Answering the Knock of Opportunity:

Addressing the Data Needs for California's English Learners

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February 2008

Policy Brief

California currently faces an opportunity to develop an effective data system that can assist in improving the state's future understanding of the educational progress of English learners (ELs). This policy brief outlines the needs for good data on ELs and makes recommendations for creating an effective longitudinal data system for ELs.

California officials are currently developing information systems to comply with regulations outlined under No Child Left Behind (NCLB) calling for each state to measure the progress of all students every year to determine if schools and districts meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). To this end, NCLB requires states to establish longitudinal databases with the ability to track individual student progress over time. California is currently developing two statewide data systems—the California Longitudinal Pupil Achievement Data System (CALPADS), which will track individual students over time, and the California Longitudinal Teacher Integrated Data Education System (CALTIDES), which will track individual teachers over time.

While many states are grappling with meeting these federal data reporting requirements, California also faces a large and ever-growing population of ELs, making up more than one-quarter of the student population in California, who have additional data needs in order to effectively track their progress. ELs require specific instructional programs and

What Is CALPADS?

In response to requirements from the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), California has been working since 2002 on the development of the California Longitudinal Pupil Achievement Data System (CALPADS), a statewide data system to track a student's academic performance over time. The 2005–06 school year saw the first large step in compiling information for CALPADS, when the California School Information System (CSIS) assigned all K–12 students an individual student identifier to allow individual students to be tracked over time. The next big step for CALPADS is for California Department of Education (CDE) to create and implement the actual data system that includes student state assessment scores, student enrollment data, and certain demographic elements. To this end, CDE released a Request for Proposals to solicit outside assistance to develop the full CALPADS and integrate the information being collected by CSIS, with the goal of being fully operational by the 2009–10 school year.

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additional resources to meet their educational needs, meaning practitioners, policymakers, and researchers need access to comprehensive information that allows for a clear understanding of ELs' academic progress and English proficiency development. The timing of federal data collection requirements aligns with this growing need for a better data system for ELs and affords the California Department of Education (CDE) a unique opportunity to develop a strong and useful data system.

This policy brief outlines recommendations for how California can best take advantage of this opportunity by detailing important components of the structure of these data systems, outlining key data elements specific to ELs that should be included, and providing general advice on how to enhance CALPADS and CALTIDES. Ultimately, legislators, practitioners, and researchers can all benefit from the creation of an effective

longitudinal data system that better assesses the effectiveness of various programs serving the state's EL population.

The Need for Good Data on English Learners

Why should the state's population of English learners receive a specific focus in CALPADS? Indeed, California is a very diverse state with varied student populations and student needs, leaving some to argue that this new and powerful data system should not be utilized for specific student populations. However, the number of EL students in California schools has grown dramatically over the past 30 years to become a very substantial proportion of the state's student population. Today, nearly 1.6 million students out of 6.3 million students in California's public schools are English learners. They are enrolled in almost every district and in the majority of the schools in the state. Their origins are very diverse and their needs vary greatly. They are more likely to live in poverty than their native English-speaking peers and are often highly mobile. In addition, since 2005, ELs have been considered a subgroup that needs to meet specific academic growth targets measured by both the Academic Performance Index (API)—California's accountability measure—and the federal accountability measure of AYP. Indeed, attempting to master literacy in English at the same time as achieving the same standards as all other students is a daunting task. As many schools and districts fail to meet AYP and API growth targets due to their large EL populations, it is clear the state needs better indicators to understand the success of alternative approaches to addressing these substantial teaching challenges.

Research recently completed by the American Institutes for Research (AIR) and WestEd on California's Proposition 227 further underscored severe limitations to the state's current information on ELs. This 5-year study of Proposition 227—an initiative requiring ELs be taught "overwhelmingly in English" through sheltered/structured English immersion programs—sought to understand the impact of the initiative on ELs in California. However, limitations in statewide

What Is CALTIDES?

