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## **The Schooling of English Learners**

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An increasing number of students entering California's schools come from non-English speaking backgrounds. Although some of these language minority students enter school already proficient in English, the majority do not. These students are now referred to as English learners.<sup>1</sup>

There are several reasons why Californians need to pay careful attention to the schooling of language minority students in their public schools. First, language minority students now constitute more than one-third of all students in California's schools—a proportion that will grow even higher in the future. Clearly, the success of California's students and schools will increasingly depend on the state's ability to successfully educate language minority students.

Second, English learners require a specialized curriculum and properly trained teachers to support their development of English literacy. Complicating matters is the fact that these students, even as they learn English, must also have access to the rest of the required academic curriculum if they are to keep pace with their English-speaking cohorts.

Third, the education of English learners has been highly politicized. Controversy centers around the use of native language instruction—whether it is better to first develop the native language literacy of English learners and provide initial academic content through bilingual education or, on the other hand, to simply immerse them in English and provide initial academic content through simplified English instruction. While existing evidence generally supports the bilingual approach, the research is hotly debated and far from conclusive regarding which general approach makes more sense for which students and under what conditions.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, there is a growing political movement in many states to mandate, through voter initiatives, English-only instruction. In June 1998, California voters approved Proposition 227, an initiative that greatly restricted the use of bilingual education.

This chapter provides an overview of the schooling of English learners in California. First, we review the nature and growth of the language minority population. Second, we review the political context surrounding the instruction of English learners, focusing on the adoption and impact of Proposition 227. Third, we examine the nature of the teaching force for English learners. Fourth, we analyze the achievement of English learners. Finally, we conclude with several pending or emerging issues that will continue to affect the education of English learners into the foreseeable future.

### **The Growing Language Minority Population**

Many California students come from non-English speaking backgrounds. This is due, in large part, to the large number of immigrants in California. In 1997, 25 percent of California's residents were born outside the United States, more than any other state.<sup>3</sup> It is also due to differences in the rates that immigrant families become proficient in English, which depends upon the opportunities for learning and using English in their daily lives.<sup>4</sup>

Both federal and state laws require that public schools identify students who are not yet proficient in English in order to provide them with supplemental services. This is done as a two-step process. First, schools identify students who come from non-English speaking backgrounds through a home language survey that asks parents a number of questions about the language background of their child.<sup>5</sup> If the answers to any of these questions indicate that the child comes from a non-English speaking background, the child is identified as a language minority student.

The second step of the process is to assess the English language proficiency of the student. This is typically done with one of several language proficiency tests available from commercial test publishers.<sup>6</sup> In kindergarten, when most students enter school, the tests only assess a student's oral English proficiency. Beginning in second grade, the language proficiency tests

evaluate both oral and written English proficiency. The tests usually rate students' English proficiency at five or six levels, ranging from non-English speaking to fluent English speaking.<sup>7</sup> If students can understand English as it is used in school for instruction, they are classified as Fluent English Proficient (FEP) and not provided any special services. If students are not sufficiently proficient in English to understand classroom instruction, they are identified as English learners (ELs).

The California Department of Education conducts an annual language census each spring to count the number of language minority students and to identify the instructional programs and the teaching force that serves them. The 1999 Language Census identified 2.2 million language minority students in California, which represented 38 percent of the total student population in 1998-99 (see Table 1). About two-thirds of language minority students were identified as English learners and one-third as Fluent English Proficient (FEP), but these proportions vary widely by grade level. Among younger students, the vast majority of language minority students are English learners, while in the upper grades the proportions of ELs to FEPs are more nearly equal. This pattern reflects the fact that, over time, an increasing number of English learners become proficient in English and are reclassified as Fluent English Proficient. But as we point out below, the process of reclassification is far from straightforward.

In California, three-quarters of language minority students—more than 1.6 million—are Latino and come from Spanish-speaking backgrounds (see bottom panel in Table 1). The remaining language minority population comes from a wide variety of language backgrounds, with Asian languages (Cantonese, Vietnamese, and Hmong) being the next most common groups.<sup>8</sup>

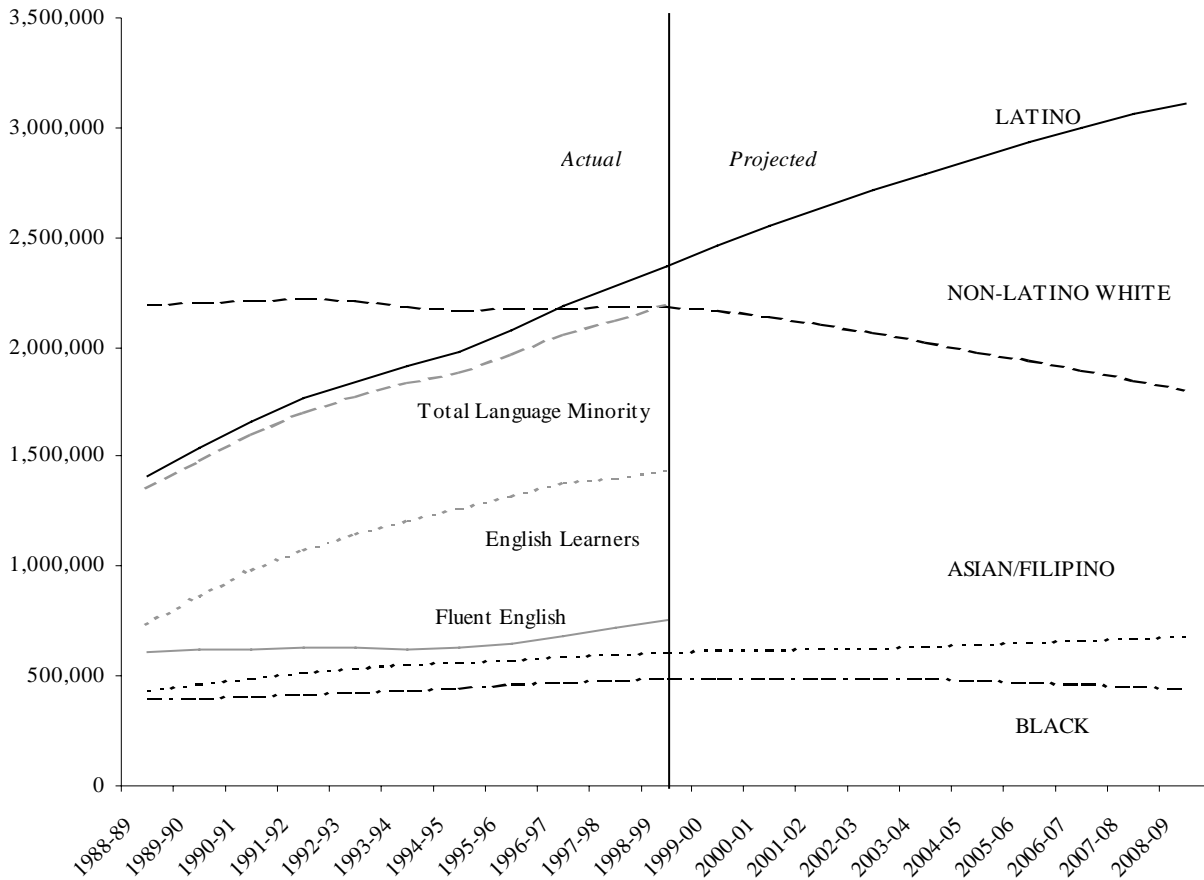
Table 1  
California Public School Enrollment by Language Minority Status and Grade Level, 1999

	English Learner		Fluent English Proficient		Language Minority Total		Total Enrollment
	Number	Percent of Total Enrollment	Number	Percent of Total Enrollment	Number	Percent of Total Enrollment	Number
ALL STUDENTS							
Grade K-5	907,379	32%	257,409	9%	1,164,788	41%	2,836,042
Grade 6-12	515,529	18%	498,363	17%	1,013,892	35%	2,916,775
Ungraded	19,784	22%	2,591	3%	22,375	25%	91,294
Total	1,442,692	25%	758,363	13%	2,201,055	38%	5,844,111
SPANISH-SPEAKING AND LATINO STUDENTS							
Grade K-5	759,845	60%	160,115	13%	919,960	73%	1,262,243
Grade 6-12	403,531	36%	316,883	29%	720,414	65%	1,107,629
Ungraded	18,177	43%	2,104	5%	20,281	48%	42,187
Total	1,181,553	49%	479,102	20%	1,660,655	69%	2,412,059
(% of all students)	(82%)		(63%)		(75%)		(41%)

SOUCRE: California State Department of Education, *Language Census Summary Statistic, 1998-99* (Sacramento, California: author). Retrieved November 8, 1999 from the World Wide Web: <http://www.cde.ca.gov/demographics/reports/statewide/lcsum99.htm>; California State Department of Education, *Enrollment by Ethnic Group, 1981-82 through 1998-99* (Sacramento, California: author). Retrieved November 8, 1999 from the World Wide Web: <http://www.cde.ca.gov/demographics/reports/statewide/ethstud.htm>;

The population of English learners in California’s schools has grown dramatically over the last fifteen years. Between 1983-84 and 1998-99, the number of English learners increased almost five times faster than the overall student population (196 percent versus 43 percent).<sup>9</sup> In 1983-84, one out of eight California students was an English learner—today it is one out of four. This proportion will likely increase in the future. According to projections from the California Department of Finance, Latino enrollment in California’s public schools will increase more than three times as fast as overall enrollment (see Figure 1). And since the majority of Latino students come from non-English speaking backgrounds, this increase will likely result in a growing number of English learners in California’s schools.

