

Title: Summary of information on model district policies and program design to support best practices for English learners

Date: July 2014

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**Question:** >> Could you provide information on model district policies and program designs to support best practices for English learner students (ELs)?

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**Response:**

This memo includes reports and articles about model district policies and program designs to support best practices for ELs.

- Citations include a link to a free online version.
- Citations are accompanied by an abstract, excerpt, or summary written by the author or publisher of the article.

We have not done an evaluation of these resources, but rather provide them for your information only.

**References**

1. District policies

Koelsch, N. (2006). *Improving literacy outcomes for English language learners in high school: Considerations for states and districts in developing a coherent policy framework*. Research Brief. Washington, DC: National High School Center, American Institutes for Research. Retrieved on July 21, 2014, from [http://www.betterhighschools.org/docs/NHSC\\_Adolescents\\_110806.pdf](http://www.betterhighschools.org/docs/NHSC_Adolescents_110806.pdf)

*Abstract:* This research brief outlines existing barriers regarding teacher expectations, tracking, and placement of English language learners and offers key policies and useful strategies in building capacity and developing learning environments conducive for all students in obtaining academic success. The brief suggests that states and districts need to redesign literacy work for English language learners in high school by moving from remediation to academic acceleration and enrichment. [REL West note: The brief also suggests, “To build the capacity of teachers to appropriately identify which ELL students would benefit from special education services and which would benefit from more inclusive strategies, states need to be explicit about what is expected of professional development and teacher preparedness in this regard.” (p. 2)]

National High School Center, American Institutes for Research. (2009). *Educating English language learners at the high school level: A coherent approach to district- and school-level support*. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved on July 21, 2014, from [http://www.betterhighschools.org/docs/EducatingELLsattheHSLevel\\_042209.pdf](http://www.betterhighschools.org/docs/EducatingELLsattheHSLevel_042209.pdf)

*Abstract:* This practitioner issue brief outlines successful strategies and recommendations for state-level policymakers, administrators, schools, and districts that are based on a five-year evaluation study on the learning environment for ELLs in the state of California. This brief offers four critical building blocks that should be in place to effectively educate ELLs: implementing a well-defined, rigorously structured plan of instruction; ensuring that teachers are skilled in addressing the needs of ELLs; systematically using data to assess teaching and learning; and regularly adjusting instructional planning on the basis of student performance. The brief also includes a list of ten tips from the successful principals interviewed for this study and a snapshot of Valley High School, an exemplary school that made strides in keeping English language learners in school and engaged in learning at high levels.

Olsen, L. (2010). *Reparable harm: Fulfilling the unkept promise of educational opportunity for California's long term English learners*. Long Beach, CA: Californians Together. Retrieved on July 22, 2014, from <http://www.californianstogether.org/reports/>

*Excerpt:* The publication includes a brief background on the emergence of Long Term English Learners, including data on the extent and magnitude of Long Term English Learners in California schools. It describes the unique needs of Long Term English Learners, how they are currently being served in California schools, and outlines promising practices piloted in some districts in the state. An analysis of the challenges facing districts in implementing effective programs provides a backdrop for a set of state policy recommendations... It is the role of the district to ensure high quality implementation of research-based programs for English Learners through: clearly defined pathways and clear descriptions of program models in English Learner Master Plans; providing professional development (including coaching and collaborative time) for teachers and administrators in understanding the needs of English Learners and strategies to meet those needs; communication and clarity of expectations about what quality instruction looks like; curriculum materials that facilitate differentiation for varying levels of needs; published expectations of growth and achievement for English Learners by length of time in program and by proficiency levels; systems of observation and mechanisms for monitoring student progress; emphasis on articulation between levels; systems for holding site administrators accountable for high quality programs for English Learners; and increasing access to preschool programs designed for English Learners.

[REL West note: For section on District Role and a District Checklist, see pages 31 and 55.]

Olsen, L. (2010). *Secondary school courses designed to address the language needs and academic gaps of long term English learners*. Long Beach, CA: Californians Together. Retrieved on July 22, 2014, from <http://www.californianstogether.org/reports/>

*Excerpt:* Well over half of the secondary school English Learners in California are Long Term English Learners—struggling academically and stuck in progressing towards English proficiency despite six or more years in U.S. schools. Many secondary schools and districts, feeling the urgency of meeting the needs of these Long Term English Learners, are attempting to modify curriculum or create new courses that address the unique language and academic gaps of these students. Most are doing so without guidance, without a clear sense of how best to design these classes, and making do with whatever curricular resources they happen to have or hear about. This publication culls the lessons learned from districts throughout the state and provides needed guidance for the field.

