

Latino Language Minority Students in Indiana: Trends, Conditions, and Challenges

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INTRODUCTION

This Special Report surveys existing conditions for Latino¹ language minority students in Indiana’s schools and identifies the most significant problems and challenges for improving their learning. The report opens with an overview of recent demographic shifts in Indiana’s K-12 student population, and makes an important distinction between Indiana’s long-standing and newcomer Latino populations; the latter account for the dramatic increase in the language minority population.

Next, the report provides an overview of federal bilingual and English as a Second Language (ESL) education policy since the 1960s, and from there moves to a specific discussion of the environment Indiana currently provides for English language learners (ELLs). Rates of ELL student achievement and ELL per-student funding are reviewed, with a focus on the inadequacy of ESL training for Indiana teachers, and the high teacher-student ratio. Then the report introduces the challenges of properly assessing the language development of ELLs, and provides a detailed account of assessment tools and practices currently in use.

The report then considers the culturally competent psychological assessment of ELL students. School psychologists, especially, bear the responsibility of balancing formal with informal assessments that take into account the unique cultural characteristics of this student population. Similarly, special education teachers and counselors must grapple with the issue of disproportionality in special education

referrals. The report updates our knowledge of special education referrals amongst the Latino population, and provides important observations about how best to diagnose and refer these students.

This Special Report draws on a number of qualitative studies around the state of Indiana to illustrate the current social climate for Latino language minority students in our schools. Although research finds much that is positive occurring in schools, it also finds that schools often segregate language minority students for purposes of “effective instruction” or concentration of resources, and that such segregation may be counterproductive socially, as well as pedagogically. Research also finds that peer relations between language minority students and their English-speaking peers may be fraught with misunderstanding and ridicule, while teacher and administrator attitudes do little to communicate a sense of true belonging and community membership. Moreover, efforts at “parental involvement” often encounter obstacles because of problematic assumptions of teachers and administrators, including the sense that a “language barrier” is due exclusively to the parents’ lack of initiative or ability to learn English.

The report offers a brief account of the “funds of knowledge” approach of González, Moll, and Amanti (2005) as one potential reform which could meet many of the challenges of educating Latino language minority students. Finally, the report concludes with several recommendations, including innovations or resource investments in peer socialization, parental involvement, literacy

development, and cultural competency. The authors suggest that the broad goal of developing cultural competency amongst all Hoosiers means that providing language minority students with more educational opportunities is an investment in the education of everyone.

I. LANGUAGE MINORITY STUDENTS: DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS

In comparison with traditional immigrant states like California, Texas, and Illinois, the number of Limited English Proficient (LEP) students and their percentage of the public school enrollment in Indiana are small.² However, Indiana is experiencing a sudden demographic shift in secondary classrooms that parallels the national trend of increased enrollment of ELLs. From 1994-95 to 2004-05, while overall enrollment in Indiana schools declined 5 percent, the enrollment of ELLs grew by 408 percent—the third fastest growth rate in the U.S. (National Clearinghouse on English Language Acquisition, 2006). At approximately 73 percent, or 44,823 overall students, Spanish-speaking Latinos make up the vast majority of the ELL student population in Indiana. After Spanish, the next top five minority languages are German (Amish), Mandarin (Sichuanese), Arabic, Korean, and Vietnamese, ranging from 2,113 German speakers to 719 Vietnamese speakers (IDOE Language Minority and Migrant Programs, 2007). Moreover, the percentage of students within the Spanish-speaking language minority group who are categorized as (LEP), and therefore in greater need of services, is 76 percent, a much higher percentage of LEPs than other language minority students (e.g., 42 percent for Chinese, or 52 percent for Korean).

Latinos, of course, have long lived in Indiana, especially in the northwestern part of the state, yet the Latino student population enrolled in Indiana schools has steadily increased over the past ten years. In the school year 2006-07, Hispanic students accounted for 6 percent of Indiana's total school enrollment (63,989

of the total 1,045,702) (IDOE, 2007a). And while the overall enrollment of Latino students in state schools doubled from 1998 through 2005, the percentage of those Latino students who tested as LEP nearly quadrupled over the same period (West, 2006, p. 117). Because Latinos currently comprise such a high percentage of the ELL student body, it is critical to take a closer look at the schooling contexts of the newcomer Indiana Latino student population within a broader examination of language minority and immigrant student issues.

Latino Newcomer Demographics

While the vast majority of Latino newcomers are Mexican in origin, immigrants from Central American countries like Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Honduras appear to make up the next largest contingent of Latino newcomers. While Mexicans are most likely to have immigrated for economic reasons, Central Americans are perhaps equally likely to have come to the U.S. to avoid political persecution and the ravages of civil war. Meanwhile, for those immigrant children who arrive here already at school age, there may be quite a variety of levels of schooling.

Because of economic privation, students from small villages who are older than six or seven may have received only one or two years of primary schooling before dropping out. Students from towns and cities are more likely to have been enrolled in schools right up to the point that they came to the U.S. This variety of school experience makes it very important for school authorities to ascertain each child's level of schooling. Mexican schools are strong in their instruction of certain subjects, especially math, and, in some cases, natural science. Children with prior schooling experiences in Mexico tend to have content knowledge in many areas, but it's easy to confuse children's struggles in school because of language difference with their struggles in the content area.

Aside from differences of national origin, most Latin American immigrants are culturally mestizo, that is, Spanish-dominant speakers who are the product of a long history of racial and ethnic mixing, from the Spanish colonial period onward. Yet some may, in fact, have an indigenous identity as well, speaking a language whose roots go back to before the Spanish conquest. The number of indigenous Latin Americans in Indiana is quite small, probably around 1,000. They are most likely of Mayan or Triqui heritage, from South-Central Mexico and Guatemala.

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Up until the 1980s or so, it was rather uncommon for male migrant workers to bring their wives and families with them to the United States. Now, men are more likely to bring their families, especially after an initial period of settlement; women may come as individuals, or with their children. In Indiana, it is not uncommon to find women who migrate here with their children, having left a husband behind in Illinois, Texas, or California, often because the large cities there have been deemed too unsafe to raise children. Greater knowledge of students' particular family situations can help teachers better understand both the needs and the strengths that these children bring to the school.

OVERVIEW OF NATIONAL BILINGUAL/ESL POLICY

English as a Second Language and bilingual education programs often operate on the premise that language minority students who are learning the dominant language of a society are better able to acquire second language skills in a specialized educational environment, which is frequently “sheltered” or kept separate from the rest of the school. National education policy from the late 1960s up to the 1980s largely reflected the view that the separation of language minority students from the mainstream student population was educationally beneficial.

However, while national policy has often focused on the supposed benefits of separation for language minority students, it has justified this separation by highlighting the limited English proficiency of these students rather than their competency in their own mother tongue. For example, in 1967 the American Bilingual Education Act (BEA), an amendment to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, was introduced by Texas Senator Ralph Yarborough to provide funds for bilingual programs in public schools. In its initial form, the Act focused explicitly on Spanish-speaking children, but it was changed to apply to “children of limited English-speaking ability” before passage in 1968. This modest change actually transformed the focus of the Act into a remedial or compensatory program rather than an additive one. The perception of eligible children as deficient was further reinforced by the provision that stated grantee schools would need to have a high concentration of students from low-income families.

Through the 1970s, the Bilingual Education Act was revised numerous times. For example, after the 1974 *Lau v. Nichols* case,³ school districts across the country adopted systematic approaches, methods, and procedures for identifying and servicing language minority students; such approaches generally favored native language or bilingual instruction, which necessitated the separation of language minority students from the mainstream

student population for at least part of the school day. Again, like the original BEA, the 1974 amendments reinforced a policy focus on English language development rather than dual language development.

National education policy has changed considerably since the 1974 *Lau v. Nichols* decision. During the 1980s there was a backlash against bilingual educational programs. As part of an effort to reduce federal monitoring of educational services, under President Reagan, the Secretary of Education withdrew the 1980 regulations that defined compliance with bilingual educational policy. Further, federal funding for bilingual programs was cut by 47 percent between 1980 and 1988.

These discouraging test results can be attributed to the fact that very few Indiana teachers are adequately trained to serve the burgeoning ELL population.

