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ABSTRACT

The typical public school classroom is more diverse, linguistically and ethnically, than 20 years ago, with a dramatic increase in the proportion of limited-English-proficient (LEP) students. This pattern is reflected in secondary as well as elementary schools. Research indicates many of these students are at risk of failure or dropping out. A telephone survey of 33 state education agency bilingual education directors revealed a number of areas in which barriers to LEP student progress occur. These include: limited access to the core curriculum because of limited language skills; lack of native language literacy skills; isolation in rural areas; dearth of counselors with appropriate language skills or training in evaluating foreign educational credentials; limited instructional materials at the secondary school level; and outdated English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) methodology. Practices that hold promise for addressing these problems include: team teaching to improve access to content areas; parent outreach; use of interactive technology to support native language and ESL instruction; and temporary English teaching certificates for teachers who are bilingual and have content knowledge. Additional recommendations include: linking these changes with overall reform initiatives; modifying teacher training; allowing LEP secondary students extra time to attain credits for graduation; and more local responsibility for inservice teacher training. (MSE)

from the Council of Chief State School Officers Resource Center on Educational Equity

CONCERNS

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A Concern About...

Limited English Proficient Students in Intermediate Schools and in High Schools.

Introduction

The shift in the demographic characteristics in the U.S. population has changed significantly the enrollment profile of many of our schools. Today a typical public school classroom is more diverse ethnically and linguistically than 20 years ago. This diversity is a direct result of high levels of immigration and high-birth rates among ethnic minorities. These two factors have significantly increased the number of non-English speaking students in the public schools. According to the Census Bureau, the number of 5-17 year old who reported that they do not speak English at home in the 1990 census was 6.3 million, or 14% of the population under 18 (Center for the Study of Social Policy, 1993). Although we do not know the proportion of the 6.3 million that is limited English proficient (LEP)[1], experts surmise that the number is approximately 3.5 million nationally (Stanford Working Group, 1993).

Nationally the growth of this population has been dramatic. Between 1986 and 1991 the total student enrollment in the nation's school increased by 4% while the LEP population rose by 50% (Fix & Zimmermann, 1993). With few exceptions, states experienced an increase in enrollment of students who do not speak English during this time span[2]. In some states these students comprise a significant proportion of the school-age population—California (24%); Arizona (18%); Florida (12%); Texas (20%); New Jersey (14%) and New York (16%)[3].

While LEP student enrollment increases have taken place primarily at the elementary level, several reports have noted that the proportion of LEP students enrolled at the secondary school level has also increased (Lucas, 1992, Minicucci & Olsen, 1992)[4]. The increase is a result of immigration of LEP adolescents, and of students who attended primary school in the U.S. but were not reclassified as fluent English proficient (FEP) when promoted to the secondary school[5]. In California, where the highest number of LEP students reside, secondary-level LEP enrollments have gone up by 42 percent within a period of three years (Minicucci & Olsen, 1992). One third of all LEP students in this state are enrolled in intermediate and secondary schools. A similar proportion of secondary school LEP enrollments have been noted in other states with large LEP enrollments—Illinois, Texas, New York and Florida.

At the local level, schools are trying to cope with the educational challenge these students pose, but many are ill equipped to meet the challenge. Schools are confronted with shortages of trained personnel, limited resources and a limited empirical research base to serve as a guide for developing effective programmatic responses. Yet, schools must address the needs of students from a variety of cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Generally, services provided include English-as-a-second-language (ESL) instruction, content instruction, and cultural adjustment services. Moreover, since

many of these students and their families have health and social service needs that bear on the student's academic achievement, schools must also establish mechanisms for dealing with non-academic needs. These services, when appropriately delivered, prepare LEP students to become self-sufficient members of their communities.

Studies that examined the in-school experiences of LEP adolescents in middle schools and in high schools have found that many of these students are at risk of school failure or of dropping out. In a study of high-school students in Dade County Florida, Portes & Gran (1991) found that the LEP students had lower levels of academic performance and dropped out more frequently than other students[6]. Rumbaut (1992) analyzed the reading and math achievement of secondary LEP immigrant students in San Diego public schools. He found that across language groups LEP and FEP students scored below their Anglo peers in reading and vocabulary achievement tests[7]. There were some differences among language groups. East Asians and South East Asians had higher scores in math than Hispanics and Pacific Islanders. Hispanics scored higher in reading than all other language groups except East Indians and Filipinos[8].

