



## Policy Memorandum: A Laser Focus on our Long-Term English Learners

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### Who We Are

We are administrators in California schools with a high number of Latino and English Learner (EL) students. We represent high-poverty, high-need communities in Northern and Southern California. Evelia Villa is currently the Chief Operating Officer for the Amethod Public Schools, K-12 system. Villa previously served as a founding principal and Chief Academic Officer within the organization. Nereyda Gonzalez currently serves as Director of Secondary Education in a district in Riverside County, where she formerly served as a high school principal, counselor, and teacher. We are Fellows from the National Institute for Latino School Leaders-California (NILSL-CA), sponsored by a UnidosUS program that links practitioners to policy makers.

### Summary

Currently, schools must notify parents of their child's language designation under Assembly Bill (AB) 81 (Gonzalez, 2017). Parents of Long-Term English Learners (LTELs) are not accounted for when we talk about any next steps or progress monitoring. Although parental notification is communicated via a written letter, support services and processes are not explicitly detailed. As administrators, we believe it is important to inform parents of this designation, as it affects the type of course access available to their children. Oftentimes, LTELs are overlooked and suffer academically from not being re-designated appropriately. Therefore, we seek to advance policy recommendations that will enhance school-parent communication and collaboration while providing support for students who have not reclassified.

### The Need

In 2014, California became the first state in the nation to define and identify English Learners who, after many years, struggle continuously to succeed academically or progress in their language development. These LTEL students are too often overlooked by educators.

Reasons for this can vary from local educational agency (LEA) to LEA in California, leaving students stuck in a category that can have a negative impact on their future. There is a critical need to elevate this issue to bring about a uniform approach, one in which all school systems are held accountable to serve and assure that students are making academic progress and that language re-designation is appropriately assessed. We find the following areas to be problematic, as they hinder the performance of English learners:

- **Latino males are overrepresented in the LTEL student population.**

The state has identified nearly 350,000 students in grades 6 through 12 who have attended California schools for seven years or more and who are still not fluent in English. They make up three-fourths of all secondary school students still learning English.<sup>1</sup> Graduating from high school is a milestone on the road to being adequately prepared for college or career success. Female ELs are 11% less likely to become LTELs than their male peers. The largest difference in observed graduation rates, 36.1%, occurred between never English learner students (meaning those who were never classified) and long-term English learner students.<sup>2</sup>

- **LTEL students have lower rates of college attendance.**

Never-English learner students had the highest observed four-year graduation rate (85%), followed by long-term proficient former EL students (81%), recently proficient former EL students (67%), and new EL students (52%). Long-term English learner students had the lowest graduation rate (49%). Thus, LTEL students as a group tend to lag behind never-English speakers in academic outcomes, including rates of high school graduation. The earlier that English learner students achieved English proficiency, the higher the graduation rate.

- **LTEL students demonstrate lower academic performance.**

According to researchers, many schools assess the language skills of students and wrongly assume that they have no special needs because they are more fluent in English than in Spanish. In fact, these underachievers represent one of California's most serious educational challenges. LTELs are not new arrivals; rather, they have been in the United States for seven or more years, and many are in fact U.S.-born.<sup>3</sup> As a result, they are usually orally proficient in English and often sound like native speakers.<sup>4</sup> Despite their oral proficiency in English, these students are characterized by low levels of academic literacy in both English and their home language. As such, their reading and writing scores below grade level in both languages, and they often experience poor overall academic performance and high course failure rates due to their inability to meet the literacy demands across content areas.<sup>5</sup>

Although AB 81 mandates schools to notify families, it has failed to yield the results needed. Given that LTELs have significantly lower rates of graduation, college attendance, and career success, it is imperative that families know their student's EL status. Without basic information about a student's educational status, we cannot expect families to make informed decisions about their children's education.

## Background

Assembly Bill (AB) 2193 (Lara, 2012)<sup>6</sup> adopted recommendations from the report entitled "Reparable Harm: Fulfilling the Unkept Promise of Educational Opportunity for California's Long Term English Learners," authored by Dr. Laurie Olson.<sup>7</sup> AB 2193 was the first bill in the nation to define "long-term English learner" and "English-Learner at risk of becoming a long-term English Learner." It also required the collection of data of "long-term English learner" and "English-Learner at risk of becoming a long-term English Learner."