In 2006, the California legislature enacted legislation (Senate Bill 1614) authorizing the new teacher data system, California Longitudinal Teacher Integrated Data Education System (CALTIDES), in order to enable the analysis of the teacher workforce over time, as well as the evaluation of teacher preparation programs and staff development and the monitoring of teacher assignment. (The legislation creating this system explicitly prohibited the use of CALTIDES for purposes of pay, promotion, sanction, or evaluation of individual teachers.) One of the first steps necessary to create a longitudinal teacher data system is the assignment of teacher identifiers so that information from different agencies can be integrated more easily. In 2006–07, the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CCTC) began developing and disseminating statewide teacher identifiers to school districts. The CDE recently completed the Request for Proposals to solicit vendors to develop the full data system, integrating the information collected from various agencies such as CDE, CCTC, and the Employment Development Department. At this date, CDE has not yet identified when this data system will be operational.

data made it impossible to definitively resolve the longstanding debate underlying Proposition 227 as to whether one instructional setting (e.g., bilingual instruction versus English immersion) is more effective in educating ELs. The major limitation encountered in the study centered on the fact that the state does not collect information at the student level on the type of instructional setting in which ELs are being taught. Instead, the state collects data on the instructional *services* an EL receives in the current year (e.g., English language development, specially designed academic instruction in English, or support in their primary language). However, because ELs can receive various services in any given instructional setting, it is not possible to draw conclusions about which types of instructional settings are more effective in meeting the needs of ELs based on data from the current system. In addition, EL status—unlike race, ethnicity, and often poverty—can change over the course of a student's academic career. Thus, this population of students in particular would benefit from longitudinal information about their educational needs over time.

In short, CALPADS should be developed with California's varied and most important needs in mind, and not only as a narrow response to federal reporting requirements. Statewide data should help state policymakers to evaluate resource allocations to EL programs, district and school leaders to utilize data to determine how to most effectively serve ELs in their own schools and classrooms, and researchers to use statewide data to evaluate the effects of different EL programs and resources on student outcomes.

A Look at California's Current Data System

California has worked over the past several years to develop data collection systems to track educational progress across the state and to comply with the needs of state and federal accountability policies. Since the implementation of the Public School Accountability Act (PSAA) of 1999, California has initiated several data collection efforts in order to track student progress. Today, the state has 125 different data sources and

databases, the majority of which are publicly available (Hansen, 2006). However, these databases are collected and maintained by multiple state and local agencies that do not always coordinate their efforts, resulting in data that are sometimes redundant and impossible to combine.

In addition, access to the data is currently restricted and can be quite problematic for purposes other than internal use at the state education agency. That the data are not designed for and are

Current Data Collection Efforts in California

Of the more than 100 data collection efforts going on in the state, the following 11 databases are the core source for educational information, with the first 3 containing the most important data collection efforts for ELs:

1. California Standards Tests (CSTs) Data Collection—Part of the Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) Program

2. California English Language Development Test (CELDT) Data Collection

3. Language Census Data Collection (R-30)—Education Data Office

4. Academic Performance Index (API) Base and Growth Database

5. Adequate Yearly Progress Database (AYP)

6. California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE) Annual Apportionment Data Collection

7. California Basic Educational Data System (CBEDS) County/District Information Form (CDIF), Personnel Assignment Information Form (PAIF), and School Information Form (SIF)

8. Standardized Account Code Structure (SACS) Financial Reporting Software Data Collection

9. Free and Reduced-Price Meal Database (FRPM)

10. California Special Education Management Information System (CASEMIS) Database

11. Common Core of Data (CCD) Preparation File Database

not often made publicly available for policy analysis and other applications severely limits the usefulness of the data.

Despite these limitations, several data systems contain valuable information tracking the academic performance and instructional needs of ELs. For example, the Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) Program collects demographic and academic achievement information, the California English Language Development Test (CELDT) tracks language proficiency, and the Language Census Data Collection (R-30) collects information on ELs' instructional settings and services as well as ELs' primary language. Unfortunately, these different data sources cannot be linked at the student level; thus, it is only possible to do analysis for one type of information and at one point in time. This means that today California does not collect information that can be used to answer questions that demand a link between academic achievement information and language proficiency status, nor can California track ELs' academic progress over time. In short, the data systems' structure leaves many of the state's most pressing policy questions unaddressed.

