



EDUCATION NEWS

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Educating English Language Learners, Is There a Best Practice?



The education of English Language Learners (ELLs) has often been a contentious debate in the US. Too often embroiled in the politics of illegal immigration, discussion fails to acknowledge the diversity associated with ELLs and more importantly that ELL education has a direct bearing on the future success of the U.S. as a whole. At 5.3 million ELL students represent the fastest growing student population in the country¹. In the last decade the total school population has increased by less than 3% while the ELL student population has soared by more than 60%². In states such as North Carolina and Nevada the ELL population has grown 500% and 200%, respectively, over a ten year period³. It is clear that in a country where Hispanics are projected to make up 30% of the total adult population by 2050, the education of ELLs is an imperative for not only individual interests, but for the good of the country⁴.

While Spanish-speaking students do comprise approximately 75% of ELLs, the ELL population is an extremely heterogeneous group that is made up of speakers of over 150

different languages⁵. Additionally, more than 75% of elementary ELLs are second generation students and 95% of children under the age of six who live in immigrant families are US-born⁶. Such a diverse group of learners makes a one-size-fits-all approach to English language acquisition and academic achievement unfeasible.

A number of provisions have been put in place to ensure that all students, regardless of home language or legal status are entitled to a public education in which they can reach academic proficiency. The Supreme Court case *Lau v. Nichols* (1974) stated that limited English proficient students should be treated with equality among the schools. Among other things, *Lau* reflects the now-widely accepted view that a person's language is so closely intertwined with their national origin (the country someone or their ancestors came from) that language-based discrimination is effectively a proxy for national origin discrimination. The *Lau* guidelines reflected a preference for native language instruction in some form of the following: transitional bi-

lingual education programs, which use native language instruction until a student became functional in English; or bilingual programs, which employ native language instruction after English language functionality is reached in order to produce students fully functional in multiple languages. Advocates of bilingual education argued that bilingual education programs develop native language literacy skills that facilitate students' transition to English, while allowing those students to keep pace with their peers in the standard curriculum. In an effort to guarantee the basic right of every child to an education, the *Plyler v. Doe* (1982) Supreme Court case stated that no state or district can deny any undocumented child the right to a public education.

The executive and legislative branches have also implemented significant changes to ELL instruction over the last half century. The first reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in 1968 made the initial provisions for instruction of ELLs. During the 60s and 70s the law focused on providing some form of bilingual education to those in need. However, Congress began to emphasize instructional practices of ELLs in the 1980s. The 1984 and 1988 reauthorization took steps to increasingly fund English-only programs. Currently, states are ultimately in charge of approaches to instruction, but the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) changed the goal of ELL instruction from English Language Acquisition to the goal of reaching academic proficiency while developing language proficiency. Schools are now held accountable for the academic achievement of ELL students as well as their English speaking peers under Title III of NCLB⁷. As a result, many states and districts have become increasingly invested in developing a coherent model that works for their student population. Following is a table of six basic models that are used:

Continued on following page.

Model	Goal	Characteristics
English Immersion	Linguistic assimilation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ 100% English ■ Mainstream classroom ■ No special support
ESL Push-In/Structured Immersion	Linguistic assimilation; remedial English	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ 90–100% English ■ Mainstream classroom ■ Subject instruction at student's level ■ Teacher trained in ESL
ESL Pull-out	Linguistic assimilation; quick exit to mainstream education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ 90–100% English ■ Students pulled out 30–45 minutes daily for non-academic content ■ Teacher trained in ESL
Transitional Bilingual	Linguistic assimilation/English acquisition without falling behind academically	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ 50–90% English ■ Initial literacy is usually in home language ■ Subject matter instruction at student's level of English ■ Teacher trained in bilingual education
Developmental Bilingual	Bilingualism/Biliteracy/English academic achievement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ 10% English initially and gradually increasing to 50%. ■ Initially, literacy and some subject instruction in home language ■ Initially, ESL and subject matter instruction at student's level ■ Teacher trained in bilingual education
Dual Language Immersion	Bilingualism/Biliteracy/English academic achievement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ 50% English ■ ELLs and native English speakers are taught literacy and content in both subjects ■ Teacher trained in bilingual education

Source: *The Campaign for Education Equity. (2008). From English language learners to emergent bilinguals.*

ELL STORY

Continued from previous page.

