POLICY BRIEF

Improving the Opportunities and Outcomes of California's Students Learning English:

Findings from School District–University Collaborative Partnerships

Ilana M. Umansky,
University of Oregon

Sean F. Reardon,
Stanford University

Kenji Hakuta,
Stanford University

Karen D. Thompson,
Oregon State University

Peggy Estrada,
University of California, Santa Cruz

Katherine Hayes,
Los Angeles Unified School District

Hilda Maldonado,
Los Angeles Unified School District

Susan Tandberg,
Los Angeles Unified School District

Claude Goldenberg,
Stanford University

Introduction

Enormous transitions are underway in how California educates students learning English. The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and new California English language development (ELD) standards – together with new assessments for each – have the potential to fundamentally alter the content of what English learners (ELs) learn in school. The Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) provides additional resources to districts that educate ELs. Furthermore, in November 2016 California voters will weigh in on a possible expansion of bilingual and dual language education. With these changes in financing, policy, standards, assessment, and instruction, it is a moment of immense opportunity to examine and shape EL policy and practice in the state.

This policy brief offers an examination of several key components of English learner education and the implications of those findings for future policy and practice. The brief brings together research conducted by three school district–university research partnerships focused on examining English learner needs, policies, practices, and outcomes in California school districts. Identifying trends and patterns across districts both large and small, from

Executive Summary

Recent policy changes in California's education system have opened up a unique opportunity to improve educational opportunities for the state's 1.4 million English learner students (ELs). The implementation of new state standards including new English Language Development standards will require major changes in teaching and learning for all students including ELs, while the Local Control Funding Formula gives districts that educate large numbers of ELs additional resources to improve the services that they provide. To take full advantage of these opportunities policymakers and educators should rely on the best available evidence to shape state and district policies and to inform classroom instructional practice for EL students.

In this policy brief Ilana Umansky and her co-authors review research findings from three university-school district research partnerships and present recommendations for changes in policy and practice to expand opportunities for EL students. They draw three main conclusions. First, California must improve the ways in which students who need language supports are classified and reclassified, in order to improve alignment across districts in the state, and alignment between classification and services. Second, state and local officials must

Executive Summary (Cont.)

become more systematic in how data on ELs are collected and used, by tracking students' progress over longer time periods and by including all students who were ever ELs in accountability metrics. Finally, and most importantly, the state must improve ELs' educational opportunities in school by expanding access to core content, bilingual instruction, and well-prepared teachers. Changes along these lines would not necessarily require large new investments, but they could yield substantial benefits for large numbers of California students.

Los Angeles (about 650,000 students) to Corning (about 2,000 students), the findings from these research partnerships shed light on five key areas of EL education: (1) The diversity of EL students and their educational outcomes and experiences; (2) Challenges to ensuring that ELs have full access to core academic content in school; (3) Factors that should be considered when determining reclassification policies and practices; (4) The promise and potential of bilingual and dual language programming; and (5) The needs of teachers of ELs as they embark on large scale changes in California's educational goals and policies.

These findings emerge from partnerships between university researchers and school district practitioners and policymakers. These partnerships aim to produce research that is grounded in the practical realities of California

schools in order to identify effective policies, instructional approaches, and services. Our hope is that the findings from these partnerships will inform the deliberations and decisions of state and local education policymakers and leaders throughout California.

Together, our findings point to a set of challenges in both the current classification system for students learning English and in the provision of services for these students. Specifically, they indicate that EL classification is too blunt an instrument to capture accurately the diverse learning needs of students learning English, and that reclassification is elusive for many students, sometimes for problematic reasons. Our research also points to weaknesses in the provision of services for English learners, especially in terms of full access to core content and teachers' level of preparedness to work with students acquiring English. We offer policy suggestions that emerge directly from these research findings, including modifications to California's system for classifying English learners and improvements in service provision, such as the expansion of bilingual and dual immersion instructional programs.

The Three University-School District Partnerships on English Learner Success

The research described here was conducted in the context of three research-practice partnerships in California. Designed to inform research, policy, and practice, the first partnership, funded by the Institute of Education

Sciences (IES) from 2011 through 2015, involves the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), the University of California, Santa Cruz, SRI International, and Stanford University. This partnership investigates EL reclassification policies and practices, EL and former-EL students' access to core content, and the relationship of reclassification to academic outcomes, using longitudinal student data and staff interviews and surveys. Collaborators included researchers as well as key staff in the district's departments responsible for data and research, the English learner program, and curriculum and instruction.

The second partnership brings together seven small- and medium-sized school districts, primarily from California's inland regions, to build capacity and learn about effective policies and practices for English learners. This partnership, known as the English Language Learner (ELL) Leadership Network, has been funded through the S.H. Cowell Foundation from 2011 through the present. The districts partner with Stanford University. Their collaboration includes data analysis, site visits in which districts observe and learn about each other's policies and practices with English learners, and biannual conferences where districts come together to discuss research findings, share experiences, and plan next steps.

