

EDUCATION WEEK

SPOTLIGHT

On English-Language Learners in the Classroom

Editor's Note: One out of every five children now enrolled in American public schools speaks a language other than English at home. This Spotlight focuses on ways to meet English-Language Learners' needs, including teacher professional development, early detection of dropouts, and what the new common-core standards mean for ELL students.

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Educating Immigrant Students a Challenge for U.S. and Others



NICOLE FRUGÉ/EDUCATION WEEK

Some topics will be introduced earlier, some omitted, and students will have to show their understanding

By Nirvi Shah

One out of every five children now enrolled in a U.S. public school speaks a language other than English at home. Many of them were born in other countries. Some have had little or no formal education before coming to the United States, even among those who are the age of American middle or high school students.

By 2030, the proportion of students learning English as a second language in American public schools will be more like two out of every five students, although not all of them will have been born outside the country. Data from the U.S. Census show that as of 2009, 22.5 percent of all pub-

From left, 7th grader Ilya Monahov from Israel, 6th grader Maryam Ghalambor Dezfouli, from Iran, and 7th grader Mercedes Nyari, from Hungary, participate in an English-as-a-second-language support session at E.J. Sand Public School in Thornhill, Ontario.

lic school students are either foreign-born or have at least one foreign-born parent.

While some quintessential American policies are in place to enable these students to succeed, the U.S. hasn't yet mastered how to best teach children coming to school with an array of cultural and linguistic challenges endemic to a nation of great social diversity. And, at least in this respect, U.S. educators are far from alone.

"I don't think anybody has found the perfect answer," says Delia Pompa, a senior vice president for programs at the National Council of La Raza, the largest national Hispanic civil rights and advocacy organization in the United States. "I can't think of a country where, if we just did 'that,' we'd be perfect."

Teaching foreign-born students and students learning English is a complex task, further complicated by issues of race, culture, and ethnicity. Because defining these groups is difficult, measuring their performance and progress can also be a challenge.

One way of defining this challenge is to examine the academic performance of students in nations around the world who have at least one foreign-born parent, or who are non-natives themselves. A recent report from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, in Paris, "Overcoming Social Background," studied how well such students did in reading.

"Across OECD countries, first-generation students ... score, on average, 52 points below students without an immigrant background," the report noted. "Second-generation students outperform first-generation students by 18 score points in reading. These large gaps highlight the disadvantage of first-generation students."

Statistical Snapshot

The performance of U.S. immigrant students is difficult to classify.

On the 2009 OECD Program for International Student Assessment, or PISA, given to 15- and 16-year-olds in 65 countries, about 60 percent of first- and second-generation immigrant students in the United States scored at proficiency level three out of seven in reading. That's slightly better than the average for all OECD countries. (The participating countries make up 90 percent of the world economy, OECD says.)

Among countries classified as having an immigrant student population of between 15 percent and 30 percent, which is where the United States falls, students in Canada, New Zealand, Australia, and Switzerland do slightly better in reading on the PISA. In the United Kingdom, with a smaller percentage of immigrant students—between 5 percent and 15 percent—average reading scores are lower, as they are in Chile, Spain, Sweden, and Ireland, all of which have a smaller percentage of immigrant students.

Many countries with a similar proportion of nonnative students did worse than immigrants in America. Among Western European countries, for example, Germany had the largest gaps in performance between its native- and foreign-born students in all subjects.

"If you had to make a global judgment, the U.S. does



not show up as really any better than the Western European countries. Germany is the exception—Germany does really poorly," says Richard Alba of the City University of New York, where his teaching and research focus on international migration in the United States and Europe.

A quick analysis of the PISA data by Maki Park, a policy analyst at the Migration Policy Institute's National Center on Immigrant Integration Policy, shows that American immigrant children score behind Canada's foreign-born in reading and math, and behind those in the United Kingdom in some subjects. (Canada's foreign-born students consistently outperformed all other countries' foreign-born students in each subject by a significant margin, Park says.)

But what those results really mean as a road map for policy is unclear, says Margie McHugh, co-director of the institute.

"With the PISA data you're just getting this snapshot," says McHugh, whose organization is based in Washington. "You've got these other issues—first vs. second generation. You can't capture, then, how long have these kids been in the school system."

Immigration Policy

The performance of immigrant students varies from country to country not simply because of vast differences in education systems, but also because

Mahmuda Khatun, from Bangladesh, reads to her son Marzuq Rashid, 3, at the Parenting and Family Literacy Center in Crescent Town Public School in the Toronto school district. The center helps equip parents with the skills necessary to prepare their children for school.

of unique immigration policy and strategy. Upon close examination, even countries that seem similar to the United States in some respects appear to become incomparable as a result.

In a report outlining lessons from PISA for the United States, the OECD wrote extensively about Canada's success with immigrant students. The organization directly links the country's immigration policies to that success.

"The majority of immigrants who come to the country are selected to fill economic needs. This means that they are not seen as a threat or as competing for jobs, and increases the political support for their arrival," the report states.

A prior report from the OECD found that first-generation Canadian students had parents with as many or more years of education as native-born parents. In addition, Canada was one of only a few countries where immigrant students had access to the same or better school conditions than native-born students, such as lower student-teacher ratios, higher teacher morale, and better school infrastructure.

Is the United States' neighbor to the north, then, a source of ideas and inspiration for educating American immigrant students?

The OECD's Andreas Schleicher says yes.

"It's true, Canada has many immigrant children from relatively rich backgrounds. But you can also look at the immigrant children from poor backgrounds and [look at] comparable immigrant children between Canada and the United States. And if you do that, you'll actually see that immigration makes much less of a difference than it does in the United States," Schleicher says.

While German immigrant students' performance still lags behind that their U.S. peers, even that country's policies provide an example to follow, he adds. Germany's immigrant students' performance has improved over the last decade.

"In 2000, Germany's situation looked a lot worse than the United States. There were a lot of policy initiatives—greater emphasis on primary schools, establishment of universal early-childhood education," says Schleicher. "The question is: Does this always come down to culture? No, Germany didn't change its culture; it changed the way it dealt with immigrant students."

For example, the country has tried to better integrate immigrants, extending naturalized citizenship to many immigrants and emphasizing language education, notes a report from the Centre for Eastern Studies, based in Poland.

More broadly, there are other ways the U.S. education system can work more effectively with immigrant students, says Alba, of CUNY.

"Unlike a lot of European systems, kids start school here relatively late. Pre-K is not universal; we know that the children of some immigrant groups are less likely to be in preschool than some middle-class whites," he says.

In France, by contrast, pre-K is universal. "By the age of 3, and often by the age of 2, all kids are in educationally rich settings, playing with other kids, supervised by other adults, probably speaking French with these other kids," Alba says. Learning the native language is part of the foundation of their academic success.

Another factor may be the length of the school year, which tends to be shorter in the United States, says Alba. Students have been shown to lose ground over the summer, and it's often the students struggling the most in school, including non-native English-speakers, who lose the most ground.

Distinct Policies

Test scores aside, America's immigrant roots and history, along with modern policies, position its educational system to work with immigrant students in a way few other countries can. In the United States, the issue of educating immigrants often is synonymous with educating students learning English, which has drawn increasing federal attention and priority in recent years.

In 2000, then-President Bill Clinton signed an executive order that required the federal government to improve access for those with limited English skills to federal services and programs.

Then the 2002 No Child Left Behind law cemented the status of students learning English in the U.S. as a group of children whose performance must be tracked. The law requires schools, districts, and states to test these students in math and reading and report their scores on tests that are the same as their English-speaking classmates. These students must also take English-language proficiency exams every year, another requirement of NCLB.

Despite those policies, data on those students make for a truly alarming picture.

On the 2009 National Assessment of Educational Progress, in reading, just 6 percent of 4th graders learning English were proficient, along with 3 percent of 8th-grade English-learners. In math, 12 percent of students learning English were at or above proficiency, as were 5 percent of 8th graders.

While American educational policies, in theory, should position many students for success, the manifestation of those policies varies widely from school to school, district to district, and state to state. And whatever federal policies and laws may say, the federal

“If you had to make a global judgment, the U.S. does not show up as really any better than the Western European countries.”

