ABSTRACT
        This Spring 2002 issue of the occasional paper, CSR
Connection, reports on information that builds the capacity of schools to
raise the academic achievement of all students. The success of English
language learners and Native American students in U.S. public schools has
been, and continues to be, impeded by deep "disconnects" between schools and
students' families and communities. Effective strategies to address these
disconnects were the focus of a regional forum in Albuquerque, New Mexico, in
June 2001. Policymakers, researchers, and practitioners made the case that
these disconnects persist because the educational system was designed for a
mainstream middle-class student, and its policies and practices have not
changed or been adapted to serve the needs of culturally and linguistically
diverse students. Participants called for policy and practice to transform
school systems so that their relationships with families and communities
become more responsive, collaborative, and student-centered. Forum
participants identified key issues and effective strategies for building
connectivity in four areas: connecting students with an academically rigorous
curriculum that is culturally and socially relevant; connecting teachers with
the knowledge, skills, and professional environment they need to be effective
in linguistically and culturally diverse environments; making all levels of
the system accountable for student success; and connecting schools and
families in collaborative partnerships. Although a broad range of effective
strategies was provided, participants emphasized that deeply entrenched
patterns of school failure present a complex problem requiring comprehensive
changes at every level. (Contains a glossary, a list of participants, and 13
resource Web sites.) (SV)

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Preventing School Dropout and Ensuring Success for English Language Learners and Native American Students

By Naomi G. Housman and Monica R. Martinez

The success of English language learners and Native American students in U.S. public schools has been, and continues to be, impeded by deep "disconnects" between schools and students' families and communities. Effective strategies to address these types of disconnects were the focus of a dialogue in June 2001 sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education (USED), in partnership with the Region IX Southwest Comprehensive Regional Assistance Center and the National Association for Bilingual Education (NABE). The regional forum, convened in Albuquerque, New Mexico, focused specifically on English language learners and Native American students and the factors leading to high rates of school dropout within these student populations. The forum planners invited thirty experts to bring their unique policy, practice, and/or research perspectives to the dialogue. To inform the work of the USED, participants were asked to recommend policies and practices at the local, state, and federal levels that have proven effective for the success of English language learners and Native American students.

The Albuquerque forum built upon a dialogue begun in November 2000 when USED convened a group of re-

gional policymakers, researchers, and practitioners in Philadelphia to recommend the most effective policies and practices for turning around low performing schools. These recommendations, described in a brief produced by the National Clearinghouse for Comprehensive School Reform (NCCSR), were organized around three major areas: coherence, complexity, and connectivity. The recommendation to establish coherence suggests that all schoolwide improvement efforts must be organized around a shared vision and mission for student success. The recommendation relating to complexity suggests that, in order for schoolwide improvement efforts to be successful, the multiple layers of school and community culture and history must be openly acknowledged and addressed. The recommendation to build connectivity describes the need for a schoolwide culture that is student-centered and in which teachers and families work collaboratively for continuously improved teaching and learning. (See page 3 for further description of themes from the Philadelphia forum.)

During the Albuquerque regional forum, connectivity again emerged as a central theme. Participants made the case that, due to deep "disconnects" between schools and students' families and communities, establishing connectivity is particularly critical for the success of English language learners and Native American students. Further, participants argued, these disconnects persist because the current system of public education has never fundamentally changed its core policies and practices to more effectively serve and adapt to the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse students. As one participant explained, "the system was designed for a main-

stream middle class student who we don't have in many of our communities...creating big barriers of connectivity not just between the student and the teacher, but with the parents, and the community. There is also a major disconnect of the students to the curriculum, which has no meaning for them."

To repair these disconnects—and to ensure student success—participants called for policy and practice that will help to transform school systems so that their relationship with families and communities is more responsive, collaborative, and student-centered. By working collaboratively, school leaders, teachers, families, and community members can draw upon one another's expertise and concerns in order to make better, more informed choices about the school programs and policies that impact their children. An inclusive and collaborative decision-making process can help the school become a more "connected" place: where families and communities feel valued and respected, where educators feel connected to and influential in the lives of their students, and where students feel connected to educators who are invested in their success and who are working with their family and community to ensure it. To create these layers of connectivity, participants made recommendations for policy and practice along four major areas: Curriculum, Instruction, Accountability, and School-Family Partnership.

The following sections summarize the dialogue that transpired during the Albuquerque regional forum as participants articulated the key issues and effective strategies for building connectivity in each of these four areas.