The final partnership is between a large, urban school district in California and Stanford University's Center for Education Policy Analysis. The goal of this partnership, which was funded

through the Institute of Education Sciences from 2011-2014, was to compare the academic progress of EL students enrolled in four different instructional programs for ELs: English immersion, early exit bilingual, maintenance bilingual, and dual immersion classrooms. The project also sought to determine how academic progress varies among different subgroups of ELs. The district's office of research and evaluation and the office responsible for English learner services spearheaded the project, in collaboration with researchers from Stanford University.

Research Findings

Diversity of EL Students, their Educational Experiences, and Outcomes

English learners come to California schools with a diverse and complex set of backgrounds and needs. Far from a homogeneous group, school districts are increasingly aware of the differences between newcomer students and long-term English learners, between first- and second-generation English learners, between current and former ELs, between ELs with and without special education identification, and between students with complete, high-quality prior schooling and those with incomplete and/or poor-quality prior schooling.

There are also important differences between districts with regard to the education of English learners. Districts vary with regard to the proportion of their students who are classified as ELs, the linguistic and cultural homogeneity or heterogeneity of their EL population, the relative concentration or dispersion of ELs across schools, and the specific characteristics and needs of their EL populations.

Our research partnerships confirm these important differences and shed light on the implications of these differences for the design and implementation of policy for English learners. Research conducted by our partnerships, for example, suggests that academic language skills, in English and students' home language, are highly predictive both of how long it takes students to be reclassified and of their academic performance in middle and high school. Students who enter Kindergarten with higher levels of academic language skills in English or their home language tend to be reclassified earlier and to have higher academic performance, compared to those with lower levels of academic language skills in Kindergarten (Thompson, 2015a). In other words, students with strong literacy bases have much less acute educational and linguistic needs than those with less developed literacy bases, including students with interrupted formal education.

Our research also confirms wide variation in EL student achievement. First, there are large differences between the academic performance of current ELs and former ELs. This is important to note, given that some analyses of EL outcomes fail to take into account that the highest achieving ELs are quickly reclassified out of EL status, leaving an increasingly low-performing pool of EL students as students move up

TABLE 1. Identification in special education in the ELL Leadership Network districts, by language classification

District	Percent of ELs in Grades 6-12 who are LTELs	Percent of LTELs in Grades 6-12 who qualify for special education	Percent of EOs in Grades 6-12 who qualify for special education	Percent of other ELs, IFEPs, RFEPs in Grades 6-12 who qualify for special education
Corning Elementary	89%	15%	12%	4%
Fairfield-Suisun Unified	80%	27%	12%	4%
Firebaugh-Las Deltas Unified	77%	32%	7%	2%
Napa Valley Unified	82%	40%	9%	3%
Sanger Unified	89%	15%	7%	8%
Tahoe-Truckee Unified	87%	40%	7%	6%
Ukiah Unified	81%	34%	14%	3%
Across the ELL Leadership Network	**83%**	**30%**	**10%**	**4%**

Note: EL - English learner, LTEL - Long-term English learner, EO - English only (non-language minority), IFEP - Initially fluent English proficient, RFEP - Reclassified fluent English proficient. Data from the 2011-12 academic year.

in grade. Second, our research shows troubling achievement gaps among English learners of different linguistic and national origins. In one district roughly 90 percent of Chinese-origin ELs have been reclassified by the end of fifth grade, while only 65 percent of Latino ELs have been reclassified. Similar gaps exist with regard to academic achievement on California Standards Tests (CSTs) (Valentino & Reardon, 2015). These achievement gaps emerge early in students' schooling trajectories and are evident in second grade when students take the CSTs for the first time. This variation is likely due in part to differences in educational opportunities and experiences, and due in part to differences in family resources and out-of-school learning environments between the two groups (Zhou & Kim, 2006).

Recently, California legislators have placed increased attention on the subset of English learners who have not been reclassified after six years in California schools, defining these students as long-term English learners (LTELs). As a group, LTELs typically have advanced oral English proficiency but may require support in reading and writing development and access to rigorous academic language and content instruction. Research from our partnerships suggests that LTELs themselves are a diverse group of students with different educational needs, however. One cause of this variation is structural: reclassification criteria are not consistent across the state. As a result, LTELs in a district with high reclassification criteria will have, on average, higher English language proficiency levels and/or higher academic performance, than LTELs in a district with lower reclassification criteria.

