Closing Achievement Gaps

Improving Educational Outcomes for Hispanic Children



English Language Acquisition and Middle School Preparation: Keys to Latino Educational Success

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National Hispanic Caucus of State Legislators

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“The economic and political challenges of the 21st century make confronting and solving the issues of Hispanic under-education an integral component of America’s educational success.”

– Dr. Harry Pachon
Tomas Rivera Policy Institute

NHCSL
National Hispanic Caucus of State Legislators

Dear colleagues:

There is no issue more central to American competitiveness than the quality of our education system. Latino students compose more of every sector of America's schools with each passing year, underscoring the main reason that we must pay attention to the needs of Latino students: To remain the world's economic leader in the next century, America's schools must prepare every child for the economic opportunities of the future.

The recommendations presented here update NHCSL's first Closing Achievement Gaps paper. They are also a foundation for action and a policy development process that must include all leaders at every level. This paper is a call to action to address the achievement gap threatening Latino youth in middle schools and who are classified as ELL. This gap is a long-term threat to American competitiveness.

As legislators, NHCSL members work daily to direct our states' resources and policies to meet this obligation. Yet there is so much work to be done at every level. The federal government, the states and school-based leaders must continue to evolve. We must work to build and implement effective strategies, and ensure that teachers are prepared to teach every student to their highest potential and have the support in place to secure success. We must also work to make more families fully engaged in the process.

This paper would not have been possible without the leadership of NHCSL's past President, Joseph E. Miro, members of the NHCSL leadership team and members of the education taskforce. All gave of their time to review, make recommendations and deliver this final product. Thank you to Dr. Harry Pachon and his team at the Tomas Rivera Policy Institute for your work on this paper. Thanks to NHCSL Executive Director, Elizabeth Burgos and Senior Policy Advisor, Jason Llorenz for your insights and guidance throughout the paper's development.

In partnership,

Senator Iris Y. Martinez
NHCSL President

Dear Colleagues:

The Tomás Rivera Policy Institute (TRPI) has been pleased to work with the National Hispanic Caucus of State Legislators (NHCSL) on this important policy document, entitled English Language Acquisition and Middle School Preparation: Keys to Latino Educational Success. This marks the second instance where NHCSL and TRPI have mutually worked together to address a critical issue of educational opportunity in the Hispanic community.

This report differs from our first effort by focusing on two critical issues confronting the education of Hispanic children. Whereas our first report was more of an overview of all the major issues affecting educational attainment, this report is meant to bring to policy salience the need to focus on the critical situation present in most English language learners programs and the importance of improving middle school educational experiences.

This joint effort with NHCSL is one of the many activities TRPI has undertaken in the educational field. Through applied action research and dissemination of policy findings as well as aggressive media outreach, the Institute is bringing to light those factors that affect the educational potential of the Latino community.

Researchers at TRPI where enriched by the wise and relevant input and advice of the NHCSL as well as others involved in developing this report, in particular Elizabeth Burgos and Jason Llorenz. In addition, I would like to thank TRPI Doctoral Research Fellow Icela Pelayo, who devoted extraordinary time and effort to the research and analysis for the completion of this work.

We look forward to your reactions and comments on this report.