June 2001 Regional Forum: Four Areas for Creating Connectivity	November 2000 Regional Forum: Three Themes for Turning Around Low-Performing Schools

Curriculum
Connect students with an academically rigorous curriculum that is culturally and socially relevant, and create school structures that support learning.

Instruction
Connect teachers with the knowledge, skills, and professional environment they need for effective instruction and learning in culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms.

Accountability
Connect all levels of the system with accountability for student success.

School-Family Partnership
Connect schools and families in partnerships to work collaboratively for student success.

Coherence
Develop a vision shared by the school and community of what a low-performing school can and should become and clear expectations for significantly improved student achievement.

Connectivity
Personalize and professionalize school culture to overcome isolation and anonymity so that staff, students, and parents relate as partners in the educational process.

Complexity
Recognize and address the multiple layers of culture, history and socio-economic context that shape a school and the attitudes and expectations that parents, students, and staff bring to it.

A set of two briefs was prepared based on the proceedings of the first regional forum. A brief by the National Clearinghouse for Comprehensive School Reform (http://www.goodschools.gwu.edu/pubs/issue/IBApril01.pdf) provides recommendations for practitioners, and a brief prepared by the Consortium for Policy Research in Education provides recommendations for policymakers. Both can be accessed online through the U.S. Department of Education (http://www.ed.gov/offices/OESE/LPS/index.html).
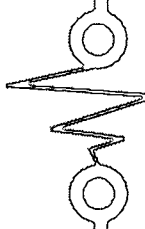
Curricular and Structural Connectivity: Supporting a Rigorous and Relevant Learning Environment

In many different ways, forum participants described how school systems must begin the process of transforming the school experience for English language learners and Native American students by first addressing the curriculum and school structures in which learning takes place. Many of these recommendations focused on the high school level, where students often become lost and disengaged—and where change is often especially difficult.

In order to transform the classroom into a place of success for students, participants recommended that schools adopt an academically rigorous curriculum. Too often the curriculum of entire schools, of the programs attended mostly by English language learners and Native American students, lacks academic rigor. The inadequate curriculum and instruction found in many lower track classes disproportionately impacts student populations, such as English language learners and Native Americans, who are often over-assigned to them. As one participant said, "The place where things tend to be a disaster is in the low tracks. That is where there are policies in place that really encourage the assignment of less expert teachers... and [where there are] the largest classes."

A crucial step in transforming the curriculum for student achievement is eliminating low track classes and replacing them with rigorous academic courses.

One participant shared the perspective that, "If we have systems and curriculum that treat our students as gifted students, our students will perform at that level." To demonstrate the effectiveness of this approach, one participant described a high school that brought completion rates from the bottom to the top half in the district by eliminating all low track courses and instituting rigorous academic courses schoolwide. A similar strategy was adopted by an entire school district, which invested in increasing access to Advanced Placement (AP) courses and AP teacher training. Nearly half of its high school students are now enrolled in AP classes and take the AP examinations each year. The district makes it possible for teachers to attend summer workshops to receive training in quality AP instruction, which has had an impact throughout the school. A participant explained that, "The quality of teacher training and the instruction has gone up a great deal. [It] has filtered down to all of the classes." Without a rigorous, quality curriculum, many high school students disengage and drop out, or as one participant put it, "get lost in the system." However, research indicates that disengagement can also result from the school's failure to help students remain connected to a positive sense of self and cultural identity. A participant stated that, "Young people who are solidly grounded in their own culture and language are the most successful, which is absolutely the opposite of the assimilatory policies that still guide too many schools serving American Indian youth." Nonetheless, it was noted that, to this day, most curriculum and textbooks "are not written to include the Native American in a favorable light." While both English acquisition and instruction are crucial for stu-

dents' success, participants explained that curriculum that affirms the value of their native languages is also important to counteract many of the negative messages students and their families receive about their communities. For example, state propositions to eliminate bilingual education programs are often interpreted at the local level as promoting a view of students' native languages as obstacles, rather than assets, in the learning process. As one participant explained, such policies may send a message "telling our parents and our grandparents and Native Americans that [their] language has no value."