This coincided with a dramatic increase in the number of language-minority students. Amendments to the BEA during the 1980s continued to reinforce a focus on English-only programs. More recently, the BEA expired in 2002 and was not renewed as part of the No Child Left Behind “school reforms.” Under No Child Left Behind, federal funds continue to support the education of English language learners, but the money supports different programs from those funded under the BEA.

Thus, despite the distinct pedagogical benefits of bilingual education that have been documented overwhelmingly in the research literature,⁴ the rapid teaching of English through full-immersion now takes precedence. In addition, language

minority students are now required to take annual English-language assessments, and schools are held accountable for their annual yearly progress.

STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT AND TEACHER TRAINING

In Indiana, as in the rest of the nation, traditional, native English-speaking students in the same classrooms with ELLs constitute the new mainstream learning environment of the 21st century. Yet, across the country, language minority students are underachieving in schools. For example, in the reading portion of the 2005 National Assessment for Educational Progress, 71 percent of ELL students scored Below Basic. Combined with the 25 percent who scored at the Basic level, this means that 96 percent of ELL students across the country are unable to read at levels of Proficient or Above (Perie, Grigg, & Donahue, 2005). Thirty-one percent of ELL students fail to complete high school, and among those who reported difficulty speaking English, only 18 percent are likely to complete high school (Short & Fitzsimmons, 2006).

Latino English language learners, who comprise the largest group of ELL students nationwide, have the lowest graduation rate of all students (Ruiz-de-Velasco & Fix, 2000). Of every 100 Latino students, many of whom are designated ELL, only 61 will graduate high school; of those who graduate, 31 will complete some postsecondary education, and only 10 will graduate with a bachelor’s degree (Venezia, Callan, Finney, Kirst, & Usdan, 2005).⁵

For too many ELL students, graduation from high school, let alone college, remains out of reach. This dire national picture is replicated at the state level in Indiana. ELL students in Indiana, of which approximately 73 percent speak Spanish and 15 percent speak Asian languages, are not achieving English language proficiency and are at risk for academic failure. The Indiana state goal is for all students to score at or above the

passing level on the Indiana Statewide Testing for Educational Progress-Plus (ISTEP+), the state's standards-based test of specific skills defined for each grade. On the 2006 ISTEP+, the average passing rate for the state for the English/Language Arts portion was 67 percent for 9th grade and 66 percent for 10th grade.

These discouraging test results can be attributed to the fact that very few Indiana teachers are adequately trained to serve the burgeoning ELL population. In 2002-03, Indiana had only 379 state-certified ESL teachers. This amounts to one ESL teacher for every 59 LEP students—barely half the teacher-to-student ratio recommended by the Indiana Division of Professional Standards. Clearly, Indiana needs to better prepare and recruit teachers for the new mainstream of students. To a certain degree, Indiana's General Assembly has recognized this need, but the need has often grown faster than the allotted resources. In 1999-2000, when Indiana had far fewer LEP students, the General Assembly funded the "Non-English Speaking Program" at a per-LEP student allocation rate of \$75 (see Table 1). Such funds

were to be used for materials, staff, or training to help LEP students become English language proficient. In 2005, the General Assembly re-funded the program at the same level, but increases in the LEP population reduced the average allocation per eligible student to \$19.54 (IDOE, 2007d).

In the spring of 2007, however, the General Assembly approved a significant increase in funding for the Non-English Speaking Program. The categorical amount of \$700,000 was increased to \$6,929,246 for each year of two consecutive years. This increase in funding is accompanied by a higher level of accountability (IDOE, 2007b). As the marked increase in state funds indicates, there is an enormous and immediate need to attend to the growing LEP student population in the state of Indiana. Further, language minority student enrollment figures indicate that this need will grow in the coming years; indeed, for the 2006-07 school year, the highest totals for language minority student enrollments were in the kindergarten through fourth grades (IDOE Language Minority and Migrant Programs, 2007).

Along with the sudden, explosive growth of the number of ELL students in districts that have never had to serve them, Indiana schools have seen aggressive new accountability measures designed to ensure that ELL students quickly become proficient in academic English language and literacy skills and achieve up to state academic standards. Indiana secondary teachers face a particular challenge in teaching ELL secondary students who enter Indiana's educational system in middle or high school, after the intensive focus on language and literacy development in the elementary grades has ceased. These teachers are not trained to teach literacy skills to Limited English Proficient adolescents who must also concurrently master complex course content (Rueda & Garcia, 2001). Moreover, as the following sections discuss, besides providing teachers trained in working with ELL students, Indiana must also meet the challenges of adequately assessing and appropriately placing language minority students in academic environments that will best promote excellence in learning for this growing student population.

TABLE 1. The State-funded Non-English Speaking Program*

	School Year 1999-00	School Year 2000-01	School Year 2001-02	School Year 2002-03	School Year 2003-04	School Year 2004-05	School Year 2005-06	School Year 2006-07
# OF LEP STUDENTS (LEP count indicated for allocation is based on prior school year data.)	9,114	13,079	17,194	20,351	22,584	28,741	31,951	35,816
# OF SCHOOL CORPS RECEIVING FUNDS ^a	207	219	231	218	217	222	225	235
STATE ALLOCATION	\$700,000	\$700,000	\$700,000	\$651,000 ^b	\$700,000	\$700,000	\$700,000	\$700,000
PER PUPIL ALLOCATION	\$75.00	\$53.58	\$40.71	\$31.99	\$30.99	\$24.36	\$21.91	\$19.54

* These monies are used to supplement the education of Indiana Limited English Proficient (LEP) students.

^a LEP count indicated for allocation is based on prior school year data.

^b As a result of the Governor O'Bannon's Deficit Management Plan, the annual state allocation was reduced by 7%.

Source: The Indiana Department of Education, Division of Language Minority and Migrant Programs, <http://www.doe.state.in.us/lmmp/nonenglishspeakingprogram.html>. Accessed 5/17/07.

II. CHALLENGES OF ASSESSMENT

ASSESSING LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY

Title III of the No Child Left Behind Act requires the annual English proficiency assessment of all LEP students in grades K-12 to ensure that LEP students are making progress in learning English and attaining English proficiency. The English language proficiency assessment must be linked to English Language Proficiency (ELP) Standards and must measure both conversational and academic English ability in the domains of listening, speaking, reading, writing, and comprehension. All grades, K-12, must be tested in all language domains annually. The English proficiency assessment is administered each spring, and overall proficiency results are utilized for state and federal reporting.

Prior to the implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act, Indiana school corporations had the flexibility to locally select from three state-approved instruments (Woodcock-Muñoz Language Survey, Language Assessment Scales [LAS], and the Idea Proficiency Test [IPT]) for annual English proficiency assessment. Over the past few years, a shift has occurred to mandate one state-approved instrument for consistent use by all school corporations statewide. This change ensures that a uniform, standards-based measure of progress is available for all LEP students and school corporations.

The process of selecting and implementing the new English proficiency assessment began in the 2003-04 school year with Indiana's participation in an 18-state consortium through the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO). This group developed a new English proficiency assessment, English Language Development Assessment (ELDA). ELDA was field tested by Indiana school corporations in spring 2004 and spring 2005. At that time, only grades 3-12 of the ELDA assessment were available and the K-2 and Placement Test versions were under development. In fall 2005, in

accordance with state law, the Indiana Department of Education entered into the Request for Proposal (RFP) process, a formalized procurement method, to secure operations for its statewide English proficiency assessment. After this competitive bidding process, ELDA was dropped, and the LAS Links English Proficiency Assessment from CTB/McGraw-Hill was selected for statewide implementation. LAS Links was selected for its strong alignment to Indiana's ELP Standards, inclusion of all language domains, ability for use to determine student exit from services, scoring and reporting options, and the availability of a Placement Test version. The LAS Links was administered statewide for the first time in spring 2006, and it is now administered each spring to measure student progress and determine eligibility for exiting from services.

While it is important to measure individual student progress, several challenges exist at the state and local level in meeting this English proficiency assessment requirement. For example, states must establish annual expected gains for student performance on the English proficiency assessment. Establishing these annual expected gains is important because school corporations are held accountable to the Indiana Department of Education for annual measurable achievement objectives (AMAOs) based on student performance. However, establishing these annual expected gains is especially challenging immediately after developing a new assessment tool because school corporations must use the new assessment several years before longitudinal data on student performance are available.