RICHARD ALBA

Teacher and Researcher,
City University of New York

Education and Justice departments have investigated, and continue to look into, school districts that fail students learning English.

In October, for example, the Education Department unveiled the results of a 19-month investigation of the Los Angeles Unified School District, the nation's second-largest district. The 670,000-student district agreed to remedy disparities in the quality of education for students learning English through measures including a complete overhaul of its English-learning program. Only 5 percent of the scores of high school English-language learners registered as proficient in either English or math, the district's 2009-10 state exam scores show, compared to an overall district average of 37 percent proficient in English and 17 percent in math. Other department investigations in recent years have yielded settlements with the Philadelphia and Boston school districts.

Underlying all of that, says Pompa, of the National Council of La Raza, is the requirement that all children—regardless of their immigration status—be accepted into public schools. However, she says, "the implementation is another matter."

The hurdles in providing a quality education to students learning English exist at every facet of public school systems, from communicating and engaging parents, training teachers, and testing students, says McHugh of the Migration Policy Institute.

"It does seem to me when one looks at many of the [European Union] countries. ... they seem to think more about discrimination and cultural differences between [immigrant] students and their teachers, addressing prejudice and cultural bias," she says. "In the U.S. we have almost none of that. We focus mostly on the process of language acquisition."

"I think the ideal is having both."

Assistant Project Editor Sean Cavanagh contributed to this article.



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Mass. Requires ELL Training for Regular Teachers

By Lesli A. Maxwell

Under pressure from federal civil rights officials to improve schooling for English-language learners, education leaders in Massachusetts are forging ahead with major changes that will require intensive training for thousands of academic-content teachers with ELLs in their classrooms.

Massachusetts—more accustomed to being lauded for its student-achievement results than criticized—is overhauling its programs for the state’s growing population of English-learners. After a civil rights investigation last year, U.S. Department of Justice officials determined those programs to be inadequate.

The probe found that as many as 45,000 teachers in districts across the state had not received specialized training to effectively work with English-language learners.

At the heart of the state’s effort to better serve ELL students is a new mandate for teachers at all grade levels in the core areas of mathematics, English/language arts, social studies, and science to earn an “endorsement” in sheltered English immersion, by taking a three-credit course that has been developed by language-acquisition experts. The course is being tested with a small number of teachers in the Springfield district this summer and will be piloted in a handful of other districts in the fall.

The training also will be required for all prospective core-content teachers as a condition for licensing, starting in July 2016.

The goal is that by fall 2016, all English-learners will be assigned to classrooms with teachers who have had the training, said Mitchell D. Chester, the state commissioner of education. At the same time, administrators who supervise teachers with ELLs in their classrooms must also receive specialized training, he said.

“Short of a comprehensive approach, we are not going to be able to make the improvements that we need to really serve our ELL students,” Mr. Chester said. “Training teachers and administrators is just part of it.”

Massachusetts’ K-12 enrollment was just over 950,000 students in 2011-12. More than

7 percent were English-language learners, and their proportion grows each year, Mr. Chester said. Federal scrutiny of the state’s record with English-learners has been ongoing since 2009, when the Justice Department investigated ELL programs in Boston and two other districts and found widespread deficiencies.

Growing Population

Sheltered English immersion, which involves strategies and methods for teaching English to students at the same time they are learning academic content, has been Massachusetts’ main instructional approach to teaching English-learners since a voter-approved initiative a decade ago all but banned bilingual education programs in public schools.

Other major pieces of the improvement plan include scrapping the state’s current standards for English-language development and tests used to judge students’ levels of English-language proficiency. Now, Massachusetts will use the English-language-development standards and assessments of proficiency devised by the World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment, or WIDA, consortium. Twenty-seven other states also use WIDA standards and assessments.

Ongoing coaching of teachers in using sheltered English instruction is also part of the effort and will be offered through a half-dozen district assistance centers around the state, Mr. Chester said.

The state school board gave the overall improvement plan a final stamp of approval in late June. Mr. Chester said that the Justice Department has not yet signed off on it. Department officials have been reviewing the state’s revised regulations for teacher training and will continue to monitor whether the new training course will be adequate and reach large numbers of teachers within a reasonable time frame, a Justice Department spokesman said.

The scope of changes involved, especially the four-year timeline for training as many as 25,000 current teachers, has raised con-

Improvement Plan

Massachusetts education officials have agreed to a multifaceted plan to improve achievement for the state’s English-language learners, prompted by a U.S. Department of Justice investigation that found that tens of thousands of teachers had not been trained adequately to work with English-learners. Highlights include:

- Required training in “sheltered English immersion” instructional approaches and strategies for core-content teachers who work with English-learners;
- Adoption of English-language-development standards and assessments from the World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment consortium, made up of 28 states;
- Required training in sheltered English immersion for administrators who supervise core-content teachers working with ELLs;
- Professional learning communities and continued coaching on sheltered English immersion for teachers who have received the SEI training; and
- Setting goals in the state’s new teacher-evaluation system for English-learners’ growth.

SOURCE: Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

cerns about the state agency’s ability to both meet the deadline and provide training substantive enough to change practice.

Too Much, Too Soon?

“There is no question that many, many of our teachers need this training because they have English-learners in their classrooms but they’ve never been trained on how to educate them unless they are a specialist,” said Paul Toner, the president of the Massachusetts Teachers Association, an affiliate of the National Education Association. “But getting to

7,500 teachers each year over the next four years is extremely ambitious.”

For now, plans call for the course to be taught in districts by teachers trained by the state education agency. Teachers working in districts with high percentages of English-learners and low performance will be trained first.

Mr. Toner, a high school social studies teacher who taught in a school where half the students are English-learners, said he would want the training if he were still in the classroom. But teachers already face time demands in meeting other professional-development requirements for relicensing every five years. He also said many teachers should be given an option of testing out of the endorsement course.

The overhaul is also coming at the same time that the state is preparing teachers for the common-core standards in English/language arts and mathematics, and as it implements a new teacher-evaluation system.

Training Highlights

Lilia I. Bartolome, a professor of applied linguistics at the University of Massachusetts Boston, has partnered with Diane Staehr Fenner, an independent consultant who is a former English-as-a-second-language teacher in the Fairfax County, Va., school system, to create the training course.

It is broken into three sections: The first focuses on getting teachers to understand and embrace their responsibility for teaching language to ELLs, the second centers on understanding how language is acquired, and the third describes the instructional strategies and practices that make up sheltered English immersion, the course developers said.

“When you don’t know another language or haven’t had the experience of learning another language, it’s difficult to imagine the challenges that students experience as they acquire English,” Ms. Bartolome said.

The course will also include training on the diversity of English-learners, who can range from U.S.-born students with conversational English that belie their struggles with formal, academic discourse, to immigrant students with low literacy skills in their native language, Ms. Bartolome said.

Roger L. Rice, a civil rights lawyer and a tough critic of the Massachusetts’ programs for English-learners, said he thinks the training for teachers must go beyond core-content teachers.

“What about the shop teacher?” said Mr. Rice, the executive director of the group Multicultural Education, Training, and Advocacy, based in Somerville, Mass. “The fact is, all teachers have English-learners in their classrooms, and need to know how to most effectively teach them.”

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‘Dual’ Classes See Growth in Popularity

By Lesli A. Maxwell
San Jose, Calif.

In a preschool class at Gardner Academy, a public elementary school near downtown San Jose, teacher Rosemary Zavala sketched a tree as she fired off questions about what plants need to grow. “¿Qué necesitan las plantas?” she asked her 4-year-old charges in Spanish.

“Las flores toman agua” was the exuberant answer from one girl, who said that flowers drink water. A boy answered in English: “I saw a tree in my yard.”

The next day, Ms. Zavala’s questions about plants would continue—but in English.

This classroom, with its steady stream of lively, vocabulary-laden conversations in Spanish and in English, is what many educators and advocates hope represents the future of language instruction in the United States for both English-language learners and native English-speakers.

The numbers of dual-language-immersion programs like this one have been steadily growing in public schools over the past decade or so, rising to more than 2,000 in 2011-12, according to estimates from national experts.