Another study of Vietnamese secondary-school students enrolled in San Diego public schools noted that although many of these students are successful, there are many who drop out of school (Davis & McDaid, 1992). These findings are not surprising. Limited English proficiency has been identified as a risk factor in the research literature and Hispanics, the largest segment of the LEP population, have the highest drop-out rates of all ethnic groups. There is evidence that these students drop-out before they reach the 10th grade, which suggests the need for more in-depth analysis of the in-school experience of these students. Of those who graduate, a smaller proportion go on to college than white high-school students.

Numerous reports have noted that the economic well being of this nation hinges upon the ability of the school system to produce a well-educated workforce. Because language minority students will comprise a significant proportion of the nation's workforce, improving learning opportunities and achievement outcomes of these students at this juncture is critical.

CCSSO Survey of Bilingual Education Directors

In an attempt to identify key policy issues and concerns regarding the education of LEP students enrolled in middle and secondary schools, staff of the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) conducted a telephone survey of state education agency bilingual education directors. The survey, conducted during the summer of 1992, consisted of two questions that elicited comments about barriers that LEP students face at these levels of their educational careers. A total of 33 state directors in 32 states responded to the survey. These states represented different regions of the country and different levels of LEP enrollments. States surveyed included six states whose combined enrollment comprises over 75% of LEP student enrollment nationally.

To ensure the issues raised in 1992 were still of concern to the state directors, CCSSO staff recently contacted state bilingual directors from seven states with high LEP student enrollments. Directors were asked to verify the timeliness of the issues previously cited. In all cases the directors noted that the issues were still important.

This article summarizes the concerns raised by the state directors in both surveys. The summary is supplemented with examples drawn from other studies focusing on LEP students, especially the study of LEP students in California's secondary schools conducted by Minicucci and Olsen (1992). This is the most comprehensive examination of the instructional services available to LEP students at the middle-school and secondary-school levels. With one exception, there was no major difference in the types of concerns raised between states with high LEP student enrollments and those with a lower LEP enrollments. Themes that emerged are discussed below by highest to lowest frequency of occurrence.

Access to the Core Curriculum

Middle schools and high schools are a disaster area. A lot needs to be done because the student is being impacted.

Attitudes are our number one problem—attitudes of the guidance staff, administration, and more importantly, teachers. They have low expectations at this level because it is viewed as they [students] will be out of the system in a little while and there is nothing they can really do.

The issue of greatest concern cited by the directors was the inability of LEP students in intermediate and high-schools to gain access to the core-content curriculum. This problem is particularly severe at the high-school level where LEP students must not only learn English, but also acquire content knowledge within a relatively short period of time. As one director noted,

With increased requirements it has gotten a lot more difficult to get children through high school.

A complicating factor for second language learners is that linguistic and academic demands of the secondary-school program are more challenging. Therefore, it is much more difficult for LEP students to meet the same academic standards as their peers.

There are several ways of conveying content to LEP students at the intermediate and secondary levels. Which approach is used in a given district is a function of state requirements, availability of trained personnel, teacher/pupil ratio, and the district's philosophy vis a vis the education of LEP students in intermediate and secondary schools. Generally, local districts have discretion in the type of approach to use and in the training provided to content teachers.

The prevailing mode of delivering content to LEP students is to place them in the English-only content courses as soon as they are able to master oral English language skills. Very often the students continue to take one or more periods of ESL while enrolled in the content courses. Directors noted that ESL classes offered are specially designed for these students. They described these ESL courses as "intensive," "content based," and "interdisciplinary". They also noted that in some cases support is provided through a bilingual aide or a tutor. Simultaneous enrollment in content courses and ESL is most often used because there are few teachers that can teach content in students' primary languages, and local personnel want students to take the required content courses in order to meet the high-school graduation requirements.

