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The High Schools English Learners Need

There is a growing interest in reforming high schools to better prepare students for future work and further education. High school reform is especially critical for English learners (ELs) because most high schools are not meeting their needs, resulting in poor academic performance and high dropout rates. The longer report from which this brief is drawn presents a vision for high schools that will promote greater success for California's English learners. It draws on existing research in the field of secondary and EL education, as well as on my 25 years of experience working with teachers and administrators responsible for educating English learners and immigrant students throughout the state.

English Learners in California High Schools

More than 300,000 of California's 1.6 million English learners attend the state's public high schools. These are more than statistics; although these adolescents share the English learner designation based on their limited English language proficiency, they arrive in high school via diverse paths and with a wide range of skills and experiences. Most are long-term English learners, often born in the U.S., who have attended California schools since kindergarten or first grade. Others have recently arrived from other countries where they had limited or interrupted schooling before emigrating. Still others have had successful school experiences in their home country at or above the level of rigor of California's education standards.

Far too many English learners are not faring well in high school. While the majority learn English—60% of 10th grade ELs in 2005 scored "proficient" on the statewide assessment of English language development—many do not have a level of English that facilitates their learning of advanced academic subjects and prepares them for college. For instance, only 3% of 10th grade English learners scored "proficient" on the more rigorous 2005 California Standards Test in English, and only 50% of 11th grade English learners had passed the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE) by the end of 2005, which is required to earn a diploma beginning in 2006.

Five Myths about Secondary English Learner Education

The comprehensive high school is—if not entirely broken—in major disrepair with regard to most of the state's English learners. Fixing it will require significant commitment, resources and a willingness to think—and act—creatively.

The following are some myths that stand in the way of the educational changes needed for secondary English learners to thrive in California's high schools, and some suggestions on what schools can do to address them.

MYTH #1: English learners bring nothing to the table except need

English learners come to secondary schools with assets that often go unrecognized. These assets include their prior schooling, skills in non-English languages, life experiences, bilingual and bicultural

capacities, and their cultural heritage. These assets can form the foundation on which schools can help build additional knowledge and skills. To build on these assets, schools can:

1. Inventory prior education and seek to recognize competencies and standards students may have met through non-traditional means.
2. Assess competence in the student's primary language, and validate this competence as meeting second language ("foreign" language) high school graduation and college entrance requirements.
3. Provide education programs that take advantage of students' language and culture competencies, making these learning assets.

MYTH #2: English language development (ELD) is all ELs need

Many high schools consider ELD courses as "the program" for ELs; yet ELD is only part of what English learners need. They also need a foundation of habits, competencies, and attitudes that will allow them to meet the same broad educational goals of all students, as well as knowledge and skills that will help them have productive academic and work lives. To meet these needs, schools can:

1. Articulate a complete program for ELs that includes diagnosis of both language and academic needs, followed by a program of instruction to meet those needs. This includes providing coherent, sustained instruction in the primary language of students, whenever possible.
2. Plan for full integration of ELs with all other students and establish daily and weekly routines to ensure that this happens.
3. Promote a school-wide focus on languages (both the primary language and English) as important tools for learning.

MYTH #3: The current approach to the calendar and clock are sacred

Time is the most precious resource and the greatest lever we can apply to improving schools. English learners need time to master grade level content, learn English, reconcile differences between U.S. and their home country schooling systems, and for many, manage a double or triple load of work, family responsibilities, and school. To change the current approach to time, schools can:

1. Expand the time provided for high school to five years or more for ELs who need and want it.
2. Expand the school day to be more responsive to the personal and economic realities of students' lives. A campus could be scheduled for classes and independent study for hours well beyond those currently available to better meet students' work, internship and apprentice schedules.

