

RESOURCES FOR ENGLISH LEARNER EDUCATION

**Patricia Gándara, UCLA
Russell Rumberger, UCSB**

Policy Brief for

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**Contact: Patricia Gándara
gandara@gseis.ucla.edu or
310 267-48785; 310 267-5562**

NOTE: This brief is based on the deliberations from two all day meetings held with a group of professional educators, researchers, and policymakers held on August 27 and September 24, 2007 in Sacramento. We wish to acknowledge their contribution to these ideas. It proposes policy ideas in several areas that are consistent with the areas of critical resource needs outlined in our study commissioned for the GDTF project.¹

TEACHERS

There is little debate that highly qualified teachers are students' most critical resource and that EL students are the least likely to have qualified teachers –by any definition (whether with appropriate credentials, experience, or skills in teaching these students). There is no single greater resource need, and we make this argument in our Getting Down to Facts paper.

The dire teacher shortages and large numbers of under-prepared teachers of the recent past have abated. Currently only 18,000 of the state's teachers lack a preliminary teaching credential compared to four years ago when 42,000 of California's 307,000 teachers did not have this basic authorization. Nonetheless, poor and minority students continue to have a disproportionate share of these teachers and of novice teachers who are not yet as effective as those with more experience. Moreover, with the aging of the teacher workforce, veteran teachers are retiring in record numbers so that a return to teacher shortages could well be on the horizon (CFTL, 2006).

There is evidence that many teachers who have completed a full complement of teacher preparation courses (CSU Office of the Chancellor, 2003; CFTL, 2005) do not feel competent to teach EL students and even teachers with experience indicate feeling unprepared to meet the needs of English Learners (Gándara, Maxwell-Jolly and Driscoll, 2005). Studies of professional development (Pérez, et al., 2004) and teacher preparation show that there is not deep capacity to help teachers acquire these skills. Induction is supposed to provide the experience and support but too often there aren't teaching staff available to provide a good induction experience. There is a growing body of evidence that apprenticeship models may be effective means by which to bring teachers to a high skill level. But we need to learn (1) what is essential for teachers to know and be able to do; (2) how different EL students' needs differ; and (3) how to best provide these skills and knowledge to California's current and future teaching force. Centers of Excellence would be designed to help answer these questions. The centers would marshal existing resources from many partners with only minor additional support from the state to leverage the partnerships. They would bring practice and research together in one setting to both answer questions and apply the knowledge. And they would consolidate state resources where they can be more systematically disseminated.

(1) Centers for Excellence in Teaching and Learning for EL Students.

Centers of Excellence that serve as incubators for teacher preparation and professional development could be sited at several campuses across the state. Such sites could be established using the expertise and resources from UC, CSU, and private colleges and institutions combined with some clustering of federal Title III funds, state help, and assistance from foundations. The most knowledgeable faculty, experts, and researchers would be assigned as “in residence” for a period of time. Research on critical issues that can be applied to teaching, and teacher preparation would occur simultaneously with prospective teachers participating in preparation through an apprenticeship model. The Centers would have a role in (1) discovering new knowledge about effective EL practices, (2) preparing new EL teachers, and (3) developing skills for teaching ELs in existing teachers. Teachers might apprentice for 6 months working in an affiliate school and in the center alongside highly skilled mentors. The Centers’ would also train professional developers who would share the Center-developed knowledge with other teacher training institutions, districts, and schools.

The Centers would focus on English Learners but the knowledge base built would improve learning for all students. In developing these centers we would draw on the work previously done by others with regard to collaborations between universities and actual schools and districts such as the professional development schools (e.g., Lieberman, 1990; Darling-Hammond, 2006). Finally, the Centers could serve as sites for developing additional means for increasing the capacity of schools to meet the needs of English Learners. Examples include development of the advanced authorization for teachers of EL students and the enhanced bilingual teacher role discussed below and ways to develop a larger corps of teachers from the students’ communities.

These Centers could help fill the current gaps in research with regard to English Learner education. Some key questions to which we need answers are:

- When is the appropriate time is to reclassify students, and what are the appropriate criteria?;
- Is possible for EL students to meet standards in the same time frame that English speakers are expected to, and if not, what is the appropriate time frame?;
- What should the content of instruction for academic literacy in a range of subjects be and how should instruction be organized at the various grade levels?