Although well intentioned, this practice can place LEP students at risk of academic failure, particularly when content teachers are not trained to modify their instruction to accommodate these students. Often the students do not acquire sufficient mastery of the second language (strong reading and writing skills) to be successful in the academic curriculum. Additionally, because these students are not performing at grade level—as measured by tests in English—local staff assume that they cannot handle a more rigorous academic program. Consequently, the students are placed in less challenging academic tracks. State directors noted that under these circumstances students can become discouraged and ultimately drop out of school.

Another approach is to place students in an ESL program until students have gained sufficient mastery of English reading and writing skills to be mainstreamed into English-only content classes. The decision to mainstream the student is based on the results of English language achievement tests in reading/language arts. Considering that under the best conditions it takes 3-5 years to acquire a second language, LEP students in this situation do not have enough time to become proficient in English and gain content knowledge at the high-school level[9]. By the time they are ready for English language content instruction they are nearing the end of their tenure in high school. Thus, as LEP student are learning English, their academic development is interrupted.

Opportunities for access to the core curriculum can be enhanced by training content area teachers to modify instruction for second-language learners without diluting content. Sheltered content instruction is one approach favored in many school districts. In a sheltered content class, students receive grade-level content instruction in English designed for non-native speakers who have reached an intermediate level of English proficiency. Sheltered content experts assert that districts should use this approach along with ESL and native-language instruction. However, it appears that school districts are using sheltered instruction in place of native-language content support or instruction. Moreover, effective implementation of this approach requires the training of content area teachers. According to 17 of the 32 state directors interviewed, few content-area teachers have been trained to use this methodology.

Academic courses in the native language can provide LEP students in intermediate and secondary schools with an opportunity to continue their conceptual development while they learn English. **This is the most desirable way of delivering content to LEP students.** However, this approach is the least likely to be implemented by school districts because they lack sufficient numbers of bilingual teachers who are also content specialists. Moreover, this option is most often used with students who are Spanish speakers, in areas where there is less of a shortage of qualified personnel. Even for these students, all core curriculum courses are not available in their primary language (Spanish), nor are the courses offered at all grade levels. Lack of trained personnel is the greatest barrier to a district's ability to provide the most effective and desirable mode of delivering content instruction to LEP students in intermediate and middle schools.

This observation is supported by a recent study that examined the range of programs offered to LEP students in California's secondary schools. Researchers found that fewer than one fourth of the schools surveyed were able to offer a full array

of core content courses to LEP students (Minicucci & Olsen, 1992). A full array of content courses includes instruction in ESL, math, science, social studies, and electives.

Thus, it appears that no matter what approach is used to deliver content instruction to LEP students, sizable numbers may not have equal access to instructional services. Those LEP students that ultimately complete the high-school graduation requirements do so in five or more years. States with large LEP enrollments noted that students are given until the age of 21 to complete their high school requirements.

Instructional Models for Students Lacking Literacy in Their Native Language

This issue for us is a tremendous challenge—those youngsters that have limited educational experiences who have not developed academic language proficiency in their first language. How do we deal with literacy development?

The issue is one of the most problematic that state and local school systems have to address. There is a sizeable number of LEP students in secondary schools who lack literacy skills in their primary language. Many of these students, who come from poor rural areas in Mexico, Central America, and Southeast Asia, received limited schooling or no schooling in their home country. Consequently, these students lack literacy skills and the content knowledge that is foundation for more advanced work in the content area.

Minicucci & Olsen, (1992) noted that in secondary schools these students might achieve oral English language fluency but would not be reclassified fully English proficient, or complete challenging academic requirements. One director noted that districts cope with this situation by conducting informal teacher assessments to determine th content and linguistic strengths of these students and modify materials to make the content more accessible to them. They also stressed that instruction in ESL is not sufficient to help these students. The challenge for the schools is to develop the basic literacy skills of these students and bridge the gaps in academic content learning.

LEP Students in Rural Areas

The one issue that distinguished the responses of directors from states with high LEP enrollments from states with lower LEP enrollments was concern about services to LEP students in rural areas. Directors from 10 mid-western and southern states were eager to know about instructional approaches that are effective in rural districts. These states have also experienced some growth in LEP students. However, their numbers remain relatively low and consequently these districts have not been able to generate funds to enhance services to these students. In some instances, ESL specialists have difficulties in physically reaching LEP students in isolated rural areas, or there are no teachers trained to address the second language learning needs of these students.