Figure 1  
California Public K-12 Enrollment by Major Ethnic and Language Minority Groups,  
1988-89 to 2008-09



SOURCE: California Department of Finance, *California Public K-12 Enrollment Projections by Ethnicity: 1999 Series*, Retrieved from the World Wide Web November 21, 1999: <http://www.dof.ca.gov/html/Demograp/K12ethtb.htm>; California Department of Education, *Language Census Report for California Public Schools*, various years.

While the procedures for identifying language minority students and assessing their initial level of English (usually oral) proficiency are relatively straightforward, the procedures for re-classifying students as fluent English proficient and instructing students to achieve English fluency are not. Until recently, district procedures for reclassifying English learners had to follow quite prescriptive state guidelines. But the California State Board of Education recently abolished many of those guidelines.<sup>10</sup>

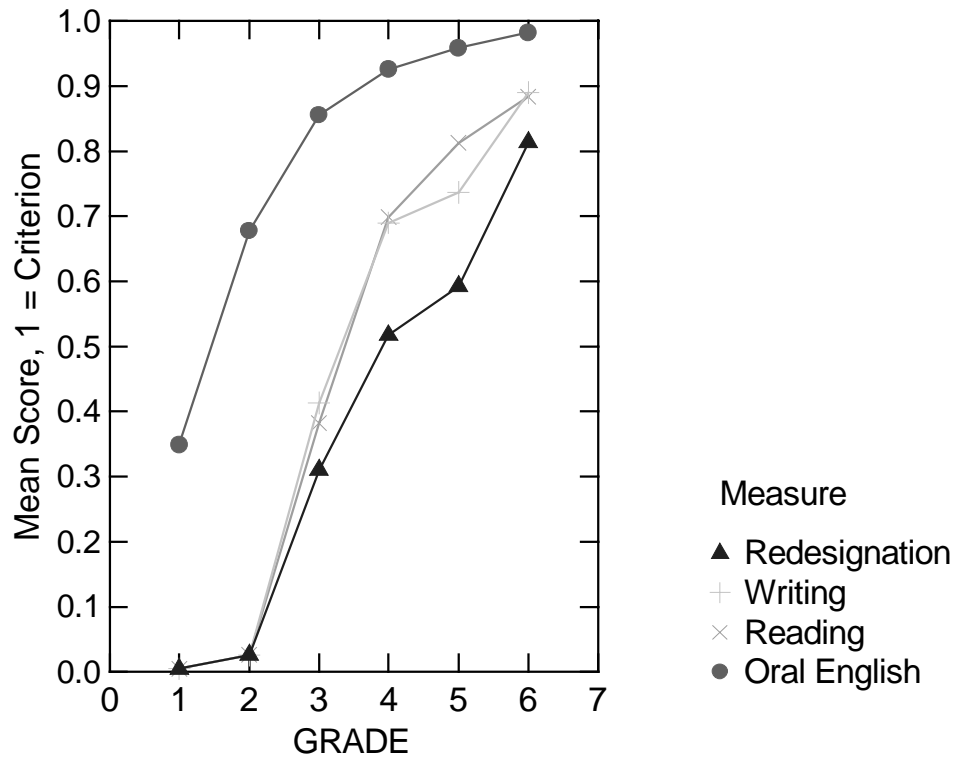
In the past, reclassification was based on multiple measures of both English proficiency and student achievement. These assessments were based on either commercial English proficiency tests or district-developed assessments. In addition, students had to perform above a certain percentile level (usually 35 to 36) on a norm-referenced test in reading in order to be reclassified as Fluent English Proficient. The achievement-level requirement was not only to ensure that English learners were proficient in English, but to ensure that they were minimally successful in school before losing all supplemental language support. Critics have argued, however, that using even a relatively low cut-off on a norm-referenced achievement test sets too high a standard since the use of percentile measurement virtually ensures that a significant percentage of English learners can never meet the criterion. In effect, they would have to outperform about one-third of native-English speakers in order to do so.<sup>11</sup> Even with the previous standard of using the 36 percentile as a cut-off, however, six to eight percent of all English learners are reclassified as Fluent English Proficient each year. And over the last ten years, the number of English learners reclassified as English proficient has increased at almost the same rate as the overall population of English learners—100 percent (also see Figure 1).

One subject of considerable debate concerns how long it takes for students to become proficient in English. The answer to this question depends on how English proficiency is defined and measured. Even based on the more common approaches described above, the length of time is considerable. A good illustration comes from a recent study of a school district in the San Francisco Bay area with a mix of Spanish and Vietnamese background students.<sup>12</sup> The study examined the English proficiency and reclassification of a sample of 1,872 students in grades 1-6 who had entered the district as English learners in kindergarten. As Figure 2 shows, it takes longer for students to become proficient in written English than in oral English. By the end of



fourth grade, after being in the district for five years, 90 percent of the students were classified as proficient in oral English. But it took seven years in the district for 90 percent of the students to be classified as proficient in English reading and writing. These findings probably understate the amount of time it takes to become proficient in English because the sample only included students who had been in the same district since kindergarten. Research has shown that student mobility increases the amount of time it takes to become proficient in English.<sup>13</sup> Other studies have found that the amount of time it takes to become proficient in English reading and writing varies from six to ten years.<sup>14</sup>

Figure 2  
English Oral Proficiency, Reading and Writing Development and Redesignation Probability  
as a Function of Grade Level: One California School District



SOURCE: Kenji Hakuta, Yuko Goto Butler, and Daria Witt, *How Long Does It Take English Language Learners to Attain Proficiency?* (Santa Barbara: UC Linguistic Minority Research Institute, forthcoming), Figure 8.

Some scholars believe that existing indicators of English proficiency are insufficient to ensure the continued school success of English learners. They argue that to succeed in school, especially in secondary and postsecondary school, English learners need to acquire *academic English*, “the specific type of English entailed in reading and writing academic papers and in discussing academic issues.”<sup>15</sup> Academic English involves using specific linguistic functions of the language—such as persuading, arguing, and hypothesizing—that are not well represented in general measures of English proficiency. Therefore, English learners who may be classified as English proficient based on standardized English proficiency tests may not have acquired proficiency in academic English. Some of these students may even do well enough in secondary school to get into college, but they often encounter difficulty doing college work.

For example, at the University of California, Irvine, which enrolls the largest population of language minority students in the UC system, 60 percent of incoming freshmen failed the freshman writing exam in 1998.<sup>16</sup> Over 90 percent of these students were language minority students who had attended American schools for over eight years; furthermore, 65 percent of them had taken Honors and Advanced Placement English courses in high school. A similar pattern exists at the twenty-two campuses of the California State University System, where 65 percent of all entering Mexican American and Asian American students required remedial English in 1998.<sup>17</sup>

These data suggest that even the most successful English learners—those who enroll in four-year colleges—may not master the levels of English required in advanced academic settings. However, most English learners never advance that far. The reason is simply that learning English is difficult and learning academic English is even more so. While ordinary or everyday English is

learned both inside and outside of school, academic English is generally learned in school from teachers and textbooks, and only with proper instructional support.<sup>18</sup> Unfortunately, as we point out below, many English learners are not given the instructional support they need because of a lack of properly trained teachers who can provide support over a sufficient period of time.