After the second administration of LAS Links in spring 2007, the Indiana Department of Education will analyze two years of data to determine appropriate expectations for annual growth in proficiency on this assessment. These expected growth targets on LAS Links are the basis of the first two AMAO components, which measure annual increases in the number and percentage of LEP students making progress in learning English, as well as annual increases in the number and percentage of LEP students attaining English proficiency.

The final AMAO component which focuses on the adequate yearly progress (AYP) for LEP students under Title I⁶ is based on student performance on the academic assessment Indiana Statewide Testing for Educational Progress Plus (ISTEP+). The Indiana Department of Education holds school corporations to annual measurable achievement objectives (AMAOs) based on LEP student performance. If any of the three AMAO components are not met, the student and school corporation are considered to have not met the AMAOs. If a school corporation receiving Title III funds does not meet the AMAOs for two consecutive years, the development of an improvement plan specifically addressing the factors contributing to failure is required. If AMAOs are not met for four consecutive years, the modification of curriculum, program, and method of language education instruction is required. The state may also require the replacement of staff and, ultimately, may even severely curtail a school's funding.

Additional logistical challenges to the administration of English proficiency assessment exist at the local level. Due to the nature of the assessment, the speaking domain is individually administered and scored by the test examiner using established rubrics. Individual administration of the speaking domain takes 20-30 minutes per student, and can thus be very time-consuming, especially for school corporations with large numbers of LEP students. The domains of listening, reading, and writing may be group administered; however, groups should be kept fairly small and be organized by level of English proficiency, if possible. The test examiner must be fluent in English and must also be familiar with test content and scoring rubrics. School corporations have local discretion in identifying staff to serve as test examiners, and state provided training is conducted annually. This on-going training is very important in ensuring that test administration occurs in a standardized and uniform manner. School corporations are becoming more familiar with the test administration process, as well as the instructional data yielded from the results.

Criteria for Defining Fluent English Proficiency

LAS Links English proficiency results are used not only to determine annual growth, but also as the criteria for exit from services and transition to Fluent English Proficient (FEP) status. Students at Levels 1-4 are considered LEP. The transition from limited English proficiency to fluent English proficiency is marked by the first overall score of Level 5 on the LAS Links assessment, at which time the student is exited from daily English language development services and reclassified to FEP status for reporting. At this time, informal monitoring begins. The student must again score at an overall Level 5 on the next LAS Links administration the following school year in order to begin the formal two-year monitoring period. Throughout the two-year period of formal monitoring, the performance of former LEP students on the ISTEP+ academic assessment continues to count in the LEP subgroup for adequate yearly progress (AYP) calculations under Title I of the No Child Left Behind Act.

Also during this time, former LEP students have access to language development services if needed. Monitoring must ensure that former LEP students who have been reclassified as FEP are able to participate meaningfully in the regular educational program, which means that these students are able to perform on-par with their native English-speaking peers in the regular educational program, are able to have full access to all aspects of the school's mainstream curriculum and participate successfully without the use of simplified English materials, and have access to language instruction services if needed.

During this two-year period, school corporations must establish a process for monitoring the academic performance of former LEP students. Designated instructional staff (such as ESL staff or a guidance counselor) must formally monitor the student's academic performance regularly. The information must be doc-

umented in the student's records. If monitoring shows that the student is falling behind in academic performance and/or English language skills, the situation must be assessed and analyzed, and arrangements should be made to provide the student with appropriate assistance. Access to English language instruction services such as English as a Second Language must be made available if the student needs assistance. The district must collect data on the academic performance of former LEP students who have been reclassified as FEP for the duration of the two-year period. The sources of information collected may include: records on length of time from entry to transition and/or exit from program; performance on standardized achievement tests; grades in content area classes; English oral, reading, and written skills as demonstrated by grades in language development courses; grade point averages (GPAs); teacher observations; parent observations and/or feedback; meeting promotion and graduation requirements; and graduation rates.

Implementing a Statewide English Proficiency Assessment

The LAS Links Placement Test was implemented for the first time in summer 2006. The Placement Test is administered only to newly enrolling students who indicate a native language other than English on the Home Language Survey (HLS). Upon enrollment, school corporations utilize the Home Language Survey to identify students as being in a language minority. The HLS contains the following questions:

- What is the native language of the student?
- What language(s) are spoken most often by the student?
- What language(s) are spoken by the student in the home?

If parents indicate a student's native language to be other than English on the HLS, the Placement Test version of the English proficiency assessment is admin-

istered. This process for identifying which students should be given the English proficiency assessment may be challenging for local school corporations and parents. In some cases, parents do not understand that the intent of the HLS is to identify students in need of English language development services. Parents may indicate knowledge of another language when, in actuality, the child's native language is English, or the child is bilingual.

Once the English proficiency assessment has been administered, parents must be informed of the result. This must occur within thirty days of enrollment at the beginning of the school year or within two weeks of late enrollment during the school year. Parents have the right to decline English language development instructional services upon notification of the result of the English proficiency assessment, however, the assessment itself is required. The LAS Links Placement Test is locally administered and scored. Placement Test data are managed locally and are used only to identify students as Limited English Proficient for placement in an English language development program.

Since implementing the Placement Test, a few challenges have been identified. The Placement Test is not designed to provide a Level 1-5 proficiency level score. Instead, it rates students' performance as Not Proficient (NP), Approaching Proficient (AP), or Proficient (P). Teachers need to know the level of proficiency for each student upon enrollment in order to identify appropriate instruction. Thus, an informal conversion has been developed: the Placement Test performance levels are informally correlated to a Level 1-5, with NP roughly equivalent to a Level 1 or 2, AP roughly equivalent to a Level 3 or 4, and P equivalent to a Level 5. This is usually sufficient to adequately place a student in English development services until more data on student performance are available from the results of the spring administration of the summative LAS Links.

It is very challenging to administer LAS Links tests to Level 1 (Beginner, students. Many Beginner students are

unable to complete portions of the assessment and receive the Lowest Obtainable Scale Score (LOSS) for that section. This results in students receiving a lower overall proficiency score. Test examiners are instructed to encourage students to attempt items in each section of the assessment, and the test directions may be repeated verbatim in English; however, no translation of test directions or content is permitted.

Implementation of the Placement Test for students entering kindergarten and first grade has also been challenging. As required, the Placement Test contains all domains: speaking, listening, reading, writing, and comprehension. It is very difficult for K-1 students to demonstrate proficiency in these areas, especially reading and writing, since they have not yet learned these skills. As with all K-1 students, reading and writing skills will develop and are not necessarily evident at the beginning of the school year. This has resulted in an over-identification of K-1 students at Level 1, and consequently, school corporations have larger numbers of students identified for English language development services.

Aligning English Proficiency Assessment with Provision of Instructional Services

LAS Links is becoming an integrated component of the standards, instruction (provision of services), and assessment process at the state and local level. This standards-based assessment provides data that drive English language development instruction.

The LAS Links English proficiency assessment is linked to Indiana's English Language Proficiency (ELP) Standards. The ELP Standards address the development and attainment of English language proficiency by language minority students in grades K-12; address the domains of listening, speaking, reading, writing, and comprehension; and are linked to the academic content achievement standards. The ELP Standards

include indicators at each level of English proficiency, from Level 1 (Beginner) to Level 5 (Fluent), that describe what students at each level should know and be able to do. They serve as a classroom tool for informing instruction, aligning curriculum between English language development services and the general education program, and assisting teachers in evaluating Limited English Proficient students' progress in their attainment of English proficiency. Progress in attainment of English proficiency is formally assessed each spring on the LAS Links, so it is important that the ELP Standards are incorporated into instruction at the local level.

The data yielded from LAS Links are critical to identifying appropriate services for each student. The data outlined in students' score reports are utilized to evaluate the effectiveness of the English language development services that students are receiving and to determine exit from services. Score reports by class, grade, building, and corporation also provide important aggregate and comparative data on progress in, and attainment of, English proficiency. Score reports from the spring administration are available at the end of each school year. This allows school corporations to analyze the results and make placement decisions for the following school year.