While there has been a great deal of research on best practices, little consensus has been reached on any specific program. The spectrum ranges from those who argue for bilingual education to those in favor on English immersion models, all with valid concerns. Proponents of the bilingual model have been greatly influenced by the concept of linguistic interdependence. Proposed in the late 70s, it states that supporting a student's native language also promotes acquisition of the new language provided there is adequate exposure to the new one. Additionally, the native language does not need to be fully developed before introduction of the new language and it is essential that the native language must be fully developed⁸. Advocates often criticize the prioritization of English language acquisition at the expense of academic content as opposed to developing both simultaneously. Lastly, many argue that bilingual education strengthens the linkage between the school and the home, combating student alienation.

Bilingual education began to lose favor with the increasing momentum of the "English-only" movement around the country. English-only advocates argued that bilingual-

bicultural programs segregated non-English speaking students, hindered assimilation, and delayed the student's acquisition of English-language skills. In the past few decades, California, Arizona, and Massachusetts have passed measures largely eliminating their bilingual education programs in favor of intensive English "immersion" programs. The cost of bilingual programs is also cited as a constraint. However, more recently groups have attempted to work past the traditional argument; studies have argued that the instructional model is less relevant than the quality of the program. Debate should focus on how a variety of programs can be successfully implemented, with the best interest of the student's education in mind⁹.

Whatever course is chosen for a community, one key point should be kept in mind. While the top performing education systems of the world have erased educational inequities by the second generation of immigrants, the US has lost ground. The "immigrant paradox" highlights the fact that immigrants on average do better socially, physically, and academically than US born ELLs¹⁰. A primary concern in this struggle is the social isolation of ELLs that grow up in a culture vastly different from their parents. We must recognize that the children of immigrants are faced with a variety of social and cultural barriers that hinder their academic

performance. We must make every effort to support these students through decreasing the damaging effects of social isolation, regardless of the method of instruction.

Endnotes

- 1 http://edfunders.org/downloads/GFEReports/GFE_Investing_in_Our_Next_Generation.pdf
- 2 U.S. Department of Education. (2008). Biennial report to Congress of the implementation of Title III state formula grant program, school years 2004-06. Office of English Language Acquisition, Language Enhancement, and Academic Achievement for Limited English Proficient Students Washington DC.
- 3 National Research Council of the National Academies. (2011). Allocating federal funds for state programs for English language learners. Retrieved from http://books.nap.edu/openbook.php?record_id=13090&page=R1
- 4 Dolan, S. (20??). Missing out: Latino students in America's schools. NCLR.
- 5 http://edfunders.org/downloads/GFEReports/GFE_Investing_in_Our_Next_Generation.pdf
- 6 http://edfunders.org/downloads/GFEReports/GFE_Investing_in_Our_Next_Generation.pdf
- 7 National Research Council of the National Academies. (2011). Allocating federal funds for state programs for English language learners. Retrieved from http://books.nap.edu/openbook.php?record_id=13090&page=R1
- 8 Cummins, J. (2000). Language, power, & pedagogy: Bilingual children caught in the crossfire. Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.
- 9 http://edgewood.schoolwires.net/2014105221133950/lib/2014105221133950/14.POLICY_BRIEF_ELLS_2002.pdf <http://www.cis.org/ImmigrantParadox>

Science Education and Latino Students

The Department of Education recently released the science results for the federally mandated National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP) in grades 4, 8, and 12¹.

The assessment, administered to 156,500 fourth graders, 151,100 eighth graders, and 11,100 twelfth graders, offers valuable insight into students' understanding of the physical, life, earth, and space sciences. While the update means that we cannot compare 2009 data to earlier assessments, it does offer more current content that can be used for comparison in the future. Inquiry-based thinking and problem solving skills have also been more fully incorporated in an effort to align with current trends.