The original version of AB 2193 included parent notification, intervention, and support. Unfortunately, as the bill moved through the legislative process, these same requirements of parent notification, intervention, and support were removed.<sup>8</sup>

However, AB 2193 did lead to the collection of data of LTELs. Currently, California's DataQuest database collects the number of LTELs. Specifically, it collects the number of students that are "At-Risk" of becoming LTELs and LTELs by grade by school within a district. The data allows the public to view the number of students who are LTELs or at risk of becoming LTELs according to gender, disability, or other disadvantaged student groups, such as Socially Economically Disadvantaged students (SED), foster, migrant, and homeless. Although this database provides several filters, the data cannot be cross-tabulated. In addition, the number of LTELs is not disaggregated in any part of the California Data Dashboard.

Five years after AB 2193 passed, AB 81 was enacted.<sup>9</sup> This piece of legislation required the annual notice of assessment of a student's English proficiency to include specific additional information, including whether a student is at risk of becoming LTEL. The legislation mandated parent notification but stopped there.

In addition, Title III, as part of the Federal Monitoring Program, requires LEAs to report on the "most recent ELP level, standard instructional program (i.e. ELD, including designated and integrated instruction, International Baccalaureate, Advanced Placement, and A-G subject requirements), and academic assessment data." It also requires that LEAs "include all currently enrolled ELs and identify those who are long term English learners (LTELs) or ELs at risk of becoming LTELs."<sup>10</sup>

LEAs collect data on LTELs and the instruction they receive as part of their Title III program monitoring. Although this information is collected, it is unclear what is done with the data beyond collection.

Specifically, although California has started to collect data on LTELs, the growth of this student population has provided us with a heightened sense of urgency. According to one report, "in California, for instance, the number of LTELs in California secondary schools grew from 344,862 in 2008/09 to 380,995 in 2015/16; in other words, the percentage of LTEL students among the total EL population in secondary schools increased in seven years by 20 percentage points."<sup>11</sup>

It is imperative to act on the needs of this growing population by collecting the necessary data that will enable systems and educators to better identify needs, communicate and collaborate with parents, and provide teachers with the professional development opportunities that will better position them to support and teach LTELs. We must move beyond collecting data on Long Term English Learners and turn swiftly to action.

## Our Ask

- **Parent meetings:** In addition to the parent notification for LTELs, schools should be required to hold an annual meeting with parents to discuss reclassification and supports and to create an intervention plan.
- **DataQuest:** Additional fields should be added, to allow for cross-tabulation that provides more detailed and comprehensive information about EL students, including LTELs.
- **Funding:** Earmark and report the amount of Title I, II, Title III, supplemental, and concentrated Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) funding for professional development opportunities for teachers, parents, and district staff, to dive in data equity analysis that considers the needs of ELs, and in particular, LTELs.

## Impact

In California and within the EL population, the LTEL population continues to grow. These students are “at-risk” of low academic achievement and lower outcome data, such as graduation or college-going rates. What is predictable is preventable! The following refinements to the current system will lead to greater awareness and change the trajectory of this student population from “at-risk” to a path of greater opportunity.

1. **Parent meetings:** In addition to the parent notification for LTELs, the school would be required to hold an annual meeting with parents to discuss reclassification and supports and to create an intervention plan.

If we are able to inform parents of what it means to have their child identified as an LTEL and provide resources and supports, then parents would know how to advocate for their children. A major area of concern is that parents do not know what is available and what they need to know regarding an LTEL designation. If schools create plans that include supports and interventions, then more students will be reclassified.

2. **DataQuest:** Additional fields should be added to allow for cross-tabulation that provides more detailed and comprehensive information about EL students, including LTEL students.

If we have more specific data about LTELs, it will lead to increased transparency about the academic achievement of LTELs. We especially believe knowing important data such as graduation rates, A-G completion, and assessment will lead to greater understanding of the growth of our LTELs, or lack thereof. One of the key ideas is that what we measure is intentional and defines what we value. If we continue to spotlight the achievement of LTELs, then we will increase accountability for the outcomes of our LTELs.