With the second administration of LAS Links in spring 2007, changes have been made to improve the test administration process. Barcode labels were provided to decrease the need for bubbling student demographic information, ensure the quality of student data, and increase the ability to analyze longitudinal student data. Ordering of test materials was also improved by providing an online ordering system. This allowed school corporations to specify the quantity of materials needed and to identify the appropriate contact person to receive materials.

In future years, work will continue in the areas of aligning ELP standards to instruction; test administration training; analyzing test data to inform provision of instructional services; exploring the most appropriate format for assessing LEP students in kindergarten and first

grade; and identifying appropriate annual expected gains to measure student progress over time.

CULTURALLY COMPETENT PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT OF ELL STUDENTS

There are instances when individual ELL students struggle significantly in school, and school personnel may conclude that individual testing is necessary to rule out the presence of a disability, including learning disabilities. In these cases, teachers may refer individual students for testing by the school psychologist. The school psychologist's role is to gather evidence from multiple sources (teachers and parents) about a student's performance in various settings (in and out of school) by using formal and informal assessment tools.

As the population of ELL students in American schools increases, educators should take appropriate measures to ensure that these students receive the educational services they need. Culturally competent assessment practices can assist in collecting information and evaluating the needs of these students. Culturally competent assessment is more than the adequacy of tests to measure the abilities of culturally and linguistically diverse student populations; it is a comprehensive process involving the implementation of various strategies to identify and remedy educational conditions that systematically disadvantage particular student groups (Skiba, Knesting, & Bush, 2002).

School psychologists can develop skills in culturally competent assessment by becoming familiar with background knowledge of their students' community, understanding the group's unique abilities, and using this information in the collection and interpretation of assessment data. In addition, careful consideration of the limitations and applicability of traditional assessment tools to evaluate the needs and abilities of ELL students is essential. Therefore, adjusting the procedures for collecting and inter-

preting data is an important consideration. ELL students should be assessed using a multifaceted evaluation, and no one assessment procedure should determine eligibility for receiving special education services in school. Finally, various stakeholders should be included in the assessment process. Their various perspectives help to increase the validity of assessment, eligibility, and recommendation decisions.

Assessment of ELL students can be challenging. Due to their limited English proficiency, ELL students should be assessed cautiously when using traditional assessments created for their monolingual peers. Many assessment instruments rely heavily on language and, as cultural products, the validity of these instruments is influenced by a child's level of acculturation. If the level of acculturation is not taken into consideration, results of these assessments may not reflect the child's true abilities. Furthermore, scores on these assessments can lead to inappropriate expectations or misdiagnoses. Therefore, in identifying the special needs of ELL students, school psychologists are encouraged to use an array of culturally competent strategies that accommodate the diverse needs and abilities of ELL students.

Assessment Considerations

Before a psychological evaluation can be initiated, preliminary steps should be implemented that account for the student's unique language abilities. School psychologists should first note that seemingly proficient verbal communication in English does not imply proficient comprehension in English. ELL students develop varying language abilities, as described by the concept of Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP).⁷ CALP refers to formal academic learning skills in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. As described above, language abilities should be evaluated for levels of proficiency prior to selecting assessment methods. When students have a native language other than English, language proficiency in the child's native language as well as in English should be assessed by a trained

professional. Both formal and informal procedures should be employed, helping students to transfer prior language knowledge to learning their new language. If students have low abilities in both languages, additional evaluation should be conducted to rule out possible problems in hearing, learning, or language usage.

Culturally competent assessment is more than the adequacy of tests to measure the abilities of culturally and linguistically diverse student populations; it is a comprehensive process involving the implementation of various strategies to identify and remedy educational conditions that systematically disadvantage particular student groups

When an ELL student is assessed in both their native language and English, a more accurate picture of the student's abilities can emerge. Interpreters trained in psychological measurement may be used during this stage. Interpreters must be familiar with evaluation procedures, specific test instruments, and administration guidelines. Interpreters who do not possess knowledge of the assessment process can undermine the validity of the results, and, therefore, they normally should not be used. Nevertheless, if an interpreter is the best option, school psychologists can assist and inform this individual prior to an assessment session.

Use of Formal Assessment Procedures

Both academic achievement and cognitive assessment batteries (e.g., WJ-III, WISC-IV) are examples of formal assessment procedures. These assessment procedures require knowledge of the norm sample used for standardizing the assessment. Moreover, assessments given to monolingual students should not be translated into the ELL student's native language. Tests that have been translated may not reflect the individual student's specific dialect and may not be representative in the norm sample. Translated tests lose standardization and produce results that often are inaccurate and invalid. Attention should be given to assessments that have been normed and standardized on the representative sample. The Wechsler's Intelligence Scale for Children-4th Edition in Spanish is an example of a formal cognitive assessment tool that includes a representative ELL norm-sample. Unfortunately, finding assessment tools with a representative norm-sample can be difficult. Nevertheless, these tools are important for making eligibility decisions.

When formal assessments are not available in the native language of the child, assessments may be modified and used informally to collect some additional information. School psychologists can use less verbally loaded sections of a formal assessment tool to capture abilities such as processing speed, working memory, or visual-spatial abilities. Assessment directions can be modified to allow for a teaching opportunity, where the school psychologists can teach the student the task and observe how the student responds. These techniques should be used with ELL students who have higher levels of English proficiency. The purpose of this recommendation is to help the student to comprehend the information in the assessment. Information collected from these assessment techniques should be used in combination with information gathered from other procedures. Otherwise, the information likely will not be valid and may be an

inaccurate reporting of the unique abilities and needs of the student.

Nonverbal tests are another form of formal assessments that have been used to assess ELL students. Given the seemingly lower need for verbal skills in English on this type of test, nonverbal assessments have been used to collect information about other cognitive processing abilities. However, nonverbal assessments require receptive and effective communication abilities, suggesting the use of these procedures only with children who have not achieved CALP in either their native language or English (Rhodes, Ochoa, & Ortiz, 2005).

An additional formal assessment tool is curriculum-based assessment and measurement (CBM). This technique involves monitoring and assessing curriculum skills to indicate mastery of content. CBM allows educators to monitor progress on specific tasks each week based on instructional content. Standardized probes can be given in the child's native language as well as in English.

Use of Informal Assessment Procedures

Assessments given to ELL students should allow them to demonstrate their

knowledge regardless of language ability. Additional assessment methods that can capture a wider array of abilities include classroom observations, checklists, and rating scales. These assessment techniques target individual student behaviors in the classroom, as well as collect information about the educational environment and social interactions of the classroom context. Parent interviews can also provide valuable information about the home environment and the student's previous education.

Both dynamic assessment and performance assessment procedures can be used informally to collect progress information on an ongoing basis. These assessments are used to capture the student's potential for learning. In addition, dynamic assessment asks the school psychologists to apply teaching opportunities to additional knowledge and skills the ELL student is able to learn. On the other hand, performance-based assessments collect information about the student's current knowledge and abilities. Portfolios are an example of performance-based assessments where students are evaluated on what they produce in the classroom over time.

Another informal strategy is to enlist the assistance of school staff, family members, and community partners in assessment procedures. School psychologists

are encouraged to work collaboratively with a multidisciplinary team to collect and interpret data from multiple sources. Individuals who have knowledge about ELL students and second-language acquisition, as well as speech pathologists, can be integral to the data collection process. Interpreters also can be used to assist in inviting ELL student parents for interviews, case conferences, and Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) proceedings. Assistance also might be sought from local community partners, such as social service agencies, to help in developing recommendations and providing additional resources that may be unavailable at the school level.

DISPROPORTIONALITY OF SPECIAL EDUCATION REFERRALS

Ethnic minority student disproportionality in special education has been a national concern for several decades. Since the issue was first documented (Dunn, 1968; Mercer, 1973), evidence of disproportionality has been found at the national, state, and district levels. Although disproportionality in special education can refer to either evidence of overrepresentation or under-representation, overrepresentation has received the most attention. Overrepresentation of

How is Disproportionality Measured?