### **Proposition 227 and the Instruction of English Learners**

The rate at which English learners are reclassified as English proficient and no longer in need of special services has become an important political issue in the larger debate about the schooling of English learners. Ever since the *Lau v. Nichols* (1974) decision, states and local school districts have been required to provide appropriate services to English learners. But the nature of those services has generated considerable controversy in many states, including California. The debate has focused on whether English learners should be instructed in their native language while learning English, or simply instructed in English.

California was one of the first states in the nation to enact a comprehensive bilingual education bill—the Chacon-Moscone Bilingual-Bicultural Education Act of 1976, which provided detailed instructions to schools about the type of language support that should be provided for English learners. By 1986, however, the existing California bilingual education legislation had “sunsetting” by not being reauthorized, so bilingual education programs continued under the authority of department of education regulations, which were shaped largely by federal requirements. Numerous attempts were made between 1985 and 1998 to hammer out compromise legislation to restore the statutory basis for the provision of language support services for English learners, but none of these attempts was ultimately successful.

In 1998, California became a battleground for a national movement to abolish all native language instruction by mandating English-only instruction. In California, this movement took the

form of a voter initiative—Proposition 227—that severely restricted the use of primary language for instructional purposes, and instead provided for a transitional program of “structured English immersion” that was not normally to last more than one year.<sup>19</sup> The initiative was approved by the voters in June 1998 and schools were required to implement it in the opening days of the 1998-99 school year. For many districts, this meant that only about sixty days were available to prepare for this policy implementation. The state board of education rushed to provide guidelines for schools,<sup>20</sup> although most decisions about how to implement the mandate were left to the local education agencies. At the same time, districts were dealing with a plethora of other state initiatives that were having an impact on the schooling of English learners, which we discuss below.

What has been the impact of Proposition 227? Proponents of 227 have argued that the shift toward more English instruction is already improving the test scores of English learners.<sup>21</sup> Yet at this early stage there is little research evidence to scientifically assess the impact of 227 on student achievement.<sup>22</sup> However, preliminary research does indicate that Proposition 227 has had a considerable impact on the instruction of English learners in California.

A team of University of California researchers<sup>23</sup> looked at the effects of Proposition 227 in sixteen districts and twenty-five schools during the initial months of implementation.<sup>24</sup> Urban, rural, and suburban K-8 and unified districts were included in the study, as were very large and very small districts. Most of the ten largest districts in the state were also included. Some of the districts had a history of strong support for primary language instruction and had extensive primary language programs before 227; others had relied heavily on English-only programs. Beginning in the fall of 1998, the teams interviewed administrators charged with the policy implementation at each district, and then followed up with interviews of principals, teachers, and

bilingual coordinators in key schools within these districts. Researchers selected schools that had relatively large populations of English learners and would therefore be most affected by the policy. Classroom observations were also conducted in most of these schools. This study has yielded several important insights into the implementation and impact of Proposition 227.

### Diversity of District Responses

Across the sixteen districts and twenty-five schools, there was wide diversity of responses to the mandate, although this diversity was not without a pattern. Districts with a history of extensive primary language programs and significant numbers of certified bilingual staff were more likely to consult with their communities and to attempt the continuation these programs than were districts and schools with weaker primary language programs and inadequate numbers of certified bilingual staff. Researchers also found that where strong leadership was exercised at the top of the district, either in providing parents with information about alternative options to structured English immersion classes, or in urging principals to discontinue primary language instruction, schools followed suit. However, where district leadership was less prescriptive, the decisions fell to principals, creating a diversity of responses within the district.<sup>25</sup> In both situations, some teachers exercised considerable autonomy in interpreting district and school directives, resulting in a diversity of instructional strategies within the same school.

### Variation in Procedures Regarding Provision of Waiver Options

In the initial months of implementation, there was considerable confusion across the state about the role of the district and the schools in informing parents of their rights to seek waivers from the structured English immersion program provided under the provisions of Proposition 227. Although the state board of education had issued an advisory stating that parents were to be notified of the right to seek a waiver from SEI instruction, a fall 1998 survey conducted by the

California Department of Education showed that only 67 percent of districts had formally notified parents of this option.<sup>26</sup> Some districts interpreted the initiative as barring any proactive dissemination of waiver information while others considered it their duty under the law to provide parents with information about their program options. Thus, some of the districts moved quickly to provide waiver information to the schools and parents, while others provided such information only as requested from parents, or only after a lengthy period of debate and reflection. Schools and districts that facilitated access to information about the waiver option were more likely to continue to provide primary language instruction for significant numbers of students.

#### Impact on Classroom Instruction

What teachers chose to do in their own classrooms in the post-227 period depended to a great extent on what they had done prior to 227, and on their own skills, experience, and beliefs about students' learning. However, it was rare to encounter a teacher who contended that his or her instruction and class organization had not been affected. Not surprisingly, teachers who were certified and experienced in bilingual instruction, although no longer assigned to bilingual classrooms, were more likely to continue to provide some level of primary language support for their students. However, this varied greatly depending on the climate in their schools. These teachers were careful to keep primary language support within the strict confines of providing instruction "overwhelmingly in English," as defined by their district. Although many teachers who taught in waived classrooms, using bilingual methods, contended that their teaching had not changed significantly, they were quick to note that they worried about the future and the possibility that they would be required to change their practice over time. There was a real sense among many teachers that official policy was continuing to evolve. Many experienced bilingual

teachers who were no longer in bilingual classrooms reported feeling frustrated by not being able to use the full range of skills they possessed to instruct their English learners.

In the schools that were studied intensively, a much more reductionist notion of literacy was observed, compared to what went on in these same classrooms prior to the implementation of Proposition 227.<sup>27</sup> Language and literacy were rarely used as tools for learning other subjects; instead English itself—in terms of developing oral fluency and reading decoding skills—was becoming the focal point of instruction. Teachers attributed this focus to their concerns about the English language testing to which students would be subjected and by which students' educational progress would be gauged by policymakers and the public.

### Issues in Implementation

The implementation of 227 created a number of problems for schools and teachers:

- Lost instructional time. The thirty day English-only period at the beginning of the year mandated by Proposition 227 resulted in a loss of instructional time for almost all English learners because of the temporary and transient nature of the classes and unavailability of materials to meet all children's needs.
- Inadequate materials and training for implementing the structured English immersion program. Several schools reported that while Spanish language texts were discarded or stored away, no comparable texts were available for students in the new English-only program and that teachers were uncertain about how to approach the instruction of their students.
- Inadequate professional development in the teaching of English reading to English learners. Professional development time available within the regular school calendar has been reduced as a result of new legislation, and none of the districts or schools studied during the first half

of the 1998–99 school year had provided training for teachers that focused specifically on the teaching of reading to English learners under the new Proposition 227 conditions.

- Teachers’ fear of legal reprisals. A hyper-interpretation of the new law was noted in some schools where teachers created instructional practices and restrictions that were not mandated by the law in an attempt to protect themselves from the possibility of reprimand or prosecution. For example, a teacher might focus on specific features of English, such as word recognition, while ignoring other aspects of general literacy development, such as story-telling.

#### Overall Effects of Proposition 227

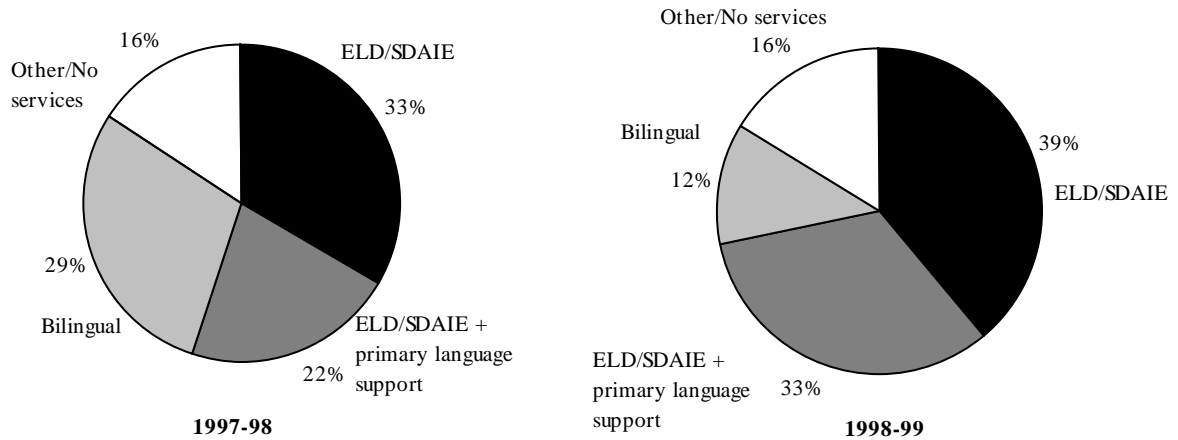
All but four of the sixteen districts studied reduced the percentages of students receiving primary language instruction (reductions ranged from 12 to 100 percentage points); three districts maintained a similar percentage; and one contended that it increased the percent of students who were assigned to primary language programs. Across the state, 29 percent of English learners were in a primary language program prior to 227, and only 12 percent were assigned to one after the implementation of 227 (See Figure 3)

While there was a tendency for schools and districts with extensive primary language programs to continue to provide these programs at some level, some schools with well-developed primary language programs completely abandoned them in the wake of Proposition 227.