(2) ELD/ESL Specialist Credential For Secondary Instruction

Currently in California there is a significant shortage of teachers at the secondary level who have skills in teaching English Learners. Moreover, teachers at this level say that they want more expertise in teaching these students (Gándara, Maxwell-Jolly & Driscoll, 2005). We will recommend the design and adoption of a single subject specialist certification for teachers in grades 7-12. The content of this certification would be established by a group of experts in the field with input from teachers and administrators statewide through an online survey.

Several other states New York, Maryland, North Carolina, Florida, Oklahoma and Arizona, offer English Language Development (ELD)/English as a Second Language (ESL) single subject credentials for high school teachers. In order to change credentialing policy, legislation is needed to add additional authorizations to change education code and for the Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CTC) to create the standards for this type of credential.

(3) Enhanced Role for Bilingual Teachers

Bilingual teachers are currently overburdened with duties outside of their own classrooms. Their specialized expertise in the instruction of English Learner (EL) students, their ability to

communicate with parents and students, and to informally assess EL students place them in high demand in schools regardless of the program being provided at the school. Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment (BTSA) struggles to provide appropriately trained mentors for induction of new teachers who will be teaching EL students, because there are so few teachers with the full range of skills to serve EL students. Bilingual teachers are critically needed in this capacity. Moreover, research shows that “the teacher next door” is often a more effective change agent than an educational consultant who is not as familiar with the school and its population. But all of these duties run the risk of burning out the bilingual teacher. The purpose of this recommendation is to acknowledge the advanced skills of these teachers, to allow them opportunities to support their colleagues without having to do so at cost to their own time, and to provide an enhanced role that would be both challenging and rewarding. This could reduce the turnover of these teachers and encourage more to join their ranks. We therefore recommend that:

- (1) Bilingual resource teacher positions be funded at attractive levels and that they be offered at every school with EL students.
- (2) The APEL (forgivable loan) awards to increased for credentialed bilingual teachers from \$11,000 to \$18,000—the level of awards for special education, math, and science teachers.

ASSESSMENT STRATEGIES

Valid and reliable assessment is another critical resource need of EL students. Although this is complex and expensive and will require time to develop truly valid and reliable instruments, some interim steps are more accessible. We can begin by reporting currently available student assessment information in a way that is easily accessible and allows policymakers to make decisions about how to best use it. The following proposals are low cost steps toward developing more accurate testing of ELs.

- (1) Reporting California English Language Development Test (CELDT) scores cross tabulated with the California Standards Test (CST) scores would allow policymakers and practitioners to evaluate to what extent CELDT is aligned with or predicts, CST performance. This information would help people to make better decisions about how to use these instruments.
- (2) Reporting reclassification criteria for each district on the web would make it is possible to track the performance and existence of EL and Reclassified Fluent English Proficient (R-FEP) students in districts and see the relationship between the criteria and student progress.
- (3) Initiating pilots of alternative measures, such as primary language tests, portfolios, and performance tests would start to develop the necessary foundation for the eventual introduction of such measures on a wider scale. The pilots would be funded by state and federal funds (possibly a clustering of Title III monies), or new No Child Left Behind (NCLB) funds as they become available.

CURRICULUM STRATEGIES

MATERIALS

While there is considerable debate in California about the specific curriculum needs of EL students, a significant body of research indicates that materials that are designed specifically for students who are learning English can enhance education effectiveness for English Learners (Bailey & Butler, 2003; Short et al, 2007). However, the majority of adopted programs are not based on research on English Learners and therefore do not address the specific needs of these students. Moreover, there is great diversity in the EL population (e.g., age at entry in California schools,

language background and first language skills and competencies, home language, socio-economic status) all of which affect in different ways their English and academic learning needs. Teachers and principals indicate that they need these materials in their schools (Pérez, et al, 2004) in order to have a full complement of tools to address the varied education needs of English Learners. This was strongly reiterated by administrators and experts at our meetings who work with numerous schools and districts around the state.

Currently there are very few commercially available materials designed for English Learners. This is largely because state policy provides funding overwhelmingly for adopted materials, so publishers have no financial incentive to develop other materials. Most of what does exist takes the form of add-ons to the currently adopted materials for English fluent students. Many experienced teachers of EL students report that these materials are not well-designed for the needs of their English Learners. A frequent comment from teachers in focus groups that we conducted as part of a larger teacher study (Gándara, Maxwell-Jolly & Driscoll, 2005) was that EL students are an “afterthought” in curricular packages and that these include a few pages in the teacher’s manual with very limited suggestions for use with EL students. Moreover, this curricular limitation with regard to English Learners has a “trickle down” effect on professional development since so much teacher staff development is based on and administered by the publishers of these packages.