Curricula based on principles of experiential education and service learning were identified as effective ways to engage students in school by bringing real-world relevance to the learning experience. Participants offered examples of how this type of learning can build strong academic skills while helping students build a stronger connection to a positive sense of identity, community, and culture. A participant described one such program implemented in three rural schools. There, eighth grade students and their teachers became ethnographic researchers to learn how access to water has impacted their community. The program built learning experiences on real community issues so that students developed reading, writing, researching, interviewing, presenting, and other skills in a context that was relevant to and drew upon the experiences of students and their families. According to the practitioner who described it, experiential learning also helped the school incorporate the "incredibly rich and resourceful knowledge base in the community that often goes untapped." Data from the schools implementing this program,

which has students writing extensively in both English and Spanish, indicate significant improvements in literacy development.

Participants described another successful service learning-based program in which high school students helped to develop civic engagement and self-determination in their community by working to raise voter participation and awareness of issues. In the process, students studied complex issues, learned how to communicate them effectively, and experienced the dynamics of teamwork. Another example of engaging students through service-based learning was a program that brought middle and high school students into elementary classrooms twice each month to support teachers in the instruction of math and science. Data from this program indicate that elementary school attendance has improved, and that the older students persist in the program and in school. In describing these programs, the participant explained that, "If we can bring students together for one common purpose, for the greater good of the community, it has a tremendous effect on their self-esteem that they know something about themselves and they are willing to give that knowledge or the time to an endeavor."

In addition to curricular changes, school leaders may need to make significant changes in school structures to support a more positive context for successful learning. English language learners and Native American students often must cope with both subtle and overt messages that they are not valued members of their own school. In many cases, this is manifested in the placement of classes for English language learners in

"out of the way" areas of the school building—such as in the basement—and a program structure that provides no opportunity for interaction with students in the school's "mainstream." District and school-level structures often encourage and reinforce this curricular isolation and an attitude among the school's professional staff that these students are not their responsibility. As recounted by one participant who recently heard a teacher ask "when the 'real students' are coming back," this perception persists even in schools where English language learners make up a majority of the student body. Strategies for transforming teacher attitudes and professional practices can be found in the following section on teacher connectivity.

Support must also be provided for the difficult academic transitions many English language learners experience as they progress to middle and high school, particularly if they are also transitioning out of a bilingual education or other English language acquisition program. In Latino communities with high dropout rates it was noted that, "One of the critical points at which children become discouraged is the point —around grade eight or nine—at which the language load of instruction dramatically increases... [when it] hits them, they get discouraged, and start a disengagement process that results in their dropping out."

To support the successful transition to high school, some schools have established freshman "academies" that create more intimate and supportive environments for students. For example, freshmen in one large, urban high school are placed in clusters in which they remain until they graduate. Each cluster is assigned four teachers—three aca-

One participant described a high school that brought completion rates from the bottom to the top half in the district by eliminating all low track courses and instituting rigorous academic courses schoolwide.

demic and one "elective"—so that each student has access to adults from within his or her cluster to address both academic and non-academic concerns. According to one participant, the cluster system requires teachers to be more student-centered when "non-academic" matters are not automatically delegated to central office personnel. The principal has organized the school so that instead of counselors and assistant principals, there are "student managers, [whose] job is to work with a group of students... It's a one-stop shopping deal. You enter, you get discipline, you get counseled, and you get career guidance."

School structures determining a set timeline for high school completion can also be changed to be more responsive to students' needs. One principal built flexibility into the school by establishing a five-year curriculum, after recognizing that some students, such as those who come to the United States as teenagers, need more time to learn English and successfully complete high school. In one pueblo, tribal policy allows students to remain enrolled in school beyond age 18, or as long as it takes for students to graduate. Since recent dropouts often express the desire to return to the public school setting rather than continue in a GED program, it was also

suggested that school systems consider policies that allow dropouts to come back to school. An educator who has worked with school dropouts discovered that, "after the reengagement process, they are able to reset goals and redirect their lives."

A clear message emerging from the forum discussion was that students need an academically rigorous curriculum that is also respectful of and relevant to students' cultural and community context. At the same time, structures and supports that provide a positive context for learning must also be present. To make all of these curricular and structural changes possible, however, schools need well-prepared teachers. The next section captures recommendations for improving the quality and preparation of teachers for English language learners and Native American students.

