



Policy Memorandum: Leveling the FIELD: Funding, Intervention, and English Language Development in Elementary Schools

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Who We Are

We are local leaders and principals of effective public schools spanning kindergarten through 12th grade, representing both the traditional and public charter school system, with the vast majority of students served being from predominantly low-income Latino communities and families. Alma-Delia Renteria is a principal in El Rancho Unified School District. Jonathan Tiongco is the Founding Principal and Executive Director for the Alliance Marine - Innovation & Technology 6-12 Complex and an educational consultant. We are also part of the National Institute for Latino School Leaders-California (NILSL-CA) Fellowship with UnidosUS, which seeks to bridge the divide between policy and practice and train effective advocates for policies and reform efforts to strengthen educational outcomes for Latino students.

Summary

As educators who understand the detrimental effects experienced by English Learners (ELs) who do not reclassify and who are denied access to higher-education and career-bound academic opportunities, we request the California Legislature to join national advocacy efforts in asking for an additional \$2 billion in Title III funding starting with fiscal year 2022 and for an increase to the supplemental and concentration funding allotment for elementary schools under the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF). A boost in funding for English Language Development (ELD) in general and specific funding at the elementary level would provide additional, proactive EL support services and early interventions to prevent students from becoming Long-Term English Learners (LTELs). LTELs are students who have not been able to demonstrate proficiency in English to participate in mainstream English coursework in middle and high school settings. The reclassification of students earlier in students' academic trajectories will prepare them for long-term success.

The Need

Looking at the academic achievement levels of ELs in 2018-2019, the last year California had the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP) assessment results, only 12% of ELs met or exceeded the standards in English-Language Arts and Mathematics, compared to 51% in English-Language Arts (ELA) and 40% in Mathematics for all students, demonstrating a clear and profound performance gap.¹

While reclassification rates play a role in this statistic, EL performance over time on the CAASPP declines steadily from 3rd grade to 11th grade in both English-Language Arts and Mathematics. In 3rd grade, approximately 18% of students met or exceeded standards in ELA and 15% met or exceeded standards in Math. In 5th and 6th grade, when most students will be transitioning to secondary settings, ELs met or exceeded standards in ELA at 13% and 10%, respectively, and met or exceeded standards in Math at 10% and 8% in those same grades.²

According to 2019 data from the State Dashboard, only 48.3% of ELs are making progress towards English Language Proficiency (ELP).³ Not only does this signify that only half of our EL population is making progress towards ELP, our college- and career-readiness indicators highlight a more tragic reality. While 72.7% of ELs graduated in 2019, only 16.8% of those graduates reached the “Prepared” level on the College and Career Indicator.⁴ EL students are further at a disadvantage when seeking higher education opportunities that, in the long run, translate into access to higher paid jobs and improved quality of life, etc.

Background

In 2018-2019, approximately 1.2 million ELs were enrolled in California public schools, **meaning that 1 out of every 5 students in the state is an English Learner.** California has the largest Latino student population in the United States and its student population has increased by almost 8% over the past decade. An estimated 55% of K-12 students in California are Latino, and 82% of ELs in California identify Spanish as their home language.⁵

The majority of ELs (70.2%) are enrolled in the elementary grades (K-6),⁶ meaning that through increased funding, earlier intervention supports at the elementary level can increase and improve ELP and meet our California Department of Education goals for ELs. At the secondary level, 59% of the EL population in California has been identified as LTELs.⁷ In U.S. schools, a “Long-Term English Learner” means an English Learner who is enrolled in any grade from 6 to 12, has been enrolled in schools in the United States for more than six years, and who has remained at the same English-language proficiency level for two or more consecutive years as determined by the English language development test and underperformance on the state summative assessment.⁸ LTELs have higher dropout rates and lower college-going rates than their peers. **In order to meet the needs of our EL populations, increased funding, particularly in the earlier grade levels, is absolutely critical.**