We propose a zone of choice where schools and teachers, in conjunction with researchers and outside providers could target the development of materials and instructional strategies for specific students. The development of new materials could also take place in the centers of excellence described in (1) above. For example, they could target the most recent immigrants, those who are in the lowest achieving schools, or those who are proficient on the CELDT but can't move beyond this because they need academic language. Such materials would be developed and used on a pilot basis with careful evaluation of their usefulness and ability to boost student learning. One specific instance where such materials might be piloted is with regard to texts that focus on the needs of English Learners to attain academic vocabulary, genres, and usage. Some work on developing the appropriate content of such materials for ELs in science has already been done under the auspices of the California Department of Education and thus could be built upon. Moreover, the guidelines established by the state curriculum commission in 2006 include an option that calls for 60 minutes of ELD per day for English Learners. This option would clearly call for appropriate materials that might be developed specifically for schools that follow this recommendation.

Zones of Choice

Currently districts that get into Program Improvement (PI) status advised to implement the programs that they have not been successful with more rigorously. They are not given the option to re-consider these programs and try something that might be more effective with their students. It appears to that not many schools are coming off of PI status, suggesting that "doing the same thing only more" appears not to be working. Our proposal would give flexibility to schools whose EL students are not thriving, to try something else through an ideas we have called "choice zones". This approach would provide for some Program Improvement (PI) and underperforming schools to come to the state with a plan for improvement that allows flexibility and adopts curriculum that has been proven in other contexts. These schools would be required to develop a plan with an outside provider who is expert in the field for instructional improvement. Such a plan would have the additional requirement of including research-based practices for ELs, such as those being developed currently by the CDE or those encompassed in the National Literacy Panel recommendations. The PI program already has significant funding so this idea would not require new resources. Once these schools met existing PI requirements they would be free to choose how to address the needs of their students. These schools would have to have a comprehensive educational and evaluation plan

including a strategy for how they will partner with experts, and would have to show results based on carefully collected data to remain in operation. This has been done in other states. In fact, some of New York City's schools that have the greatest success with English Learners including International High School and Central Park East, grew out of a similar effort begun 23 years ago to address failing schools.

EDUCATION LEADERSHIP STRATEGIES

In our work and that of others, the importance of the role of administrators as instructional leaders for schools with English Learners is evident. However, many administrators lack the skills needed to provide support and guidance for teachers and programs for English Learners. The words of one teacher we interviewed in 2005 echoed the view of many of her colleagues,

You talk to your principal ... and there's an assumption that your administrator... understands about the whole picture of what a comprehensive EL program is, and this isn't always the case. And, I don't even know if it's on anybody's horizon at the state.

Without developing this capacity among administrators we are ignoring a very important means for improving EL education. In order to begin to address this, we propose the following ideas for building this capacity.

The first step must be to define what we believe to be the necessary skills and knowledge for administrators with regard to English Learner education. There are existing organizations that can be of great help in developing guidelines in this area. The California Latino Superintendents Association (CALSA), for example has an extensive administrator mentoring program and The California School Boards Association (CSBA) has a Latino school board member organization that has attends to these issues. These guidelines for necessary skills and knowledge would not only be for school administrators but for school board members and superintendents as well.

Initially we propose that the guidelines developed through this process be included in a voluntary authorization rather than a credential. Incentives that would attract applicants might be offered such as paying costs of professional development through a grant or other means and providing a small stipend. Once the skills and knowledge were established the actual training might be done through organizations such as the ones mentioned above. There are also existing programs that might serve as partial models and/or would provide guidance in the development of such certification. These include the PROMISE Initiative leadership strand, the California Tomorrow ELL secondary leadership program, and the work that West Ed has done on educational leadership through its Quality Teaching for English Learners program. Some County Offices of Education are also developing programs to support administrators of schools with large EL populations.

The choice zones discussed above could be part of this effort—exploring how to build administrator capacity as part of the overall school an district infrastructure necessary to supporting effective EL programs. Our previously discussed idea of Centers of Excellence would also explore this area. In fact, we envision that the apprenticeship model would also include principals. One idea is that there would be different phases of apprenticeship with leadership woven in later.

Finally, we need to find the ways to include some of these skills and knowledge in principal preservice and inservice, for those administrators who don't seek this extra certification. We recommend that the Principal Leadership programs being conducted in California adopt the content of the certification for all principals in training.

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¹See Gándara & Rumberger, *Resource needs for California's English Learners*, At: www.lmri.ucsb.edu/publication/jointpubs.php