That growth has come even as the numbers of transitional-bilingual-education programs shrank in the aftermath of heated, politically charged ballot initiatives pushing English immersion in states like Arizona, Massachusetts, and here in California.

Experts say the interest in dual-language programs now is driven by an increased demand for bilingual and biliterate workers and by educators who see positive impacts on academic achievement for both English-learners and students already fluent in English.

In California—home to more than 1 million ELL students and some of the fiercest battles over bilingual education—the earlier controversies are showing signs of ebbing.

While the state’s Proposition 227 ballot initiative, approved by voters in 1998,

pushed districts to replace many bilingual education programs with English-immersion for English-learners, the state is now taking steps to encourage bilingualism for all students: Graduating seniors can earn a “seal of biliteracy” on their high school transcripts and diplomas, which signifies they have reached fluency in English and a second language. Last year, 6,000 graduates in the state earned the seal.

“The momentum behind these programs is really amazing,” said Virginia P. Collier, a professor emeritus of education at George Mason University, in Virginia, who has studied dual-language programs extensively.

“And we are not talking about a remedial, separate program for English-learners or foreign-language programs just for students with picky parents,” she said. “These are now mainstream programs where we’re seeing a lot of integration of native speakers of the second language with students who are native English-speakers.”

‘An Asset’

Part of the 33,000-student San Jose Unified School District, Gardner Academy offers a two-way immersion program, in which native speakers of English and native speakers of Spanish learn both languages in the same classroom. Generally, to be considered a two-way program, at least one-third of the students must be native speakers of the second language.

Many of Ms. Zavala’s 4-year-olds will continue to receive at least half their instruction in Spanish as they move into kindergarten, 1st grade, and beyond. The goal is to establish strong literacy skills in English and Spanish in the early grades, and to produce fully bilingual, biliterate students by the end of elementary school. Because of the state’s Proposition 227 law, parents must “opt” for their children to enroll in the two-way program.

In one-way immersion, another form of dual-language learning, either native English-speakers or native speakers of the second language make up all or most of the

students enrolled and instruction takes place in two languages.

The number of one-way and two-way programs is roughly equal, according to Leonides Gómez, an education professor at the University of Texas-Pan American in Edinburg, Texas, who developed a two-way-immersion model that is widely used in the state's public schools.

There are variations in how dual-language programs work, but all of them share a few hallmark features.

At least half the instructional time is spent in the second language, although in the early grades, it may take up as much as 90 percent. There must also be distinct separation of the two languages, unlike in transitional bilingual education, in which teachers and students alike mix their use of both languages.

Spanish is by far the most prevalent second language taught in dual programs, followed by Mandarin Chinese and French, according to national language experts.

For English-language learners, the dual-immersion experience is dramatically different from that in most other bilingual education programs, in which teachers use the native language to help teach English with the goal of moving students into regular classes as quickly as possible, said Mr. Gómez, who serves on the board of the National Association for Bilingual Education, or NABE.

"The goal isn't to run away from one language or another, but to really educate the child in both and to use the native language as a resource and an asset," said Mr. Gómez. "Content is content, and skills are skills. When you learn both in two or more languages, it moves you to a different level of comprehension, capacity, and brain elasticity."

Role of Motivation

Research examining the effects of dual-language programs has shown some promising results for years, although there is not consensus that it's the best method for teaching English-language learners. One problem with discerning the effect of dual-language methods is determining how much self-selection is a factor. All such programs are programs of choice, with students and their families having the motivation to opt for the dual-language route.

Another factor is the great variability among dual-language programs.

"I think many of the new programs aren't able to achieve the ideal conditions for them to truly work, especially for English-learners," said Don Soifer, the executive vice president of the Lexington Institute, a think tank in Arlington, Va., that generally supports English immersion for the teaching of English-learners.

For starters, Mr. Soifer said, finding teach-

ers is a major challenge because they need strong skills in two languages, as well as subject-matter competence. He said it's also necessary for two-way programs to have an even balance of native English-speakers, a feature that he says is difficult to achieve in some districts.

Still, several studies in recent years have demonstrated that ELL students and other frequently low-performing groups, such as African-American students, do well in dual-language programs.

Ms. Collier and her research partner, Wayne P. Thomas, found in a 2002 study that ELLs in dual-language programs were able to close the achievement gap with their native English-speaking peers, and that the programs achieved important intangible goals, such as increased parental involvement. The study examined 20 years of data on ELLs in 15 states who were enrolled in dual-language, transitional-bilingual-education, and English-only programs.

Ms. Collier and Mr. Thomas are also conducting an ongoing study of students in two-way dual-language programs, most of them in Spanish and English, in North Carolina. The researchers have found so far that gaps in reading and math achievement between English-learners enrolled in dual-language classes and their white peers who are native English-speakers are smaller than gaps between ELLs who are not in such classes and white students.

The data are also showing that English-speaking African-American students who are in dual-language programs are outscoring black peers who are in non-dual classrooms, Ms. Collier said.

Leading the Nation

Texas has more dual-language immersion programs than any other state—with between 700 and 800 of them in schools—including some of the most mature, according to several experts.

One district in the state's Rio Grande Valley along the Mexican border—the Pharr-San Juan-Alamo Independent School District—is likely to become the nation's first to have dual-language programs in all its schools, including middle and high school, Mr. Gómez said. In June, the fourth cohort of students who have been in dual language since kindergarten will graduate from the district's four high schools.

In Utah, a statewide dual-language-immersion initiative funded through the legislature—the first such broad-scale effort in the United States, according to experts—is now in its third year, said Gregg Roberts, a specialist in world languages and dual-language immersion for the state office of education.

By next fall, public elementary schools

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LAURIE OLSEN

Director, Sobrato Early Academic Literacy Program

across Utah will offer 80 programs under the state initiative, with roughly 15,000 students enrolled in Spanish, Mandarin, French, and Portuguese. The goal is to have 30,000 students enrolled in 100 programs by 2014, Mr. Roberts said.

"Utah is a small state and, for our future economic development and the national security of our country, we have to educate students who are multilingual," he said. "There is broad agreement in our state about that. It's not a red or a blue issue here."

Many of Utah's programs so far are two-way Spanish-English immersion, drawing on the state's growing Latino immigrant community, said Myriam Met, an expert on immersion programs who is working closely with Utah officials on the initiative.

But the most in-demand programs in Utah are Mandarin. Ms. Met said there were fewer than 10 Chinese immersion programs in the nation in 2000. The current estimate stands at 75 Chinese programs, and by next fall, roughly a quarter of those will be in Utah, she said.

Some of the nation's oldest Chinese programs are offered in the 56,000-student San Francisco public schools.

Most students start in one of the city's five elementary schools, where they split instructional time between English and Cantonese or English and Mandarin. Eventually, many end up at Abraham Lincoln High School, where a mix of native Chinese-speakers and students

who have been in the immersion program since the early grades take advanced Chinese-language courses, in addition to at least two content-area courses each year in Cantonese.

Amber Sevilla, a 14-year-old freshman in the Chinese-immersion program at Lincoln, is fluent in English, Cantonese, and Mandarin. She has been in Chinese immersion since kindergarten and learned some Chinese at home from her grandmother. Through middle school, nearly all her instruction was conducted in Chinese, including math. Currently, she is taking health education and college and career education in Chinese.

"I'm excited that I can count on being bilingual and biliterate as I go to college, and I know it's going to be an advantage for me even though I don't know yet what I want to do for my career," said Ms. Sevilla. "It's hard work, but it's worth it."

Like nearly all her classmates in the immersion program, Ms. Sevilla is on track to earn California's new state seal of biliteracy.

Cognitive Benefits

Rosa Molina, the executive director of Two-Way CABE, an advocacy group for dual-language programs that is an affiliate of the California Association for Bilingual Education, said students like Ms. Sevilla benefit in multiple ways.

"They preserve their primary language or their heritage language, they develop a broader worldview that they take into college and the work world, and they gain huge advantages in their cognitive development that translates into flexibility in their thinking and the ability to successfully tackle really rigorous coursework," Ms. Molina said.