Moreover, considerable change was found in the actual classroom practices of teachers, with much more emphasis on the use of English, even in schools that purported not to have changed or reduced their primary language instructional programs. Concerns about the requirement that students be tested in English drove these new practices as much as teachers’ concerns about avoiding reprimand or worse.



Figure 3  
Types of Instructional Services for English Learners Before and After Proposition 227



NOTE: ELD/SDAIE is English Language Development (ELD) or Specially Designed Academic Instruction in English (SDAIE).

SOUCRE: California State Department of Education, *Language Census Summary Statistic, 1997-98* and (Sacramento, California: author). Retrieved November 8, 1999 from the World Wide Web: <http://www.cde.ca.gov/demographics/reports/statewide/lcsum98.htm>; California State Department of Education, *Language Census Summary Statistic, 1998-99* and (Sacramento, California: author). Retrieved November 8, 1999 from the World Wide Web: <http://www.cde.ca.gov/demographics/reports/statewide/lcsum99.htm>;

The extent to which schools and districts were changing their perceptions about the need to recruit bilingual teachers was investigated in seven of the sixteen districts. Five of the seven districts continued to seek bilingual teachers; two decided to curtail these hires. This was in spite of the fact that both the department of education and the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing have continued to underscore the importance of BCLAD teachers for a number of instructional purposes.<sup>28</sup>

Thus, while it was tempting to conclude on the basis of principal interviews that not a great deal had changed in some of the schools, a look inside the classrooms yielded a different perspective. Even in bilingual classrooms, teachers were changing their practice to accommodate both practical concerns—such as the impact required English testing would have on their

students— as well as concerns for their own professional well-being. Moreover, there was a pervasive sense that policies were still unfolding in many districts; consequently, teachers were unsure of what the future held.

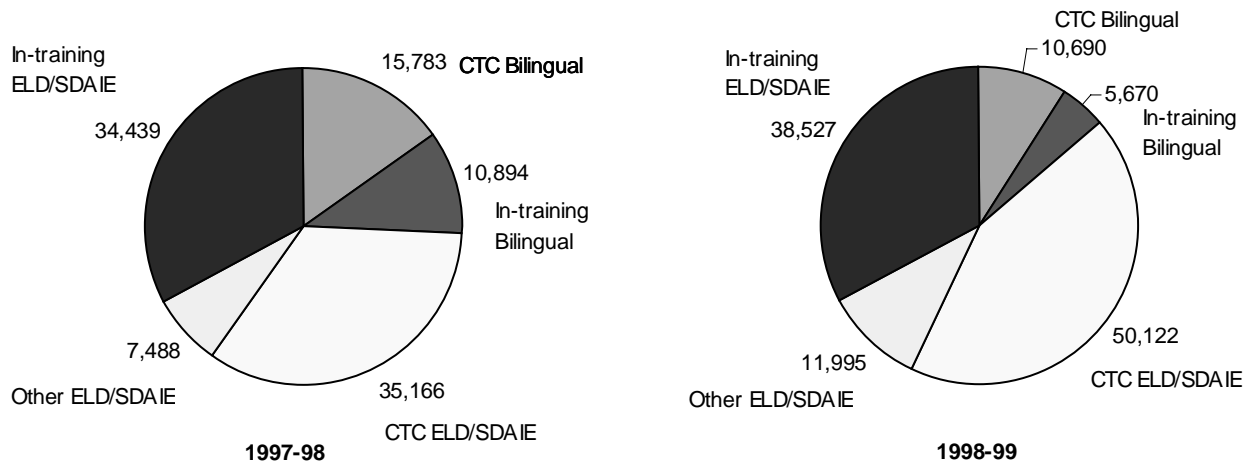
### **Teacher Recruitment and the Adequacy of the Teacher Pool for English Learners**

Perhaps the greatest challenge for the education of English learners is the recruitment and preparation of sufficient numbers of teachers who are qualified and skilled in meeting their specific learning needs. Two primary credentials are offered in California today that are supposed to address the needs of English learners. One is the Cross-cultural, Language and Academic Development (CLAD) credential, which can be earned by examination or through coursework on cultural and linguistic diversity, which includes techniques for Specially Designed Academic Instruction in English (SDAIE) and English Language Development instruction. The other is the Bilingual Cross-cultural, Language and Academic Development (BCLAD) credential, which requires, in addition to the basic CLAD requirements, proficiency in a second language.<sup>29</sup> If obtained through coursework requirements, the BCLAD usually includes more extensive preparation related to second language acquisition.

As pointed out in the chapter on teachers and teaching in California, currently 28,500—or a little more than one in ten—of the state’s approximately 280,000 teachers are uncredentialed. This situation is not likely to improve any time soon. Furthermore, uncredentialed teachers are not evenly distributed across the state, nor are they evenly distributed among schools and classrooms containing different types of students. English language learners, for instance, are extremely likely to have a less than fully qualified teacher. In 1998, prior to the passage of Proposition 227, California had a shortfall of 11,000 certified bilingual teachers and 34,000

teachers certified to provide appropriate English language training (see Figure 4, left panel). This meant that only about one-third of all English learners had a fully certified teacher.<sup>30</sup>

Figure 4  
Number of Teachers Providing Instructional Services for English Learners by Certification, Before and After Proposition 227



NOTE: CTC teachers are teachers who hold valid certificates for the designated type of instructional service from California Commission for Teacher Credentialing (CTC). ELD/SDAIE teachers hold certificates to teacher English Language Development (ELD) or Specially Designed Academic Instruction in English (SDAIE). Other teachers hold an SB1969 certificate or CDE approved district certificate.

SOURCE: California State Department of Education, *Language Census Summary Statistic, 1997-98* and (Sacramento, California: author). Retrieved November 8, 1999 from the World Wide Web: <http://www.cde.ca.gov/demographics/reports/statewide/lcsum98.htm>; California State Department of Education, *Language Census Summary Statistic, 1998-99* and (Sacramento, California: author). Retrieved November 8, 1999 from the World Wide Web: <http://www.cde.ca.gov/demographics/reports/statewide/lcsum99.htm>

Today, because of the growth of English immersion programs and the reduction of bilingual education programs brought about by Proposition 227, the number of teachers who hold credentials to work with English learners has grown dramatically. For example, the number of teachers with English Language Development (ELD) and SDAIE training has increased to 50,122 (see Figure 4, right panel). Another 11,995 teachers have been “grandfathered” into the category of CLAD teachers through provisions of SB1969, which allows experienced teachers to receive

certification through staff development training or college course work. Added to this number are 10,690 teachers with BCLAD and other bilingual credentials. On paper, it appears that among those teachers in California who instruct English learners, a significant number (52 percent) have received some kind of preparation in instructing English learners. Unfortunately, this preparation is often cursory and only sufficient to make a teacher aware of what he or she does not know. Under SB1969, CLAD certification can often be acquired with only forty-five hours of relevant training.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, students often are not assigned in their student teaching to the teachers who have been prepared to teach them. This is due, in large part, to the unequal distribution of qualified teachers across schools and districts. Given the teacher shortage in the state, the best prepared teachers can choose to take positions in the suburbs and in districts with less challenging populations, forcing the less well-prepared teachers into the inner cities and the schools with high proportions of poor students and English learners.