- ⇒ Composition Index (CI): The composition index compares the representation of a given ethnic group in special education. This rate is then compared with the proportion that group represents in the population or in school enrollment.
 - ◆ Interpretation: At the national level, African American students account for 33 percent of students identified as mentally retarded, but only 17 percent of the student population.
- ⇒ Relative Risk Ratio (RRR): Compares the rate of special education for different service groups in order to generate a ratio describing the extent of disparity. When calculating a group's relative risk, you simply divide their risk index by the risk index selected for comparison, such as all other groups. Risk ratios of 1.0 indicate precise proportionality, risk ratios greater than one indicate overrepresentation in special education, while risk ratios less than one indicate under-representation. The question addressed by the risk ratio is: "How much more or less likely are students in a given racial/ethnic category than other students to be served in special education?"
 - ◆ Example: 2.64 percent of all African American students are identified as mentally disabled, as opposed to 1.18 percent of White students, meaning that African Americans are 2.36 times as likely as White students to be identified as mentally disabled.

ethnic minority students in special education raises concerns given that the trajectories of students in special education are often marked by school failure and low academic attainment (Fierros García & Conroy, 2002; Gottlieb, 1994). Overrepresentation in more restrictive environments such as separate classroom settings has also raised concerns, since it limits the contact that students with disabilities have with the mainstream curriculum and non-disabled peers.

Research has found the evidence of disproportionality in special education for Latino youth to be mixed. In 2000, the U.S. Department of Education reported that the overall enrollment of Latino students in special education appeared to be proportionate when compared to their enrollment in the general student population (U.S. Department of Education, 2003). However, in specific disability categories, evidence of overrepresentation was found in the learning disability, hearing impairment, and orthopedic

impairment categories. Early district-level studies in California and New York have also cited evidence of overrepresentation of Latino students in speech and language, mental retardation, and learning disabilities (Gottlieb & Alter, 1994; Wright & Santa Cruz, 1983). Further, more recent data at the national and Indiana state level reveal that in contrast to evidence of African American student overrepresentation in special education, Latino students are for the most part under-represented in special education (U.S. Department of Education, 2003).

Previous analyses of Indiana state level data for both the 2003-04 and 2004-05 school years revealed a pattern of underrepresentation of Latino students, both in overall special education service and in a number of specific categories (Skiba et al., 2004). Since 1998, the state of Indiana has been working to describe, understand, and address disproportionality in special education. For this report, we use data drawn from the state's Computer-

ized Data Project (CODA) database to explore disproportionality in Indiana's 314 school corporations and charter schools with available disability data for the 2004-05 school year. General enrollment data for each school corporation in the state, disaggregated by race, were obtained from the Indiana Department of Education Web site. Statewide analyses describe the extent of disproportionality for Latino students by disability category and placement type for the state of Indiana, using both the composition index and relative risk ratio.

Data for the extent and dispersion of disproportionality in the school corporations in Indiana during the 2004-05 school year were analyzed.⁸ In these analyses, we address the following questions:

1. What is the pattern of enrollment of Latino students in special education disability categories in the state of Indiana?
2. What is the pattern of Latino students served in special education placement categories?

Overall Special Education Service

Table 2 presents an overview of the patterns of special education service for Latino students across all disability categories. During the 2004-05 school year, 4,947 Latino students were served in special education programs across the state of Indiana. Nearly half (45 percent) of all Latino students served in special education were found to be identified for services in Learning Disability, followed by those served in Communication Disorder (24 percent). Analyses reveal underrepresentation in almost all disability categories, with the exception of Hearing Impairment, Orthopedic Impairment, Moderate Mental Disability, and Severely Mentally Disabled.

The disproportionality of Latino students served in special education is also apparent at the school corporation level. Across Indiana, there was evidence of underrepresentation of Latino students in 64 out of 314 school corporations and charter

TABLE 2. RRR and CI for Latino Students Served in Indiana's Special Education Categories, 2004-05

Disability Category	# of Latino Students	% of Students Represented	RRR
Overall Disability	4,947	3.2%	0.61
Learning Disability	2,259	3.6%	0.69
Communication Disorder	1,211	3.3%	0.62
Mild Mental Disability	578	3.4%	0.65
Moderate Mental Disability	174	4.7%	0.91
Emotional Disability Full Time	144	2.1%	0.39
Autism Spectrum Disorder	110	2.0%	0.37
Other Health Impairment	109	1.4%	0.26
Emotional Disability All Other	94	1.3%	0.25
Hearing Impairment	79	4.7%	0.90
Orthopedic Impairment	59	4.0%	0.77
Multiple Disabilities	45	2.9%	0.55
Severely Mentally Disabled	44	5.5%	1.08
Visual Impairment	25	3.4%	0.65
Traumatic Brain Injury	16	2.9%	0.55
Dual Sensory Impairment	0	0.0%	0.00
Statewide Latino Enrollment	52,408	5.1%	

Note: Column 3 represents the composition index, column 4 the relative risk ratio. The composition index can be interpreted by comparing it to the overall Latino enrollment rate at the bottom of the column.

schools with available disability data for the 2004-05 school year. In contrast, only 16 Indiana school corporations showed evidence of Latino overrepresentation in overall special education service.

Specific Disability Categories

Table 3 describes the number and proportion of Indiana school corporations with evidence of disproportionality in a particular disability category. In terms of overall service, there appears to be a greater issue of under- rather than overrepresentation at the corporation level. However, in other categories these data also reveal a large proportion (i.e., 10.8 percent) of corporations with overrepresentation in Communication Disorder. Overrepresentation was also more prevalent in both Moderate and Mild Mental Disability categories.

Placement in More or Less Restrictive Settings

Given the importance of service in the least restrictive setting for students in special education, it is also important to attend to the representation of Latino students in more or less restrictive educational settings. It should be noted that these analyses apply only to those students who are currently being served in special education. At the school corporation level in Indiana, analyses reveal patterns suggesting some tendency toward overrepresentation in more restrictive settings and under-representation in less restrictive settings. In both Resource Room and Separate Class settings, more corporations with overrepresentation were observed (13.7 percent), while a proportion of corporations with disproportionality in Regular Class settings showed evidence of under-representation (6 percent). These data show a similar, though less severe, pattern to that found for African American students with dis-

abilities in more or less restrictive educational settings (Skiba et al., in press) and suggest a need for further exploration of the placement of students of color in more or less restrictive settings.

What Factors May Influence Disproportionality?

As noted, research exploring the disproportionality of ethnic minority students in special education, including Latino students, has focused on overrepresentation. As a result, there is currently limited information bearing upon the under-representation of Latino students in special education. However, some discussions on the referral process and assessment procedures indicate, in part, uncertainty in making appropriate decisions identifying Latino students for special education. Mainly, these concerns arise in association with Latino students who are learning English as a new language. Issues

TABLE 3. Indiana School Corporations with Disproportionality in Disability Categories in 2004-05*

Disability Category	# of School Corps. w/ Overrepresentation	% of School Corps.	# of School Corps. w/ Under-representation	% of School Corps.
Overall Disability	16	5.1%	64	20.4%
Autism Spectrum Disorder	6	1.9%	11	3.5%
Communication Disorder	34	10.8%	15	4.8%
Dual Sensory Impairment	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Emotional Disability All Other	8	2.5%	15	4.8%
Emotional Disability Full Time	4	1.3%	14	4.5%
Hearing Impairment	10	3.2%	0	0.0%
Learning Disability	12	3.8%	24	7.6%
Mild Mental Disability	14	10.5%	18	5.7%
Moderate Mental Disability	10	7.6%	3	1.0%
Multiple Disabilities	6	4.5%	1	0.3%
Orthopedic Impairment	10	7.6%	2	0.6%
Other Health Impairment	4	5.7%	12	3.8%
Severely Mentally Disabled	3	1.0%	1	0.3%
Traumatic Brain Injury	2	0.6%	0	0.0%
Visual Impairment	3	1.0%	0	0.0%
Total School Corporations	314			

* Note: Disproportionality was based on evidence of a significant RRR. Under- and over-representation is assigned based on the level of RRR calculated for the designated disability category, that is above or below 1.0 proportionality level.

that have been associated with disproportionality of this group include:

- Dual characteristics, which are apparent in both students learning a new language and students with learning disabilities, are overlapping and causing uncertainty in the identification process (Ortiz, 1997).
- Definitions for LD and criteria used to identify students for special education may be unclear in addressing ELL students' language acquisition considerations and issues (Barrera, 2006).
- English Language Learner (ELL) services mediate special education eligibility decision-making for Latino students with academic concerns. In other words, Latino students may be considered for special education services only after ELL services are exhausted for the sake of careful consideration for language acquisition concerns, especially during early elementary grade levels (Artiles et al., 2002).