## 2. Program designs

Baker, S., Lesaux, N., Jayanthi, M., Dimino, J., Proctor, C. P., Morris, J., Gersten, R., Haymond, K., Kieffer, M. J., Linan-Thompson, S., & Newman-Gonchar, R. (2014). *Teaching academic content and literacy to English learners in elementary and middle school* (NCEE 2014-4012). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance (NCEE), Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved on July 21, 2014, from [http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/pdf/practice\\_guides/english\\_learners\\_pg\\_040114.pdf](http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/pdf/practice_guides/english_learners_pg_040114.pdf)

*Abstract:* This practice guide provides four recommendations that address what works for English learners during reading and content area instruction. Each recommendation includes extensive examples of activities that can be used to support students as they build the language and literacy skills needed to be successful in school. The recommendations also summarize and rate supporting evidence. This guide is geared toward teachers, administrators, and other educators who want to improve instruction in academic content and literacy for English learners in elementary and middle school... The four recommendations in this guide are:

- Teach a set of academic vocabulary words intensively across several days using a variety of instructional activities
- Integrate oral and written English language instruction into content-area teaching
- Provide regular, structured opportunities to develop written language skills
- Provide small-group instructional intervention to students struggling in areas of literacy and English language development.

Center for Public Education. (2007). *Research review: What research says about preparing English language learners for academic success*. Alexandria, VA: National School Boards Association. Retrieved on July 21, 2014, from <http://www.centerforpubliceducation.org/Main-Menu/Instruction/What-research-says-about-English-language-learners-At-a-glance/Preparing-English-language-learners-for-academic-success.html>

*Excerpt:* In this research review, we explore answers to these questions:

- How many ELL children are in our schools and what do we know about them?
- How long does it take for a student to become “English proficient”?
- What factors influence how quickly ELL students learn English?
- What school practices support ELL achievement?
- Is it important for ELL students to have support in their first language while they learn English?
- **What can school districts do to help ELL students become English proficient and successful in school?**

Improving academic success for ELLs is a multi-pronged challenge. Some challenges must be addressed at the federal or state level—for example, the alignment of state assessments and content standards, and sufficient inclusion of academic English in both. Many decisions about ELL education, however, are made locally. In making these decisions, school and district leaders need to consider the number, diversity, and mobility of the ELLs being served. They must also be responsive to changes in the student population. Although empirical research is not available to guide all aspects of ELL education, the research literature suggests the following:

- **Make proficiency in academic English the goal for ELLs.** Academic English is the kind of language used in textbooks and classrooms and is key to content-area learning.

- Increasing students' opportunity to learn academic English across content areas and grade levels and across domains (reading, writing, speaking, and listening) can benefit both ELLs and native English speakers.
- **Provide ample professional development to help teachers meet the educational needs of ELLs.** Teachers need to understand how to increase ELLs' opportunity to learn academic English. They also need to use a comprehensive framework for delivering academic instruction, and to differentiate instruction to promote the success of all students, including ELLs. Middle schools and secondary school teachers, in particular, need professional development and support in helping ELLs improve their reading comprehension—and their proficiency in academic English—through explicit instruction in literacy strategies, vocabulary, and background knowledge.
  - **When possible, include some first-language instruction when teaching ELLs.** Research suggests that support in the child's first language can have long-range benefits for ELL students. Also helpful—if enhanced and adjusted to meet ELLs' learning needs—is reading instruction focused on the five components of reading, as identified by the National Reading Panel (phonics, phonemic awareness, reading fluency, vocabulary, and reading comprehension). Replacing English language development with a reading intervention, however, can slow ELLs' academic achievement.
  - **Make ELL achievement a schoolwide focus.** Many of the attributes of effective schools can also support ELL achievement. These include a schoolwide commitment to ELL achievement, consistent language support services of adequate duration across all grade levels, sufficient educator capacity, and a match between resources and the community served (National Literacy Panel on Language-Minority Children and Youth).
  - **Base assessment policies and ELL classification decisions on measures of students' proficiency in academic English.** However, keep in mind that this may be easier said than done. According to many researchers, valid and reliable measures of academic language proficiency still need to be developed.
  - **Continue to monitor ELLs' progress even after they have been reclassified as English proficient.** The methods currently used to classify and place ELLs may result in some students' being pulled out of English language support programs too soon. To help these students get back on track, schools should monitor the academic progress of ELLs who exit language support programs and provide extra help when needed.