3. Modify the calendar to match needs of the local community, such as aligning the school calendar with migrant cycles.

MYTH #4: High school must take place in a building called “High School”

High school may be the most appropriate place for the majority of adolescents to receive their education, especially newcomers who need to be part of a school community. Yet, different students have different needs, and all learning does not have to take place in the school building itself. To meet the needs of English learners beyond the traditional high school environment, schools can:

1. Design course delivery that is flexible around the needs of a community, such as evening classes, classes in the community, televised classes, online coursework.
2. Explore how English learners might take advantage of the California Community Colleges (CCCs) while they are still in high school, allowing for a combination of vocational and academic goals.
3. Allow—and even encourage—students to challenge entry into a course that they may have completed in their home country, even if they have not met language or academic pre-requisites.

Myth #5: Secondary education has only one worthwhile goal and a single “best” path to completion

All students should have the opportunity to pursue a college preparation path if they desire, but according to recent projections, less than 40 percent of jobs in California’s future economy will require a four-year college degree. Consequently, high schools should broaden the kinds of opportunities they offer students, and expand the definitions of school success by providing multiple pathways and options leading to success for students who do not choose college. Such a direction could lead to better outcomes for many English learners. To do this, schools can:

1. Make curriculum and performance standards for success part of an individual plan for English learners, so that students, parents, and teachers understand each individual’s goals and time line for reaching them.
2. Provide a real opportunity for all students to choose a college path by reducing the barriers to college attendance for ELs and other under-represented groups, such as additional time to satisfy college entrance standards.
3. Promote courses of study that are routes to high paying jobs, many of which do not require attendance at a four-year college.
4. Create the conditions sought by promoters of small schools and small learning communities—such as a common focus, high expectations, and personalization—without necessarily creating smaller schools. Larger high schools have advantages of resources and the potential for students to move from one type of instructional setting to another as appropriate.

Conclusion

California’s current approach to high school for English learners is failing, in part, due to misleading myths and our inertia in challenging them. This brief identifies five myths and what schools can do to address them. The longer report expands on these, and provides recommendations for action that should be taken by the governor and legislature, the state Board of Education, education organizations, foundations, and the media that would help lead to much improved high schools for English learners—and all other students.

To make the far-reaching changes necessary will require a

significant investment in the reconfiguration of the goals, pace, and place of high schools. All stakeholders need to engage in refining the agenda for redesign, for organizing to overcome the anticipated opposition to change, and building the momentum that will create the high schools English learners need. To do any less is to ensure that tens of thousands of our youth will continue to leave high school ill-equipped for further education, for finding and keeping rewarding work, and for full participation in American society.

—Norm Gold with Julie Maxwell-Jolly

This cover story is based on the UC LMRI Policy Report of the same title released in June 2006 (http://www.lmri.ucsb.edu/publications/06_gold.pdf). The report draws on the more than 25 years that Dr. Gold spent at the California Department of Education, where he held several posts that involved developing and monitoring programs for English learners.

NEW RESEARCH STUDY

Resource Needs for California’s English Learners

by Patricia Gándara and Russell W. Rumberger

This is one of more than 20 research studies being conducted as part of a multimillion dollar education research project to help determine what reforms are needed to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the California school system, and how much it should cost to provide every child in California with a quality education.

The initiative, **Getting Down to Facts: A Research Project to Inform Solutions to California’s Education Problems**, is being funded by four leading philanthropic foundations in response to requests by the Governor’s Committee on Education Excellence, Democratic leaders in both chambers of the state Legislature, and Jack O’Connell, Superintendent of Public Instruction. It is designed to provide California’s policymakers and other education stakeholders with the comprehensive information they need to raise student achievement and reposition California as an education leader. The research initiative is being conducted by a prominent group of scholars from across the United States

For more information, see: (<http://www.hewlett.org/NR/rdonlyres/8FD327FD-90E8-4C2E-9D8E-80AB5E6C9928/0/GETTINGDOWNTOFACTSSUMMARY.pdf>).