A second source of variation among LTELs is special education identification. An important subgroup of LTELs (and English learners more generally), are those with dual classification with special education. Our research shows that a large proportion of LTELs have dual classification (see Table 1). Across the seven small- and medium-sized districts in the ELL Leadership Network, 30 percent of LTELs qualify for special education compared to only 4 percent of other current and former ELs and 10 percent of English-only students. EL students are also disproportionately concentrated in specific special education categories. Special education classifications are numerous, yet a full two-thirds of the LTELs who qualify for special education are identified in the exceptionality category "specific learning disability." In contrast, only 31 percent of other current and former ELs (and 37 percent of English-only students) who qualify for special education are classified as having specific learning disabilities (Thompson, 2013).

These findings, paired with other research, suggest that EL students may be disproportionately identified for special education. This disproportionality can include both under- and over-representation depending on the exceptionality category, grade level, and particular context. (See, for example, Artiles, Rueda, Salazar, & Higareda,

2002; Hibel & Jasper, 2012; Morgan et al., 2015.) This disproportionality may reflect challenges in districts' ability to appropriately identify special learning needs that are distinct from ELs' unique linguistic and academic needs. Misidentification, whether it is too late, too early, or inaccurate, can severely compromise students' access to timely and appropriate instruction and other educational resources.

English Learners' Access to Core Content

English learner students have dual learning needs: they need to acquire English to have fuller access to school and society, and they need to learn academic content alongside their non-EL peers. These dual needs often manifest as a tension in EL education in terms of the relative focus schools place on ELs' linguistic versus academic instruction, often in a context of limited time, human, and material resources. California and federal law require that schools provide ELs with targeted services to meet both English language and content learning goals. Despite the law, however, research from the three partnerships suggests that English learners often suffer from restricted educational opportunity compared to that of non-English learners, particularly with regard to their academic learning needs.

Threats to ELs' equitable access to academic content take three forms. First, ELs are modestly over-represented in lower track classes and under-represented in upper track classes (Estrada, 2014b; Estrada & Wang, 2013; 2015b;

Umansky, 2015). (See Table 2.) Second, ELs are less likely than non-ELs to be enrolled in core academic subject courses and, as a result, earn fewer credits (Estrada, 2014b; Estrada & Wang, 2013; 2015b). ELs' placement into lower track classes is primarily due to EL students' lower academic achievement, but ELs' reduced enrollment in core content courses is a direct result of EL classification. In one district we find that nearly one in three middle-school ELs is not enrolled in an English language arts (ELA) course, and more than a third of EL students are not enrolled in a full course load (math, science, and ELA) in any given semester of middle school (Umansky, 2015). Limited access to ELA is largely due to ELD classes being used as a substitute, rather than a complement, for ELA. This is problematic both because ELD and ELA typically encompass very different curricula and because ELA is a foundational content area that is tightly linked to students' educational outcomes and opportunities, including eligibility to apply to the University of California or to a California State University.

ELs often have limited access to secondary mathematics courses that serve as gatekeepers to postsecondary education. Enrollment and success rates in high-level math courses in secondary school are low among all students, but very low among ELs. In the ELL Leadership Network districts approximately 5 percent of ELs enroll in an accelerated math sequence of Algebra 1 in eighth grade, geometry in ninth grade, and Algebra 2 in tenth grade, compared to approximately 25 percent of non-EL

students in the same grades (Thompson, 2015b).

A third form of inequitable access to content among ELs is weak or inappropriate instruction. This can occur when instruction in mainstream classes is inaccessible to ELs due to lack of appropriate instructional practices for ELs (Bunch, 2013) or when specialized core content area classes for ELs offer less access to content compared to mainstream classes. Teachers and administrators often report that sheltered classes (core content area classes that are targeted to ELs and designed to incorporate instructional modifications to make content more accessible to ELs) can be less rigorous, slower paced, and use more alternative versus standard curricula, compared to mainstream core content area classes (Estrada, 2014b; Estrada & Wang, 2013, 2015a).

In addition to having less access to core academic content, ELs experience limited exposure to high-achieving and non-EL peers. This exposure is important for giving ELs access to meaningful, abundant, and authentic use of English in an academic setting. ELs typically share their classrooms with other ELs, former ELs, and low performing non-ELs (Estrada, 2014b; Estrada & Wang, 2013; 2015a). We find that EL classification itself directly results in placement into classrooms with fewer English proficient students (Umansky, 2013).

The services provided to students learning English – such as ELD and sheltered instruction – are intended to support their dual needs to learn both language skills and academic content, but the evidence on EL course-taking patterns presented here suggests that EL status sometimes results in unintended negative consequences. Specifically, EL status appears to reduce access to core courses, advanced level courses, and rigorous instruction, which may hamper ELs' opportunities to fully succeed in school (Estrada, 2014a; 2014b; Estrada & Wang, 2013; 2015a; Thompson, 2015b; Umansky, 2015).