A study commissioned in 2002 by the California Department of Finance on the state of California's data system found many problems with these decentralized, fragmented, and inconsistent data collection efforts (Hanson, 2006), including:

- Lack of a common system for naming and defining data across different offices in the CDE

- Limited and inconsistent validation of reported data

- Inconsistent units of analysis or time periods

- Excessive reliance on paper submissions of data

- Inconsistent data storage in different manners and locations

However, even if data collection efforts were more streamlined, made consistent across offices, and submitted electronically, one essential limitation would remain: the current structure is still only cross-sectional. It is not possible to track student or teacher progress statewide over time. This limitation means that today in California the state **cannot:**

- **Track English learners individually** from year to year to learn essential information such as the length of time an EL has been in the United States; his/her academic and language proficiency progress; his/her academic settings (e.g., bilingual, English immersion); his/her background to determine which types of ELs perform better on the state's standardized assessments; or his/her graduation date.

- **Track teachers individually** over time to link them to their individual students and also to their teacher education/preparation and professional development programs.

- **Provide teachers with student histories** and statewide assessment scores in order to be better informed about the students they teach.

- **Provide school principals with classroom performance histories** so they can better allocate teachers to classrooms, provide professional development, facilitate teacher collaboration, and exercise effective leadership.

- **Assess statewide which programs and services are most effective** in affecting ELs' English proficiency and academic outcomes.

Building a Useful Longitudinal Data System in California

By enacting Senate Bill 1453 to create CALPADS, and Senate Bill 1614 to create CALTIDES, California has already begun to take important steps toward building useful and powerful longitudinal data systems that will measure the progress of students and schools over time. CALPADS will follow students over time, allowing the system to track students' progress from year to year, even if students change schools or move to other districts. To meet this need, the California School Information System (CSIS) has assigned all students with an individual,

non-personally identifiable identification number. The California Department of Education will develop the full CALPADS to include this identifiable number for each student as well as academic achievement information, enrollment data, and other required data to meet NCLB reporting requirements (see "Goals of CAL-PADS" for details on SB 1453's requirements).

While CALPADS is thought of as a student information system, the proposed plan is to include unique teacher identifiers in this system as well, where each student ID will be linked to a teacher ID in each class and course. While California is working on developing CALPADS, concurrent efforts are focused on developing CALTIDES, a data system to integrate data on teachers and other certified employees across several existing information systems. The information provided by CALTIDES will help evaluate teacher preparation programs, track teacher mobility between schools and districts, and log the types of credentials and preparation options used by teachers in the state. This information is crucial for developing effective policies that will help ensure that California's educational system is able to help students meet the high levels of academic achievement set by the state and provide teachers with professional training shown to be effective.

The creation of CALPADS and CALTIDES provides an opportunity to address many of the issues of California's fragmented data systems. However, the exact list of information CALPADS will contain has not yet been finalized by the state. Important technological issues regarding privacy of the student-identified data are currently being considered. For example, maintaining the confidentiality of student information presents a large concern for parents, schools, districts, and the state legislature (Hamilton, 2002). However, it is critical that discussions around CALPADS go beyond these issues and also center on what data elements should be included to best serve the needs of practitioners, policymakers, and researchers. Indeed, while the main focus of CALPADS is to be responsive to the data requirements of NCLB, Senate Bill 1453 also outlines an important goal of the data system as "provid[ing] a better means of evaluating educational progress

and investments over time." Unfortunately, the California Department of Finance has called for CALPADS to include only the elements necessary to fulfill the NCLB requirements. This would severely limit the value of such a powerful and expansive data system, as longitudinal data systems create the power to monitor student progress, understand factors that promote or impede that progress, delineate the effectiveness of specific strategies and interventions, and track local school improvement.

To this end, state officials working to create CALPADS should consider the following recommendations for the structure and elements of a longitudinal data system that would greatly expand our understanding and ongoing assessment of the academic progress and instructional needs of ELs in California.