Advocates for English-learners emphasize the importance of expanding programs that are truly two-way and fully accessible to ELLs. Laurie Olsen, a national expert on English-learners who designed the instructional model in use at the Gardner Academy in San Jose, cautions against allowing programs to become dominated by middle- and upper-income students whose parents want them to learn a second language. If that happens, she said, one of the most promising approaches to closing the achievement gap between English-learners and fluent English-speakers will be squandered.

"We know that English-learners who develop proficiency in their home language do better in English and in accessing academic content," she said. "Yet we still live in a world where the belief is wide that English should be enough."

Coverage of "deeper learning" that will prepare students with the skills and knowledge needed to succeed in a rapidly changing world is supported in part by a grant from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, at www.hewlett.org.

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ELL 'Shadowing' Shows Promise

Having teachers experience "a day in the life of an English-language learner" can reveal gaps in academic-language exposure.

By Liana Heitin

It's a professional development tool that stems from the concept of taking a walk in someone else's—in this case a student's—shoes. And in one California school, it has reportedly helped close the achievement gap for English-language learners.

The technique, which second-language acquisition expert Ivannia Soto began using in 2003, is called ELL shadowing. A teacher or administrator follows an English-language learner to several classes. Neither the student nor his or her teachers know the real reason the observer in the back of the room is there, which is to look specifically at the student's use of academic language. The observer takes notes at five-minute intervals on the student's actions regarding listening and speaking. Soto, an associate professor of education at Whittier College in California, claims the process is "enlightening."

What educators tend to notice first and foremost is that many ELLs sit silently through their classes. These students are given very few opportunities to develop their academic oral language—broadly defined as the language of textbooks and testing, though Soto uses it to refer to proper "vocabulary, grammar, syntax, and register." In fact, English-language learners spend less than 2 percent of the school day improving their academic oral language, she says, even though it's a critical foundation of literacy.

Overall, Soto adds, ELLs are missing out in one of two ways: "We've either dummed down the curriculum so it's too easy and students stay at the basic levels of social language, or we keep the rigor but

don't provide appropriate scaffolding so students can access the content."

Creating 'Urgency,' Raising Scores

Rudy Gonzalez, the principal at Morrison Elementary School in Norwalk, Calif., began working with Soto to implement ELL shadowing three years ago. Though his school, where 85 percent of students receive free or reduced-price lunch, was already considered high-achieving, he was concerned about a lingering achievement gap between ELLs and English-only students. And while English-language learners—who make up nearly half the student population—were doing well on grade-level academic standards, they were not doing as well with language proficiency.

The shadowing protocol clarified that teachers weren't using enough academic language in their classes. "We were concerned about giving kids access to the core curriculum versus giving them access through knowing academic language," Gonzalez says. "That was our downfall as a school. That's where the achievement gap exists."

The teachers, who had been effective by many measures, were receptive to the focus on academic language after participating in the shadowing. "It was so eye-opening that kids weren't talking and didn't have confidence," Gonzalez says. "The way we structured classes, we weren't allowing for the give and take with students."

The "day in the life of an English-language learner" experience often creates a sense of urgency about helping these students improve their academic language skills, according to Soto, whose book *ELL*

Shadowing as a Catalyst for Change will be released by Corwin in February 2012. "Shadowing isn't about pointing fingers at anybody. ... It's about being reflective and seeing this as a systemic issue."

Soto trains teachers in three concrete instructional strategies that foster academic oral language development. Think/pair/share, reciprocal teaching, and the Frayer model of using pictures and context to teach vocabulary all encourage students to converse with and learn from each other.

Some might contend these strategies are simply best practices that can help all learners. But Gonzalez explains that the consequences of not using them are particularly "devastating for a second-language learner." While English-only students have opportunities to practice English-language skills at home and on the playground, for many ELLs, "this is it. If they're not getting it in school, they aren't going to get it." Soto acknowledges that the strategies are not new, but says the difference is in using them systemically and "being intentional" about integrating them.

Gonzalez says that once his teachers at Morrison began focusing on language development, benchmark test scores went up right away. Increases on state tests followed. California sets a target score for schools of 800 on its Academic Performance Index, the statewide accountability system. For the 2008-2009 school year, Morrison's overall API was 818, while the score for the ELL population alone was 791. For 2010-2011, the overall score was 856, and the ELL score was 850. "That's phenomenal growth in two years," says Gonzalez. In addition, the discrepancy between ELLs and the general population is down to six points, he emphasizes. "We've closed the gap."

Published June 6, 2012, in Education Week

Study Finds Grades Give 'Early Warning' on ELL Dropouts

By Lesli A. Maxwell

How well English-language learners perform in their 9th grade courses in Chicago's public high schools is a much stronger predictor of their graduation prospects than their language proficiency, regardless of students' race or ethnicity, or the length of time they have been receiving language instruction, according to a new study.

Specifically, English-learners' absence rates and course failures in their freshman year, along with grade-point average and the number of credits they've earned—the so-called "early warning" signs used to identify students most at risk of dropping out of school—are more predictive of their later high school graduation than their level of proficiency in English or whether they have experienced interruptions in their schooling. Overall, the study found the early-warning indicators to be as predictive of graduation for English-learners as they were for students who have never been ELLs.

The findings are part of a new report released last week by the University of Chicago's Consortium on Chicago School Research and the National High School Center at the Washington-based American Institutes of Research.

"This really opens the door to let schools know that they can use these same early-warning indicators to identify English-language learners who are not on track to graduate," said Julia Gwynne, one of the report's co-authors. "I think it's often people's intuition that indicators that are more specific to English-learners, such as proficiency, might be more useful."

Researchers at the Chicago research consortium, along with Robert Balfanz of the Everyone Graduates Center at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, were among the first to identify early-warning indicators, which are being used by a growing number of states to flag students who are not "on track" to gradu-

“ This really opens the door to let schools know that they can use these same early-warning indicators to identify English-language learners who are not on track to graduate.”

JULIA GWYNNE

Senior Research Analyst, The University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research

ate from high school.

In the new study, grade-point average was found to be the overall, most accurate predictor of eventual graduation for English-language learners, correctly identifying the outcome for such students 82 percent of the time. That is significantly higher than the predictiveness of students' language-proficiency levels at the start of high school, an indicator that predicted eventual graduation 60 percent of the time.

Study Design

The researchers analyzed data for all Hispanic, white, and Asian students who were first-time freshmen in the 2004-05 school year in Chicago's public high schools, and followed them for five years, until 2009, when they should have graduated. They compared the performance of English-learners with those who were not ELLs, and also looked at how five different subgroups of Hispanic students compared with one another. More than 70 per-

cent of the English-language-learner population in the 405,000-student Chicago public school system is Hispanic.

For the purpose of the study, “new ELLs” were students first identified for ELL services in 6th grade or later and entered 9th grade still designated as English-learners; “long-term ELLs” were first identified prior to 6th grade and had not yet gained proficiency at entry into 9th grade; “recently proficient” students were former English-learners who had reached proficiency between 6th and 8th grade; “long-term proficient” students were former English-learners who achieved proficiency before 6th grade; and “never ELLs” were students who were native English-speakers or who scored high enough on an exam when they entered the Chicago school system to be classified as English proficient.

Overall, the newest English-learners did as well or better than their peers in any other group in their 9th grade courses, including students who had been proficient since before 6th grade and those who were never ELLs. On average, new ELLs earned between a C and a C-plus grade-point average, failed just under two classes, and missed about six days of school each semester. Two-thirds of them were deemed on track for graduation by the end of 9th grade, meaning they had accumulated five full-year course credits and had no more than one semester F grade in English, mathematics, science, or social studies.

Except for their 9th grade English course—which, for most students, was an ESL course—new ELLs took the same required classes as their peers in other groups, including Algebra 1 and World Studies. New ELLs also reported spending more time studying during 9th grade than their peers and had better attendance rates, the researchers found.

Explaining the Differences

Even so, new ELLs had the second lowest four-year graduation rate, at 57 percent, of any of the ELL groups, except long-term ELLs, who had the weakest performance on the indicators and a 52 percent graduation rate. Long-term proficient students graduated at a rate of 68 percent. In comparison, the districtwide graduation rate was 61 percent.