Although the assessment does not allow the identification of any longitudinal trends, the results do show that Latinos are struggling in relation to their peers. Of 300 possible points, 4th grade Latinos scored an average of 131 compared to 163 for white students; 8th grade Latinos scored 132 while white students averaged 162; and 12th grade Latinos scored 134 compared with 159 for white students. Additionally, 47% of white students scored at or above proficient in grade four while only 14% of Latinos reached the same score. At grade eight, the gap remains high with 42% of white students proficient or above compared to 12% of Hispanic students. In twelfth grade, in general the scores were lower, but Latinos still struggled with 8% at or above proficiency as opposed to 27% of white students and 36% of Asian/Pacific Islander students.

These figures, compounded by the fact that all demographics performed far below expectations and the United States' mediocre performance on the 2009 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA)², illustrate the need to for improvements in science instruction. The assessment has served as a call to the US education community to improve our system for the economic competitiveness of the nation. In his State of the Union, President Obama highlighted the importance of science and math education in driving innovation and scientific discovery. Referring to our current situation as "our generation's Sputnik³" moment, he called for 100,000 new Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) teachers over the

next decade. Obama has been promoting increased attention to STEM since early in his term through his 2011 budget and the federal stimulus package. The recently released President's budget furthered the administration's support through an optimistic emphasis on STEM that prioritized three main areas: increasing STEM literacy; improving the quality of math and science teaching; and expanding STEM education and career opportunities for underrepresented groups⁴. It provides \$435 million for programs that support the preparation of 100,000 STEM teachers over the next decade. It offers investments in K-12 math and science such as \$206 million to support STEM professional development, assessments, and instructional support as well as \$300 million for another round of the Investing in Education program. It calls for more than \$3 billion for STEM education activities across several federal agencies such as NASA and the National Science Foundation.

The proposal also takes steps to provide smaller pots of funding for programs that specifically support minority students. It provides \$35 million to Upward Bound, which offers academic support to low income students in preparation for college attendance. \$100 million are also recommended for the Hispanic-serving Institutions STEM and Articulation program, designed to increase the number of Hispanic and other low income students earning degrees in STEM fields⁵.

Obama has also pushed partnerships with the private sector. The Educate to Innovate initiative has sparked collaboration through a non-profit called Change the Equation⁶. The non-profit, which is a coalition of 110 companies, argues that almost all of the 30 fastest growing occupations over the next decade will require a background in STEM literacy.

Despite support from the administration and the private sector, House Republicans have argued for many drastic cuts, including in STEM education. Prior to the President's release of his 2012 budget recommendations, the House GOP released a proposal for the remaining 2011 budget, which would apply from March 4 through the rest of the 2011 fiscal year. In it,



they propose a reduction of \$5 billion from the Department of Education's \$64 billion budget in 2010. While President Obama endorses consolidation of various programs, the GOP chose instead to cut many programs such as the Mathematics and Science Partnership, which provides ongoing professional development to math and science teachers.

It is growing increasingly clear that Latino students are underperforming on STEM literacies and that targeted interventions are necessary. The 2010 Education Week Quality Counts survey gave K-12 education a D in stemming STEM diversity amongst women and underrepresented minorities⁷. The Obama 2012 proposal recommended significant steps toward addressing the poor achievement of the Hispanic community. The challenge now lies in convincing Congress that targeted appropriations are necessary.

Endnotes

- 1 See <http://nationsreportcard.gov/about.asp> for more details
- 2 The PISA is an internationally administered test that measures the performance of 15-year-olds in reading literacy, math literacy, and science literacy every three years. The US ranked 17th of the 34 countries of the Organization for the Economic Co-operation and Development.
- 3 The 1957 Soviet launch of the first satellite, "Sputnik," prompted the United States to aggressively reform its education system to provide improved science and math instruction in an effort to compete with the Soviet Union.
- 4 <http://www2.ed.gov/about/overview/budget/budget12/crosscuttingissues/stemed.pdf>
- 5 <http://diverseeducation.com/blogpost/333/president-obama-s-2012-commitment-to-stem.html>
- 6 <http://www.whitehouse.gov/issues/education/educate-innovate>
- 7 <http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2010/03/31/27report-b1.h29.html?qs=stem+minority>