Goals of CALPADS

SB 1453 specifies that CALPADS should accomplish the following goals:

- Create an individual, non-personally identifiable student identification number for all students

- Establish a data system that includes statewide assessment data, enrollment data, and other required data to meet NCLB reporting requirements

- Maintain longitudinal pupil achievement data on the Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) program, the California High School Exit Examination (CAHSEE), and the California English Language Development Test (CELDT)

- Provide school districts and CDE with the necessary data to comply with NCLB reporting requirements

- Provide a better means of evaluating educational progress and investments over time

- Provide local education agencies with information that can be used to improve pupil achievement

- Provide an efficient, flexible, and secure means of maintaining longitudinal statewide pupil level data

Recommendation #1: Link Student Information From Year to Year

Thanks to the availability of longitudinally linked information in other states, educational research has been transformed during the past decade. Researchers have continuously sought to measure the causal effects of different educational programs or policies on the academic progress of students. While studies use different empirical models and methods to measure student academic growth, all of them rely on the availability of student information that is linked over time. If the academic progress of individual students cannot be tracked from year to year, researchers and policymakers are limited in their capacity to measure academic progress for a given cohort of students. As Loeb, Beteille, and Pérez (2008) discuss, trying to infer the academic progress of individual students by looking at snapshots of different cohorts at various points in time is problematic, since cohorts are likely to vary in measurable and immeasurable ways.

Moreover, the availability of this type of data is not only changing how educational research is done, but also how school accountability is implemented. In November 2005, Secretary Margaret Spellings invited states to submit proposals to use a growth-based accountability system, instead of the fixed target model outlined in NCLB. In order to qualify, the state needed a data system capable of measuring individual student progress over time. To date, eight states have been approved to participate in the pilot of this growth model accountability system.

Other states' development of longitudinal data systems that link individual student information over time shows that this is also possible in California. In fact, according to an *Education Week* (2006) study of states' data and technology capacity, 39 states have student-identified longitudinal systems that can track individual demographic and assessment data over time as the student moves within the state. Given that states such as New York and Texas, with large and diverse student populations similar to California, have developed longitudinally linked, individually identifiable student databases, it is clear that it is not an impossible task for California.

Creating a longitudinally linked, individually identifiable student database does not solve all the problems of tracking individual student growth over time. California's state assessments—the California Standards Test (CSTs)—are not vertically aligned and therefore do not allow growth to be calculated for individual students from year to year. However, while this lack of vertical alignment does present one barrier to tracking individual progress over time, the benefits of an individually identified system that can track students over time for a variety of other purposes remains clear. We urge the state to continue to develop (and fund) CALPADS in order for this system to be fully operational by the 2009–2010 school year.

Recommendation #2: Link Teacher Information From Year to Year

The limitations presented by not tracking individual students over time are compounded by not being able to track individual teachers over time. Without individual teacher data linked over time, we do not have the ability to understand when teachers leave certain schools or leave the teaching profession. We also are not able to evaluate the effects of curriculum, instructional programs, professional development programs, or different forms of teacher preparation on the outcomes of English learners.

California currently collects an impressive array of teacher information. The Personnel Assignment Information Form (PAIF) from the California Basic Educational Data System (CBEDS) accounts for all certified staff in the state; their major functions (e.g., the type of classes taught, the type of administrative services provided) in a given school or district; and the relative amount of time spent on a particular activity. The PAIF also provides information on personnel characteristics, such as an individual's gender, experience in education, highest educational degree obtained, and credential status. In addition, the PAIF provides information on the courses schools offer, such as course enrollments and whether or not the course satisfies the state college's admittance requirement. Yet, this information is only for a given point in time. Teachers cannot be

tracked from year to year, making it impossible to know something as basic as the number of years a given teacher has been at a given school.

Given the existing data collected from teachers across the state and given the importance of being able to understand the teacher workforce over time, we urge the state to continue to develop and fund CALTIDES in order for this system to be fully operational by the 2009–2010 school year.

Recommendation #3: Link Student and Teacher Information

Combining the power of a longitudinal system that tracks individual teachers and students over time with the power of linking individual students with their teachers would substantially enhance the capacity to evaluate ELs' programs and progress. The link between individual teachers and students would strengthen attempts to understand the effects of specific resources (such as class size or instructional aides) on students, as it is crucial to be able to match actual classroom resources to individual students and the academic outcomes they produce.