To try and explain why the performance of new ELLs did not translate into a higher graduation rate, the researchers compared them with their peers who were long-term proficient students. Three factors, in part, help explain the gap in graduation rates between the two groups despite their similar academic performance. New ELLs reported having lower educational expectations for

themselves such as whether they would attend college, tended to enter high school at an older age, and were more likely to be enrolled in academically weaker high schools than long-term proficient students.

But Ms. Gwynne said those differences accounted for about “half” the gap between the two groups.

“There are still other factors that we haven’t accounted for, which could be a really important area for additional research,” said Ms. Gwynne. New ELLs were also more likely to remain on track than their other ELL peers as they moved through 10th grade, Ms. Gwynne noted, suggesting that factors that occur later on in high school are impacting new ELLs’ ability to graduate in four years.

Though long-term proficient students had the strongest overall performance of all the Hispanic ELL groups in the study, they still lagged well behind their ELL peers who were Asian or white.

“Overall, their GPA was a C-plus and we know ... that students coming out of high school need an A or B average to do well in college,” Ms. Gwynne said.

Mindee O’Cummings, a research analyst at AIR’s National High School Center, said the report should be helpful to cash-strapped districts seeking to improve graduation rates.

“So many schools struggle with this population of students, and they need help in figuring out how to more effectively allocate their resources,” Ms. O’Cummings said. “These indicators can work just as well with this subgroup that disproportionately drops out of high school.”

Published May 23, 2012, Education Week

FOCUS ON: ENGLISH-LEARNERS

Districts Serving Most ELLs Fall Short on Federal Goals

Study finds 10 states that met all goals for accountability

By Lesli A. Maxwell

Most English-language learners were enrolled in school districts that failed to reach all their accountability goals for such students in the 2008-09 school year, according to a national evaluation of the federal program that supports services for English-language acquisition.

While more than half the districts that receive federal money to support programs for ELLs reported meeting all their academic goals that year, those districts served only 39 percent of the total ELL population. Only 10 states achieved all their accountability goals for English-learners under the No Child Left Behind Act that year.

"It's the most comprehensive report we've seen, and it gives us a very good snapshot in time of both how far states and districts have come to develop and implement the requirements of Title III," said Kathleen Leos, who was the director of the U.S. Department of Education's office of English-language acquisition during President George W. Bush's administration. "But it also tells us how much further they need to go to change the actual achievement results for English-language learners."

More Complete Picture

The findings are part of a long-awaited evaluation of Title III, the section of the NCLB law that authorizes federal aid to states and local districts for English-language-acquisition programs. The data provide the most complete picture so far of the overall academic progress of the nation's 5.5 million English-language learners, the fastest-growing subgroup of students in American public schools.

Researchers at the Washington-based Amer-

ican Institutes for Research conducted the Title III study, which the Education Department released May 11. Two other reports on Title III's progress—those that are required to be given to Congress every other year—may be released in the coming weeks, according to an Education Department spokeswoman.

The report says states and districts have made big strides in developing and implementing systems with defined standards for English-learners and assessments for measuring their educational progress.

The evaluation of the progress of the \$732 million-a-year Title III program found that "states and districts are largely complying with the major provisions of the law." Nearly

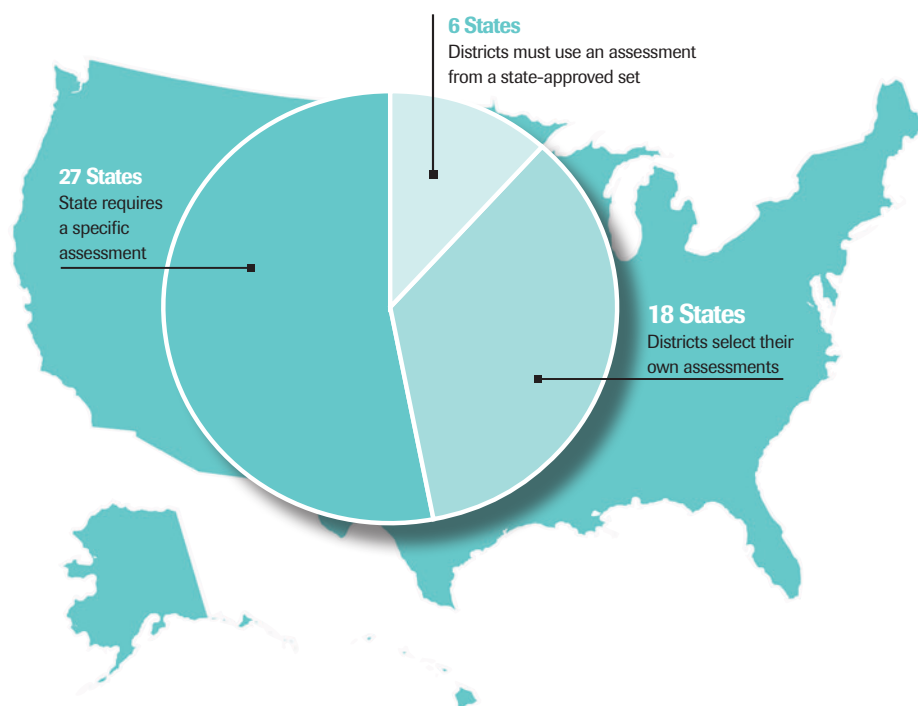
Assessing Proficiency

An evaluation by the American Institutes for Research finds that states varied widely during the 2008-09 school year in their policies regarding the choice of assessments used to determine when English-language learners have achieved proficiency in the language.

Likewise, only 19 states had established consistent criteria for school districts to follow in making those determinations the following school year.

The study is the most comprehensive to date to measure states' progress in meeting the requirements of Title III, the federal program that supports services for English-language acquisition.

SOURCE: American Institutes for Research



all states reported that they have aligned English-language-proficiency standards with state academic content standards in at least one core subject, and that they have also linked state English-proficiency tests with their proficiency standards.

But the researchers also noted large variations in how states and districts define which students are English-language learners and when they have reached the point of proficiency.

In all but eight states in the 2009-10 school year, districts have discretion in how to identify ELLs. In the same vein, only 19 states that year had established consistent criteria for districts to follow to determine when students no longer need English-language-acquisition services.

Still, one ELL expert said, the study found that states and districts have made significant progress in developing and putting into practice more-consistent systems for English-learners.

"If you go back just 10 or 15 years, most states had no English-language-proficiency standards and offered a long menu of different types of English-proficiency assessments that were completely noncomparable," said Robert Linquanti, a senior research associate with WestEd, an education research-and-development organization in San Francisco.

"The other reality is that you had districts who did not assess these kids annually or even look at how they were doing for years," he said, "and there was no real focus on the relationship between the development of English-language proficiency and their [students'] progress on academic subject matter."

Still in 'R&D'

Raul González, the director of legislative affairs for the National Council of La Raza, a Hispanic advocacy group based in Washington, said the report shows that states and districts have focused attention on English-learners in a way that is creating a "demand for better products and services for these children."

But he described states and districts as still largely in an "R&D" stage of figuring out the best materials and instructional strategies to use. "States and districts realize they need better programming, but they are still struggling to find it," he said.

Half the school districts reported that they lacked good information on research-based curricula and instruction for English-learners.

The 40 states that fell short of making all three goals in the 2008-09 school year were not required to report on which ones they failed to meet. The 10 states that did meet all accountability goals in all three areas for ELLs—known as "annual measurable achieve-

ment objectives," or AMAOs—were Alabama, Delaware, Maine, Mississippi, Nebraska, New Jersey, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Wisconsin.

Under the rules of Title III, each state sets its own AMAOs, which are goals for progress in learning English as measured by results on English-language-proficiency exams, attainment of fluency in English, and demonstration of ELLs' proficiency on state content tests in reading and mathematics.

That's a slight setback from the last update on Title III. In a series of research briefs on Title III released by the Education Department in May 2010, analysts said that 11 states met their accountability goals for English-learners in the 2007-08 school year.

At the district level, 80 percent of Title III districts reported in the new evaluation that they had met their first two goals for ELL students: making progress in learning English and attaining English proficiency. Sixty-four percent of them reported that they had also reached their third goal by making adequate yearly progress for the English-learner subgroup on state reading and math assessments, as well as other indicators such as attendance and graduation rates, according to the study.