As a result of these uncertainties, educators may be inclined to be "lenient" towards Latino students due to language learning difficulties and, hence, less likely to refer these students to special education. Similarly, debates surrounding appropriate assessment of Latino students with language developmental needs are controversial and may further hinder the special education process.

Are There Implications of Latino Student Disproportionality?

Unlike the national attention on African American student overrepresentation in special education, under-representation has attracted much less attention. Nor is it even clear at this point in time whether under-representation is an issue that demands remediation. On the one hand, given the concerns about stigma that have historically followed students identified for special education, it might seem questionable to advocate for a greater proportion of Latino students to

be served in special education. On the other hand, special education has historically provided a service for students with more intensive learning and behavioral needs. Certainly the growth in the number of Latino students in the U.S., and especially their consistent record of academic underperformance, suggest that patterns of special education disproportionality need to be examined further. Currently, The Equity Project at Indiana University is conducting a qualitative investigation of special education services for Latino students. We hope that these efforts will yield a better understanding of the factors that influence the under-representation of Latino students in special education and eventually provide guidance on how to promote the best service to the Latino student community in Indiana's schools.

III. SCHOOL CLIMATES AND SOCIAL CONDITIONS FOR LATINO LANGUAGE MINORITY YOUTH

"Whose Kids Are These, Anyway?": Segregation or Effective Concentration of Resources?

An apparent lack of coherence and a similar deficiency in coordinating responsibility for integrating new students into Indiana classrooms has exacerbated two notable challenges: that of adequately assessing and appropriately placing language minority students, and, also, the lack of teachers trained to work with this student population. For example, in a recent study of responses to Latino newcomers in two Indiana communities (Levinson, Everitt, & Jones, 2007), researchers found that Latino students were primarily identified by their speaking of Spanish, and that the people who were therefore charged with the greatest responsibility for their education were language acquisition specialists.

Researchers in the study contacted numerous offices within the state Department of Education, as well as legislators and educators who had been involved in some way with efforts to

respond to the increased cultural diversity in the state. Almost without exception, their initial response was: "Have you talked to the folks in the Division of Language Minority and Migrant Programs (LMMP)?" This response at the state level seems often to be replicated in schools and school corporations across the state; researchers and teachers frequently hear that Latino newcomer students "belong" to ESL teachers. Certainly, having ESL teachers who consider Latino newcomer students as "theirs" can help foster a positive student-teacher relationship in a critically important academic area for these students. However, when ESL teachers are the only teachers in school who consider Latino newcomers "their" students, the experiences of Latino students, their relationships with school personnel, and their membership in a school community become reduced to the linguistic dimension. School personnel can work to counter this by actively expressing that all students "belong" to all teachers. Such an attitude can work to build a stronger sense of an integrated and coordinated school community that is beneficial for everyone.

While acknowledging the benefits of integrating language minority students into the school community, some educators believe that schools can better serve the needs of language minority students by giving them separated, specialized instruction. In addition, schools and school districts strapped for resources might decide that centralizing personnel trained to work with language minority students can better meet the range of needs of these students. For example, in the course of interviews conducted with administrators and teachers in two Indiana school corporations, respondents often referred to the challenges of utilizing limited personnel resources in a way that best suited the needs of a growing ESL student population. Many administrators and teachers expressed a belief that, given limited resources, their school could best meet the educational and social needs of language minority students by "assigning" them to particular school personnel, as well as grouping

these students together in academic, lunch, and extra-curricular activities.⁹

... when ESL teachers are the only teachers in school who consider Latino newcomers “their” students, the experiences of Latino students, their relationships with school personnel, and their membership in a school community become reduced to the linguistic dimension.

This practice is not atypical across the country, with some schools even creating separate areas of a school building or using a separate building designated for language minority students. Laurie Olsen studied one such school in the Bay area of California in her book, *Made in America—Immigrant Students in Our Public Schools* (1997). In response to a rapid increase in the number of language minority students, the “Madison High” school district opened the “Newcomer School” to serve LEP students in grades 7 through 12. When Olsen studied Madison High and the adjacent Newcomer School in the early 1990s, she found many educational benefits to separating newcomer students and concentrating often scarce resources and personnel trained to work with language minority students. However, Olsen also found that there were significant drawbacks to this separation, including social segregation between language minority and mainstream students, misunderstanding between groups of students, and outright hostility and racism toward newcomer students.

Peer Groups, Ridicule, and Intercultural Communication

Findings similar to Olsen’s were also apparent in recent interviews with administrators, teachers, and students in two Indiana school corporations.¹⁰ Especially clear in these interviews was the tension between intentionally grouping language minority students together so that they could help and support each other, and the sense that this grouping exacerbated social divisions already apparent in schools. Respondents repeatedly referred to the social segregation and isolation of newcomer Latino students, noting, for example, that Latino students tended to work only amongst one another in their mainstream classes. Among school staff, there was an overwhelming attitude that while this grouping limited the social integration of newcomer Latinos into the rest of the student body, it also gave newcomer Latino students a sense of security and “safety.” Because of the attitude that segregated school work has positive benefits, some teachers talked about actively encouraging newcomer Latinos to work and socialize together in exclusive groups.

Despite the fact that school personnel often saw social and academic benefits to grouping Latino students together, several administrators and teachers also noted that newcomer Latino students often seemed less animated during social periods such as lunch, as if they did not enjoy the time as much as other students did. Moreover, those students, administrators, and teachers interviewed almost invariably mentioned the cafeteria and lunch periods as the space and time where social divisions among students were most apparent. Newcomer Latino students especially expressed the opinion that lunch time was the least enjoyable and most difficult part of their school experience; it seemed that lunch time, while often perceived as a period of enjoyable social relaxation for many students, might intensify language minority students’ sense of social segregation and isolation. One student, for example, discussed how she would read during lunch

every day, and just “wait for the bell to ring,” because she felt so uncomfortable.

Many administrators and teachers interviewed perceived the tendency of newcomer Latino students to primarily socialize with other newcomer Latinos during lunch time as being reflective of a voluntary self-segregation. One administrator commented that this perception guided scheduling decisions: “And what we try and do is make sure that we put Latino kids in the same lunch period so they have some comfort level and those kids then will help them branch out to other children.” While well-intentioned, the attitude guiding this decision places the onus of integration primarily on the newcomer students.

Administrators and teachers repeatedly expressed disappointment that the “Latino students” were not “intermingling” more with the non-Latino students. Often this social division was framed as a direct result of language differences, with administrators and teachers mentioning that once the newcomer students learned English better they would be more “able” to socialize with the broader student body. Yet while many adolescents struggle to find their social niche during adolescence, it is critical that school administrators and teachers pay attention to how language minority students do and do not feel welcome and integrated into the non-academic social life of their school, and how dynamics other than language difference affect the experience of these students.

TEACHER/ADMINISTRATOR PERCEPTIONS AND ATTITUDES

The So-Called Language Barrier: Burdens of Communication

Going hand in hand with the tendency to segregate and define language minority students primarily by their English abilities is the frequent mention of a “language barrier” between monolingual English speaking school personnel and non- or limited-English speaking students and their families. Such phrasing automati-

cally positions ELLs as “lacking” the resources to overcome an obstacle. Yet, with the No Child Left Behind Act and the push toward English-immersion approaches to English fluency, it is especially important for schools to avoid framing the need to learn English as being the result of a linguistic deficit. Further, while many educators acknowledge that language differences within a student body are pedagogically challenging, especially if there are not ample resources to service the students’ needs, neither the children who speak a first language other than English nor their language should be described as a “problem.”