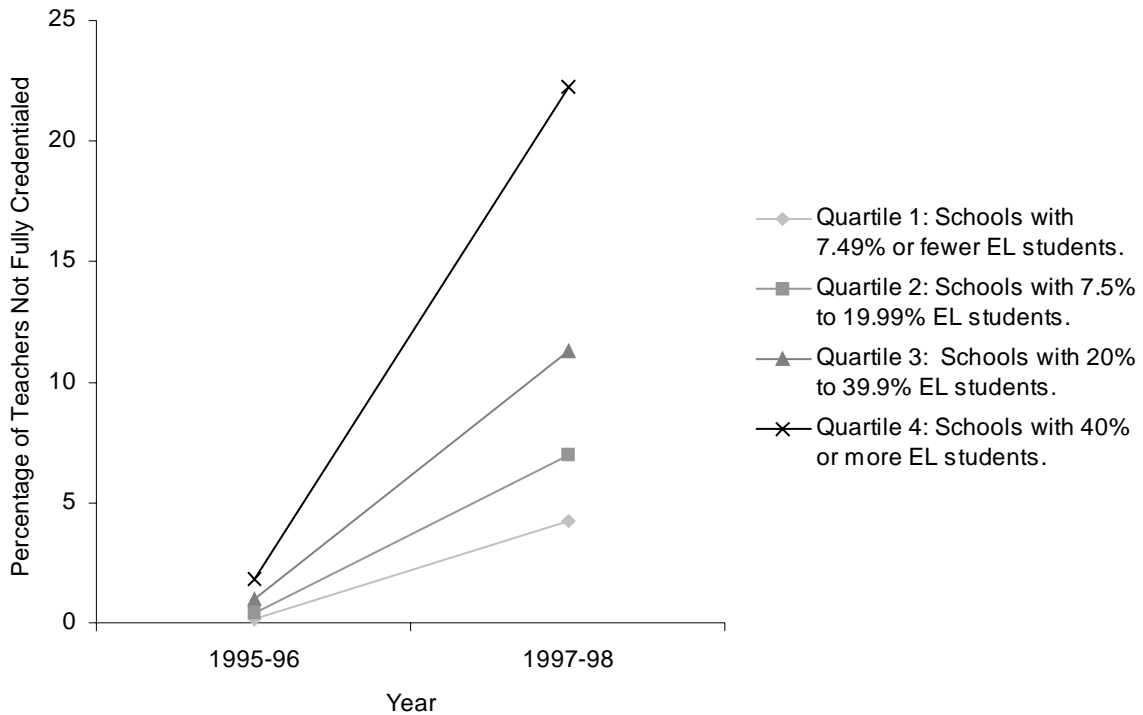
A recent review of middle school and secondary programs for English learners points out the acute problem of under-preparation of CLAD-credentialed teachers to meet the needs of English learners, especially in math and science.<sup>32</sup> Because these classes are “gatekeepers” for college preparatory coursework, students who do not do well in them are typically assigned to a general course of study that does not provide them with the option of entering a four-year college. This can have life-altering consequences for these students. A similar problem exists in that CLAD-credentialed English teachers often do not utilize their classes to prepare English learners for the academic requirements of subject areas.

The present crisis in providing English learners with fully qualified teachers has been exacerbated by recent reforms, particularly class-size reduction. A recent early evaluation of class-size reduction in California found that it increased the disparities in the numbers of qualified

teachers between schools with large concentrations of English learners and schools with small concentrations of English learners.<sup>33</sup> For example, the percentage of teachers not fully credentialed in schools with the least number of English learners (less than 8 percent) only increased from .2 percent in 1995-96 to 4.2 percent in 1997-98 (see Figure 5). However, the percentage in schools with the greatest proportion of English learners (40 percent or more) increased from 1.8 percent to 22.3 percent over the same two-year period. As a result, schools with the most English learners benefited the least from class-size reduction, at least in terms of access to fully credentialed teachers.<sup>34</sup>

Although Proposition 227 had no statutory effect on the credentialing of bilingual teachers (BCLAD), the issue has been raised whether certified bilingual teachers are still needed or desirable in a state that has placed rigid restrictions on the provision of bilingual education. In a somewhat ironic twist, it may be that bilingual teachers are more necessary now than under the conditions that existed prior to the passage of the initiative. Structured English immersion, the instructional approach recommended by 227 language, is an approach that actually relies on a teacher's knowledge of the students' primary language. While the children are usually not instructed in their primary language, past studies have nevertheless demonstrated that this approach is most effective when it incorporates a significant amount of primary language support to ease the students into the English-only curriculum. Moreover, bilingual teachers credentialed in California possess a body of knowledge about second language acquisition and the

Figure 5  
Percentage of Public K-3 Teachers Not Fully Credentialed  
by School Quartiles of English Learners: 1995-96 and 1997-98



SOURCE: George W. Bohrnstedt and Brian M. Stecher (Eds.), *Class Size Reduction in California: Early Evaluation Findings, 1996-1998* (Palo Alto: American Institutes for Research, 1999), Table D.31.

pedagogical tools that can enhance it that most non-bilingual teachers do not have.<sup>35</sup> At a time when there is so little direction being provided to teachers to help them with English learners and their primary language resources, this skill base of bilingual teachers may be especially important. There is also a growing awareness of the connection between parent involvement in schooling and children's academic achievement, pointing up the critical importance of home-school communication.<sup>36</sup> Without a teacher who speaks the language of the home, direct communication is not likely to occur. Thus, while the instructional methods of teachers may change under the new law, the importance of understanding children's educational needs in conjunction with their

linguistic development and communicating with their families does not. However, the perception that bilingual teachers may no longer be needed in California is likely to negatively affect both the supply and demand of such teachers for the state's English learners.

### **The Educational Achievement of English Learners**

Learning English is only one of the challenges facing English learners. The other is for them to succeed in all the other academic arenas of school. How are English learners in California doing in school? For many people inside and outside of the educational system, both in California and in the nation, achievement in school is best represented by one thing—scores on standardized tests. But as pointed out in the chapter on student performance, scores on standardized tests are not necessarily the best way nor should they be the only way to gauge the educational achievement of students.

This is especially true in the case of English learners because most existing national and state assessments are conducted in English. Because English learners are not yet proficient in English, such assessments may not accurately reveal the subject matter knowledge of English learners. A recent report by the National Research Council on the use of testing for tracking, promotion, and graduation posed the issue this way: “The central dilemma regarding participation of English-language learners in large-scale assessment programs is that, when students are not proficient in the language of assessment (English), their scores on a test given in English will not accurately reflect their knowledge of the subject being assessed (except for a test that measures only English proficiency).”<sup>37</sup>

California has responded to this dilemma by exempting English learners from taking the two English-based state proficiency tests that are part of California's Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) program—the Stanford 9 achievement test and the STAR augmentation

tests—if they have been enrolled in a California school for less than twelve months.<sup>38</sup> Instead, Spanish-speaking students enrolled less than twelve months are required to take the Spanish Assessment of Basic Education (SABE).<sup>39</sup> Based on existing research evidence, this policy means that English-based test scores for English learners in California will tend to understate their knowledge of subjects other than English.<sup>40</sup>