Counseling Services

We have scheduling problems and problems with making sure that these students are getting the counseling and guidance support that they need; there is not enough staff.

The very fact that they are immigrants generates a negative stereotypical image.

Intermediate-and secondary-school counselors are important to all students at this level of education because they provide students advice concerning academic planning, post-secondary career options, high-school program (academic, general, vocational education), and overall expectations of the school and the district. Recognizing that there is a shortage of both bilingual and monolingual counselors across school districts, state directors asserted that with appropriate training counselors could serve LEP students more effectively.

The directors raised a number of issues of concern—or example, inability of counselors to evaluate a student's prior academic experience. Students with prior schooling in their home country may have taken courses that can be credited to their high-school graduation requirements. Counselors who lacked training in how to evaluate foreign credentials may recommend placement of newcomer students into classes that are either too advanced, or too elementary[10]. In either case, the outcome can be detrimental to the students.

Poor academic advice can also delay a student's plans to go to college. One state director cited a case in which a former LEP student was denied admission to college because the student had not taken a sufficient number of advanced-level courses. He added that while this can happen to any student, LEP students are more likely to be overlooked.

Counselors are often unaware of issues and stressors affecting LEP secondary students who are newcomers. However, with appropriate training they can play a significant role in easing the transition of LEP adolescents. Directors stated that counselors need training, in cross-cultural communication. Training was also recommended for counselors to enhance their knowledge of the

stresses and needs of recently arrived students who lack familiarity with the norms, behaviors, and expectations of the American school system.

Stressors that can have a negative impact on academic performance of these students stem from various sources. These include "the need to learn a new language, deal with possible disruptions to family life, cope with effects of poverty, and adjust to a culture that may simultaneously be confusing, threatening and at odds with the values of an immigrant student's own culture" (McDonnell & Hill 1992). A study conducted by Kenji Ima of immigrant students in San Diego, found that about one fourth of attempted adolescent suicides are by Filipino youth, and about one third of successful suicides are also by Filipino youth. Ima noted that these students are under tremendous pressure to succeed academically (Ima, 1992).

Directors also noted that counselors can work more effectively with parents of immigrant students. The prevailing belief is that immigrant parents are not willing to get involved in school activities. However, studies of immigrant students and their families have shown that these parents have high expectations but they lack the knowledge base with which to help realize academic success for their children (Phelan, 1992; Casas, 1992). Specifically, researchers found that many of these parents did not know **how** to help.

Ideally, counselors should have some knowledge of the culture of language minority students, an understanding of the immigrant experience, and, when feasible, the language of these students. In this regard, bilingual counselors can be instrumental in communicating to parents the expectations of the school system and in facilitating communication between the school and the home.

Instructional Materials

Most instructional materials in non-English languages have been developed for LEP students enrolled in the elementary grades, and the overwhelming number of these materials are for Spanish- language readers. At the secondary-school level there are few primary language content texts or other instructional materials. The limited materials available are in Spanish and do not include all of the subject areas in the high-school curriculum. The problem is most severe at the senior high-school level.

English as a Second-Language Instructional Methodology

Outdated English-as-a-second-language (ESL) instructional methodology was another issue raised by state directors. ESL instruction that uses a grammar/structural approach to teaching the second language is not consistent with recent evolution of second-language acquisition theory, which posits that the learning of content/language is enhanced when made more meaningful to the student. Thus, experts recommend content-based ESL, a technique that focuses on using a second language as the medium of instruction for mathematics, science, social studies and other academic subjects. Considering that most LEP students enrolled in secondary schools do not receive content in the native language, use of effective second-language teaching strategies is highly desirable since this approach can ease the transition to all English-language academic instruction.

Promising Practices

During the interview, state directors gave examples of state and local actions that can improve services to LEP students in the intermediate and high-school grades. These comments are distilled here as both promising practices and recommendations. Promising practices identified include:

- **Team-teaching approaches to ensure that secondary LEP students have access to the content area.** In this approach an ESL teacher and a content area teacher deliver instruction to a self-contained content class comprised of LEP students. The approach works best with students who have reached an intermediate level of second language proficiency.

- **Parent outreach programs that provide orientation to the American school system and the expectations of the particular district and school in which the student is enrolled.** These programs are provided in the native language and are scheduled at a time most convenient to the parents.