But one-third of Title III districts—which collectively served about half the ELLs receiving Title III support nationwide—reported in 2008-09 that they had missed one or more of their goals for English-learners for two or four consecutive years, which subjected them to such accountability actions as developing improvement plans and notifying parents of ELLs of their failure to meet all goals for such students.

The AIR research team interviewed Title III and assessment directors in all 50 states and the District of Columbia, conducted a nationally representative survey of more than 1,500 districts receiving Title III aid, and used data collected in case studies of 12 Title III districts in five states.

The study also found notable differences in Title III per-pupil funding levels among the states, even though the money is provided under a formula.

And it notes that in the 2009-10 school year, 74 percent of Title III districts reported that all their teachers serving English-learners were "fully certified" to do so. But nearly the same share said that the "lack of expertise among mainstream teachers" to address English-learners' needs was a "moderate or major challenge."

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Sophisticated Language Use Awaits ELLs in Standards

Students required to go well beyond grammar, vocabulary

By Lesli A. Maxwell

Putting the common-core standards into practice in classrooms is a monumental change for teachers in the nation's public schools, but for educators who work with English-language learners, the shifts in instruction are expected to be even more groundbreaking.

That's because the new academic expectations for English/language arts and mathematics now adopted by all but four states require much more sophisticated uses of language than the mishmash of standards that have been in use for years across the states, say language-acquisition experts.

Grammar and vocabulary, for example, are often the primary focus of instruction for English-learners, as is teaching students to master certain language functions, such as suggesting or complimenting. Under the standards developed through the Common Core State Standards Initiative, however, instruction for English-learners will have to move far beyond those fundamental components of learning the language to include instruction on how to read and comprehend complex texts and to construct and convey arguments in writing across the content areas.

"For the most part, the profession has focused on bits and pieces of language," said Aída Walqui, the director of teacher professional-development programs for WestEd, a San Francisco-based education research firm. "The common core is really going to require teachers to move from understanding language as form or function to understanding it as activity and giving students the supports they need to participate in academic activities using language.

"Vocabulary and grammar are still important, but at a lower level of importance," she added. "That's going to be a momentous change."

This work will no longer be just the province of English-as-a-second-language teachers. The common core demands that teachers across all content areas teach literacy skills and the

so-called "academic language" that is at the heart of their area of expertise.

As some states and districts—such as the Miami-Dade County school system in Florida, where 58,000 students are English-learners—push ahead on an early timeline with turning the standards into actual classroom instruction, language scholars, policymakers, advocates, and educators around the country continue to wrestle with important questions about how the language needs of English-learners will be met under the more-rigorous standards. A number of small- and large-scale efforts are taking shape to develop tools, resources, and instructional supports to help ensure that English-learners—the fastest-growing subgroup of students in the nation—will have the same access to the rigorous instructional levels of the common core as their peers who are native English speakers.

'Academic' vs. Everyday

Helping English-learners surmount the higher expectations of the common standards will depend largely on how well teachers get them to understand academic language, in contrast to the informal, everyday English they use outside the classroom.

One of the most far-reaching efforts under way to help teachers in that vein is a project led by the World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment consortium, a group of 27 states that currently share a common set of English-language-proficiency standards. Using broad input from member states, language experts at WIDA are working to finalize a new edition of the consortium's five English-language-development standards that will show clearly the connections between the content standards of the common core across every grade level and the academic language that will be necessary to teach across the varying levels of English proficiency.

For example, in 1st grade, the common core calls for pupils to "write opinion pieces in which they introduce the topic or name the book they are writing about, state an opinion, supply a reason for the opinion, and provide

some sense of closure." The WIDA edition clearly spells out the grade-level vocabulary words and expressions that teachers should use—such as fact, paragraph, topic sentence, main idea, detail—while teaching that writing standard to students at all levels of English development. The WIDA edition also offers example topics that are pulled directly from a content standard in the common core and provide teachers with the types of support and scaffolding of academic language that they need depending on students' proficiency.

The new edition is also more explicit in showing teachers the cognitive demands required of the core-content standards and how to adjust instruction in line with English proficiency.

"I am hoping that teachers can see how to differentiate their instruction, so that even if you are a level-one English-learner, your teacher is going to have the tools to help you access the content even though you don't have much English," said Margo Gottlieb, WIDA's lead developer of common assessments for English-learners.

The final version of WIDA's English-language-development standards should be published by June, and, starting in late summer, the group will hold four regional conferences around the country to provide training to teachers and school administrators on the new edition and its connections to the common standards.

WIDA is also leading the effort of a group of 28 states to design new assessments of English-language proficiency that will measure the language demands of the common standards.

Readying Exemplars

Another major initiative unfolding to craft an array of free instructional resources for teachers of English-learners is centered at Stanford University, where Kenji Hakuta, an education professor and an expert on English-learners, is co-chairing a project with María Santos, a former director of English-learner

programs for the New York City school system, that will map out the English-language demands of the common standards. Ms. Walqui of WestEd is also on that team of experts.

Earlier this month, the team launched its Understanding Language website with a dozen papers related to the common core and ELLs, along with a collection of practice and policy briefs that will address key issues.

The project is well-funded, with separate, \$1 million grants from the Carnegie Corporation of New York and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. (Both foundations also support some areas of coverage in *Education Week*.)

Ms. Walqui said the group is hard at work devising “exemplars” to demonstrate to teachers what planning a unit for ELLs under the common core would look like. The first exemplar, she said, is scheduled to come out in June and will focus on middle school English/language arts, because “it’s a critical transition point for English-learners.”

The key for lesson planning is that the goals for students must be the same, Ms. Walqui said, but that there are multiple pathways for students of varying developmental levels of English to achieve the goals.

“The differentiation is within the activities or versions of the activities for students,” she said.

As the team publishes its exemplars, it will host webinars to train teachers, Ms. Walqui said.

The Council of the Great City Schools—which represents 67 urban school systems that are home to 30 percent of the nation’s English-learners—is involved in a multitude of initiatives to help its member districts implement the common standards as thoughtfully and carefully for ELLs as they do for students who are not learning English. The rigor of the common core is also providing a prime opportunity for some districts to improve their services for English-learners, said Gabriela Uro, the manager of English-language-learner policy and research for the Washington-based council.

“The English-language-learner programs in many of our districts need ramping up anyway, and now they understand that if you are going to improve those programs, you needn’t bother improving to the current standard,” Ms. Uro said. “You need to design it for the common core.”

For nearly two years, the council has offered sessions on the common core during the regular meetings Ms. Uro conducts with district directors of English-learner programs. Part of that has included bringing in language-acquisition experts to explain the implications of the new standards for ELLs and to show explicitly, for example, how to teach complex texts to English-learners.

The council is also coordinating a project to help districts provide information to parents of ELLs by writing guides on the new standards in Spanish, Chinese, and up to eight additional languages that are represented in urban school systems.

Ms. Uro is also serving on the steering committee of the Stanford project to keep “the district perspective in the mix and to make sure that we bring all of this down to a greater applicability at the district level.”

Districts Adapt

In the 345,000-student Miami-Dade school system, teachers and school administrators are largely forging ahead on their own to adapt the new standards for English-learners, said Karen Spigler, the administrative director of language arts/reading and bilingual education/world languages for the district. This year, the common-core standards are already implemented in kindergarten and 1st grade, with 2nd and 3rd grades on tap to begin in the fall, she said.

The district offered teams of teachers in those early grades a two-day training to focus on how to bridge instruction—especially in reading—from the state standards they have been using to the common core, Ms. Spigler said.

A major component of that training, she said, was explaining to teachers how they must incorporate more nonfiction into the curriculum and how to figure out ways to judge the complexity of those texts for students.

“Our early-grade teachers think about children reading ‘stories,’ but we have to shift our thinking to how do we prepare them to read a science piece or something about the environment,” she said.

Another big shift for teachers—especially those working with ELLs—will be letting students struggle with difficult texts.

“That’s huge,” Ms. Spigler said. “We have been very focused on making everything readable for kids, and they haven’t been as successful in independently reading difficult texts.”