Teacher Connectivity: Preparing for Success in the Classroom

Throughout the forum, participants sounded a clarion call for high quality teachers who are prepared, through pre- and in-service training, to utilize instructional practices effective in culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms. As the primary source of contact between students and the school system, teachers play one of the most essential roles in student success. To emphasize the importance of quality teachers, one participant cited a re-

cently published report that looked at differences in dropout rates among 247 U.S. high schools. One of the strongest predictors for dropout rates was the "degree to which students felt that the teachers were good teachers who respected them as well as taught them well."

Participants defined quality teachers as those who are centered on student learning, who apply research-based, effective "pedagogy and curriculum that incorporates language and culture," and who regard students' native cultures and languages as assets, rather than as deficits, for student overall development. Producing such teachers requires change and attention at all levels of the system to what is required and expected of teachers. As one participant remarked, "We are [still] preparing our teachers to work for a group that probably never existed in the good old days."

Participants made it clear that to be prepared for today's culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms, what teachers are expected to know and do must change—and that university and college teacher preparation programs have a critical leadership role to play in making these changes. States also must assume a leadership role in influencing the preparation of more effective teachers at institutions of higher education. One effective way for states to do this is by developing policies for the accreditation of schools of education that reflect best research and practice for English language learners and Native American students. For example, participants recommended that states hold schools of education to a standard of "across-the-board inclusion of culture and lan-

guage" for the curriculum of teacher preparation programs. Given the language needs of many students in high poverty schools, accreditation policy could also require that schools of education prepare all new teachers with a foundation in literacy development. By giving teachers the skills to distinguish between language and cognitive issues, participants suggested that this could also reduce the over-identification of English language learners and Native American students for special education.

To make the necessary changes from within schools of education, the academic leadership must hold all faculty—not only those who specialize in bilingual or multicultural education—responsible for their part in preparing teachers for culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms. Participants recommended that schools of education establish policies to hold faculty accountable for their competency in culturally and linguistically relevant curriculum and instruction, and for modifying their course syllabi to include relevant content. Schools of education may also need to establish a way to assess their faculty members' skills and knowledge gaps and require "in-service" training on current research on effective curriculum and instruction for English language learners and Native American students in particular.

Participants suggested providing more extensive training in the theory and practice of multicultural education as an effective means for improving teacher quality. One participant described study findings indicating that a foundation in this approach to curriculum may not only be good for students, but for teachers as well. The study found that while stu-

dents in teacher preparation programs tend to be resistant to multicultural education coursework, after ten years in the classroom most identified their multicultural education courses as the most important to their success as teachers. Coursework in classroom discipline, which was initially valued as most important, was then rated as least important. In a time when teacher demand and attrition is high, it is important to know what can be done to prepare teachers, both during pre- and in-service training, so that they can succeed in the classroom.

Institutions of higher education must also invest in long-term, collaborative working partnerships with low-performing schools and districts. Such partnerships are mutually beneficial in that they help inform teacher preparation curriculum so that it is relevant to the needs and realities of schools, and bring much-needed external technical assistance to schools to support their comprehensive improvement efforts. Higher education institutions can also play an important role by helping local schools and districts meet the demands of newly enacted language policies. For example, in states that now require sheltered English immersion for all English language learners, schools and districts have an enormous need for in-service training so that teachers can provide appropriate instruction for English language learners that complies with new state policy. Teacher preparation institutions must also change their systems so that they reward involvement in schools. One participant cited a university in which "tenure is tied to how well [faculty] connect and work with school districts."

District and school leaders must also raise the level of expectations for what teachers must know and apply to be effective in classrooms with English language learners and Native American students. In one school with a predominantly English language learner population, a "non-negotiable" condition of employment was that every teacher must, within seven years, become bilingual in one of the primary native languages of the student population. Teachers were also required to complete coursework in multicultural curriculum and to be proficient in cooperative learning techniques, which have been found to be compatible with the value systems of Native American and many English language learner students' communities. Cooperative learning, in which students can work and learn in peer groups, has also been found to be particularly effective in classrooms in which students have varying levels of English proficiency. One participant stated that English language learners "like to work with each other because if they didn't learn one way, somebody re-teaches it to them in a group."