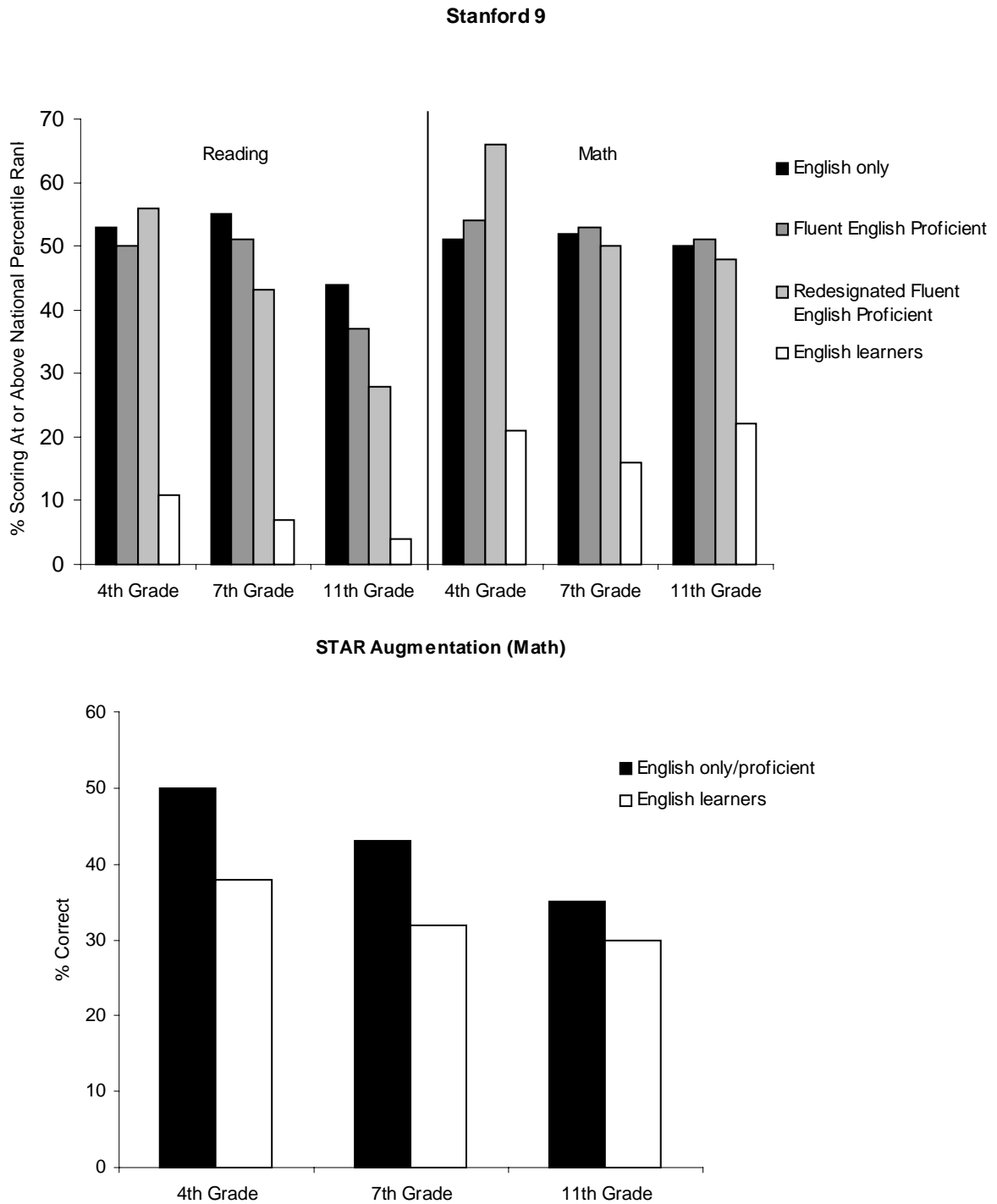
Another problem is that scores on standardized tests are typically reported as national percentile ranks, which only rates the performance of students to a relative standard—the performance of other students—rather than to a fixed standard that actually reveals what students know. This method of ranking ensures that some portion of students, regardless of what they know, will be ranked low. Nonetheless, this is the most common way of reporting test score results, which almost inevitably places English learners toward the bottom.

For example, in the 1999 statewide test program, English learners scored considerably lower than English-only students in the Stanford 9 reading and math tests. Among fourth grade students, for example, only 11 percent of English learners scored at the national average (50<sup>th</sup> percentile) in reading and 21 percent at the national average in math, compared to 53 in reading and 51 percent, respectively, for English-only students (Figure 6, top panel). Similar disparities existed for students in grades seven and eleven.

In 1999, California students were also tested, albeit in a very limited way, on their knowledge of the newly adopted California academic content standards. Unlike national exams like the Stanford 9, these tests were specifically designed to test students' knowledge in the subject areas that the state feels are most important for students to know. In addition, the only comparisons possible are between different groups of California test takers, not a national population. Results on the math portion of the 1999 tests are shown in the bottom panel of



Figure 6  
1999 State SAT-9 Reading and Math and STAR Augmentation (Math) Test Scores  
by Language Background



SOUCRE: California State Department of Education, *California Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR), 1999: State Reports* (Sacramento, California: author). Retrieved November 30, 1999 from the World Wide Web: <http://star.cde.ca.gov/star99/reports/English.html> and <http://207.87.22.181/STAR/>.

Figure 6. This time, the comparisons suggest that English language learners are much closer in terms of performance to English proficient students, although they still score below them at all grade levels.<sup>41</sup>

But even these comparisons do not provide a complete picture of the achievement of language minority students. These comparisons only focus on the achievement of language minority students who are not yet proficient in English (English learners) while ignoring the achievement of language minority students who are proficient in English. In other words, the comparisons do not account for those who enter the schools as fluent English speakers or for those who become fluent while in schools and hence are redesignated as fluent English proficient (FEP). To fully judge the performance of language minority students and the programs that are designed to teach them, it is important to examine both the performance of students who are still learning English and the performance of students who have become fully proficient in the language.

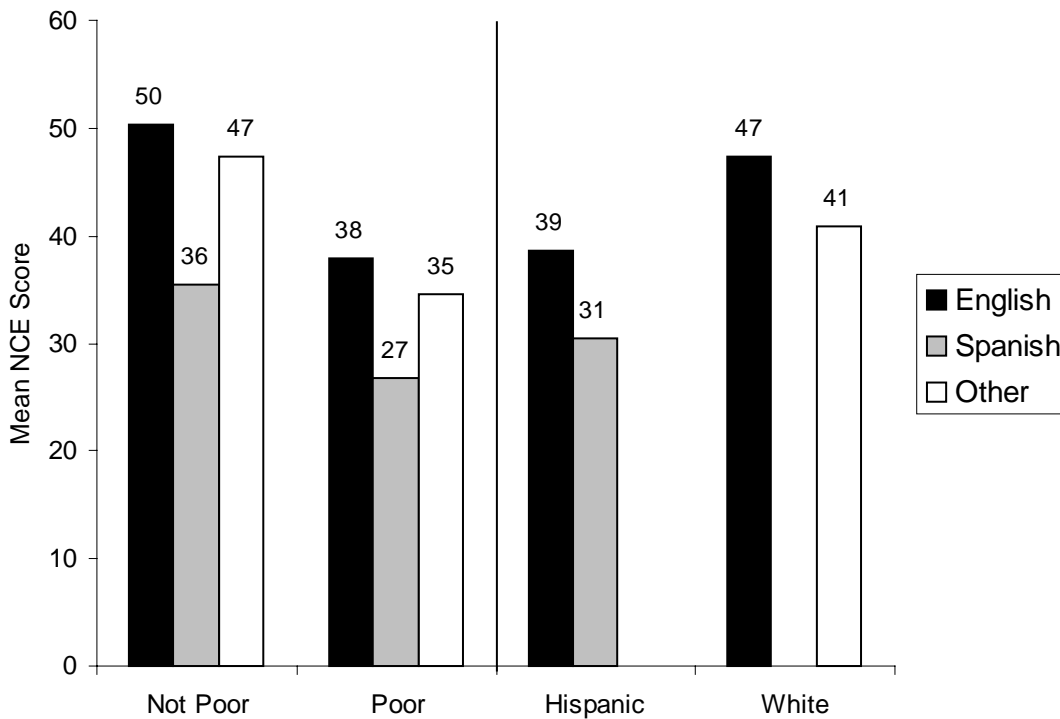
California has just released Stanford 9 test scores of fluent English proficient students separately from English-only (native English speakers) students. These results show that, in general, both fluent English proficient and redesignated English proficient students score as high or higher on standardized achievement tests in math as native English speakers (Figure 6, top panel). In reading, fluent English speakers score similarly to native English speakers in the lower grades, but score lower in the upper grades, which again supports the earlier claim that English learners have a considerably harder time acquiring more advanced, academic English in the upper grades.<sup>42</sup>

These results suggest that if all English learners could become proficient in English, then their achievement would be at least comparable to that of other students. This conclusion may be

simplistic, however, because it is based on two related beliefs. One is that the reason English learners have lower levels of educational achievement is primarily because of their lack of English skills. The other is that non-English speakers will demonstrate much higher achievement once they learn English. But existing research questions both beliefs.

A recent study provides a good illustration. The study examined the influence of language background and other factors on the 1998 Stanford 9 test performance for 26,126 second, third, and fourth grade students in eight Southern California school districts.<sup>43</sup> First, the study examined the independent effects of two factors—language background and poverty—on student achievement (see Figure 7, left panel). These results show that poverty affects the achievement of all students regardless of their language background. Because the majority of English learners are poor, it means that they are at a particular disadvantage in school. Next, the study examined the impact of language background and ethnicity on student achievement (see Figure 7, right panel). These results show that even Hispanic students from English-speaking backgrounds had significantly lower test scores than Whites from English-speaking backgrounds. This suggests that something other than English proficiency must be accounting for those differences.<sup>44</sup> It further suggests that while improving the English proficiency of English learners will improve their academic achievement, English proficiency alone is unlikely to raise their achievement to the levels of White, native-English speakers.