3. **Funding:** Earmark and report the amount of Title I, II, Title III, supplemental, and concentrated LCFF funding for professional development opportunities for teachers, parents, and district staff to dive in data equity analysis that considers the needs of ELs, and in particular, LTELs.

If we increase the collective knowledge of the gaps and needs of LTELs, then we will understand the needs of parents, students, and staff. If we provide professional development to educators for research-based best programs and practices, then we can effectively implement the programs and practices that will have the greatest impact for our LTELs.

## Endnotes

- 1 Teresa Watanabe, "California schools step up efforts to help 'long-term English learners,'" *Los Angeles Times*, December 17, 2014, <https://www.latimes.com/local/education/la-me-english-learners-20141218-story.html>.
- 2 "Characteristics of Long-Term English Learners," Los Angeles Unified School District Independent Analysis Unit, October 15, 2018, accessed April 1, 2021, <http://laschoolboard.org/sites/default/files/IAU%20Report20181015-CharacteristicsofLELs.pdf>.
- 3 *Spotlight on "Long-Term English Language Learners": Characteristics and Prior Schooling Experiences of an Invisible Population*, Kate Menken Department of Linguistics Queens College & Graduate Center City University of New York Tatyana Kleyn Bilingual Education TESOL Program City College of New York Nabin Chae Center for Urban Education Graduate Center City College of New York *International Multilingual Research Journal*, 6: 121-142, 2012
- 4 Jorge Ruiz-de-Velasco, Michael E. Fix, and Beatriz Chu Clewell, "Overlooked and Underserved: Immigrant Students in U.S. Secondary Schools," Urban Institute, December 1, 2000, <https://www.urban.org/research/publication/overlooked-and-underserved-immigrant-students-us-secondary-schools>.
- 5 See Ruiz de Velasco, Fix, and Clewell, "Overlooked and Underserved." See also Kate Menken, Tatyana Kleyn, and Nabin Chae, "Spotlight on 'Long-Term English Language Learners': Characteristics and Prior Schooling Experiences of an Invisible Population," *International Multilingual Research Journal* 6 (2012): 121-142, accessed April 1, 2021, <https://katemenken.files.wordpress.com/2011/10/menken-kleyn-chaе-2012-spotlight-on-e2809clong-term-english-language-learnerse2809d-imrj1.pdf>. See also Kate Menken and Tatyana Kleyn, "The Long-Term Impact of Subtractive Schooling in the Educational Experiences of Secondary English Language Learners," *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism* 13, no. 4 (July 2010): 399-417, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13670050903370143>.
- 6 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](https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billTextClient.xhtml?bill_id=201120120AB2193).
- 7 Laurie Olsen, "Reparable Harm: Fulfilling the Unkept Promise of Educational Opportunity for California's Long Term English Learners," Californians Together, 2010, accessed 4/1/2021, <https://www.californianstogether.org/reparable-harm-fulfilling-the-unkept-promise-of-educational-opportunity-for-californias-long-term-english-learners/>.
- 8 Senate Appropriations Committee Fiscal Summary [http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/pub/11-12/bill/asm/ab\\_2151-2200/ab\\_2193\\_cfa\\_20120816\\_124320\\_sen\\_comm.html](http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/pub/11-12/bill/asm/ab_2151-2200/ab_2193_cfa_20120816_124320_sen_comm.html)
- 9 California Assembly Bill 81, Chapter 609, "English learners: identification: notice," California Education Code Section 313.2 (Gonzalez Fletcher 2017), [https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billTextClient.xhtml?bill\\_id=201720180AB81](https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billTextClient.xhtml?bill_id=201720180AB81).
- 10 California Department of Education, 2020-21 Cycle A and C Program Instruments, "English Learner Program Instrument," accessed April 1, 2021, <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/cr/progrinst202021.asp>.
- 11 Regional Education Laboratory West (REL West), "Long-Term English Learners: Spotlight on an Overlooked Population," WestEd, November 2016, <https://www.wested.org/resources/long-term-english-learner-students/#>.