Improving Education for Multilingual and English Learner Students

RESEARCH TO PRACTICE

California Department of Education
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The strength of California as the world’s fifth-largest economy is dependent upon the success of our students. Our priority for student success begins with improving educational outcomes for students of color, multilingual students, and English learner students. Now is an opportune time in California’s history to collectively impact the lives of these students by building on the rich social and cultural assets they possess, which will help lead them to become active global citizens.

Of California’s 6.2 million students, 1.1 million are English learners, and 2.6 million have a language other than English in their background. Many of our students bring to school a vital cultural heritage, values, and the ability to communicate in their home language—all assets. The collective responsibility for providing equitable opportunities to our students lies with everyone in the school community.

The California Department of Education (CDE) engages stakeholders and advocates as partners in addressing major barriers in education focused on closing the opportunity gap, improving literacy/biliteracy, reducing chronic absenteeism, and advancing initiatives as a means to improve education for all students.
Improving Education for Multilingual and English Learner Students: Research to Practice will help realize the goals of these educational initiatives. This publication presents current evidence-based pedagogy and practices in the areas of developing multilingualism, early education, assets-based environments, English language development, and the creation of systems that support the implementation of these practices. Further, the publication provides a deeper dive into accessing actionable examples of how evidence-based pedagogy and practices may be implemented in districts, schools, and classrooms to positively impact multilingual and English learner students.

This volume will be an important resource within the California System of Support by assisting local educational agencies in building local capacity to sustain improvement and effectively address outcomes for multilingual and English learner students. This publication complements the English Learner Roadmap Policy and Guidance, the California Education for a Global Economy Initiative, the Global California 2030 Initiative, the State Seal of Biliteracy, the World Languages Standards, the Social and Emotional Learning Guiding Principles, and the statewide content standards and curriculum frameworks.

The CDE and I are grateful to the expert authors who participated in writing this publication. We invite researchers, educators, stakeholders, and advocates to continue your dedication to equitable education for multilingual and English learner students to meet their goals and make their dreams a reality.

Sincerely,

Tony Thurmond
State Superintendent of Public Instruction
Acknowledgments

_Improving Education for Multilingual and English Learner Students: Research to Practice_ was developed by the California Department of Education (CDE) through a contract with WestEd. This project was a collaborative effort that involved the participation of practitioners, researchers, and organizations that are dedicated to nurturing the educational profession so multilingual and English learner students engage in a world-class education.

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She was a contributing author to the 2017 report *Promoting the Educational Success of Children and Youth Learning English: Promising Futures*, and contributed content related to dual language learners and English language development to the *California Early Learning Foundations*, the *California Preschool Curriculum Frameworks*, and the *Desired Results Developmental Profile* (2010). Dr. Espinosa served as the lead consultant for the LAUSD Transitional Kindergarten program development team and is a member of the Council for Professional Development Governing Board.

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**Pamela Spycher**, Ph.D., is a senior research associate at WestEd. Over her 30–year career in education, her focus has been improving educational experiences and outcomes for multilingual learners, especially students from immigrant backgrounds and economically underresourced communities. Dr. Spycher recently led two large federally funded research projects aimed at educational equity for multilingual learners: *Leading with Learning—Systemically Transforming Teaching for English Learners* and *College Ready English Learners—Preparing Teachers to Foster English Language Development with the Expository Reading and Writing Curriculum*. She was a lead author of *California’s English Language Development Standards* (2012), *English Language Arts/English Language Development (ELA/ELD) Framework* (2014), *Practitioners’ Guide for Educating English Learners with Disabilities* (2019), and
Arts Standards (2019), as well as a contributing author to California’s Science Framework (2016) and Health Education Framework (2019). In the first part of her career, Spycher served as a first grade bilingual teacher, an ELD specialist, and a high school ELA/ELD and world languages teacher.

