher performing schools reported that teachers had strong knowledge of the subjects they were teaching and a proven ability to raise student achievement. Principals and teachers at higher performing schools also reported easy access to classroom materials, including current textbooks.
- ✓ **Closely aligning the curriculum with state academic standards**  
Teachers at higher performing schools reported that classroom instruction and materials were closely aligned with state academic standards. Schools where the curriculum was aligned from grade-to-grade to ensure smooth transitions to the next year also tended to be higher performers.

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✓ **Setting measurable and ambitious goals for student achievement**

Schools where teachers and principals clearly articulated concrete, measurable goals for improving student achievement, including meeting or exceeding state and federal performance targets, tended to be higher performers.

The 237 elementary schools in the study sample differed by over 250 points on the English Learner Academic Performance Index scores although the schools served similar populations of low-income, Spanish speaking English Learner students. APIs are based upon student test scores on the California Standards Tests, which measure how well students are mastering grade level academic standards. EL-API scores report API results among English Learner students only. EL-API scores were released for the first time in 2006 and are based on state tests taken in the spring of 2005.

The California Department of Education (CDE) defines EL students as those who “have not developed listening, speaking, reading, and writing proficiencies in English sufficient for participation in the regular school program.” There are approximately 1.6 million EL students in California’s public schools (K-12) – one-third of the nation’s total. An estimated 85 percent of California’s EL students are Spanish-speakers, according to CDE.

The four practices associated with higher performance among EL students were the same practices associated with higher performance among all elementary students (both EL and non-EL), according to a previously released analysis, *Similar Students Different Results: Why Do Some Schools Do Better?*

“There’s a significant EL-API performance gap in California between schools that serve very similar low-income, Spanish speaking EL students. Our analysis provides strong direction about the school strategies that will reduce that gap the most. It’s important that the educational practices we’ve identified are also correlated with higher performance among non-EL students. This suggests that all students at a school will benefit from implementation of these four strategies,” said Trish Williams, Executive Director of EdSource and Project Director of the Research Team.

The study did not evaluate bilingual education programs, which have been sharply curtailed in California since the passage of Proposition 227 in 1998.

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“How to best educate English learners is one of those hot-button issues that always sparks intense debate and strong emotions. Unfortunately, those debates often distract educators from paying attention to actions that most strongly impact student achievement. This study doesn’t fall into that trap.” said Stanford University Professor Michael Kirst, who served as policy consultant to the research team.

The study also raised an important question about the training of teachers of English learners. It found that the presence of teachers at a school holding California’s specialized certification for English learner instruction (known as CLAD/BCLAD) was not associated with higher EL student achievement. Yet teachers with EL certification were more likely to be in classrooms with larger numbers of EL students, and they were more likely to want additional training on instructional strategies for EL students.

“Teachers aren’t getting everything they need through the certification process. They understand the challenge of working with EL students and they’re asking for more support,” said Stanford University Professor Kenji Hakuta, who served as Principal Investigator of the research team.

*Similar English Learner Students, Different Results: Why Do Some Schools Do Better?* is based on the first-ever release of California’s EL-API data and a survey of nearly 4,700 teachers and 237 principals in 137 California school districts, an extraordinarily robust sample that bolsters the study’s key findings. All schools surveyed had similarly challenged student populations, including large numbers of low-income students. Despite their similar student profiles, schools surveyed differed by as much as 250 points (out of a possible 1,000) on their EL-API scores.

Electronic copies of the study, “Similar English Learner Students, Different Results: Why Do Some Schools Do Better?” are available at [www.edsource.org](http://www.edsource.org).

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### **About EdSource**

*EdSource is an independent, impartial, not-for-profit organization whose sole mission is to clarify complex education issues and to promote thoughtful decisions about public school improvement. EdSource does not advocate or lobby and has developed a solid reputation since 1977 as a credible and respected source of information on California’s K-14 education policy and school reform issues.*

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