In addition to raising expectations and supporting teachers in attaining specific skills, district and school leaders can allocate time and resources to facilitate schoolwide professional learning communities, a "break the mold" form of professional development that is continuous, job-embedded, and peer-based. To make this possible, teachers must have time built into their daily or weekly schedule for professional interaction focused on student learning. In professional learning communities, teachers share what is or is not working in their classrooms, help improve one another's practice, and exchange instructional expertise on a regular basis. This interaction also provides a forum in which teachers can learn from their peers who have specialized knowledge, particularly in areas such as literacy development and effective instruction for English language learners. As one participant noted, these skills are "too often just in the hands of the bilingual staff and not in the hands of the entire system." Teachers also need opportunities to work and interact with one another across the elementary, middle, and high school levels within a system. Participants felt that doing so would promote a student-centered focus throughout the district and would encourage practitioners to think more broadly in terms of "one educational system, not as one classroom or one elementary school."

In order to maximize further the instructional expertise that exists within a school, some schools are creating a professional learning community through "vertical teaming," an organizational structure that gets teachers working with and learning from one another across grade levels, content areas, and fields of expertise. In one high school that uses vertical teaming, an English as a second language (ESL) teacher is present at every department meeting to contribute his or her expertise in language/literacy issues, and to influence the instructional program "of every department and every subject." Having at least one ESL-trained teacher in each academic department also makes it possible for students who are learning English to study subject areas at a level that is appropriate to their age and skill level.

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Participants offered a range of recommendations for what institutions of higher education and state, district, and school leaders can do to improve teacher quality. Higher education institutions that prepare teachers must take responsibility for a curriculum that will produce teachers who can apply best practices for culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms. By revising accreditation standards to reflect these best practices, state level policymakers can also hold teacher preparation institutions accountable for the teachers they produce for English language learners and Native American students. At the school and district levels, leaders must provide the time and resources needed for teachers to learn new skills and to work in professional learning communities and across the system throughout the school year. One participant captured well the relationship between teacher quality and accountability for student success by saying "We know what skills and knowledge our teachers need to create success for all kids. Until we have a system that requires it and nurtures it and rewards that kind of behavior, it's not going to happen." The next section summarizes participants' recommendations for building system-wide accountability.

Systemic Connectivity: Accountability for Student Success

Participants explained that the system of public education has yet to change in fundamental ways to ensure equity and success for all students, particularly those who have been historically underserved and who represent the growing minority populations in the nation's changing demographic picture. Although accountability mechanisms for federal, state, and local education agencies have been put in place over the last several decades, they have not been adequately enforced to eliminate failure and inequity within the system. Participants described how each level of the system is responsible for ensuring the success of English language learners and Native American students, and offered a variety of recommendations for building system-wide accountability.

Participants made the case that policy should be developed at the federal, state, and local levels that would enforce accountability measures for student improvement and equity. These policies could require consistent methods of identifying and collecting data on retention, dropout, and grade level performance, as well as data on equal access to programs, such as gifted and talented programs. One participant emphasized that, "What gets measured gets done. We need to measure a lot of things that we haven't before for improvement, not elimination."

At the federal level, participants recommended tying Title I funds to quarterly school attendance records rather than the current policy of basing the formula

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on census counts. This shift would have direct impact at the school level by changing an incentive that exists under the current system for schools to do only what they can "to keep kids until the magical census date" and then little after to support students at-risk of dropping out.

Practitioners at the district and school levels must also be accountable for chronic student absenteeism and other signs of disengagement leading to dropout. One policy recommendation was made to require that school systems track students after they move out of the English language learner designation and into the general curriculum so they don't "fall out of the system" unnoticed. Another policy recommendation was to impose a requirement that schools make formal contact with someone at the student's home after two consecutive days of absence from school. Establishing an annual accreditation process could further develop school-level accountability. According to a local practitioner, this would involve the entire school in a process of "constantly reviewing the quality of services and learning opportunities for serving the needs of all students in a comprehensive manner." By shifting from a compliance-based to an accountability-based model for annual review, the whole staff must participate in a reflective analysis of how effective school policies and practices are for meeting the goal of serving all students. All of the recommendations from the practitioners included districts and schools establishing a process for continual assessment, or "pulse taking," to detect changing student needs, conditions and behaviors.

Establishing methods to track students across the system is one important way to remain aware of and responsive to their needs. Participants also called for policy and practice at levels that begin to "think K-16," rather than treating each level of the education system as separate from the others. At the local level, data can provide the key to building articulation across grade levels and across subject areas from school to school so that a district can identify the gaps or important transition points where students are getting lost. As one participant stated, "Rather than breaking out the data at high school only, if we broke it out based on the feeder schools it begins to get to the problem of articulation." The system can feed data from high school student performance to the middle and elementary school levels to identify the gaps in learning and how they can be addressed before high school. To make the connection with higher education, one participant cited rural school districts that will be tracking the college matriculation and completion rates of students participating in a youth college program created through a university partnership.