TABLE 2. English learner (EL) and English only (EO) course-taking in middle school, per semester, in one large urban district

	ELs	EOs
Number of Classes	4.92	4.54
Number of Core Content Classes	3.10	3.36
Subject Area Enrollment		
Percentage Not Enrolled in ELA	30%	2%
Percentage Not Enrolled in Math	4%	2%
Percentage Not Enrolled in Science	8%	2%
Percentage Not Enrolled in Full Course Load*	35%	4%
Level Enrollment		
Number of Grade-Level Classes	2.42	2.32
Number of Honors Classes	0.14	0.50
Number of Remedial Classes	0.34	0.26
Percentage in Algebra by 8th Grade	34%	36%

Note: From Umansky, 2015. Data from an anonymous district; data compiled for academic years 2000-2001 to 2011-12. EL - English learner; EO - English only. *Full course load indicates enrollment in math, science and English language arts.

The implications of these barriers to full access on academic achievement are potentially profound. Following students who enter Kindergarten with relatively high English proficiency levels, research from one district suggests that students who are classified as English learners have significantly lower academic achievement than an otherwise identical group of students who are not classified as ELs (Umansky, 2013).

Reclassification of English Learners

A key milestone for English learners in California is being reclassified as "fluent English proficient." Reclassification ends a student's designation as an English learner, and signifies that he or she is sufficiently proficient in English and sufficiently academically prepared to enter the educational mainstream without further EL-specific instructional supports. The California Department of Education (CDE) provides guidelines for reclassification criteria. Up until 2014 these guidelines included use of the California English Language Development Test (CELDT) and the California Standards Test in English language arts (CST-ELA). With the development and implementation of a new English language proficiency assessment (the English Language Proficiency Assessments for California, or ELPAC) and new content-area assessments in English language arts and mathematics developed by the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (known as SBAC), the state and individual districts are at a turning point in determining new reclassification policies. All three of the partnerships

discussed here conducted considerable research on reclassification, including how long it takes students to be reclassified, what factors predict faster or slower reclassification, what the barriers are to reclassification, and what the effects are of reclassification. This section summarizes findings in each of these areas.

Timing to and Predictors of Reclassification

Prior research shows that some EL students are reclassified after only a few years, while others remain ELs for 8 years or more; moreover, reclassification rates vary across school districts (Grissom, 2004; Hakuta, Butler, & Witt, 2000; Slama, 2014; Thompson, 2015a). Some of this variation is due to different criteria and processes for reclassification (Abedi, 2008; Linquanti & Cook, 2013; Ragan & Lesaux, 2006); while some is due to differences in student background, home language, and other out-of-school factors that affect students' English development and academic performance. Undoubtedly (as discussed below), some is also due to quality of instructional programs and other features of EL services.

The findings from these partnerships confirm that for most students it takes many years to satisfy the academic and linguistic criteria required for reclassification. In one district, approximately seven out of ten ELs are reclassified by the end of fifth grade (Reardon et al., 2014). In another district with different student, school and programmatic characteristics, 57 percent of students are reclassified by the end of fifth grade

(Thompson, 2015a). Among the districts in the ELL Leadership Network, the likelihood of students who entered the districts as ELs in Kindergarten being reclassified by the end of fifth grade ranges from 24 percent to 65 percent, depending on the district.

What causes the wide variation in timing to reclassification between school districts? Our studies identify numerous factors. First, student background–including factors that are closely linked to reclassification timing, such as the extent to which ELs are exposed to English in their homes and communities, as well as family income and parental education levels–varies among districts. Students' incoming academic language skills – both in English and in their native language – are also highly predictive of how long it takes students to be reclassified (Thompson, 2015a).

Second, the criteria that districts set for reclassification differ widely. (See Table 3.) We found wide variation in reclassification criteria across districts, both in terms of the inclusion or exclusion of certain criteria/assessments, and in terms of the levels set on those criteria. For example, while all districts in the partnerships used the state English proficiency assessment (CELDT) and the state standards test of English language arts (CST-ELA), many districts also had additional criteria, including grades and local assessments. The threshold levels set on assessments also vary. Among the partnering districts, for example, the threshold for passing the CST-ELA varied from basic (300,

or about one year below grade-level) to proficient (350, or at grade-level).

Third, having numerous criteria can create a structural barrier to reclassification. Students typically need to meet all criteria simultaneously in order to be eligible for reclassification, but different criteria become activated at different moments throughout the academic year. For example, CELDT assessments are taken in the fall and results are available in the winter. CST tests are taken in the spring and are available in the summer. Grades and local assessment results are available on still different schedules. The end result is a complicated matrix of how and when to determine whether a given student is eligible for reclassification at a given point in time (Estrada & Wang, 2013; 2015b). In addition, even if a student misses only one of several criteria in a given round, he or she must meet each criterion again in the next round in order to be reclassified. This often delays reclassification for one or more years and results in a subset of students remaining classified as English learners who have relatively high English proficiency and academic achievement (Thompson, 2012).