Cheung, A., & Slavin, R. E. (2012). *Effective reading programs for Spanish dominant English language learners (ELLs) in the elementary grades: A synthesis of research*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University, Center for Research and Reform in Education. Retrieved on July 22, 2014, from [www.bestevidence.org/word/ell\\_read\\_mar\\_19\\_2012.pdf](http://www.bestevidence.org/word/ell_read_mar_19_2012.pdf)

*Abstract:* This review synthesizes research on English reading outcomes of all types of programs for Spanish-dominant ELLs in elementary schools. It is divided into two major sections. One focuses on studies of language of instruction, and one on reading approaches for ELLs other than bilingual education. A total of 14 qualifying studies met the inclusion criteria for language of instruction. Though the overall findings indicate a positive but modest effect ( $ES=+0.19$ ) in favor of bilingual education, the largest and longest-term evaluations, including the only multiyear randomized evaluation of transition bilingual education, did not find any differences in outcomes by the end of elementary school for children who were either taught in Spanish and transitioned to English or taught only in English. The review also identifies some promising whole-school and whole-class interventions, including Success for All, cooperative learning, Direct Instruction, and ELLA. In addition, programs that use phonetic small group or one-to-one tutoring have also shown positive effects for struggling readers. What is in common across the most promising interventions is their use of extensive professional development, coaching, and cooperative learning. The findings

support a conclusion increasingly being made by researchers and policymakers concerned with optimal outcomes for ELLs and other language minority students: Quality of instruction is more important than language of instruction.

Cheung, A., & Slavin, R. E. (2005). Effective reading programs for English language learners and other language-minority students. *Bilingual Research Journal*, 29(2), 241–267. Retrieved on July 21, 2014, from [http://www.bestevidence.org/word/ell\\_read\\_2005\\_BRJ.pdf](http://www.bestevidence.org/word/ell_read_2005_BRJ.pdf)

*Abstract:* This article systematically reviews research on elementary reading programs for English language learners and other language-minority students. It focuses on studies that compared experimental and control groups on quantitative reading measures. Among beginning reading models, research supported structured, phonetic programs emphasizing language development in both native-language and English instruction. Tutoring programs were also supported. For upper-elementary reading, research supported a broad range of programs, but particularly effective were programs using cooperative learning, extensive vocabulary instruction, and literature.

Garcia, O., Kleifgen, J., & Falchi, L. (2008). *From English language learners to emergent bilinguals. Equity matters: Research review No. 1*. New York: Campaign for Educational Equity, Teachers College, Columbia University. Retrieved on July 21, 2014, from <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED524002.pdf>

*Abstract:* One of the most misunderstood issues in pre-K–12 education today is how to educate children who are not yet proficient in English. When policymakers refer to these students as English language learners (ELLs)—as many school district officials presently do—or as limited English proficient students (LEPs)—as federal legislators did in the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)—it signals the omission of an idea that is critical to the discussion of equity in the teaching of these children. English language learners are in fact “emergent bilinguals.” That is, through school and through acquiring English, these children become “bilingual,” able to continue to function in their home language as well as in English, their new language and that of school. When officials and educators ignore the bilingualism that these students can and often must develop through schooling in the United States, they perpetuate inequities in the education of these children. The central idea that will emerge from this review of research is that there is a growing dissonance between research on the education of emergent bilinguals and policy enacted to educate them. As the authors will demonstrate, whereas research has consistently shown the importance of building on the children’s first language as they develop English language proficiency, U.S. educational policy has often ignored these research findings.

In Part I of this review the authors identify the students who are the subject of their attention: students they refer to as emergent bilinguals. In Part II, they briefly review the policies and practices targeted toward this group of students that have developed over the last 40 years. Finally, in Part III, they review what the research reveals about the educational programs, assessments, curriculum, pedagogy, resources, and family and community involvement necessary to educate these children equitably. In Part III, therefore, they also identify and describe the educational inequities that directly affect the education of these children. Most of these inequities stem from policymakers and often educators’ lack of understanding of bilingualism itself. Thus, throughout the third part of this review, the authors will discuss how such misunderstandings of the nature of bilingualism have educational equity consequences for some of the most disadvantaged children. The authors end this review with some recommendations.