Making sure that all students have access to the curriculum they need to meet higher state standards has become a major responsibility for leaders at the school and district levels. With many state testing and accountability measures now in effect, districts are beginning to face the consequences of failing to prepare all students for success. One participant noted that, in addition to "the isolation [and] the lack of adequate curriculum," a major challenge for school districts is a "lack of awareness [on the part] of the system administrators that

they truly are responsible, and everyone through the whole system is responsible for all the kids and not just for certain kids." Other participants emphasized that leaders must also be held accountable for curriculum that goes beyond the basics and that will engage students in higher levels of thinking and inquiry. Rather than a focus on preparing students for test performance or proficiency, schools must help students "learn how to learn," and be focused on "creating lifelong learners."

Addressing issues of language and literacy is one major component of accountability. Participants noted that literacy is a critical but often overlooked factor when considering the conditions for student success in Native American communities—where many students are, in fact, English language learners. One participant observed that, "It is estimated that on many Indian reservations the average vocabulary of the adults in the community is at the fourth grade level. Yet you are never allowed to call them limited English proficient. They don't fit the standard definition because they don't know their native languages either. Our children have neither language." Policy that recognizes that some Native American students should be designated as English language learners will help make it possible to provide the curriculum and instruction these students need for literacy development. One participant who works closely with Native American communities urged policymakers and practitioners to adopt an expanded perspective on students' literacy needs: "Language development for English language learners crosses ethnic and linguistic groups—it's not just immigrant children."

Teachers also need opportunities to work and interact with one another across the elementary, middle, and high school levels within a system.

Participants urged that both policy and practice recognize the vital link between native language literacy and students' connection to cultural identity. To help students' maintain this stabilizing connection, it was recommended that English language acquisition should be approached as a means for academic success rather than as the goal of education itself. Referring to new policies mandating a one-to-three-year period for English language acquisition, participants called for a more realistic, flexible time frame that recognizes the needs of students of different ages and with varying levels of prior education. This is especially important as accountability systems hold all students to higher academic standards. A participant explained that, "When we do not give the appropriate time [for children to obtain] the skills to succeed to high standards, then we are doing those children, their parents, our state and our nation a big disservice."

In one school, leaders hold themselves accountable for making the adjustments on an ongoing basis in accordance to individual student needs, cultural and linguistic group needs, and community needs. In this school, the entire staff "…did whatever it took to try to make kids and their families successful. So if it was a language issue, this was just one more thing we dealt with, but generically it really wasn't different than anything else you do for any other kind

of kid. So whatever those needs are, you address them. If [parents] don't speak English, then you speak the language they do speak. [If they don't read] you call them on the telephone or visit their homes."

During the forum, participants emphasized that, in holding students to higher standards, leadership at all levels must also hold systems of policy and practice to higher standards. With this in mind, participants offered a range of recommendations and examples for building stronger system-wide accountability through policies and practices that support student success. In the next section, participants describe the challenge of building partnerships between the school and home, and recommend ways in which each can be accountable to the other.

School-Family Connectivity: Forging Partnerships

Forging meaningful partnerships with students' families is another major challenge and responsibility for schools committed to ensuring the success of English language learners and Native American students. Doing so requires leaders who not only believe that students, teachers, families and communities have the will and capacity to make student success possible, but who also demonstrate a commitment to working collaboratively.

Partnerships that connect the school and home are crucial because the isolation

and devaluation that English language learners and Native American students often experience in school also function to isolate and devalue family and community members, thus discouraging their participation in the school. Because many parents, particularly on Indian reservations, had a negative school experience when they were students, the messages and attitudes that the school conveys can either reinforce or break with past realities. As one participant noted, "Parents that are resistant to schools, that don't believe in schools, are that way because they have gone through the system. It's not that they hate something they don't understand. They understand pretty well." For example, the curricular and structural isolation of English language learners and/or Native American students in the school (as mentioned previously in this paper) conveys a negative message about the way the school values these students. "Physically where we place [Indian and ELL] students and how we refer to them makes a big difference...because if in the hierarchy [these] students and the teachers or offices are not valued, then the parents don't want to go there. Why should they?"