Linking teacher information to the students they teach is critical to evaluating the impact of different curricula, instructional settings, or specially designated programs for ELs. Without linking teachers to students in CALPADS and CALTIDES, we can only show the *average* gains of students in each school, making it impossible to observe effects of interventions on *different* students and *different* teachers. For example, we may think that a given curriculum is more helpful for some English learners who are new to the country. Or we may want to capture the effects of a specific professional development program that only some of the teachers attended within a grade or within a school. We might want to test our belief that teachers with certain educational experiences will benefit more from a given intervention than other teachers. Or we may wonder whether one type of instructional setting for ELs is better suited to a unique type of student's needs than another. Unless we can follow individual students over time and link them to teachers, we will not be able to assess these effects accurately for teachers and students with different characteristics.

The linkage of separate student-level and teacher-level data systems does present several logistical and political difficulties. However, six states (Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Ohio, and Tennessee) have already been able to develop advanced data systems that link student and teacher information over time (Editorial Projects in Education Research Center, 2006). Additionally, since language in the legislation to create individually identified teacher IDs explicitly prohibits the use of information in CALTIDES for purposes of pay changes, evaluation of individual or groups of teachers, promotion, or sanctions, the political difficulties that often present themselves when dealing with linking student and teacher data may have been mitigated.

In short, knowing that initial discussions at the state level have considered linking CALPADS and CALTIDES, we urge that the state pursue this linkage and ensure coordination between the developers of both data systems.

Recommendation #4: Link Data From Existing Sources

One large problem that emerges from the current fragmented data system is an inability to link information across data collection efforts, which greatly limits the power of data already collected in the state. By linking these different sources of data, we will be able to obtain a better understanding of student and teacher progress as well as a better understanding of the effects of various interventions designed for these students and teachers.

Current plans for CALPADS include the ability to link the CSTs and CELDT test results, which will be extremely helpful in understanding both ELs' language skills development and academic knowledge. With the data the state currently collects, researchers, policymakers, and other interested stakeholders cannot link an individual EL's academic score on the CSTs to his/her language proficiency score on the CELDT, making it very difficult to understand how ELs are progressing in terms of both English fluency and academic knowledge. Beyond the specific state assessment results, the data system should also be able to link other data the state already collects.

In short, we strongly urge the state to maintain current plans to link the CST and CELDT data when developing the new CALPADS and to expand the linkages for individual student data to the other existing data sources on students' academic progress, including:

- STAR assessment results, which include the CST results in all subjects, the California Achievement Test Sixth Edition (CAT/6), the Standards-Based Tests in Spanish (STS), the California Alternate Performance Assessment (CAPA), and the California Modified Assessment (CMA)

- The California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE) results

- The CELDT, which includes both the initial assessment of a student's English proficiency, as well as the annual assessment to track an EL's progress toward proficiency

Looking beyond the various measures of students' academic progress, the new data system should also link measures of family background and student characteristics to student achievement outcomes in order to isolate the family, school, and community impact on students' academic progress. To this end, CALPADS should be the repository of the following information already collected by the state:

- Student characteristics such as birth date, place of birth, time the student has been in the U.S. school system, primary language spoken at home (collected over time, as the home language may change for an EL over time), participation in the National School Lunch Program, date of redesignation as fluent English proficient (RFEP), participation in instructional services designed for ELs, expulsion and suspensions, participation in a Gifted and Talented program, type of A-G requirements (California's college preparation coursework) completed at the end of each school year, and date of graduation

- Mother and father's education (i.e., years of school completed), given that this is often considered a better measure of socioeconomic status than family income

Tracking these currently collected data can help provide a better understanding of the impact of mobility, as ELs are a highly mobile population (Hamilton, 2002). Additionally, linking these data has potential additional benefits beyond the K–12 education system in California, as institutions of higher education may be interested in continuing data collection around these elements, such as the A-G requirements completed, to better understand the EL population attending their colleges and universities in the state.

In short, ensuring that data *already collected* across the state are linked to individual students will greatly multiply the power of the data the state already collects to answer complex questions about the progress and needs of ELs. Further, this can be accomplished with only a small amount of effort from those already reporting data to the state.