- **Use of interactive technology to support primary language and ESL classroom instruction.** This approach can be particularly helpful to districts with significant numbers of semi-literate students.

- **Temporary Emergency Teaching Certificates for people who are bilingual and have content knowledge, but lack bilingual/content certification.** In one state these individuals are given eight years in which to complete certification requirements, allowing more students to receive content instruction in their native language.

Recommendations

State directors also made the following recommendations:

- **Link efforts to meet the needs of LEP students in intermediate/secondary schools with school reform efforts (school restructuring, systemic change).** However, the special attention that these students require should not be subordinated to this effort. State and local personnel involved in system-wide reform often do not want to focus on "particular student groups." Unfortunately, this belief results in a disregard for the particular conditions, needs, and strengths of LEP students.

- **Modify teaching-training programs.** Institutions of higher education and other providers of training must ensure that intermediate and high-school content-area teachers are provided with training in culturally appropriate instruction and strategies for teaching in classrooms with second-language learners. Additionally, in states and localities with high LEP enrollments, institutions of higher education should develop programs to increase the number of bilingual teachers who are also certified to teach content. Moreover, once these teachers have been certified, monetary incentives should be provided so that they will remain in the state in which they received the training.

- **Allow LEP students enrolled in high school extra time to earn the credits needed for graduation.**

- **Amend state administrative codes to place greater demands on school districts in the area of in-service training focused on LEP students.** In one state all school personnel (administrative and instructional) are required to take 18 credit in-service points (or three semester hours) of training focusing on cross-cultural topics, communication, and understanding. The states can also mandate that districts with high LEP enrollments provide native language instruction in key content areas. When this option is not feasible, then districts should train all content area teachers in the sheltered content approach.

This summary is based on the findings of an informal telephone survey of state directors of bilingual education. Given the nature of the data collection method used, the responses were necessarily general and therefore no definitive conclusions can be drawn about the educational experience of LEP students in any one school district.

However, *the remarks summarized here do provide insight into the kinds of issues and concerns that merit in-depth analysis and action at the local, state and federal levels.* CCSSO and other organizations have on previous occasions expressed concern about the limited information base on LEP students' educational experiences. This problem is most evident when examining the status of these students in intermediate and secondary schools.

With the exception of the state of California, none of the 32 states contacted had conducted a thorough assessment of intermediate/secondary school services to LEP students. This type of needs assessment effort must be undertaken by states with large LEP enrollments. State education agencies will then be better poised to develop standards for serving LEP students, and implementing strategies for helping LEAs build their capacity to more appropriately serve these students.

ENDNOTES

[1]Limited English proficient students are native-born students and immigrant students who do not speak English or are limited in their ability to speak English. Students who have lived in the U.S. for less than three years, are considered immigrants.

[2]Since 1986, enrollment of students from a non-English language background has either declined or remained stable in 10 states. Language minority included in the tabulations are Hispanic, Asian/Pacific Islanders, American Indians/ Alaskan Natives. Source: NCES.

[3]These figures represent the proportion of the total school age population (ages 5-17) that does not speak English at home, includes both LEP and language minority background students who speak English. Source: Center for the Study of Social Policy.

[4]Unless otherwise specified, secondary schools include middle schools (6-8), junior high schools (7-9), and senior high-schools (10-12).

[5]LEP students who receive language support services and test out of these programs are placed in English only mainstream classrooms and are designated as fully English proficient (FEP).

[6]Portes and Gran used enrollment in ESL as an indicator of recent immigration. In this article it is used as an indicator of LEP status. In the schools studied by Portes and Gran most of the students enrolled in ESL courses were Spanish speakers.

[7]FEP = Fluent English Proficient. These are the students that have been mainstreamed into English only classrooms.

[8]Students from these countries have been exposed to English in their home country.

[9]In a study of 8th grade LEP students from middle and upper class backgrounds, Collier (1987) found that it took more than five years of second-language schooling for students to reach the 46th percentile in English-language reading skills. Thus, students who started second-language instruction at the secondary level (intermediate or high school) were not able to reach the 50th percentile during their high school years.

[10]A newcomer is an immigrant student who arrived fairly recently to the US.

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