Participants noted that curricular policies discouraging the maintenance of

Policy that recognizes that some Native American students should be designated as English language learners will help make it possible to provide the curriculum and instruction these students need for literacy development.

students' native languages can create greater barriers to parental involvement in school by making it more difficult for non-English speaking parents to communicate with their children. One participant explained that state propositions prohibiting bilingual education programs can deepen these disconnects in both practical and symbolic ways: "We are telling parents that you are not our partner in education; we don't want you in the school. We want the children to speak English. Leave your culture and your language behind."

Partnerships that bridge disconnects must also create opportunities for family and community engagement in discussions and decision-making on policies that will impact their children. According to one participant, this is especially important in Native American communities: "For Indian people, self-determination and sovereignty issues are critical. When we leave them out of policies, there is a great deal of resistance."

One policy recommendation to help bridge these disconnects is to require home-school liaisons whose job it is to keep parents and caretakers involved in the school and their child's education throughout the year. To access parents working multiple jobs or on irregular shifts, liaisons often must work outside the parameters of the 8 to 5 workday. According to one participant, making the face-to-face connection with parents and other caretakers is crucial; "Our home-school liaisons are some of the most critical people."

At all levels, policy must reflect a responsibility to help build the capacity of parents and other caregivers. One participant described a state tradition that demonstrates such a commitment. For the past twenty-one years, a statewide parent coalition has brought a diverse group of parents from at-risk communities for a Memorial Day weekend mountain retreat to discuss issues that affect their children. Parents participate in discussion groups and workshops to learn the skills they need to empower themselves, to support their children, and to recognize early warning signs of disengagement before it is too late to prevent dropout. Students, who are also a part of the weekend, participate in some of the training alongside their parents and have opportunities to present information to their parents about their school experience.

Another approach to reaching out to the community includes investing in adult education, especially in Native American communities where a substantial portion of the adult population, including many parents of school-age children, dropped out of school. Noted one participant: "If it weren't for adult education, the [Indian] community would never have been able to access post-secondary education."

Forging partnerships for greater school-family connectivity is an essential part of a successful school. Schools and families each have tremendous funds of knowledge to offer one another in the quest to keep English language learners and Native American students engaged and successful in school. As participants have shown, everyone grows stronger when schools and families work together.
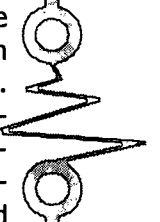
Leading the Way for Comprehensive Change

The consequences of disengagement—failure and dropout—cannot be accepted as a fact of public school education for any group of students. The disproportionate representation of English language learners and Native American students in school dropout rates demands changes that will reverse this dangerous trend.

Although a broad range of effective strategies for change were provided over the course of the two-day forum, participants emphasized that the scope of change required for turning around deeply entrenched patterns of school failure will not be accomplished simply by implementing new special programs targeted at high risk populations. What emerged clearly from the forum is that student dropout is a complex problem requiring comprehensive changes to policies and practices at every level. An official of the U.S. Department of Education described the comprehensive approach that was heard throughout the forum: "A number of the recommendations are multi-barrier, multi-strategy recommendations of things that have to happen simultaneously across families, across communities, across school systems, across different levels in the policy realm."

When comprehensive changes have successfully transformed institutions for English language learners and Native American students, their success will no longer depend on the commitment of a few heroic school leaders. To bring about these changes, committed leadership is needed at all levels. From the state house to the classroom, leaders must make it their mission to do what is necessary to engage members of the school and community in the achievement of success for all students.

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David Beaulieu – United States Department of Education
Gene Benton – Tucson Unified School District
Marcia Brenden – Drawing from the Well Project
Hugh Burkett – United States Department of Education
Rudy Chavez – University of Colorado-Boulder
Rudolfo Chavez Chavez – New Mexico State University
Emily Cole – Houston Public Schools
Joseph Conaty – United States Department of Education
Donna Deyhle – University of Utah
Susan Duron – META Associates (Facilitator)
Sandra Fox – National Indian School Board Association
Rosalle Gonzales – Gadsden School District
Elizabeth Gutierrez – University of California-Riverside
Mary Jean Habermann Lopez – New Mexico Department of Education
(Retired)
Genevieve Jackson –Division of Diné Education
Jackie Jackson – United States Department of Education
Kooch Jacobus – Office of Senator Jeff Bingaman
Joseph Johnson – United States Department of Education
Jeanette Lim – United States Department of Education
Paul Martinez – Region IX Southwest Comprehensive Assistance Center
(Co-sponsor)
Toni Nolan-Trujillo – New Mexico Department of Education
Delia Pompa – National Association for Bilingual Education (Co-sponsor)
Charlene Rivera – Region III Comprehensive Center
Harriet Romo – University of Texas-San Antonio
Russell Rumberger – University of California-Santa Barbara
Lia Rupp – Zuni Public Schools
Elmer Salazar – Los Alamos National Laboratory
Walter Secada – University of Wisconsin-Madison
Gil Sena – Retired Superintendent
Michael Silva – Rio Grande Education Collaborative
Nilda Simms – Mid-continent Regional Educational Laboratory
Fran Tenorio – New Mexico ENLACE Project
Gloria Yepa – Bureau of Indian Affairs
Evangeline Sandoval Trujillo – New Mexico Mesa Incorporated
Molses Venegas – The Albuquerque Partnership