Fourth, different levels of adherence to reclassification policies also impact reclassification rates. We found that some students who are eligible for reclassification (based on their CELDT and CST scores) are not immediately reclassified, while others not eligible are. Among the districts involved in our partnerships the proportion of eligible ELs who were not reclassified when eligible differed by district, grade, and year. These differences were partly due to differences in reclassification

TABLE 3. Reclassification Criteria, by District for Grades 3-12, across the districts in the Los Angeles and ELL Leadership Network partnerships reveals the wide variation in criteria across the state.

School District	Reclassification Criteria						
	CELDT Overall	CELDT Subscales	CST-ELA	Parent/Teacher Consultation	Grades*	CAHSEE	District Assessment(s)
Corning	4	3	325	Yes	Yes	No	No
Fairfield-Suisun	4	3	300	Yes	No	350 (alternate to CST-ELA)	Student Oral Language Observation Matrix
Firebaugh-Las Deltas	4	3	300	Yes	Yes	Passing score (Grades 10-12)	Student Oral Language Observation Matrix Writing sample
Los Angeles	4	3	300	Yes	Yes	Passing score on ELA (Grades 10-12) (alternate to CST-ELA)	No
Napa	4	4	300	Yes	No	350 (alternate to CST-ELA)	Student Oral Language Observation Matrix Writing sample
Sanger	4	4	325	Yes	Yes	No	Student Oral Language Observation Matrix District English proficiency assessment
Tahoe-Truckee	4	4 (Grades 3-5) 3 (Grades 6-12)	300	Yes	Yes	No	No
Ukiah	4	3 (Listening & Speaking) 4 (Reading & Writing)	350 (Grades 3-4) 325 (Grades 5-12)	Yes	Yes	370 (alternate to CST-ELA)	Curriculum Associates benchmark assessment ADEPT or LAS Links ELD assessment

Note: CELDT - California English Language Development Test, CST-ELA - California Standards Test in English Language Arts, CAHSEE - California High School Exit Exam. Table represents criteria in the 2012-13 academic year. *Districts vary in terms of which subject area and which grade-level (e.g., elementary, secondary) grades are included as reclassification criteria.

processes and practices, including the extent of paper and hand processing versus automation; the ambiguity of criteria; and school staff discretion over reclassification decisions (Estrada & Wang, 2013; 2015b). In some schools and districts, for example, teachers can stop reclassification of an otherwise eligible student or trigger reclassification for an otherwise ineligible student. Adherence to reclassification criteria also varies by grade-level. In one district we find that more students are eligible for reclassification than are reclassified in elementary school, while the reverse is true in secondary school (Umansky & Reardon, 2014). District staff suggested that this reversal results from a growing sense of urgency to reclassify students once they enter middle and high school.

Finally, instructional design can also influence how long it takes for students to be reclassified. Bilingual programs are designed to focus on home language instruction in the early grades, transitioning into English as students gain a strong footing in their first language and are able to transfer their skills to a second language. EL students in bilingual classrooms are consequently less likely to be reclassified by third grade, on average, than are comparable students in English immersion programs, because English acquisition occurs more gradually in bilingual classrooms in the early grades. In the long run, though, our research shows that students in bilingual programs are more likely to become English proficient and to be reclassified than similar EL students in English immersion

settings, as we discuss further in the section below on bilingual education (Umansky & Reardon, 2014).

Barriers to Reclassification

Our research also examined which of the criteria for reclassification held back the largest number of students, and which students were most likely to be held back. We find that for students in elementary grades the most common barrier to reclassification is passage of the CELDT English proficiency criterion. In middle and high school, in contrast, the most common barrier is passage of the CST-ELA content standards criterion (Estrada & Wang, 2013; Thompson, 2015a; Umansky & Reardon, 2014). In other words, by the time they reach middle school most students who enter the school system as ELs have reached English proficiency on the CELDT. Many of these students have also met the reclassification standard on the state ELA test and have been reclassified. Students who are still ELs in middle school are typically students who have achieved English proficiency, as measured by the CELDT, but have not scored sufficiently well on the state ELA test to meet the academic criterion for reclassification.

The Impact of Reclassification

Given that timing to reclassification varies so widely, both among students and across school districts, it is important to understand the implications of reclassification as an event on students' access to core content and academic outcomes. Research in LAUSD finds that reclassification can affect student

outcomes (Robinson-Cimpian & Thompson, in press). Specifically, Robinson-Cimpian and Thompson find that when English proficiency reclassification criteria are set low reclassification can result in an academic penalty (evident in lower graduation rates and lower test scores) for students right at the cusp of reclassification eligibility in high school. They suggest that this is because students who just meet the reclassification criteria lose access to EL services from which they otherwise would have continued to benefit. When reclassification thresholds were raised they found no negative impact of reclassification, suggesting that EL students at the margin of reclassification eligibility were now being reclassified at an appropriate time, given their particular set of services and instruction.