Recommendation #5: Include New Data Variables in CALPADS to Improve Our Understanding of the Needs of ELs

In addition, we urge the state to consider the introduction of *new* elements to the new database that would assist the state in developing a better understanding of the needs of ELs. In order to provide a database that can more effectively evaluate the educational progress of the state's students over time, California would greatly benefit if CALPADS also contained new types of data that would specifically help to understand the academic progress and instructional needs of all students and specifically ELs.

In short, the state needs to focus on the factors that make a difference for EL achievement. We need to learn as much as possible from the state's vast experience with EL instruction. To accomplish this, the state needs to be able to identify success, to gain better understanding of what is driving the success, to learn from this success, and to disseminate this knowledge to others. To meet this goal, we need transparent and easy-to-access information about successful models of instruction, the particular mix of resources that

help meet the needs of all ELs, and the varying and changing characteristics of this student population.

Therefore, the data elements included in CALPADS should help address key EL issues such as:

■ **Understanding Redesignation:** How long does it take English learners to be redesignated as fluent English proficient (RFEP)? What are the factors that influence the redesignation process? Should students be reclassified as early as possible, or should we keep them in EL status for as long as possible? The state should consider revising California's current redesignation guideline criteria and collect additional redesignation information. Specifically, defining which ELs are within a "redesignatable" range on both statewide academic measures and English proficiency would standardize the criteria across districts. Both Parrish et al. (2006) and Linquanti (2001) found that redesignation procedures varied substantially from district to district, with much more support for ELs found in high-redesignation-rate districts. Clearer, empirically tested redesignation criteria that use specific cut points on state-wide EL and academic achievement measures incorporating an EL's time in California schools and grade level would help standardize redesignation rates as well as services offered to ELs. CALPADS should ensure the following data elements regarding redesignation are collected:

   – Exact date at which ELs are identified as English learners and exact date at which ELs are redesignated as fluent English speakers

   – Criteria and scores of the additional local measures used in the redesignation process

■ **Effective Instructional Practices for ELs:** Which instructional settings and services are more effective in meeting the academic and English development needs of ELs? Our experience indicates that in order to identify successful instructional settings and services in the education of these students, CALPADS should include:

   – Information on the curriculum adopted at the school and at the district level.

   – Information on both the *services* the EL is receiving (whether he or she is receiving English language development (ELD) support, specially designed academic instruction in English (SDAIE), or support in his or her primary language), as well as the type of *instructional setting* the EL is in when receiving those services. It is important to know whether the student is in a bilingual or English immersion program at the school. While the type of instructional setting is not uniform across schools—for example, a "bilingual" program in one school could look dramatically different from a bilingual program in another school—collecting this type of information over time for both current ELs and former ELs who have been redesignated would be a big step in better understanding the impact of different instructional settings on different ELs.

   – Information on the criteria and minimum performance scores (from the CST and the CELDT) used to determine the assignment to different instructional services (e.g., to primary language support, ELD, SDAIE), to bilingual instruction or English immersion, and to determine whether particular children should be transitioned to regular classrooms.

   – Information on participation in other specialized programs (e.g., after-school programs, dropout prevention programs, summer school) students are enrolled in outside of the traditional school day.

California can learn from other states that have already developed student-level data systems with specific variables relevant to tracking the progress of ELs. For example, the Texas data system contains variables that identify the participation of ELs in the English as a Second Language (ESL) program and in the Bilingual Education Program. In addition, Texas also tracks the instructional program in which the student is enrolled as well as how many days he or she was enrolled in that program during every

school year. This means that the Texas information system can identify successful instructional programs for the education of ELs.

Other pieces of information clearly exist beyond this list that would contribute to a better understanding of the instructional needs and the progress of ELs. For example, understanding effective instructional practices by maintaining and examining teacher logs, observational protocols, and surveys could help explore the effectiveness of ELD, English immersion, and bilingual programs (Porter, 2002; Rowan, Harrison, & Hayes, 2004). However, as these data go beyond the scope of what could be tracked in the CALPADS, we did not include this type of information in our recommendations.

- **Effective Teacher Training Programs for ELs:** What is the impact of participation in teacher training programs tailored to help teachers meet the needs of English learners? As previously mentioned in Recommendation #3, linking teacher information to the students they teach helps to evaluate the impact of different teacher professional development programs. Such information would help the state determine which type of professional development programs seem to be more effective in the education of ELs. This analysis could be disaggregated by certain students' characteristics. For example, we can evaluate which types of teacher training are more helpful when teachers educate ELs with a basic level of English proficiency, and which professional development programs are more effective when ELs have already mastered the English language.