**Allyson Tintiangco-Cubales**, Ph.D., (she/her/siya) was born and raised on Ohlone land (Fremont, California) with parents who were immigrants from the Philippines—womb (Batangas) and seed (Tarlac). Since 2000, she has been a professor in the College of Ethnic Studies at San Francisco State University and an affiliated faculty member in the Educational Leadership doctoral program. She is also the cofounder and director of Community Responsive Education (CRE), a nationwide firm that supports the development of responsive, equitable, and justice-driven educators and ethnic studies curriculum. She has provided direct support to schools, districts, and organizations in San Francisco, Daly City, Oakland, New York, and Boston. In 2001, she founded Pin@y Educational Partnerships (PEP), a “barangay” that focuses on providing schools with ethnic studies courses and curriculum, developing radical educators, and creating resources for Filipina/x/o communities and similarly marginalized people. She has authored four books of curriculum and many articles focused on the applications of critical pedagogy and the development of ethnic studies curriculum.
The context of education in California for English learner students has changed with the implementation of the Statewide System of Support (SSS), the Every Student Succeeds Act, the California Education for a Global Economy Initiative, and the California English Learner Roadmap State Board of Education Policy: Educational Programs and Services for English Learners. The scaffolding and bridging created by the SSS provide educators with the best practices necessary to assist all students through a tiered system of support. The SSS provides three levels of support for local educational agencies (LEAs), in which all other supports are contained: supports for all, including tools and resources that improve student performance and increase equity across student groups; differentiated assistance for some, focusing on significant disparities in performance among student groups; and intensive interventions for the few experiencing persistent performance issues with a lack of improvement over a specified time period. Since English learner students make up 18 percent of the student population in California, it is imperative to accelerate learning English for the 1.1 million English learner students enrolled in California public schools. This research-to-practice publication supports the goal of accelerating learning for California’s English learner students.
Within the SSS, designated networks address diverse state priorities. These networks include

- Geographic Lead Agencies that build county office of education (COE) capacity to achieve full equity and access,
- Statewide Multi-Tiered System of Support lead that has trained all 58 COEs and more than half of the state’s LEAs in a new approach to supporting all students,
- Community Engagement Initiative that works to build the capacity of communities and LEAs to facilitate difficult conversations about improving student outcomes,
- Special Education Local Plan Area Resource Leads that assist LEAs to improve outcomes of students with disabilities,
- COE Regional English Learner Specialists that provide guidance to reduce inequities for English learner students, and
- California’s Equity Performance and Improvement Program that builds LEA capacity to address barriers to equity and access.

The resources provided within the SSS are far reaching in that teachers, administrators, and others involved in the everyday education of students in California receive targeted professional development. This tiered approach is a different way of serving students, enhancing programs, and extending the reach of statewide support. Resources are made available for the SSS through the collaboration of various agencies. Multilingualism is a priority in our state and will be emphasized throughout this publication. Capitalizing on the assets that our English learner students bring to our vision of a multilingual society is vital for bringing this vision to fruition. The goal is to cultivate English learner students’ language skills and also ensure they meet the high academic expectations that are held for all students, so that they can use their biliterate/multiliterate skills to thrive and lead in a multilingual state. The English Learner Roadmap Policy is embedded in the SSS. This policy will be described in more depth in the upcoming chapters.
Every act of human learning is rooted in history. For this reason, this publication begins by offering an overview of the historical context in which California’s English learner students find themselves. This account provides an overview of important markers of policy history and notes milestones in research on human learning, language development, bilingualism, and educational policies, practices, and programs that advance English learner success (California English Learner Roadmap: Strengthening Comprehensive Educational Policies, Programs, and Practices for English Learners, page 14).

**Historical Timeline of Events in English Learner Education**

This historical overview begins in 2010 when the California Common Core State Standards were adopted. The California Common Core State Standards focus on deeper, richer, more applicable learning that will help California continue to be a center for innovation and leadership in education. In 2012, the English Language Development (ELD) Standards were adopted and the State Seal of Biliteracy was established. The adoption of the ELD Standards maintained California’s commitment to providing English learner students with a high-quality program that enables them to attain proficiency in English and to develop the skills and confidence in listening, speaking, reading, and writing that are the foundation of achievement inside and outside the classroom. The State Seal of Biliteracy was established to recognize high school graduates who have attained a high level of proficiency in speaking, reading, and writing in one or more languages in addition to English and, by doing so, emphasizes California’s commitment to the importance of the twenty-first century skill of biliteracy/multiliteracy. In 2014, the first-ever English Language Arts/English Language Development Framework was adopted. By aligning these two sets of standards, the framework formed the basis for remodeling California’s instructional practices and promoting literacy through critical thinking, problem solving, collaboration, and communication. In 2015, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) amended the Elementary and Secondary Act of 1965 nationwide. Among other changes, the ESSA advanced equity and required—for the first time—that all students in America be taught
to high academic standards that prepare them to succeed in college and careers. In 2016, voters overwhelmingly approved the Education for a Global Economy Initiative (Proposition 58), authorizing school districts and county offices of education to establish language acquisition programs for both native and nonnative English speakers and requiring school districts and COEs to solicit parent and community input in developing language acquisition programs. Shortly after this, in 2017, the California State Board of Education unanimously approved the California English Learner Roadmap Policy, which established an assets-oriented vision and mission to guide California in educating English learner students. And finally, the Global California 2030 Initiative was updated in 2019. The goal of this initiative is to equip students with world language skills to better appreciate and more fully engage in the rich and diverse mixture of cultures, heritages, and languages found in California and the world, while preparing them to succeed in the global economy. Taken together, these events set California on the path toward embracing the English learner students enrolled in its public schools and preparing them to learn and lead as engaged members of California’s diverse community.