Figure 7  
1998 SAT-9 Reading Scores by Language Background and Poverty, Hispanics and Whites:  
Eight Southern California School Districts



SOURCE: Douglas E. Mitchell and Ross Mitchell, *The Impact of California's Class Size Reduction Initiative on Student Achievement: Detailed Findings from Eight School Districts* (Riverside: California Educational Research Cooperative, 1999). Available on the World Wide Web: <http://cerc.ucr.edu/publications>.

### Prospects for the Future

California has passed a number of major reforms in recent years that are only now beginning to be implemented. Many of these reforms are likely to have an impact on the future schooling of English learners. Furthermore, these reforms raise many issues that will need to be resolved.

For example, the full impact of Proposition 227 on California's English learners is still not known. However, early indications are that most children will not transition successfully from structured English immersion to mainstream English classes within one year. With the repeal of the reclassification guidelines, what constitutes readiness for transition to English-only is an

uncertain and highly controversial issue. The state department of education is currently drafting guidelines under the authority of Title 5 of the California Education Code to help districts and schools make these decisions.

New legislation on pupil promotion and retention (AB1626, Chapter 742, 1998) requires that students who are at risk of being retained because of failure to meet grade-level standards be provided additional educational services, including supplemental instruction and mandatory summer school. It is also noted in the legislation that students who are not proficient in English should not be retained solely on the basis of language handicap. It appears, however, that since English learners are likely to be at high risk of failing to meet educational standards, additional services will need to be provided for them. The costs and logistics involved in providing these services for large numbers of English learners have not been fully considered either by the state or by school districts. Yet research has found that retention alone is an ineffective and costly means by which to improve student performance,<sup>45</sup> so provision of supplementary services will ultimately be a less expensive response to the dilemma.

High school exit examinations represent another area of educational reform with potentially large consequences for English learners. The numbers and proportions of EL students are greatest in the early grades, and for these younger students there may be sufficient time to intervene so that the possibility of failing to attain a high school diploma in spite of having completed all other high school requirements can be averted. However, approximately one-third of EL students are found in the secondary schools (see Table 1), where there is little time to gain the full English fluency and sufficient command of the secondary curriculum that are needed to pass the high school exit exam in English. This examination is only now being developed for

students who plan to graduate in 2004, but the repercussions could be severe for English learners if an appropriate solution is not found to accommodating the testing needs of these students.<sup>46</sup>

Legislative efforts to extend the school year by reducing teachers' out-of-class time for professional development has "face validity," but may in fact be shortsighted during this time when teachers, many of them under-qualified, are grappling with so many increased performance demands. In a recent survey conducted by the department of education on the impact of Proposition 227, schools cited professional development to help teachers teach English learners as one of the most highly unmet needs.<sup>47</sup> The University of California study cited earlier found no instance in which teachers had been provided with professional development geared specifically to the instruction of reading for English learners.

Assessment of English learners will also remain a difficult and controversial issue for some time to come. Currently, all English learners who have been in school for at least twelve months must be tested in English on the STAR test annually. Many districts and parents have expressed strong concerns about the ways in which this testing may affect the students and their records. However, we have seen that the most immediate impact of this testing appears to be on instruction. Teachers, whether in bilingual or SEI classrooms, expressed concern about their students being tested prematurely in English and therefore were anxious to focus on oral fluency in English rather than broader literacy skills. As one researcher put it, "language and literacy are rarely tools for learning but rather English language learning (oral fluency) is becoming the target of instruction."<sup>48</sup> The impact of this shift in instructional emphasis and student outcomes should be monitored to assess its short-term and long-term effects on the development of literacy skills for English learners.

A related issue is the assessment of English Language Development (ELD) for English learners. While ELD standards have recently been adopted by the state board of education, and legislation passed in 1997 (AB748) required that a test be developed that allowed for the assessment of ELD standards, the development of an appropriate and relevant test has just begun. Many scholars believe that it is critical to monitor this early acquisition of English skills in order to prevent failure later when children are expected to meet mainstream English curricular demands; however, there is by no means widespread agreement on this issue.<sup>49</sup>

Finally, we find no issue more compelling or more urgent than the need to recruit, retain, and strengthen the skills of teachers who serve English learners. Particular attention also needs to be paid to the competencies of middle and high school teachers who are often overlooked in the discussions on teacher preparation. However, given the current teacher shortages, the increasing numbers of English learners, and the numerous reform initiatives with which schools and districts are dealing, it is not clear where the will or the resources will come from to seriously address this problem. Certainly, it appears that both the state, through various incentive funding schemes like sign-up bonuses and scholarships, and its postsecondary institutions, through expanded teacher education and professional development programs, will need to rise to the challenge. K-12 schools alone cannot meet these enormous challenges.<sup>50</sup>

In summary, California faces a number of challenges in trying to improve the schooling conditions and learning outcomes of English learners. As their numbers increase, the future success of all California's current reform efforts will be impacted by the state's ability to successfully meet these challenges.

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<sup>1</sup> Prior to 1998, the State of California identified such students as Limited English Proficient (LEP). But a recent report on the schooling of English learners by the National Research Council suggested using new terminology—English-language learners. The State of California adopted the term English learner (EL) student in 1998. See Diane August and Kenji Hakuta, *Improving Schooling for Language-Minority Children* (Washington, DC: National Academy Press, 1997), p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> See August and Hakuta, *Improving Schooling*; Patricia Gándara, *Review of Research on the Instruction of Limited English Proficient Students* (Santa Barbara: University of California Linguistic Minority Research Institute, 1997); Catherine Snow, M. Susan Burns, Peg Griffin (Eds.), *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children* (Washington, DC: National Academy Press, 1998).

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Nativity and Parentage of the Population for Regions, Divisions, and States: 1997* (Washington, D.C: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1999). Retrieved from the World Wide Web: <http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/foreign/foreign98.html>.

<sup>4</sup> Most immigrants want to learn English and do become proficient in English over time. But their opportunities for learning and using English vary widely due to such factors as social class and place of residence. See Ruben G. Rumbaut, "The new Californians: Comparative research findings on the educational progress of immigrant children." in Ruben G. Rumbaut and Wayne A. Cornelius, eds, *California's Immigrant Children: Theory, Research, and Implications for Educational Policy* (San Diego, CA: Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies, University of California, 1995), pp. 17-69.

<sup>5</sup> These questions include the child's native language and the language used by the parents and child at home.

<sup>6</sup> The most common tests are the *Language Assessment Scales* (LAS), the *Idea Proficiency Test* (IPT), and the *Bilingual Syntax Measure* (BSM).

<sup>7</sup> The levels of proficiency that must be demonstrated vary by age or grade level—the older the student, the more demanding the proficiency tasks that must be demonstrated to be classified as fluent English proficient. Proficiency levels are not directly related to the proficiency of native-English speakers, but rather to levels of proficiency that would be comparable to an average native-English speaker of a similar grade.

<sup>8</sup> See California Department of Education, *Language Census, 1999: Summary Report*. Retrieved October 15, 1999 from the World Wide Web: <http://www.cde.ca.gov/demographics/reports/statewide/lcsum99.htm>.

<sup>9</sup> See California Department of Education, *Demographic Reports*. Retrieved September 23, 1999 from the World Wide Web: <http://www.cde.ca.gov/demographics/reports/statewide/ethstu.htm> and <http://www.cde.ca.gov/demographics/reports/statewide/redes98.htm>.

<sup>10</sup> In response to the Proposition 227 Task Force report, the State Superintendent has convened an advisory committee to re-examine this issue and make recommendations on altering them.



<sup>11</sup> For further discussion of this issue, see Patricia Gándara and Barbara Merino, “Measuring the Outcomes for LEP Students, Test Scores, Exit Rates, and Other Mythological Data,” *Education Evaluation and Policy Analysis 16* (1994): 320-338.

<sup>12</sup> Kenji Hakuta, Yuko Goto Butler, and Daria Witt, *How Long Does It Take English Language Learners to Attain Proficiency?* (Santa Barbara: UC Linguistic Minority Research Institute, forthcoming).