The vast majority of English-learners in public schools are native Spanish-speakers. That reality has led to at least one large-scale, formal undertaking to translate the common standards into Spanish and provide “linguistic augmentation” to account for the differences between the two languages when necessary.

Called Common Core en Español, the project is being led by ELL practitioners in San Diego, in collaboration with San Diego State University, the California education department, and the Council of Chief State School Officers.

“We are staying very aligned with the com-

“ Vocabulary and grammar are still important, but at a lower level of importance. That’s going to be a momentous change.”

AIDA WALQUI

Director, Teacher Professional-development Programs, WestEd

mon core. It’s the same content,” said Silvia C. Dorta-Duque de Reyes, a bilingual-services coordinator in the San Diego County office of education. “But because of the challenges that English-learners face in accessing academic content as they learn the language, one of the ways to differentiate for them is to provide the access through their primary language.”

The content standards have already been translated, Ms. Reyes said, and now the team is in the midst of providing the “augmentation” to show, for example, that in Spanish, students must learn accentuation and accent rules.

After a peer-review process over the summer, the goal is to publish the translations and make them available to all states and school districts by the end of the year, she said.

Ms. Reyes is also serving on a key panel of experts in California who are charged with revising the state’s English-language-development standards so that they are in line with the common core. And she is providing professional-development seminars to school administrators and leaders to help them prepare for implementation in another year or so.

Many frontline teachers in California, however, aren’t at the point of being trained for the shift to the common core. The new assessments for common core will roll out during the 2014-2015 school year.

“These teachers are still being held accountable for results on the [state test],” Ms. Reyes said.

Restructuring for learning excellence

Challenge

For the last five years, Bullitt County Public Schools (BCPS), the seventh-largest school district in Kentucky, has been on a mission to move from being a district of compliance to being a district of excellence. With 23 schools in the district, BCPS has seen tremendous growth in the English-language-learner (ELL) population, but not enough growth to warrant full-time ELL personnel at each school. District officials were challenged in finding a solution that could serve small ELL populations at each individual school, with school locations spread out over a very large geographical region. The district was not meeting the adequate yearly progress (AYP) requirement mandated by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. BCPS sought an effective, scalable language-learning program that could advance the language skills of ELLs through independent study with a response-to-intervention (RTI) learning approach. BCPS looked for a solution that would be affordable and create improved English-proficiency testing scores to meet AYP requirements to ultimately generate a high return on investment (ROI) from the implementation of the program.

Implementation

BCPS implemented an independent-study model with the Rosetta Stone® solution for ELLs at school locations. The district required ELLs to spend 30–40 minutes a day, five days a week, in Rosetta Course®. Using an RTI approach, learners were pulled out of the classroom throughout the school day to use the program. Classified school personnel were assigned to the labs to assist learners and ensure effective use of the program. The district benchmarked learner progress at a minimum of two completed levels of the Rosetta Stone solution in an academic year. An administrative assistant was assigned to monitor and manage student progress in comparison to established benchmarks. The administrative tool Rosetta Stone Manager™ was used to generate reports and to help administrators take action when needed to keep learners on track.

Benefits

BCPS has realized the following benefits from implementation:

- 57.3% increase from previous year in WIDA ACCESS for ELLs® composite scores
- Top 10% of learners improved their ACCESS composite scores by more than 200%
- Annual savings of over \$550 per ELL, providing an ROI of over 65%



At a Glance:

Bullitt County Public Schools has nearly 13,000 students in grades kindergarten through 12. There are 25 school facilities, a certified staff of over 850, and a classified staff of over 850 working every school day to make the district the leader in educational excellence.

The Bullitt County Public Schools learning community will educate all students to high levels of academic performance as measured by state and national standards by creating and maintaining a positive learning environment with a comprehensive system of support.

"I believe that without the Rosetta Stone solution we would not have seen success with our EL students during the 2011–12 academic year."

—Greg Schultz

**Assistant Superintendent,
Student Learning Division
Bullitt County Public Schools**

Implementing for success

Over the past five years, Bullitt County Public Schools experienced significant growth in the ELL population. In addition, the district was not meeting the AYP requirements mandated by the No Child Left Behind Act. The district restructured the delivery of ELL instruction, reallocating personnel and developing a program for language-learning success. The overall goal was to create an effective solution that provided consistency of instruction and service. The district invested in the Rosetta Stone® solution, using it as the core instruction for ELLs. The flexibility and scalability of Rosetta Course® made it easy to implement, even in schools within the district that averaged less than five ELLs per school. Through an RTI approach, learners were pulled out of mainstream instruction and into a lab environment to use the Rosetta Stone solution 30–40 minutes per day, five days per week. The district estimated that students could complete an average of two levels of Rosetta Course in a full academic year. Certified personnel at each school were provided to assist learners and to monitor the lab environment to support the use of the program.

An administrative assistant from the district monitored and managed learner study using the administrative tool Rosetta Stone Manager.™ Working with designated contacts from each school, the administrator increased visibility and accountability of learner progress. When benchmarks were not being met, the assistant would contact the school charged with managing the progress of the learner, and ask for action to be taken to turn around progress in the program. Through real-time management, BCPS was able to ensure successful implementation of the solution.

Leveraging technology

To meet language-learning requirements of ELLs, BCPS looked for alternate ways to deliver instruction. The previous delivery model used tutors to work with the ELL population. The district found that the model was not effective, as evidenced in poor test results, and that consistency of instruction had been compromised. BCPS exercised due diligence in determining other ways to deliver instruction to ELLs that could leverage the technology infrastructure available at schools. The district decided to implement a new model of instruction that leveraged technology to deliver language-learning core instruction through the Rosetta Stone solution. By setting aside time during the school day to deliver instruction with the program, BCPS made it possible for ELLs to acquire the language needed to improve academic performance.

Moving from compliance to excellence

BCPS is the seventh-largest school district in the state of Kentucky. Over the past five years, BCPS has been on a mission to elevate the district to excellence. Moving from a rating in the bottom 5% (165 out of 175) of all school districts in Kentucky to ranking in the top 100, BCPS has found effective program implementations like the Rosetta Stone solution paying off. The goal of the district is to become the premier school district in Kentucky, and the implementation of the Rosetta Stone solution has helped move the district toward achieving that goal.

ACCESS for ELLs® (Assessing Comprehension and Communication in English State-to-State for English Language Learners) test scores were very low prior to the implementation of the Rosetta Stone solution. In 2011, the district proactively looked for ways not only to become compliant with testing but to create a district of excellence, exceeding requirements. Through the effective vision and restructuring of the program, scores on ACCESS testing increased significantly during the first year of implementation. As Greg Schultz, BCPS assistant superintendent, Student Learning Division, states, "I believe that without the Rosetta Stone solution we would not have seen success with our EL students during the 2011–12 academic year."

Realizing benefits

BCPS has realized many benefits from the implementation of the Rosetta Stone solution

in 2011. Performance on the ACCESS test increased significantly with the implementation of the Rosetta Stone solution. Comparing 2010–11 and 2011–12, ELLs increased overall composite proficiency on the ACCESS test by over 57%. The top 10% of ELLs had composite-score improvements in excess of 200%.

In addition, BCPS has also found that the technology-enabled solution saved the district \$550 per learner. This allowed BCPS to realize a Return on Investment (ROI) of over 65% from implementing the Rosetta Stone solution.

About Rosetta Stone

Rosetta Stone Inc. is the global leader in language-learning software. With 20 years of experience behind us, we're continuing to develop award-winning innovations that improve the lives of people and the operations of organizations every day.

Our proprietary, proven method leverages interactive technologies to replicate the immersion environment in which people learn their first language, and it activates each learner's natural aptitude for acquiring a new language regardless of language background.

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Education

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COMMENTARY

An Immigrant Student's Story: I Was a Dictionary Girl

By Helen Janc Malone

How would you support a student who did not speak English and had no one else at the school who spoke his or her native language? I was that student some 20 years ago. Coming from the war-torn former Yugoslavia, I was placed with my peers in an English-for-speakers-of-other-languages, or ESOL, class. At home, only my father spoke some English, and at school, no one spoke Serbo-Croatian, my native language.