Gersten, R., Baker, S. K., Shanahan, T., Linan-Thompson, S., Collins, P., & Scarcella, R. (2007). *Effective literacy and English language instruction for English learners in the elementary grades: A practice guide* (NCEE 2007-4011). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved on July 21, 2014, from [http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/pdf/practice\\_guides/20074011.pdf](http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/pdf/practice_guides/20074011.pdf)

*Abstract:* The target audience for this guide is a broad spectrum of school practitioners such as administrators, curriculum specialists, coaches, staff development specialists and teachers who face the challenge of providing effective literacy instruction for English language learners in the elementary grades. The guide also aims to reach district-level administrators who develop practice and policy options for their schools.

Goldenberg, C., & Coleman, R. (2010). *Promoting academic achievement among English learners: A guide to the research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin. Book available for sale from <http://www.amazon.com/Promoting-Academic-Achievement-English-Learners/dp/1412955491>

*Book description:* A generation or two ago, the achievement of children who came to school knowing little or no English was not a prominent national issue. Today, with the increased focus on school accountability and educational equity, it is. This comprehensive resource explores the research on promoting academic success among language-minority students. The authors offer educators a firm basis for making decisions on policies and programs for English learners and provide research-based discussions on what we know about: (1) Bilingual education and using a student's home language in instruction; (2) Teaching English and academic content simultaneously; (3) School and district factors that affect achievement for English learners; and (4) Sociocultural factors in success, including the influence of parents and families. Contents of this book include: (1) Why This Book?; (2) The Role of the Home Language; (3) Literacy Instruction in a Second Language; (4) Promoting English Oral Language Development; (5) Academic Instruction in a Second Language; (6) School and District Role: Focus and Coherence; (7) Social, Cultural, and Family Influences; (8) The Research Goes to School; and (9) Conclusion: What's Next?

Moughamian, A. C., Rivera, M. O., & Francis, D. J. (2009). *Instruction models and teaching strategies for teaching English language learners*. Portsmouth, NH: RMC Research Corporation, Center on Instruction. Retrieved on July 22, 2014, from <http://www.centeroninstruction.org/files/Instructional%20Models%20for%20ELLs.pdf>

*Excerpt:* This publication seeks to offer educators and policy-makers guidance on strategies that have been effective in instructing English language learners. We begin by outlining key contextual factors that decision-makers should take into account when making instructional choices for English language learners, then follow with a brief overview of bilingual and English-only instructional models. Finally, we consider the influence of the language of instruction on academic outcomes for English language learners. Regardless of the model that school districts select, teachers must use the most effective strategies to accelerate student learning and maximize instructional time; this publication suggests research-based instructional strategies appropriate for a range of ELL instructional models.

U.S. Department of Education; Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development; Policy and Program Studies Service. (2012). *Language Instruction Educational Programs (LIEPs): A review of the foundational literature*. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved on July 21, 2014, from <http://www2.ed.gov/rschstat/eval/title-iii/language-instruction-ed-programs-report.pdf>

*Excerpt:* In 2010, the U.S. Department of Education (the Department) contracted with Synergy Enterprises, Inc. and edCount, LLC, to complete a study titled Language Instruction Educational Programs (LIEPs): Lessons From the Research and Profiles of Promising Programs. This study includes a review of the foundational literature related to LIEPs, case studies of 20 school districts with well-designed and well-implemented LIEPs, and a Lessons from the Field guide that integrates findings from the literature review and the case studies and provides practical information for local educators on selecting, designing, implementing, and evaluating LIEPs. This literature review is intended to lay a foundation for the LIEP study. It provides literature-based summaries for a range of topics that may factor into LIEP designs and functions, and supports school districts in their decisions about how to choose appropriate LIEPs for their students' needs. The review summarizes critical ideas, findings, concepts, debates, and practices that populate the literature on LIEP design, implementation, and evaluation at present...

