



Policy Memorandum: Increase Supports for Increasing Student Achievement Through Building Sustainable Systems

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Who We Are

We are Latina/o leaders that bring our own story to current educational issues impacting our communities. Our team is grounded in *respeto*, in knowing that the respect needed for our own backgrounds is more important today than yesterday. Our collective experience in leading English learners spans close to 50 years of listening to the ongoing struggles of deciding between two cultures, languages, traditions, and friends. Though one can argue that “things are better than before,” frankly, they are not and will never be good enough. Our Spanish-speaking community deserves the same consistent effort of learning English and American history. The time is now to ensure that we foster, educate, and create leaders from the universities to our schools who, beyond being culturally relevant, are culturally and linguistically on the leading edge. Our international world needs it; moreover, our communities require it, and our students deserve it. We are Fellows with UnidosUS through the National Institute for Latino School Leaders,-California (NILSL-CA), which seeks to bridge the divide between policy and practice and effectively train advocates for policy reform that lead to increased educational outcomes for Latinx students and families.

Summary

We are recommending changes to the state’s allocation of Title III to ensure that English learners are provided with teachers and leaders who are well-trained in highly effective practices and are held accountable, to ensure students are meeting all competency goals across all schools in California through the County Offices of Education (COE). The forthcoming funding request is to increase the number of Title III COE Liaison Agency representatives by two per region with an allotment of a minimum of \$4 million in annual funding.

The Need

In 2018, Global California 2030 was developed by the Communications and English Learner Support Divisions of the California Department of Education (CDE).¹ The initiative includes notable and lofty goals such as the participation of half of all K-12 students in programs leading to proficiency in two or more languages, either through a class, a program, or an experience. However, in the same timeframe (2018-19), nearly 90% of English learner (EL) students across all grades in California did not meet English and math standards.² If California does not address this crisis, it will lose the linguistic, cultural, social, and economic assets of Dual Language Learners that are needed to develop a global, diverse, and multilingual state and economy.³

The Migration Policy Institute (2018) indicates that in California:⁴

- Immigrants comprise a large portion of the population; therefore, it follows that the share of school-age children with one or more foreign-born parents is larger in California (52%) than in the United States overall (26%).
- In low-income families, 60% of children had one or more foreign-born parent(s), compared to 32% of children nationally.
- Among California school districts with enrollments of more than 10,000 English learners (ELs), four of the five districts with the largest number of ELs were concentrated in Southern California during the 2017-2018 school year.

Background

Title III provides federal monies to the states for the education of English learners. Specifically, California is required to demonstrate that English learner students are proficient and competent in state achievement standards in mathematics, reading or language arts, and science, as well as making progress in their English language development.

English learners represent a significant portion of California public school students:⁵

- The state's 1,148,024 English learners constitute 18.6% of the total enrollment in public schools.
- The majority of English learners (68.6%) are enrolled in elementary grades kindergarten through six. The rest (31.4%) are enrolled in the secondary grades seven through twelve and in the ungraded category.
- A total of 2,555,951 students (both ELs and Fluent English-Proficient) come from homes with a language other than English. This number represents about 41.5% of the state's public-school enrollment.

An English learner is identified by asking families to complete a Home Language Survey when the student first enrolls in a public school in California. If the family indicates a primary language other than English is spoken at home, or there is reason to believe that the student can benefit from English language support, then the student is administered the English Language Proficiency Assessments for California (ELPAC) screener assessment and may begin to receive English language support services, if the assessment results merit such supports. During the student's English language development, they must meet reclassification criteria to exit the program. The criteria continue to vary in three of the four criteria as well as district to district and are grounded in assessments, teacher recommendations, and grades.

For over 20 years, the challenge has been the lack of standardization of professional development across districts for how to reclassify students effectively and provide support after they have reclassified for a minimum of four years.

One example from Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) shows this challenge:

Under earlier reclassification procedures (from 2003 to 2006), some high school students in LAUSD may have been reclassified too soon, which lowered their chance of graduating from high school on time. They also found that, between 2007 and 2012, former ELs in LAUSD scored worse on math and literacy assessments than peers who weren't reclassified at the same time, but that negative effect only lasted for one year.

These and similar challenges will be further curtailed by increasing the number of Title III County Office of Education Liaisons to continue to communicate information between 11 service regions and other entities participating in the California Statewide System of Support. The Title III Liaisons also known as Regional EL Specialists are to participate in the California Statewide System of Support and communicate regularly with the California Department of Education (CDE), the California Collaborative for Education Excellence (CCEE), and the lead agencies. The new system expects all California Statewide System of Support providers to work collaboratively with one another to provide coordinated support to Local Educational Agencies (LEAs) identified for technical assistance under Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) or the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF).