- **Effective Academic and Language Development:** Do ELs have access to the core curriculum? In other words, does language status hamper access to grade-level instruction? How do EL course grades correlate to statewide assessments of their academic and language proficiency? What other factors affect ELs progress? In addition to the existing data elements already collected by the state, CALPADS should also include the following new data elements to help

understand ELs' academic and language development.

- Comprehensive information on the type of courses ELs are enrolled in at every grade.

- Course grades and/or grade point averages for high school students.

- Number of years of preschool attendance and the names/identities and descriptive information about other forms of out-of-home child care experiences.

- Prior schools attended (country, state/province, district, and campus) for children enrolling in California public schools after kindergarten, including last grade level completed. This includes both new California residents and students transferring from private schools.

- A list of all household members by sex, age, and relation, including all adults, school-age children, and other children who are living at home.

- Time spent at current residence.

Ultimately, by including the information outlined above in CALPADS, the state will be much better able to understand the complex nature of effective EL education.

Recommendation #6: Ensure the Capacity and Buy-In for Data Entry and Data Use at the Local Level

The creation of a database containing all of the information outlined above would be a tremendous step forward for California in better understanding the needs and progress of ELs. However, several current components of the data collected on ELs must be reviewed and reconsidered in order to make the longitudinal databases as useful as possible.

The data system should be designed to maximize usefulness to practitioners. This not only increases the usefulness of the system overall, it is also likely to promote the "buy-in" needed to ensure that local data are accurately and thoroughly reported. For example, Florida provides teachers with a desktop computer in each classroom to

access information on their individual students' performance, provides high school students access to a personalized data portal to monitor their own educational goals, and provides high schools with access to "feedback reports" with data on pre- and postgraduation indicators to learn about the overall progress of their students. Additionally, policymakers have access to customized performance profiles on students and schools in their districts. As a result, Florida is an example of how local stakeholders are able to derive local benefit and thereby see the purpose behind their data collection efforts, thus facilitating the creation of a high-quality data system.

To achieve this important level of buy-in at the local level, the state should review the reporting requirements for school districts to ensure that the system's design and implementation is enhancing the most effective use of these data. For example, school districts currently have to report counts of ELs and former ELs for the Language Census data collection at the end of February. However, CELDT results typically arrive at the end of January, which does not leave enough time for most districts to review the data in order to make a thoughtful decision about ELs' redesignation status. In addition, the system would be most useful if it were accessible in real time to teachers and administrators.

In addition, the state should consider policies and procedures for this new data system that would strike a reasonable balance between data confidentiality concerns and the need to allow access to data. If the state is to realize the full potential to inform policy and practice at all levels of the system, efforts must be made to increase the accessibility of extant data.

Ultimately, if we are asking the teachers, principals, and district staff to collect this information and report it to the state, these individuals must feel that they are getting something in return for their investment of time and resources. Unfortunately, the state budget passed in August 2007 did not include money for financial incentives to districts as requested by State Superintendent Jack O'Connell (CDE News Release, August 21, 2007). Therefore, we urge the legislature to consider funding in future budgets for districts to

collect and maintain quality data that are also of use to them. Ensuring benefits for reporting these data at the local level has the potential of substantially increasing the return to the state as a whole from these data collection efforts. Including local practitioners, policymakers, and other stakeholders vastly multiplies the pool of beneficiaries from such a system and the potential of the system to positively affect local, as well as state, policies, processes, and governance structures.

Conclusion

The time is ripe to develop a comprehensive information system to assist the state and its districts in assessing EL instructional and service alternatives. Building a data system to track students over time is a first big step, but that alone is not enough. With a careful eye both to the types of data collected for the system and to the development of a culture in which people from each individual school to the state legislature consider data essential to educational decision-making, California could begin an era of evidence- and research-based policies for ELs. The opportunity to develop the capacity needed to better understand what policies, procedures, and practices facilitate EL progress is here, and we urge California policymakers to seize it.

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