In our partnerships we find that under certain conditions reclassification benefits students. Research examining more recent cohorts in LAUSD finds that reclassification results in students taking more A-G core courses in high school, and earning more core course credits and higher grades in core courses, among students right at the cusp of reclassification (Estrada, 2015). A similar study in another partnership district examined the impact of reclassification in fifth grade on sixth grade course-taking among students right at the margin of reclassification in fifth grade. Reclassification results in a nine percentage points jump in enrollment in a full course load, and a 15 percentage point jump in enrollment in English language arts (Umansky, 2015). These findings suggest that for students at

the margin of meeting reclassification criteria, reclassifying in middle school and early high school can increase access to the academic core.

Together, the Robinson-Cimpian and Thompson (in press) findings and our findings (Estrada, 2015; Umansky, 2013; 2015) suggest that the effects of reclassification depend on many factors, including the reclassification criteria operating in the district; the quality and appropriateness of the services, curriculum, and instruction ELs receive; the quality and appropriateness of the services, curriculum, and instruction students receive once reclassified; and the peer groups with whom students attend classes and interact when classified as ELs and when reclassified, among other factors. Thus, reclassification itself does not guarantee that a student will receive optimal instruction. A focus on whether students are receiving optimally appropriate instruction is more important than when they are reclassified.

The Promise of Bilingual and Dual Language Programs

Most ELs in California are in English immersion instructional programs, in large part because of the passage in 1998 of laws restricting bilingual and dual immersion language instruction. This is true in our partnership districts as well, with one exception. In that district large enrollments in bilingual programs (enabled by parent waivers) make it possible to evaluate the effectiveness of three different types of bilingual instruction.

Our research in this partnership demonstrates that there are academic and linguistic benefits to bilingual instruction. These findings add to a long, rich literature on bilingual education, which typically finds a moderate advantage of bilingual instruction over monolingual English instruction on English language outcomes (August & Shanahan, 2006; Genesee, Lindholm-Leary, Saunders, & Christian, 2006; Slavin, Madden, Calderon, Chamberlain, & Hennessy, 2010; Thomas & Collier, 2002).

Bilingual programs typically take one of three forms (although within each form there is wide variation). Transitional bilingual programs are programs designed exclusively for ELs that focus on relatively rapid transition into English instruction, typically by the third grade. These programs use instruction in students' home language as a bridge to English acquisition and as a way of making content area instruction more accessible.

The second type of program is a maintenance bilingual program. Maintenance programs are again targeted exclusively toward ELs but are longer in duration. They typically have as a goal full bilingualism and biliteracy in English and the student's home language.

The final type of program is dual immersion. Dual immersion programs, unlike the prior two, target enrollment by both ELs and native English speakers, often in a 1:1 ratio. Like maintenance programs they typically run at least through elementary school, sometimes extending into middle and high

school, and they have as a goal that both ELs and native English speakers should become bilingual and biliterate in both languages.

The district in this partnership has well-developed forms of all three programs, as well as a traditional English immersion program, allowing for comparison of outcomes across programs. Our research followed EL students who entered Kindergarten with similar background characteristics but who were placed into different linguistic instructional programs. Our results show beneficial medium- to long-term effects of bilingual and dual immersion program enrollment on academic performance, English proficiency, and reclassification rates.

Specifically, we found that students enrolled in bilingual programs exhibit faster academic growth than their counterparts in all-English instructional settings (Valentino & Reardon, 2015). Furthermore, students in bilingual programs and dual immersion programs are less likely to attain English language proficiency and reclassification in the short-term (in elementary school), but in the medium- to long-term they are ultimately more likely to reach English proficiency and more likely to be reclassified. In the early grades, particularly in mid-elementary school, ELs in English immersion are more likely to become English proficient and to be reclassified than are comparable ELs in bilingual programs. By the time students reach middle school, however, students in the three bilingual programs catch up

to and surpass their EL counterparts in English immersion both in terms of English proficiency and in terms of reclassification (Umansky & Reardon, 2014).

These findings are consistent with the idea that acquiring a solid foundation in one's native language supports one's ability to acquire proficiency in a second language (Cummins, 1991; Goldenberg & Coleman, 2010). These are timely research results considering the rapid rise in dual immersion programs in the state and the 2016 ballot proposition to expand bilingual and dual immersion opportunities.

Teacher Preparation for EL Instruction

A final area of research findings pertains to teacher preparation, specifically teachers' preparation to work with English learners in the context of the new CCSS and SBAC assessments. This was not a focus in our partnerships, but we did interview and survey school leaders and teachers about EL instruction and teacher preparation to instruct ELs. In these interviews teachers report feeling insufficiently prepared to teach English learners, particularly in the context of CCSS.