As Gerardo R. López and Vanessa A. Vázquez (2006) discuss, it is not uncommon for educational manuals and educators themselves to implicitly blame language minority children for their inadequacies in speaking English, rather than looking at other sources of a language “barrier,” such as the inability of school personnel to speak a second language. In interviewing school personnel at three elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school in one Midwestern school district, López and Vázquez found that school personnel related experiencing much stress when working with members of the Latino community; they did this by sharing anecdotes of frustration, fatigue, and disillusionment when working across linguistic and cultural lines, and by referring to multiple “barriers” that had to be overcome when working with this population.

While these sentiments could, in part at least, reflect hardships accompanying the lack of adequate school resources for working with a recently increasing student population, López and Vázquez suggest school personnel attitudes and discourse also reveal a pattern of subtle, unconscious, and restrained racial bias (López & Vázquez, 2006). Many of the racial attitudes of school personnel were evident in their discussion of language “barriers;” López and Vázquez found that all respondents believed that language was the primary issue that was at the heart of many of the problems, concerns, and experiences they faced when working or

interacting with Latino families. Yet when discussing language as a “barrier” to student educational success, many respondents problematically assumed that Latino families were the ones that had the “language barrier,” and failed to recognize that the act of communication is bi-directional in nature. López and Vázquez claim that these beliefs and perceptions emerge from unconscious but deep-seated paternalistic views that immigrant groups have to shed their native language and culture into order to “melt” into an English-dominant social order.

From studies like this, it is evident that as individuals working with an increasingly culturally and linguistically diverse student body, teachers should question their own assumptions and perspectives about language and culture. Rather than position language differences as a “problem,” educators should work toward seeing language and culture as resources for learning, while addressing ways the school can more effectively support language minority students. Schools can do this through competent bilingually assisted instruction which, ideally, helps students to maintain proficiency in their native language.¹¹ In addition, schools can promote a sense of achievement in language minority students by assessing academic ability, across different subject areas, in the students’ native language.

DILEMMAS AND CHALLENGES OF “PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT”

“Parental involvement” is often mentioned as an integral aspect of building strong ties between school and the home, and fostering the academic success of students. While the positive effects of parental involvement on children’s educational development is widely noted, it is important to examine what schools do and do not recognize as constituting “parental involvement.” This examination is especially important for addressing the strengths and needs of language minority students, because understandings of appropriate and positive parental involvement, as well as expectations of

what it means to “be educated,” may vary between social and cultural groups.

For example, Latino students and their families may understand the roles of home and school in educating children differently than is common in U.S. schools. The concept of *educación*, which literally translates into the English word “education,” often has a much broader connotation for Latino students than the word might suggest to non-Latinos. The concept of *educación* in Latin American Spanish refers more to the inculcation of fundamental values and orientations in the home and the community. Thus to be *bien educado* - “well-educated”—is to have good morals and manners, to show proper respect for people, and to be a good person in the moral sense. While Latinos do highly value school and school knowledge as well, the emphasis on moral education means that people can have lots of schooling but still be considered *mal educado*—poorly educated. This distinction may seem like a minor matter of translation. However, an awareness that Latino students understand the term ‘education’ in a way that might differ from non-Latino students and teachers can not only decrease the likelihood of misinterpretations but also add to everyone’s appreciation for the diversity of ways that children can “be educated.”

Connected to this concept of *educación* is that of *respeto*, which is roughly equivalent to the English word “respect,” but is more tied to specific roles of individuals. Children are “educated” to have *respeto* for people in certain roles, especially older family members, but also those in socially important roles such as teachers and religious figures. Part of Latinos’ moral upbringing is learning to have high regard for the people who occupy these important social and cultural roles.

In addition, for Latino students and their families, school seems focused more on specialized subject “instruction.” Because of this, school is considered the province of teachers, who have specialized knowledge in these areas. In contrast to this, parents see the home as a place for learning certain practical skills,

inculcating values (moral education), and contributing to family welfare. So while both school and home are considered places of learning, each is associated with a separate sphere of learning: the school with academic instruction taught by teachers with specialized knowledge, and the home with practical and moral education taught by the family.

One important implication of this distinction between home and school learning is that teachers of Latino students should not always expect these students' parents to help with school projects and school knowledge in the home, because the home is mainly for moral education and for contributing to family welfare. While individual Latino parents each have their own norms for how they view their role in assisting with the school work that children bring home, in large part they see their primary role as moral educators, not as academic instructors.

Recognizing different understandings of home and school learning can also encourage educators to think about parental involvement in their children's education in fresh ways. For example, López (2001) and López and Vázquez (2006) challenge stereotyped assumptions of Latino parents as largely "uninvolved" in children's education by expanding conventional concepts of parental involvement and showing how Latino parents get involved in their children's schooling in ways that are often unrecognized in U.S. schools. The authors show that while Latino parents do not get involved in school in ways most often encouraged by U.S. schools (such as parent-teacher conferences and back-to-school nights), these parents concentrate on other activities, such as the giving of *consejos*, or little stories or lessons, as an important form of involvement in their children's educational lives. *Consejos* told by Latino parents interviewed included lessons about persistence, positive dispositions, and motivation. In addition, many of the Latino parents interviewed considered themselves the "first parent" responsible for imparting social, behavioral, and dispositional knowledge to their children, while viewing teachers as "second parents"

who were responsible for imparting academic knowledge.

By understanding the forms of parental involvement that may be more typical in Latino households, educators might be more willing to seek new ways of drawing upon the existing involvement of Latino parents, even as they seek to be more inclusive and proactive with Latinos in "traditional" involvement activities. This understanding will help educators work toward gaining a deeper appreciation of the home-based educational practices of their Latino students, thereby building stronger ties between home and school.

THE "FUNDS OF KNOWLEDGE" APPROACH

Any solution to America's "achievement gap" and the problem of equitable learning must involve earnest self-questioning amongst educators, and recognition of the depth of the problem. Good teaching requires educators to move well outside their comfort zones and to develop authentic cultural competency through ongoing inquiry and critical reflection. We believe that certain national reform trends, such as small schools and the creation of democratic learning communities, can best foster this kind of work, but any school configuration can advance the work.

The attainment of cultural competency and the ability to thereby teach responsively and fully is a deep, long-term process. It requires a commitment to fostering a culture of inquiry in the schools. It can also be facilitated by implementing alternative forms of parental involvement, in which teachers and administrators travel out into their students' neighborhoods and communities, to see what life is like there.

One viable and well-supported approach to working with socio-economically marginalized students and their families is the "funds of knowledge" idea of Luís C. Moll, Norma González, and Cathy Amanti. For nearly two decades, Moll, González, and Amanti have developed and put into practice theories centered on

the basic premise that people are knowledgeably competent, and that their life experiences have given them that knowledge (Moll et al. [2007] developed their approach mainly through their work with Mexican-origin working class families in Arizona). Further, Moll, González, and Amanti propose that educational processes can be enhanced when teachers actively learn about the life experiences of their students and the students' families. They propose that through reflection and ethnographic research methods, such as observations and interviews with students' families, teachers can come to understand how students and their families make sense of their lives. They can identify and document the resources, or "funds," of knowledge that exist in students' homes. For example, teachers might visit the homes of students to gather details about the knowledge base of students' families, rather than for disciplinary purposes or to teach families "best practices" for school preparation. This means that rather than only thinking of students as learners, teachers should also think of themselves as learners, taking active steps to familiarize themselves with the daily lives of students and their families.

Clearly, the "funds of knowledge" approach can be valuable for teachers working with language minority students such as newcomer Latinos. Indeed, much has been written by Moll, González, Amanti, and others on using the "funds of knowledge" approach with linguistic and ethnic minority families. Teachers and researchers who work from this approach point out that the existing knowledge of socio-economically and culturally marginalized students and families is not often academically validated in schools. Using a "funds of knowledge" approach challenges the notion that students from these groups are socially and culturally homogeneous, and "lacking" cognitive and social assets valuable for classroom learning. Rather, this approach claims that linguistic and ethnic minority families possess valuable social and intellectual resources, particular to their personal lives and cultural frames of reference, upon which classroom instruction can be effectively built.

By encouraging teachers to actively seek out and utilize the rich experiences and knowledge base that all students and their families have, the “funds of knowledge” approach positions students and their families as active participants in educational processes. Because it takes household and community knowledge as worthy of pedagogical notice, “funds of knowledge” challenges deficit models of education, such as Ruby Payne’s “aha! Process,” which characterize socio-economically marginalized students as “deficient.”