For the current 2020-21 academic year, the average base grant per Average Daily Attendance (ADA) for grades K-6 (elementary) is \$7,760. Meanwhile, the base grant per ADA for grades 9-12 is \$9,329. Due to two grade-span adjustments (one for Grades K-3 to factor the increase for smaller average class sizes, and one for Grades 9-12 in recognition of the costs for career technical education), base grants for grades K-3 were adjusted from \$7,702 to \$8,503, and for grades 9-12, base grants were adjusted from \$9,329 to \$9,572. Even with this adjustment to support smaller class sizes in the primary grades, the average K-6 base grant is only \$8,160.50 per ADA in comparison to the

\$9,572 base grant per ADA provided to grades 9-12, which represents a significant gap in funding for elementary students compared to their secondary-school-setting peers.⁹

A recent report released by the Manhattan Institute entitled “The Earning Curve” further highlights the importance of college and career readiness for our ELs as it relates to our economy.¹⁰ If ELs are only graduating from high school, their earnings are capped earlier than those of their college-graduate counterparts.

Our Ask

We request the California Department of Education (CDE) join national advocacy efforts asking for an additional \$2 billion in Title III funding starting with fiscal year 2022,¹¹ to ensure earlier and more proactive approaches in educating ELs. In addition, we request that the California Legislature increase the supplemental grant funding allotted to elementary schools to provide additional EL support and early interventions to prevent students from becoming LTELs and ensuring ELs have strong pathways to post-secondary education and career success.

We ask that the legislature increase funding from the LCFF formula to:

- Provide funds to hire additional staffing support (i.e. full-time equivalency positions such as EL teachers, EL instructional coaches, etc.) for elementary schools that have a student population of at least 20% EL students.
- Adopt staffing guidelines that are dictated by student population needs to better gauge the staffing needs of communities. Currently, elementary school principals carry too many buckets of work, thus taking away from their ability to truly serve the needs of English Learners and particularly in returning from the Covid pandemic crisis.

Impact

Our long-term goal is to provide resources and services for students to receive early intervention, reclassify, and have greater access and opportunities. By increasing funding to ensure that all local educational agencies provide all elementary schools with a 20% EL population with at least one dedicated EL-specific position to provide direct service to students and provide personalized professional development to meet the needs of our students, we will be able to:

- more proactively support students in preparation for secondary and post-secondary success
- improve reclassification rates
- minimize the numbers of LTELs who transition into our secondary school system
- increase EL graduation rates over time
- improve college acceptance rates

Thus, investment early-on will drastically improve ELs’ career and life prospects, stimulate the economy, and help us to create a more educated and equitable democracy.

Endnotes

- 1 California Department of Education, California School Dashboard, accessed March 25, 2021, <https://www.caschooldashboard.org/reports/ca/2019/academic-engagement#graduation-rate>.
- 2 <https://caaspp-elpac.cde.ca.gov/caaspp/ViewReport?ps=true&lstTestYear=2019&lstTestType=B&lstGroup=4&lstSchoolType=A&lstGrade=13&lstCounty=00&lstDistrict=00000&lstSchool=0000000&lstFocus=btnApplySelections>
- 3 ibid
- 4 California Department of Education, California School Dashboard, accessed March 25, 2021, <https://www.caschooldashboard.org/reports/ca/2019/academic-engagement#graduation-rate>.
- 5 ibid
- 6 http://publications.unidosus.org/bitstream/handle/123456789/2098/unidosus_californiaduallanguage_fastfacts.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y
- 7 ibid
- 8 California Assembly Bill 2193, Chapter 427, "Long-term English Learner," California Education Code Section 313.1-2 (Lara 2012), https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billTextClient.xhtml?bill_id=201120120AB2193.
- 9 <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/fd/ec/currentexpense.asp>
- 10 Connor Harris, "The Earning Curve: Variability and Overlap in Labor-Market Outcomes by Education Level," The Manhattan Institute, February 2020, <https://media4.manhattan-institute.org/sites/default/files/the-earning-curve-CH.pdf>.
- 11 <https://www.californianstogether.org/the-latest/page/2/>