In the ELL Leadership Network districts teachers report that they feel a need to shift their practice in order to support their students, particularly their ELs, in meeting the demands of the CCSS and SBAC assessments. In a survey of teachers and students about their experiences with the SBAC field test, teachers report that many or most of their students struggled with the assessment. Teachers expressed a need to modify their practice in a variety of ways, including providing more extended writing opportunities, more multi-step problems, more open-ended questions, more close reading, and engagement with more challenging texts in order to support their students in meeting the new standards (Thompson, Silva, Cross, Robb, & Curry, 2015).

In LAUSD, interviews with elementary teachers reveal that teachers struggle with pressure to teach all of the curriculum and standards due to insufficient time and support (Estrada, 2014b). This pressure can result in tension between coverage and teaching for mastery. Secondary teachers report needing professional development focused both on providing ELs access to the core in their specific content areas and grade levels, and on understanding and using academic language objectives in content lessons (Estrada, 2014b).

Research outside of these partnerships has begun to identify promising directions for teacher preparation and professional development, particularly with regard to ensuring that the promise of CCSS is fully realized for ELs. These include team-oriented inquiry-based opportunities to develop both competencies and dispositions to effectively teach ELs, including understanding how language development happens and the interrelationships between language and content (Santos, Darling-Hammond, & Cheuk, 2012; Bunch, 2013).

Policy Recommendations

Findings from the three school district – university research partnerships offer important implications for California policy as we move into a new era of standards, assessments, programs, and funding for English learners.

1. Improve How California Classifies Students Learning English

EL classification is currently too blunt, too variable by district, and too likely to produce unintended consequences. California policymakers can take the following steps to improve reclassification:

A. Create and mandate a common set of classification and reclassification criteria and processes across the state. This will provide a common definition of who is an English learner, reduce major variation in EL characteristics across the state, and facilitate the growth of common knowledge regarding effective EL instruction and appropriate EL services.

B. Statewide, use only English proficiency criteria, rather than English proficiency and academic performance criteria, for classification and reclassification decisions. This policy, already in place in several states including New York and Washington, will help to ensure that English learner students do not continue to receive language support services (ELD, etc.) when

they no longer need them. Because districts are expected to ensure that all students achieve academic proficiency, this would not represent a lowering of standards for EL students. California's new English proficiency assessment (ELPAC) is specifically designed to assess students' progress toward the English language and literacy demands of academic work. This makes exclusive use of English proficiency criteria for reclassification particularly appropriate.

C. Set the ELPAC reclassification criterion at the point at which the distribution of EL students' academic performance (for example scores on the Smarter Balanced assessment) most closely parallels that of the non-EL population. This level identifies the point at which ELs' English proficiency level does not impede academic performance (Linquanti & Cook, 2013).

2. Improve How California Collects and Uses Data on Students Learning English

The research from our partnerships highlights several policy implications for how the state collects and uses data on students learning English.

A. Use longitudinal data and include all ever-ELs when analyzing the effectiveness of different EL services and programs. As our research shows, examining short-term or cross-sectional outcomes of programs and services can be misleading, as is examination that focuses only on current ELs. Conducting lon-

gitudinal analysis of EL outcomes and following students who remain ELs as well as those who are reclassified out of EL status gives a more accurate and complete picture of how EL students perform and progress. Analyses should also monitor subgroups of the ever-EL population including current ELs, LTELs, students who are classified both as ELs and in need of special education services, reclassified students, and newcomer students.

B. Support districts in monitoring and setting goals for both the academic and the linguistic progress of all students who enter school without full English proficiency. This monitoring and goal-setting should include ELPAC and SBAC outcomes for the full ever-EL population (i.e., both current ELs and former ELs), aggregated and disaggregated, throughout their schooling. Support districts' use of language and content area assessments in students' home languages, both for understanding students' initial level of home language literacy and to achieve increased validity on measures of content area knowledge, when appropriate. Home language content area assessments may be more valid than English language content area assessments, particularly for newcomer students and for students in bilingual programs who are receiving instruction in that content area in their home language. Home language literacy assessments may be appropriate for initial assessment of EL students' literacy background

and current literacy strengths and needs.

C. Incentivize new and continuing research-practice partnerships between school districts and universities on issues critical to EL success. These partnerships, including the ones detailed in this brief, focus scholarship on urgent problems of practice and facilitate rapid and direct dissemination of research findings to key stakeholders.

3. Expand the Educational Opportunities of California's Students Learning English

California policymakers should focus attention on improving the services and opportunities afforded to students learning English. Emphasis should be placed on ensuring that each student is receiving the specific services, opportunities, and supports that best ensure his or her educational success.