Lastly, using the “funds of knowledge” approach aids teachers in creating connections between the home and school communities, and potentially transforms home and school relations by building reciprocal relations and *confianza*, or mutual trust, between teachers and families.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Without a doubt, the increase in funding for English Language Learners by the Indiana General Assembly in 2007 will make a significant difference in the quality of education for ELL students in Indiana’s schools. Additional funds should bolster programs and materials, teacher training, and teacher hiring for direct English instruction aimed at assisting ELLs in attaining English proficiency and academic success. However, several of the concerns outlined in this report are not likely to be addressed by the recent budget appropriation. In light of this, we make the following conclusions and recommendations:

1. Cultural competency of instructional staff and administrators must continually be developed. As we note in this report, academic success and school retention for Latino ELLs are not merely technical matters, subject to the quality of English instruction only. In order for Latino ELLs to thrive in our schools, we need to improve the cultural competency of all school personnel. The development of such competency can improve the validity

of assessment measures, and foster a more positive school climate. It is extremely important that cultural competency work be expanded in pre-service teacher education, and that it lead to imaginative school-based assignments and exercises in cross-cultural communication. Responding to the passage of 2005 legislation, Indiana Code 20-31-6 for “Cultural Competency in Educational Environments,” a number of organizations have embarked on providing such professional development, including the Indiana Project on Latin American Cultural Competency (www.indiana.edu/~iplacc), and the Education Steering Committee of the Indiana Civil Rights Commission (<http://www.in.gov/icrc/education/>).

2. State and local government, as well as local school corporations, should partner more effectively with university-based resources in the state to educate broadly and develop greater cultural competency amongst native Hoosiers for living and working with Latin-origin residents. Presently, most educational efforts are directed at the newcomers themselves, in an effort to help them “adjust.” Far fewer efforts address the intercultural competencies of the established resident population. We see the development of more study abroad programs, and dual immersion Spanish-English schools (or programs within schools), as an important aspect of this competency work. Such educational efforts, which might encompass community and workplace settings, as well as schools, could also address and broaden local understandings of community membership and citizenship. The end goal should be improved community relations and understanding between language minority families and the majority community.
3. Schools and communities must avoid segregating and marginalizing Latinos and other English language learners. Even as special resources and teachers are dedicated to integrating Latino ELLs, we must continue to view newcomers as a resource for

learning, rather than a “problem,” and we must continue to foster a broad sense of shared responsibility for their integration. One of the most direct ways we can foster such responsibility is by building programs for sustained and meaningful parent involvement. In building such programs, we need to think outside the box of traditional parent involvement and community engagement, which mainly requires parents to come to school and provide direct support for their children’s academic success outside of school. A “funds of knowledge” approach should encourage school leaders and teachers to explore and strengthen existing forms of parental involvement in their children’s education outside of school.

4. Schools should dedicate more resources and attention to literacy development for Latino ELLs. New resources for ELLs will tend to be applied toward the technical mastery of English for academic content areas. However, there is increased recognition that Latino ELLs bring literacy gaps in their native Spanish language, and that these gaps only widen as they learn to read in English. Additional training and support staff dedicated to literacy training for ELLs would enable them to make the transition into being fully proficient readers and writers of English.

END NOTES

1. A few words here about terminology and the challenges of gathering statistical data on Indiana's newcomer Latinos: The authors use the terms Latino and Hispanic more or less interchangeably. We prefer the term Latino because it indicates a certain identification with a Latin American origin, and it includes, potentially, Portuguese speakers from Brazil as well as Spanish speakers from Mexico, Puerto Rico, and beyond. The term Hispanic, meanwhile, is originally a census category that may include anyone with a Spanish-derived surname, including those who emigrated directly from Spain itself, or even the Philippines. In addition, we use the Spanish masculine term Latino over the more gender-inclusive terms Latino/a, or Latin@, mainly for reasons of space and legibility.

We use the term "Latino newcomer" to describe those of Latin American origin, usually Spanish-speaking, who have arrived in Indiana sometime in the last 15 years. The vast majority of these newcomers are poor or working class, though many of them may be highly educated professionals as well. The collection of reliable information about our Latino newcomer population is made extremely complicated by the variety of identifiers and indicators used to report population trends. For instance, the recent Sagamore Institute report provides extremely useful and relevant figures on Indiana's Mexican-origin population. Since Mexicans likely comprise over 70 percent of Indiana's new Latino population, we can use such figures as a reasonable proxy for understanding broader Latino trends, but only with some caution. Similarly, the Indiana Department of Education tracks overall numbers for Hispanic enrollment (which only imperfectly overlaps with those we call Latinos), as well as numbers of "language minority" and "limited English proficiency" (LEP) students. Of LEP students statewide, some 81 percent speak Spanish as their native language, and could thus be considered Latinos under our definition. Thus, LEP student growth in a school district is a reasonable indicator of Latino, especially Mexican, growth. However, there is no
2. For 2006-07 there are 35,816 Limited English Proficient students enrolled in public schools, which translates into 3.4 percent of the total public school enrollment (IDOE Language Minority and Migrant Programs, 2007).
3. A class action law suit in which a group of Chinese parents and students in San Francisco claimed that the failure of the school district to provide supplemental instruction in English language to two-thirds of the Chinese students violated both the 14th Amendment and Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The plaintiffs won the case. Later, the Lau Remedies of 1975 delineated specific guidelines for proper approaches, methods, and procedures for identifying and servicing language minority students. These remedies favored native language rather than ESL instruction by itself. These guidelines were further refined in 1980. (need citations)
4. See, for examples: Christian, D. (1994); Dolson, D.P., and Mayer, J. (1992); Krashen, S. (1998); Montecel, M.R. and Cortez, J.D. (2002); Nieto, S. (1999); Thomas, W.P., and Collier, V. (1997); Wong Fillmore, L. (1991).
5. For the 2003-06 Indiana high school cohort, only 61 percent of LEP students graduated high school. Calculated by ethnicity, 63.5 percent of Hispanic students graduated high school in 2006, compared to 58.5 percent African-American, 67.3 percent Native-American, 79.6 percent White, and 84.9 percent Asian-American students (IDOE, 2007c).
6. Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act is a set of programs through which the U.S. Department of Education distributes funds to schools and school districts with a high percentage of students from low-income families. Typically, to qualify for Title I funds a school must have 40 percent or more of the student population come from families defined as "low-income" by the U.S. Census's definition.
7. CALP is a theory that describes ELL students' or children's facility with academic (school) language
8. The level of risk displayed by RRRs is described in comparison to all other student groups. Although other analyses that compare Latino students to the predominant majority group (i.e., White Non-Hispanic) were conducted, analyses revealed minimal differences between those results and the reported results using all other student groups, and were therefore not included in this report.
9. We recognize that the two school corporations discussed here—both mid-sized school corporations with modest numbers of LEP students (approx. 4-8 percent of student population)—are not necessarily representative of all Indiana schools.
10. These interviews were specifically focused on the experiences and perceptions of newcomer Latino students in two Indiana school corporations. Both Latino and non-Latino students were interviewed.
11. Granted, a pool of licensed, content-area teachers that are bilingual does not exist in Indiana in sufficient numbers to support bilingual education programs. While many Indiana school corporations do provide native language support in Spanish, it is not to the extent of a bilingual program. Another factor to consider is the variety of native languages present in Indiana schools. Although native Spanish speakers are the vast majority, it is not uncommon for a school to have more than 10 native languages represented. Such multilingual conditions would make the implementation of bilingual education an even greater challenge.

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RESOURCES

EDUCATION BRIEFS

Indiana Project for Latin American Cultural Competency, at:
<http://www.indiana.edu/~iplacc/>

DOCUMENTS

Division of Language Minority and Migrant Programs, Indiana Department of Education:
<http://www.doe.state.in.us/lmmp/documents.html>

ON-LINE RESOURCES

Center for Applied Linguistics, at:
<http://www.cal.org/resources/onlineresources.html>

Latino and Language Minority Teacher Projects, University of Southern California
<http://www-bcf.usc.edu/%7Ecmmr/LTP.html>

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