<sup>13</sup> Douglas E. Mitchell, Tom Destino, and Rita Karam, *Evaluation of English Language Development Programs in the Santa Ana Unified School District* (Riverside: California Educational Research Cooperative, University of California, Riverside, 1997), p. VI-24.

<sup>14</sup> August and Hukuta, *Improving Schooling*; Gándara, *Review of Research*; Wayne P. Thomas and Virginia Collier, *School Effectiveness for Language Minority Students* (Washington, D.C.: National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education, 1997)

<sup>15</sup> Robin Scarcella, *Academic English: A conceptual framework*. Draft discussion paper. (Irvine, CA: University of California, Irvine, 1999).

<sup>16</sup> Scarcella, *Academic English*.

<sup>17</sup> California State University, *Systemwide Remediation Rates – Fall 1998*. Retrieved November 18, 1999 from the World Wide Web: <http://www.asd.calstate.edu/remrates98sys.htm>.

<sup>18</sup> Lily Wong Fillmore and Catherine Snow, “What Educators-Especially Teachers-Need to Know about Language: The Bare Minimum.” Working paper prepared for the U.S. Department of Education’s 1999 Regional Conferences on Improving America’s Schools, 1999. Retrieved October 15, 1999 from the WWW: <http://www.ncbe.gwu.edu/iasconferences/1999/institutes/lep/index.htm>

<sup>19</sup> The language of the proposition states that structured English immersion (SEI) programs are to be conducted “nearly all” in English for a period of time “not normally intended to exceed one year” except where parents explicitly request bilingual services. Once children are transitioned out of SEI, their instruction is to be provided “overwhelmingly in English,” a phrase that is open to considerable variation in interpretation.

<sup>20</sup> California State Board of Education, Policy 98-04. Educational Programs and Services for English Learners. Adopted October 10, 1998.

<sup>21</sup> See, for example, Kevin Clark, *From Primary Language Instruction to English Immersion: How Five California Districts Made the Switch* (Washington, D.C.: Institute for Research in English Acquisition and Development, June 1999).

<sup>22</sup> Kenji Hakuta, “What legitimate inferences can be made from the 1999 release of SAT-9 scores with respect to the impact of Proposition 227 on the performance of LEP students?” Retrieved November 17, 1999 from the World Wide Web: <http://www.stanford.edu/~hakuta/SAT9/index.htm>.

<sup>23</sup> Included in this team were Eugene Garcia, Tom Stritikus, Julia Curry-Rodriguez (UC Berkeley); Kris. Gutierrez (UCLA); Julie Maxwell-Jolly and Patricia Gándara (UC Davis).

<sup>24</sup> Patricia Gándara and Julie Maxwell-Jolly, *First year effects of the Implementation of Proposition 227 in 16 California School Districts*, Education Policy Brief, (Santa Barbara & Davis: University of California, Linguistic Minority Research Institute, forthcoming).

<sup>25</sup> For those administrators interested in continuing to provide bilingual programs, there are essentially three options available: (1) to seek parental waivers, which most of these districts did; (2) to interpret the meaning of “nearly all English” or “overwhelmingly in English” liberally, such as including significant amounts of primary language lesson “previews” or “reviews” as well as actual instruction in the primary language (a few of the districts in this sample also adopted this strategy); and (3) to seek charter school status, a more lengthy process that had not yet been initiated by any of the schools in the districts in this sample.

<sup>26</sup> California Department of Education, *Proposition 227 Survey, Interim Report*, May 12, 1999.

<sup>27</sup> Some of these classrooms had been part of an earlier study on literacy practices.

<sup>28</sup> California State Board of Education, Policy 98-04, *Educational Programs and Services for English Learners*. Adopted October 10, 1998; California Commission on Teacher Credentialing, *Serving Limited English Proficient Students*, Memorandum (July, 1999).

<sup>29</sup> For a summary of the CTC requirement for teaching English learners, see the CTC Publication CL-622 available from their website at: <http://www.ctc.ca.gov/credentialinfo/leaflets/cl622/cl622.html>.

<sup>30</sup> As reviewed in the chapter on Teachers and Teaching, research evidence demonstrates that teacher certification and expertise has a positive impact on student achievement in general. However, existing studies have not examined whether teaching credentials have a positive impact on the educational achievement of English learners specifically. This is a critical topic for future research.

<sup>31</sup> Patricia Gándara and Julie Maxwell-Jolly, *Preparation for Teaching California’s Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students: The Crisis of Teacher Quality and Quantity* (Santa Cruz, CA: The Center for the Future of Teaching and Learning, forthcoming).

<sup>32</sup> Barbara J. Merino, “Preparing secondary teachers to teach a second language: The Case of the United States with a focus on California,” In Christian J. Faltis and Paula M. Wolfe, eds., *So much to say: Adolescents, bilingualism and ESL in the secondary school* (N.Y.: Teachers College, Columbia University, 1999), pp. 225-254.

<sup>33</sup> This change was largely due to high-concentration schools not being able to effectively compete for better-qualified teachers. See George W. Bohrnsteadt and Brian M. Stecher, *Class-size reduction in California: Early Evaluation Findings, 1996-1998* (Palo Alto: American Institutes for Research, June 1999), pp. 73-77.

<sup>34</sup> The report notes that similar disparities occurred in schools with high concentrations of low-income students.

<sup>35</sup> Robert Milk, Carmen Mercado, and Alexandria Sapiens, “Rethinking the education of teachers of Language Minority children: Developing reflective teachers for changing schools.” NCBE Focus: Occasional Papers in Bilingual Education, Number 6 (Summer 1992). Available on the World Wide Web: <http://www.ncbe.gwu.edu/ncbepubs/focus/focus6.htm>.

<sup>36</sup> Oliver Moles, "Synthesis of research on parent participation in children's education," *Educational Leadership* 40 (1982): 44-47; Annette Lareau, "Social class differences in family-school relationships: The importance of cultural capital" *Sociology of Education*, 60 (1987): 73-87;

<sup>37</sup> Heubert, Jay P. and Robert M. Hauser, *High Stakes: Testing for Tracking, Promotion, and Graduation* (Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press, 1999), p. 214.

<sup>38</sup> These regulations are spelled out on the California Department of Education's STAR web page at: <http://star.cde.ca.gov/star99/index.html>.

<sup>39</sup> Other states have used a variety of policies for exempting or accommodating English learners. For a discussion of these see Heubert and Hauser, *High Stakes*, pp. 215-218. One school district in California has successfully challenged the existing state policy and has exempted all English learners who have been in the district for less than 30 months from taking the STAR English-based tests.

<sup>40</sup> See August and Hakuta in *Improving Schooling*, pp. 120-122.

<sup>41</sup> This further buttresses the argument that assessments of subject matter knowledge are highly language dependent.

<sup>42</sup> These findings are consistent with other studies that find fluent English speakers often do as well or better than native English speakers in school. See, for example, Russell W. Rumberger and Katherine A. Larson, "Toward explaining differences in educational achievement among Mexican-American language minority students." *Sociology of Education* 71 (1998): 69-93.

<sup>43</sup> Douglas E. Mitchell and Ross Mitchell, *The Impact of California's Class-size reduction Initiative on Student Achievement: Detailed Findings from Eight School Districts* (Riverside: California Educational Research Cooperative, 1999). Available on the World Wide Web: <http://cerc.ucr.edu/publications>.

<sup>44</sup> For a discussion of other factors that affect the achievement of English learners, see: August and Hakuta, *Improving Schooling*; Rumberger and Larson, "Toward explaining.."; National Research Council, Panel on High-Risk Youth, *Losing generations: Adolescents in high-risk settings* (Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press, 1993).

<sup>45</sup> Heubert and Hauser, *High Stakes*.

<sup>46</sup> The National Research Council committee on high stakes testing cautions against an over-reliance on test scores for graduation especially in the case where students may not have been given an adequate opportunity to learn the requisite material. See Heubert and Hauser, *High Stakes*.

<sup>47</sup> California Department of Education, *Proposition 227 Survey, Interim Report*, May 12, 1999.

<sup>48</sup> Gándara and Maxwell-Jolly, *First year effects*.

<sup>49</sup> For a discussion of this issue by the profession organization, *ESL Standards for Pre-K-12 Students* (Washington, D.C.: author, 1999).

<sup>50</sup> The implementation of recent State legislation regarding improvements in the assessment of teachers and in the certification of teacher education programs will contribute to these challenges.