Recent Events from LULAC

CHSE STATE LEADERSHIP ORGANIZING MEETING

On January 26th & 27th, LULAC and the Campaign for High School Equity partners¹, played host to a meeting of state and community education advocates in Los Angeles. The State Leadership Organizing meeting brought together leaders from the education and civil rights communities nationwide to share perspectives about state-level policy opportunities and challenges that exist as we work together to transform high school education for students of color. During this intensive two-day session these advocates heard from the CHSE partners on the Campaign's framework for high school education reform; discuss effective strategies for educating state policymakers; and begin collaborating to develop state-specific action plans to advance education reform efforts. LULAC members, from participating states, attended the meeting in Los Angeles and met with other advocates from their state, to discuss the education work that they are engaged in within their states and communities. State work groups began discussing areas of common interest for ongoing collaborative work, the current political climate in their states, and what needs done to move a high school equity agenda locally. Of particular concern for the advocates are issues

surrounding implementation of the Common Core State Standards (academic standards newly adopted by 40+ states) Expanded Learning Opportunities and increasing the availability and distribution of highly effective teachers and leaders.

LULAC NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE CONFERENCE & GALA

In the ongoing effort to support the rights of Latinos in the US, the LULAC National office has been active in supporting State LULAC offices. In January, LULAC and the Hispanic Education Coalition hosted a Grassroots State Kickoff event in California that served to familiarize LULAC members with the Campaign for High School Equity and issues surrounding the Common Core State Standards.

Over the two day conference, participants discussed and collaborated on national, state, and local strategies for supporting the CHSE.

LULAC National also recently hosted the fourteenth annual legislative conference and Awards Gala in Washington DC. The event provided LULAC members from across the country with the chance to advocate for key policies with policy makers and federal representatives. LULAC members participated in an advocacy day in which they spoke to Senators, House Representatives, and other federal officials about policies that are important in their communities. Furthermore, the gala recognized vital advocates for the Latino community and offered a forum for the Latino voice to be heard on a national stage.

Among topics of discussion at the legislative conference, federal employees, civil rights group representatives, and LULAC members spoke on a few central themes: improving poor health outcomes for Latino children, improving broadband internet access, effective advocacy strategies, and the current landscape for Latino students. The education panel addressed a number of issues—the most pressing of which were the potential for an upcoming reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act² (ESEA), the looming budget concerns, and the impact of the 2010 census.

In discussion of ESEA reauthorization, panelists applauded NCLB's accommodation of race through data disaggregated for English Language Learners (ELLs). They acknowledged that many improvements are necessary, but stressed that any updated legislation must build upon the previous bill. Among recommendations were improved subgroup accountability, larger pots of funding, greater access to early childhood development, and strengthening parent engagement. A common fear was that with drastic budget cuts and a slimmed down focus on student achievement, programs that are not directly related to k-12 will be cut.

Panelists also discussed the implications of the 2010 census with apprehension. The data will show the dramatic increase in the Hispanic population and might easily be construed in a negative light. An NCLR representative emphasized that the majority of Latinos are US citizens and that the Hispanic community must make every effort to ensure that the dominant interpretation of the data recognizes our legitimacy.

One final point was also made clear—while in an ideal world moral obligation might compel policy makers to do what's best for Latino students, today's budget crisis make it essential that the Hispanic community stress the economic imperative of educating our children. In light of republican efforts to cut fiscal spending to 2008 (or 2006) levels, any civil rights push to improve education for Latinos must make clear that American success relies heavily on the Hispanic community.

Endnotes

¹ CHSE partners are: Alliance for Excellent Education, Leadership Conference on Civil Rights Education Fund, League of United Latin American Citizens, Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials, National Council of La Raza, National Indian Education Association, National Urban League, Southeast Asia Resource Action Center

² The No Child Left Behind Act in 2001 was the last authorization of ESEA

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