UC LMRI-FUNDED RESEARCH GRANTS: FINAL REPORT ABSTRACTS *(Complete reports can be found on UC LMRI’s web site)*

A Longitudinal Study of the Resources and Challenges in Linguistic Minority Youths’ College Pathways

PI: MARGARITA AZMITIA, UC SANTA CRUZ

INDIVIDUAL GRANT #04-04CY-02IG-SC

COMPLETED: APRIL 2006

This study assessed the roles of human, social, and financial capital; personal agency; and social, psychological, and academic factors in linguistic minority Chicano/Latino- and Asian-heritage

students' first two years at a University of California campus.

The results showed that although linguistic minority students, and in particular, Chicano/Latino students, had less pre-college human capital than the other groups, they were able to access peer and institutional resources to compensate for their lack of capital. All groups reported similarly high levels of family and friend social capital (friend social capital was associated with students' feelings of belonging and fit at the university, and their mental health).

Chicano/Latino and first generation European-heritage students had less financial capital than the other groups, and the lack of financial capital constrained their activities and was a cause of concern. Despite some differences in their academic performance, regardless of their ethnicity and linguistic minority status, the participants were in good standing at the university at the end of the sophomore year.

The linguistic minority students who left the university before their sophomore year, mostly Chicano/Latinos, typically were not in good academic standing, had not found a social niche at the university, and had experienced declines in their mental health.

* * *

Transition to High School of Multi-Ethnic Urban Youth: Opportunities and Risks

PI: SANDRA GRAHAM, *UC LOS ANGELES*
INDIVIDUAL GRANT #03-03CY-04IG-LA
COMPLETED: FEBRUARY 2006

The purpose of this research was to examine the transition to high school within a sample of approximately 1400 linguistic and ethnic minority youths who had participated in a longitudinal study of social and academic adjustment during the middle school years.

Our main research questions focused on how changes across the transition impact psychological and school adjustment, and how adjustment is buffered by factors such as the school ethnic context and students' ethnic identity, immigrant status, and language brokering experiences.

In general, students' school-related affect became more positive from 8th to 9th grade, except for students who moved from a middle to a high school, which included fewer students who were ethnically similar to themselves. These students showed greater negativity in their feelings about school. We found no evidence that students' ethnic identity buffered students' adjustment across the transition. However, we found differences in how immigrant and non-immigrant students experience the transition. Students who are immigrants or whose parents are immigrants report more positive perceptions of their school climates than do non-immigrant students. Finally, we found that students who felt positively about serving as language brokers for their parents also reported positive feelings about school.

By emphasizing effects of school ethnic context, changes in ethnic identity, immigrant status, and experiences language brokering, this research highlights the diverse social factors that shape the school experiences of linguistic minority youth.

IN THE NEWS

UC LMRI Faculty Steering Committee Member **Kris Gutiérrez** will be a Fellow at the Center for Advanced Studies in the Behavioral Sciences in Palo Alto, CA for the 2006-07 academic year. The Center invites up to 48 Fellows yearly from disciplines

in human biology, the social sciences, and the humanities to work on whatever scholarly projects they consider important.

Additionally, Professor Gutiérrez will serve as the Noted Scholar in Residence this summer at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, Canada.

Earlier this year Gutiérrez, Professor of Social Research Methodology in the Graduate School of Education and Information Studies at UCLA, was announced as the 2004 recipient of the AERA Division C Sylvia Scribner Award. The award is for a body of work that has significantly influenced the field of learning and instruction.

19TH ANNUAL CONFERENCE

UC LMRI hosted its annual conference May 5-6, 2006 at the Hilton Irvine/Orange County Airport Hotel in Irvine, CA. This year's conference, co-sponsored by the Arizona State University College of Education, focused on English Learners and Higher Education.

University of Georgia professor Linda Harklau opened the conference with her presentation, "Language Minorities in Higher



Keynote Speakers Robin Scarcella and Linda Harklau

Education—What We (Don't) Know." The afternoon sessions concluded with a reception and poster session, featuring graduate students from Arizona State University, where attendees could discuss their research in-depth and socialize.