Timeline of Events in English Learner History

Long description of Timeline of Events
Snapshot of English Learner Students in California—Demographics

California English learner demographics illustrate the reason for this publication. Additional English learner student data resources are available on the CDE School Dashboard, California Longitudinal Pupil Achievement Data System, and DataQuest web pages.

Top Five Languages

The top five home languages that English learner students and multilingual students bring to California schools over the last 10 years have changed slightly with Spanish and Vietnamese maintaining the top two positions, although both languages have seen decreases in the past 10 years. Recently, Mandarin overtook Filipino (Tagalog) in the third position. Cantonese and Hmong are no longer in the top five languages.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>84.7%</td>
<td>83.7%</td>
<td>81.56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnamese</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
<td>2.34%</td>
<td>2.21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Filipino (Tagalog)</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
<td>1.37%</td>
<td>Mandarin (Putonghua) 1.87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cantonese</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
<td>Arabic 1.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hmong</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
<td>Arabic 1.20%</td>
<td>Other 1.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Number of Long-Term English Learner Students (LTEls) (2016–2018)

The success of LTEls is of utmost importance statewide. From 2015 to 2017 the number of students classified as LTEls began to show a slight decline. In 2018, however, there was a significant one-year increase in the numbers, due to the fact that only one year of English Language Proficiency Assessments for California (ELPAC) data were available to make LTEl determinations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of LTEls</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2015–16</td>
<td>238,572</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016–17</td>
<td>230,119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017–18</td>
<td>218,135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018–19</td>
<td>342,983*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The 2018–19 determinations of LTEls reflect a significant one-year increase in LTEl counts from previous years. These changes stem from having only one year of ELPAC data available in the 2017–18 academic year required for making LTEl determinations.

Number and Percent of Reclassified English Learner Students in California (2005–2018)

Overall, the number and percentage of reclassified students has increased. The ESSA requires states to standardize reclassification criteria. California currently uses four criteria for reclassifying students:

1. ELPAC overall level 4
2. Teacher evaluation of pupil mastery
3. Parent/Guardian opinion and consultation
4. Comparison of performance of pupil in basic skills

Education Code Section 313(f) and California Code of Regulations, Title 5, Section 11303
The ESSA also requires four-year monitoring after students are reclassified. The following table shows the number and percentage of reclassified students from 2010–2018.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of English Learner Students Reclassified</th>
<th>Percentage of English Learner Students Reclassified</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2010–11</td>
<td>167,854</td>
<td>11.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011–12</td>
<td>172,803</td>
<td>12.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012–13</td>
<td>168,960</td>
<td>12.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013–14</td>
<td>169,573</td>
<td>12.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014–15</td>
<td>154,959</td>
<td>11.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015–16</td>
<td>155,774</td>
<td>11.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016–17</td>
<td>183,272</td>
<td>13.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017–18</td>
<td>193,899</td>
<td>14.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018–19</td>
<td>175,746</td>
<td>13.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**California School Dashboard: Academic Performance Comparison**

And finally, a comparison of academic performance between English learner students, reclassified students, and English-only students from the 2018–19 School Dashboard shows that, as expected, reclassified students outperform English-only students. This comparison of the performance on the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium English Language Arts and Mathematics assessments reaffirms the need to continue to implement systems of support to accelerate English learner students’ progress in learning English. This is especially vital because English learner students comprise 18 percent of California’s student population; their academic progress is therefore vital to California’s success.
Improving Education for Multilingual and English Learner Students: Research to Practice

Long descriptions of the English Language Arts and Mathematics Data Comparisons

Looking forward, chapter 1 will set the stage for the remainder of the groundbreaking publication, including more generous insight into the California context for multilingual learners.