What an Effective Leader Knows to Improve the Academic Achievement of ELLs

Panel Presenter: Bernice Moro, Ph.D.
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1) An effective leader uses data to identify risk factors.

Nationwide Demographics
- Recent estimates place the number of ELLs in K-12 at more than 14 million.
- According to the 2000 Census, 1 in 5 children ages 5 to 17 (10.8 million) are from immigrant families.
- 79% of these children are U.S. born.
- Self-reported U.S. Census data indicate that the great majority of children from immigrant families (74%) speak English “exclusively” or “very well.”
- According to the U.S. Department of Education 5 million school-age children in the U.S. (more than 10% of all K-12 students) are ELLs.
- Data from the U.S. Census show that three-fifths of children in immigrant families have at least one parent at home who speaks English exclusively or very well.
- One fourth of immigrant children live in households where no one over age 13 speaks English exclusively.
- ELLs are more likely to come from low-income families.
- ELLs are more likely to have parents with less than a high school education.
- Each of these factors, as well as ethnic/racial minority status, is associated with decreased achievement averages across academic areas.
- The achievement gap among ELLs is attributable to a myriad of interrelated out-of-school factors, including parent education levels, family income, parent English proficiency, mother’s marital status at the time of birth, and single versus dual-parent home.
- The more risk factors a student is subject to, the lower the probability the student will do well in school. ELLs, on average, exhibit three of the five high risk factors and are generally at greater risk of academic underachievement.

*Nationwide demographic information obtained from The Demographic Imperative by Garcia, Jensen, and Scribner, April 2009, Educational Leadership, ASCD)
Local Demographics: New York City

- More than 40% of ALL public school students, including non-ELLs, report speaking a language other than English in their home.
- Recent estimates place the number of ELLs in K-12 at more than 149,000; these students comprise 14.2% of the City’s public school student population.
- 6% of the student population is classified as new immigrants.
- 57% of these children are U.S. born, 43% are foreign born.
- Top 5 languages spoken are Spanish (67.4%), Chinese (11.4%), Bengali (3%), Arabic (2.6%), and Haitian Creole (2.3%).
- Over 70% of ELLs are serviced in ESL programs, over 19% are in Transitional Bilingual programs, almost 4% are in Dual Language programs, and almost 6% of those who have an IEP have been “X-coded,” meaning that they have been exempted from receiving ELL services.
- Over 10% of ELLs are (or have been) Students with Interrupted Formal Education (SIFE); students who have entered the US and have had at least two years less schooling than their peers; function at least 2 years below expected grade level in reading and mathematics; and may be preliterate in their native language.
- Over 14% are Long-term ELLs, have completed at least 6 years of ELL services and continue to be classified as an ELL.
- Twenty two (22%) of ELLs have been determined to have a disability and have an IEP, with one quarter having reached long-term status.

*NYC demographic information obtained from the 2008-2009 Demographics of New York City’s English Language Learners, NYC Department of Education.

School Demographics: What are yours?

2) An effective leader knows evidence-based practices to improve the academic performance of students identified as ELLs.

- Researchers have identified many evidence-based practices that enhance the academic achievement of ELLs, such as:
  - Culturally knowledgeable teachers who are proficient in English and the learner’s native language are an asset and the strategic inclusion of the student’s native language in classroom instruction can increase overall language and academic learning.
Screening and closely monitoring learning problems, intensive small-group interventions, extensive and varied vocabulary instruction, and regular peer-assisted learning opportunities improve the effectiveness of literacy learning for ELLs.

Also, general principles of teaching and learning apply to ELLs, such as:

- Extended learning time
- Lower student-teacher ratios
- Meaningful parent involvement
- Sustained professional development for ALL teachers of ELLs

3) **An effective school leader knows how to implement evidence-based practices.**

According to Garcia, Jensen, and Scribner (*The Demographic Imperative*, April 2009, ASCD) we need to encourage more collaboration among a wide-range of policymakers; this includes federal, state and city governments, as well as private and nonprofit organizations. They note that innovative collaboration among researchers, practitioners, and policymakers is necessary to decrease the gap by applying evidence-based practice while creating new knowledge of best practices.

To meet the myriad of challenges that our ELLs face school administrators must make more efficient use of the existing knowledge of best practices and ensure that these are implemented both district and school-wide. Moro and Acosta-Sing (2011) identified a collective set of deliberate actions structured around six interrelated and interdependent *leadership practices* that are essential for raising the quality of ELL instruction. These are:

1. Take an active and involved role in ELL instruction
2. Build a collective responsibility for all ELLs
3. Define quality ELL instruction for your school
4. Provide target and differentiated PD for all teachers of ELLs
5. Redesign supervision of ELL instruction
6. Allocate resources strategically
Lasting thoughts…

*Principals help schools succeed not when they are flashy superstars, but when they stay focused on the things that truly improve schools and keep pushing ahead, no matter what the roadblocks.*

(Source: Why Some Schools with Latino Children Beat the Odds…and Others Don’t)

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