### Findings

- What Research Says About LIEPs in General
- What Research Says About the English as a Second Language Approach
- What Research Says About the Bilingual Approach

### General Emergent Themes

- High Standards and Challenging Content Are Good for ELs
- Having a LIEP Is Important
- No One Approach or Model Is Appropriate for All ELs
- Instructional Practices Are Important Variables in LIEP Design and Implementation
- Literacy and Oral Language Development in English Are Critical Instructional Components for Any LIEP
- Academic Language Seems To Be Important in EL Instruction
- ELs Need Instruction That Is Specifically Cognizant of Their Needs as Second-Language Learners
- Teachers Need To Be Prepared to Teach ELs
- Newcomer Models Are a Programmatic Option That School Districts May Use to Meet the Needs of Newly Identified ELs at the Secondary Level
- ELs' Scores on Academic Content Assessments Should Be Interpreted With Great Care
- Current Assessments May Not Be Sufficient Measures of the Linguistic Proficiency
- Necessary to Support Success in Mainstream Content Classrooms
- Culture and Community Matter

Valentino, R. A., & Reardon, S. F. (2014). Effectiveness of four instructional programs designed to serve English language learners: Variation by ethnicity and initial English proficiency. Stanford, CA: Stanford University. Retrieved on July 22, 2014, from [http://cepa.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/Valentino\\_Reardon\\_EL%20Programs\\_14\\_0326\\_2.pdf](http://cepa.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/Valentino_Reardon_EL%20Programs_14_0326_2.pdf)

*Abstract:* In this paper we provide descriptive and quasi-experimental analyses of the relationship between four elementary school instructional programs designed to serve English learners (ELs)

and their longitudinal academic outcomes in English language arts and math through middle school. We also consider differential program effectiveness by ethnicity and initial English proficiency. Although bilingual education has been well studied, little research has examined the effectiveness of programs longitudinally, most has focused on academic outcomes only in literacy, and most from the U.S. has exclusively focused on Spanish-speaking ELs. In this paper we find considerable differences in effects between programs (i.e., transitional bilingual, developmental bilingual, dual immersion, and English immersion), between students of different ethnicities (i.e., Chinese and Latino), and across academic subjects.

*What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) Intervention Reports, **English language learners**.* [Web page]. Washington, DC: Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved on July 22, 2014, from <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/Topic.aspx?sid=6>

*Excerpt:* Reviews conducted in this area examine the evidence of effectiveness of interventions designed for students whose primary language is not English and who have limited English speaking, reading, writing, and listening skills. Specifically, the WWC reviews studies that examine the impact of interventions on the following outcomes: English language development, reading achievement, and mathematics achievement. [*REL West note:* This URL includes reports for 16 interventions for ELLs.]

## **Methods**

### **Keywords and Search Strings Used in the Search**

“English language learners” OR “English learners” AND “district policies” OR “programs” OR “model programs” OR “best practices”

### **Search of Databases**

EBSCO Host, Google, and Google Scholar

### **Additional Organizations/Websites Searched**

American Institutes for Research; Californians Together; Center for Applied Linguistics; Center on Instruction; Colorín Colorado; Education Commission of the States; What Works Clearinghouse

### **Criteria for Inclusion**

In general, when REL West staff review resources, we consider—among other things—four factors:

- **Date of the Publication:** The most current information is included, except in the case of nationally known seminal resources.
- **Source and Funder of the Report/Study/Brief/Article:** Priority is given to IES, nationally funded, and certain other vetted sources known for strict attention to research protocols.
- **Methodology:** Sources include randomized controlled trial studies, surveys, self-assessments, literature reviews, and policy briefs. Priority for inclusion generally is given to randomized controlled trial study findings, but the reader should note at least the following factors when basing decisions on these resources: numbers of participants (Just a few? Thousands?); selection (Did the participants volunteer for the study or were they chosen?); representation (Were findings generalized from a homogeneous or a diverse pool of participants? Was the study sample representative of the population as a whole?).
- **Existing Knowledge Base:** Although we strive to include vetted resources, there are times when the research base is limited or nonexistent. In these cases, we have included the best resources we could find, which may include newspaper articles, interviews with content specialists, organization websites, and other sources.

This memorandum is one in a series of quick-turnaround responses to specific questions posed by educators and policymakers in the Western region (Arizona, California, Nevada, Utah), which is served by the Regional Educational Laboratory West (REL West) at WestEd. This memorandum was prepared by REL West under a contract with the U.S. Department of Education’s Institute of Education Sciences (IES), Contract ED-IES-12-C-0002, administered by WestEd. Its content does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of IES or the U.S. Department of Education nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Government.

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