A. Support districts in providing ELs with full and equitable access to core content and higher achieving non-EL peers. English learners are tasked with dual learning goals: acquiring English proficiency and learning academic content. Districts struggle to meet both the language and content needs of ELs, and our research shows that language supports can crowd out or replace core content. The state can alter this dynamic by providing resources for districts to ensure that language and content classes complement rather than substitute for each other. More research needs to be done to identify the most effective ways of

accomplishing this, but the possibilities might include providing targeted professional development on integrating language and content instruction and lengthening ELs' school day or academic year. Additional funding provided for ELs through the LCFF could support these initiatives.

B. Require, monitor, and enforce district policies to provide ELs with full and equitable access to core content and higher achieving non-EL peers. Rather than monitoring solely whether ELs have access to language services, the state should also monitor ELs' enrollment in core academic classes and the quality of instruction they receive in these classes. This would shift districts' focus from language acquisition to a balanced approach of language acquisition and academic progress, while discouraging tracking practices that limit English learners' access to core content and upper track classes.

C. At the state level, remove legal barriers and create incentives for districts to expand bilingual and dual immersion programs. Given the evidence that bilingual and dual immersion programs are effective in improving reclassification rates and academic outcomes, districts should have the option of providing such programs. Provide resources and knowledge-sharing support to districts building or expanding these programs, and encourage districts to conduct and disseminate rigorous research on the impact of their bilingual programs to

parents and community stakeholders.

D. Support the expansion of access to high-quality teachers of English learners – including bilingual teachers – through strong state guidelines on initial teacher preparation and support for capacity-building among existing teachers. Areas of expertise that matter most for the teachers of English learners include an understanding of second language acquisition and development, incorporation of language and literacy instruction in all content areas, and integration of students' prior knowledge and background into instruction.

E. Finally, support districts' capacity to correctly identify and serve ELs with special education needs in a timely manner. This will require ensuring that special education and intervention assessment and referral procedures are not biased for English learner students. Important components of unbiased assessment and referral procedures include appropriate assessments and assessment modifications for ELs and referral teams that include EL specialists and special education specialists who are knowledgeable and trained to assess EL students. The state can play an important role in identifying and requiring the use of unbiased assessments and assessment modifications, and in establishing strong guidelines for the make-up and professional preparation of special education and intervention referral teams.

Conclusion: New Opportunities for English Learners

California sits at a moment of unique opportunity. The implementation of the Common Core and California ELD standards, the resources provided to schools through the LCFF, and the upcoming vote on bilingual education together have the potential to substantially improve educational opportunities for the state's 1.4 million English learner students. To take full advantage of these opportunities, policymakers and educators should rely on the best available evidence to shape state and district policies and to inform classroom instructional practice for EL students.

The research described in this brief points to three main conclusions. First, California must improve the ways in which students who need language supports are classified and reclassified, in order to improve alignment across districts in the state, and alignment between classification and services. Second, state and local officials must become more systematic in how data on ELs are collected and used, by tracking students' progress over longer time periods and by including all students who were ever ELs in accountability metrics. Finally, and most importantly, the state must improve ELs' educational opportunities in school by expanding access to core content, bilingual instruction, and well-prepared teachers. Changes along these lines would not necessarily require large new investments, but they could yield substantial benefits for large numbers of California students.

Authors

Dr. Ilana M. Umansky is an Assistant Professor in the College of Education at the University of Oregon. Her work focuses on quantitative and longitudinal analysis of the educational opportunities and outcomes of immigrant students and students classified in school as English learners.

Dr. Sean F. Reardon is the Professor of Poverty and Inequality in Education at Stanford University's Graduate School of Education.

Dr. Kenji Hakuta is the Lee L. Jacks Professor of Education at Stanford University's Graduate School of Education and specializes in the education of English language learners.

Dr. Karen D. Thompson is an Assistant Professor in the College of Education at Oregon State University, where she frequently partners with educators to analyze data and design systems and instruction in ways that facilitate rich learning experiences for emerging bilingual students.

Dr. Peggy Estrada is an Associate Research Professor in the Latin American and Latino Studies Department at the University of California, Santa Cruz.

Dr. Katherine Hayes, Program Evaluation and Research Coordinator, is the Chair of the Committee for External Research Review for the Los Angeles Unified School District.

Hilda Maldonado is the Executive Director of the Multilingual and Multicultural Education Department for the Los Angeles Unified School District.

Dr. Susan Tandberg is the principal of Valerio Elementary School in Los Angeles and an Adjunct Professor at California Lutheran University in the Graduate School of Education, Department of Learning and Teaching.

Dr. Claude Goldenberg is the Nomellini & Olivier Professor of Education at Stanford University's Graduate School of Education.

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Stanford Graduate School of Education
520 Galvez Mall, CERAS Rm. 401
Stanford, CA 94305-3001
(650) 724-2832
http://www.edpolicyinca.org

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