KEY TERMS

ELL: English language learner. A national-origin-minority student who is limited-English-proficient. This term is often preferred over limited-English-proficient (LEP) as it highlights accomplishments rather than deficits.

LEP: Limited-English-proficient. (See ELL)

Language Proficiency: Refers to the degree to which the student exhibits control over the use of language, including the measurement of expressive and receptive language skills in the areas of phonology, syntax, vocabulary, and semantics and including the areas of pragmatics or language use within various domains or social circumstances. Proficiency in a language is judged independently and does not imply a lack of proficiency in another language.

English as a Second Language (ESL): A program of techniques, methodology and special curriculum designed to teach ELL students English language skills, which may include listening, speaking, reading, writing, study skills, content vocabulary, and cultural orientation. ESL instruction is usually in English with little use of native language.

Dual Language Program: Also known as two-way or developmental, the goal of these bilingual programs is for students to develop language proficiency in two languages by receiving instruction in English and another language in a classroom that is usually comprised of half native English speakers and half native speakers of the other language.

Maintenance Bilingual Education (MBE): MBE, also referred to as late-exit bilingual education, is a program that uses two languages, the student's primary language and English, as a means of instruction. The instruction builds upon the student's primary language skills and develops and expands the English language skills of each student to enable him or her to achieve proficiency in both languages, while providing access to the content areas.

Structured English Immersion Program: The goal of this program is acquisition of English language skills so that the ELL student can succeed in an English-only mainstream classroom. All instruction in an immersion strategy program is in English. Teachers have specialized training in meeting the needs of ELL students, possessing either a bilingual education or ESL teaching credential and/or training, and strong receptive skills in the students' primary language.

Equal Education Opportunities Act of 1974: This civil rights statute prohibits states from denying equal educational opportunity to an individual on account of his or her race, color, sex, or national origin. The statute specifically prohibits states from denying equal educational opportunity by the failure of an educational agency to take appropriate action to overcome language barriers that impede equal participation by its students in its instructional programs. [20 U.S.C. §1203(f)].

Source: U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights

U.S. Department of Education
http://www.ed.gov/

Office of Bilingual Education and Minority Languages Affairs
http://www.ed.gov/offices/OBEMLA/

Office of Indian Education, U.S. Department of Education
http://www.ed.gov/offices/OESE/oie/

Comprehensive Centers Network
http://www.wested.org/cc/html/ccnetwork.htm

Equity Assistance Centers Network
http://www.ed.gov/EdRes/EdFed/equity.html

Regional Educational Laboratories Network
http://www.ed.gov/offices/OESE/compreform/labs.html

National Association for Bilingual Education
http://www.nabe.org/index.asp

National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education
http://www.ncbe.gwu.edu/

National Clearinghouse for Comprehensive School Reform
http://www.goodschools.gwu.edu

ERIC Clearinghouse on Languages and Linguistics
http://www.cal.org/ericcll/

ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools
http://www.ael.org/eric/

National Indian School Board Association
http://www.skc.edu/NISBA/nisba.html

Intercultural Development Research Association
http://www.idra.org/

The National Clearinghouse for Comprehensive School Reform (NCCSR) collects and disseminates information that builds the capacity of schools to raise the academic achievement of all students. This is accomplished by continuously examining the literature related to comprehensive school reform (CSR), adding high quality materials to our on-line databases and actively sending useful information to educators and policy makers at the local, state and national levels. Through our web site, reference and retrieval services, and publications, NCCSR is the central gateway to information on CSR.

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