Then, from the team of 11, one Title III COE Liaison Agency is selected by the CDE to represent this group to function as follows:⁷

- Provide updates to and collaborate with the advisory bodies of the system of support.
- Attend geographic leads meetings and act as a liaison between the geographic leads and the Regional EL Specialists.
- Present acquired information at the regional level to all Regional EL Specialists using available modes of communication (i.e. online and face-to-face meetings, online sharing platforms, etc.).
- Support Regional EL Specialists to disseminate the information to all COEs and LEAs within their regions.
- Fund activities with existing Title III budget.

Through the state system of support, Title III COE Liaison Agency representatives have been divided into 11 regions; however, the division of these representatives is unequal due to the needs of particular districts with a high density of English learners (e.g. Los Angeles) compared to other rural areas that do not have the distinct demands for services. Differentiation is highly needed, including constant supports to make meaning of the English Learner Roadmap. One example is a comparison between Region 8, which services Kern, San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara, and Ventura, and Region 11, which services Los Angeles. These two regions each have one representative. Kern County has 85,000 English learners, but Los Angeles County has 257,000.^{7,8}

Our Ask

- The CDE should join advocacy efforts by civil rights and equity organizations to demand a \$2 billion increase to Title III funding starting with FY 2022. Once funding is secured, a minimum of \$4 million (a \$2 million increase from current funding levels) should be allotted to build capacity at the COE level to provide support and services for English learners.

This includes:

- An increase of the Title III COE Liaison Agency representative by two per region offering alignment to the Current Geographical Lead Agencies
- A redesign of the system of support structured to ensure oversight and accountability of LEAs as related to support, services, and outcomes of English learners. Currently, federal funding is used to enhance the capacity of the COE Liaison Agency representatives. However, the current system of collaboration with the System of Support will be leveraged with the additional support to enhance implementation, services, and outcomes.
- A cohesive and uniform approach to professional development and implementation of support and services to English learners as part of the System of Support. The 11 COE Liaison Agency representatives provide technical assistance to their region by offering capacity-building opportunities and disseminating timely, accurate, and reliable information on English learner policy, legislation, and accountability to make meaning for the local level so that it impacts student achievement.

Impact

Close the Funding Gap

Ensure equitable and adequate allocation of resources to improve the academic, personal, and social as well as college and career needs of English learners.

Share COE Liaison Accountability with LEAs

Encourage COE Liaisons to directly work with LEAs to increase consistent accountability and outcomes when equity dashboard percentages of English language or content attainment for English learners' subgroups (e.g. English learners and Reclassified) decreases or stalls, by cohesively pairing the Regional Lead and Geographical Lead structures within the System of Support. This will be evidenced in the development of alignment system structures at the county level to impact the structures at the LEA level.

Common Instructional Practices

Streamline professional development opportunities through the additional COE Liaisons, afforded across California for educators serving English learners, to include a strong understanding of successful outcomes with English learners based on typologies and reflective of local diversity and contexts. Moreover, the additional COE Liaisons will work to develop cohesive system structures within the System of Support at the local and county level to further support positive performance outcomes for English learners and implement the California English Learner Roadmap, which is the policy adopted in 2017.

Current COE Liaisons are limited in their impact to ensure efficient and effective professional development, which further ensures that "English learner (EL) students, including immigrant children and youth, attain English language proficiency (ELP) and meet the same challenging state academic standards that other students are expected

to meet,” as described by the Language Instruction for English learner and Immigrant Students Act, Section 3102.

Encourage LEAs to ensure that families and guardian communities are being provided with bicultural and bilingual learning as outlined in the English Learner Roadmap unanimously adopted by the State Board of Education in 2017.

Moreover, by supporting our English learners and boosting County of Education resources, we can continue to address the low academic performance of English learners through professional development for teachers and administrators, which will serve students as they acquire language proficiency and simultaneously enhance their academic performance.

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Endnotes

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- 2 Sydney Johnson, “Less than a third of California students met or exceeded standards on new science test,” EdSource, February 7, 2020, <https://edsources.org/2020/less-than-a-third-of-california-students-met-or-exceeded-standards-on-new-science-test/623514> (accessed January 11, 2021).
- 3 Consortium for English Learner Success, “2020-2021 Policy Agenda,” 2020, accessed January 11, 2021, http://www.afabc.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/EL_2020_Policy_Agenda.pdf.
- 4 Julie Sugarman & Courtney Geary, “English Learners in California: Demographics, Outcomes, and State Accountability Policies,” Migration Policy Institute, August 2018, https://www.migrationpolicy.org/sites/default/files/publications/EL-factsheet2018-California_Final.pdf.
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- 6 Connor P. Williams, “New Studies Hint at Clearer Ways to Measure English Learners’ Performance,” February 20, 2020, The Century Foundation, <https://tcf.org/content/commentary/new-studies-hint-clearer-ways-measure-english-learners-performance/?agreed=1> (accessed January 11, 2021).
- 7 California Department of Education, “Title III COE Liaison Agency,” <https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/el/t3/t3coeliason.asp> (accessed January 11, 2021).
- 8 Relevant statistics compiled via California Department of Education, DataQuest, <https://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/> (accessed January 11, 2021).