Saturday featured WestEd's Robert Linquanti with Patricia Gándara (*UC Davis*) and Kellie Rolstad (*Arizona State University*) on a special panel presentation: "Five-Year Study of Proposition 227: What Was Learned and What Wasn't."

UC LMRI Faculty Steering Committee member and UC Irvine professor Robin Scarcella closed the conference with, "Preparing Secondary EL Students for Higher Education in California: Access and Opportunity."

SAVE THE DATE: ASU will co-sponsor and also host next year's conference, May 3-5, 2007 in Phoenix, AZ on "Immigrants, Education and Language." A Special *Call for Commissioned Papers deadline is July 1, 2006*. A general Open Call for Papers will be announced in early fall. Visit the UC LMRI web site for more information, including this year's official conference program, photo gallery, and presenter handouts.

Education Policy Center News

UC LMRI established an Education Policy Center at UC Davis in 1997 to disseminate research findings to policymakers. The Center sponsors research and colloquia on policy issues in the education of English learners. More news and activities can be found on the UC LMRI web site.

UC-Mexico Online Education Partnership

On May 8, 2006, **Patricia Gándara** made a presentation to many top officials in the Mexican educational establishment on the plight of Mexican immigrant English learners in the U.S. Gándara was in Mexico City marking a partnership between the University of California and Mexico to provide online college preparatory curriculum to Mexican-origin students in the U.S. and in Mexico. The collaboration, "Access To Education Opportunities Without Borders Through Online Learning: The University of California - Mexico Binational Collaboration," marks a major step in cooperation between the two countries around the education of migrant students, and engages LMRI in these educational innovations. More information can be found on the UC College Prep web site (http://www.uccp.org/binational_initiative/index.php).

Declaration Supports Injunction Against CAHSEE

The Policy Center was also engaged in writing a declaration on behalf of English learners who are asked to pass the California High School Exit Examination (CAHSEE) when they may not have been given the opportunity to gain a command of English. Such students often know the material, but cannot express their knowledge in English.

A class-action lawsuit, filed in February 2006 in order to halt the state from denying diplomas to students who do not pass one or both portions of the CAHSEE, resulted in an injunction against the use of the test for 2006 and is currently expected to be appealed by the state.

From a policy perspective, UC LMRI felt it was important for the state to justify why a student would need to perform math problems in English, or why it is necessary for a student to know only English language arts (as opposed to language arts in another idiom), if the student is able to pass the California English Language Development Test (CELDT) at a level of "proficient," before withholding a diploma. These are questions that have never been addressed in a policy context.

Assembly Advised on English Learner Bills

Julie Maxwell-Jolly and **Patricia Gándara** have twice presented before the Assembly Education Committee during the quarter, and met with staff on several occasions to help advise on two Assembly Bills, both sponsored by **Assemblymember Joe Coto**. The first, **AB 2117**, would develop a network of professional development specialists and begin a pilot program to train more trainers and teachers in the skills necessary to effectively teach EL students. The second, **AB 1988**, carries a number of provisions including EL-specific 10-hour modules in both teacher preparation and induction programs, more assessment alternatives for EL CAHSEE-takers, and better communication with parents about their educational options for EL students.

AB 2117 passed out of committee unanimously, however AB 1988 is likely to meet with more resistance as it carries a host of provisions all intended to improve the education of English learners, some of which have provoked considerable controversy.

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Reports in This Issue

The UC LMRI Newsletter features abstracts from UC LMRI Research Grant Award recipients and—as they are completed—the abstracts from their Final Grant Reports.

Complete copies of UC LMRI-funded Final Grant Reports can be found on the UC LMRI web site. (Abstracts featured in the newsletter are edited for space considerations.)

Dissertation Grant Reports can be found on the UMI ProQuest Digital Dissertations Database at: <http://www.lib.umi.com/dissertations/fullcit/9993004>.

Back Issues: Newsletters from 1992 to the present are archived on the UC LMRI web site. A limited number of hard copies are available by request.

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