To help me navigate through the school day, my father bought me an English-Serbo-Croatian dictionary; however, this new communication device was both slow and imperfect. As students attempted to speak with me, I would ask them to point to words in my dictionary so I could read the translation. The process was painstakingly long, so many students just resorted to nodding and smiling.

Using my dictionary inside the classroom was equally challenging. By the time I looked up a single word from an overhead slide, another slide would appear. Some teachers allowed me to use my dictionary during exam time; however, I would use entire class periods to translate problems and questions and then to try to make sense of the information using different word-order combinations. At times, when I recognized content, usually through an image or a formula, communicating my knowledge proved to be a long process. I would write down what I knew about the subject matter in my native language, translating it at home with my father to English, and then present it to my teachers the following day.

I had two sanctuaries during my high school years: my ESOL class and an after-school program. The ESOL class was my primary sanctuary. ESOL was a place where all the kids were on the same page, desperately lost in a sea of English, facing similar challenges of culture shock, assimilation, family adjustments, home-

sickness, and social confusion. We all read aloud slowly, worked tirelessly on spelling, and still thought and dreamt in our native tongues.

An after-school program, the school's student government association, was my second sanctuary. I joined the SGA by the invitation of my social studies teacher. I started off by painting homecoming banners and planning school dances. As my English progressed, I engaged in public testimonies at the Statehouse on K-12 education issues, speaking on behalf of public school students, which led to my career path in education policy.

Having a student in the classroom who does not speak English and has no language partner at the school can prove difficult for teachers, who already have their plates full. Below are 10 suggestions, informed by my own experiences, for how to support English-language learners.

- **Get a baseline.** While baselines are generally determined through mathematics problems and a simple reading/comprehension/writing test, it is important to discern the students' last educational experiences: subjects they took, what content they covered, the most recent lesson(s) they learned, what subject(s) they found particularly difficult, or easy, and why. Such information is paramount in placing students in the appropriate grade level.

- **Push students just beyond their comfort zones.** Finding ways to challenge students to build on their knowledge and language skills is a great way to help them learn new content and grasp academic skills.

- **Pair students with language partners.** Wherever possible, it is helpful to have another student with similar English-language fluency in the class. While students could be seated apart to decrease classroom disruption, having a study partner can offer immigrant students an oppor-

tunity to check in with each other to confirm their content understanding.

- **Utilize technology.** While technology during my secondary education consisted of paper and pencils, typewriters, and overhead projectors, today's world of apps for BlackBerries and iPads makes it possible for students to easily access online language-acquisition tools. Of course, the teacher and the student should work together to ensure that technology is used in the short term, not as a crutch.

- **Make it global.** A majority of students going through our public schools today will likely interact with individuals from different countries either in person or online. Encouraging "native" students to interact in positive ways with immigrant students could be meaningful to both parties.

- **Share your own experiences.** Immigrant students who do not have a language community at school can feel isolated. Integrating cultural elements into lesson plans can help them learn about their new environment.

- **Use after-school programs as a gateway to the school day.** Engaging recently immigrated students in extracurricular activities could be a great way to introduce them to new peers, explore existing or new interests, and feel more connected to the school, all of which has the potential to increase their participation and engagement during the school day.

- **Involve families.** Involving immigrant families in their children's education is important to help them feel connected to the school; to help them begin to understand the nuances of the American education system, that of the school, and the individual teacher's expectations. Sharing information with families about adult-learning and community-engagement opportunities is also a great way to help families feel welcome.

- **Create sanctuaries.** Immigrant students, and particularly those coming from traumatic and otherwise difficult environments, can feel vulnerable in a new environment. Cultivating supportive academic and social environments could help students who are new to the country and the language adjust to the new normal, and begin the healing process.

- **Don't give up.** Learning English, and adjusting to a new life and culture, is a multiyear process, particularly for adolescents with years of experience in a different environment. With participation in high-quality ESOL classes, supportive school staff members, engaging after-school learning opportunities, and school-family partnerships, immigrant students can reach an operational level of English and integrate into their new schools fairly quickly.

Helen Janc Malone is a doctoral student at Harvard University. She conducts research on school reform, youth development, and out-of-school-time learning.

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COMMENTARY

We Must Focus on Educating English-Learners

By Margaret L. Bonanno

Over the years, educators have asked me the same questions over and over again about how best to educate English-language learners. Even though the research and best accepted practices regarding these students have become clearer and clearer, the development of a workable, comprehensive plan remains only a school or district compliance document, not a dynamic program. It is as if we are looking for a silver bullet. The thinking is that a magical solution should come in the form of a program in a box.

First, let me tell you there is no silver bullet. There is only sitting down and coming to agreement on what the research says to do and then following through with it. In addition, we seem to think that if we test these kids more, the answer will appear. These students do not need more testing; they need the best teaching strategies available. These identified best strategies must be used in English-language-development (ELD) classes, in the core instruction, and for interventions. I believe that educators have the answers; however, it is just too overwhelming for them to turn those answers into a comprehensive program.

For years, educators expected a publisher's program to help them teach English-learners, once again looking for the silver bullet. Then some elementary schools started leveling not only for ELD classes, but for all subjects, removing students from their homeroom classroom. By the time the students made it back to their homeroom at the end of the day, they hardly recognized their teacher. (So much for getting to know your students well.) Some districts established newcomer centers, some developed dual-immersion programs, others ignored the situation, and some teachers just talked louder in their classrooms.

For educators who struggle with one of

America's most daunting social-justice issues, finding the answer on how best to educate English-learners will continue to be their challenge. The educator Larry Cuban, in his 2008 book *Frogs Into Princes: Writings on School Reform*, writes about the importance of framing a problem correctly so it can be analyzed correctly. He describes two kinds of organizational problems: "Tame" problems are familiar situations for which educators have a large repertoire of solutions. "Wicked" problems are ill-defined, ambiguous, and packed with potential conflict. Wicked problems can only be managed, never solved.

Even though educating English-learners appears to be a tame problem, it really is a wicked problem because of the overlays of poverty, the immigrant experience, the lack of understanding regarding language acquisition, the focus on state test scores, the misunderstandings around parent support, and the yin and yang of the politics of educating English-learners. Add to this mix publishers who claim to have the curricular answers, and the program-improvement movement, which has imposed a formula on local schools and districts, and you have a poor recipe.

So let us be clear about what educating English-learners is not about. It is not about speaking English louder in the classroom. It is not about retention or test preparation as interventions. It is not about all those brown kids sitting in rows with their uniforms on while few hands are raised. It is not about blaming the parents or the kids. It is not about politicians, school board members, or special-interest groups planning for the education of English-learners.

What is educating these students about? It is about the educators doing the right thing. It is about identifying the best research and reading it together. It is about consensus around what the research proposes in order to develop the criteria. It is about using these criteria to

develop the plan. It is about identifying the most effective and appropriate instructional strategies, and then selecting or developing the curriculum materials to match them. It is about a comprehensive professional-development program that supports teachers during the implementation stages and provides for discussions of what worked and what did not. It is about having the flexibility and strength to stop using or carrying out a poor practice in order to develop a better practice. It is about the best core instruction. It is a planned ELD program. It is about using the student's primary language as an instructional tool. It is about good dual-immersion schools.

Now is the time to gather the best educators in your school district and have a long conversation about developing a dynamic plan to educate all English-learners. The motto for this plan must be "no excuses, just do it." Even if you have a plan, is it the best plan? Remember, a wicked problem never goes away, but it does require vigilant management.

Margaret L. Bonanno is a retired assistant superintendent, a lecturer in the educational leadership program at San José State University, and a program-improvement provider for the state of California.

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6935 Arlington Road, Suite 100
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http://esl.ncwiseowl.org/resources/dual_language/

Wayne P. Thomas and Virginia P. Collier

George Mason University, 2009

National Association for Bilingual Education

<http://www.nabe.org/>

National Center on Immigrant Integration Policy

<http://www.migrationinformation.org/integration/>

**National Evaluation of Title III Implementation
– Report on State and Local Implementation**

<http://www2.ed.gov/rschstat/eval/title-iii/state-local-implementation-report.pdf>

U.S. Department of Education, May 2012

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