Sincerely,

Harry Pachon

Harry P. Pachon

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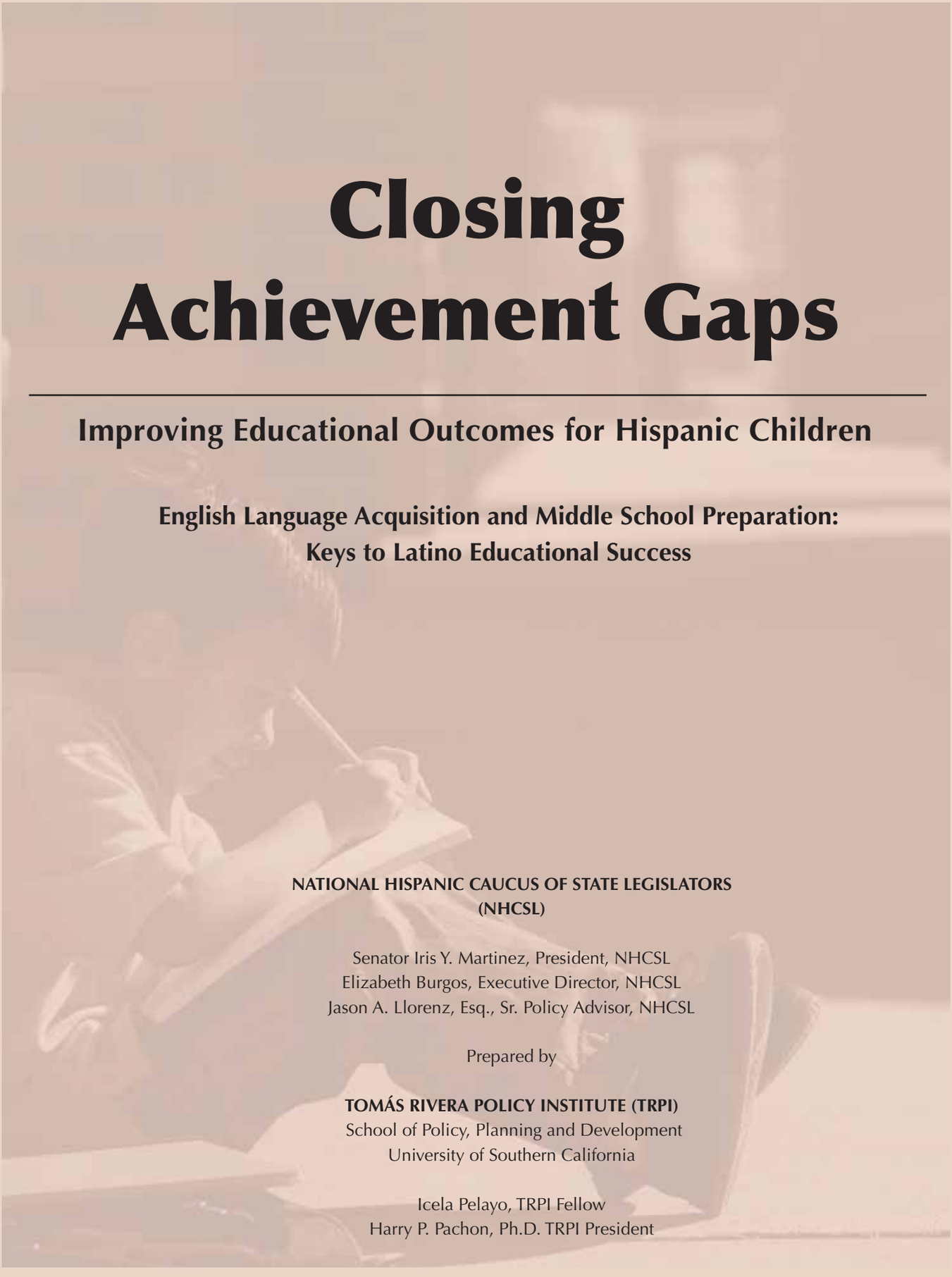
Improving Educational Outcomes for Hispanic Children

English Language Acquisition and Middle School Preparation: Keys to Latino Educational Success



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The National Hispanic Caucus of State Legislators (NHCSL) is the preeminent organization representing the interests of 300 Hispanic state legislators from all states, commonwealths, and territories of the United States. Founded in 1989 as a nonpartisan, nonprofit 501(c)3, NHCSL is a catalyst and advocate for joint action on issues of common concern, such as health, education, immigration, homeownership and economic development to all segments of the Hispanic community. NHCSL also works to design and implement policies and procedures that will impact the quality of life for Hispanic communities; serves as a forum for information exchange and member networking; an institute for leadership training; a liaison with sister U.S. Hispanic organizations; a promoter of public/private partnerships with business and labor; and a partner with Hispanic state and provincial legislators and their associations representing Central and South America.

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The Tomás Rivera Policy Institute (TRPI) advances informed policy on key issues affecting Latino communities through objective and timely research contributing to the betterment of the nation.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Major demographic developments in our nation's schools, most notably the growing Hispanic[1] population and increasing number of English Language Learners (ELLs), require the immediate attention of education stakeholders. If schools are to serve all students adequately and fairly, we must start at the root of our main educational problems. To that end, focusing on how to improve the under-education of Hispanic youth is the goal of this brief, prepared jointly by the National Hispanic Caucus of State Legislators (NHCSL) and the Tomás Rivera Policy Institute (TRPI). It is an effort to bring policy saliency—at the national, state and local levels—in the midst of a national educational crisis. Specifically, this report addresses two issues in the Hispanic community: English language acquisition and preparation for middle school. In doing so, we hope to foster a shared level of understanding among policymakers nationwide by proposing policy recommendations and actions that can be taken. These proposals are born of solid research; to provide feasible and authoritative policy options, we thoroughly analyzed studies on English language acquisition among English Language Learners (ELLs) as well as the level of success in middle school preparation.

English Language Acquisition among ELLs

An overwhelming proportion of ELLs are Latino, and ELLs are among the fastest-growing[2] and lowest-achieving subpopulation of students. Currently, ELLs are not acquiring the high level of academic English necessary to access a quality education. The problem is multi-faceted: a lack of interstate and intrastate uniformity in assessment and placement, a need for effective instructional programming, and underprepared teachers without ELL training. The issue is further complicated by polarizing debates about the language of instruction rather than the quality of instruction.

Middle School Preparation of Hispanic Youth

Many middle schools are not effectively preparing Latino students for high school and college. Generally, the problem in middle school manifests in low achievement. However, low achievement is born of a combination of factors working in tandem. Some major factors that have led to unsatisfactory results include: sub-optimal learning environments, a lack of reading engagement and motivation, a lack of academic and social support, and a lack of college awareness.

Policy Options

Based on across-the-board research findings, policymakers and legislators should consider the following key policy recommendations:

At the **federal level**, policymakers should consider implementing policies that:

- Clearly define Limited English Proficient (LEP) and former LEP students in Title III of the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) to ensure that states use identical criteria to designate LEP students and to determine which students are to be considered Fluent English Proficient (FEP)[3];

- Create a 50-state consortium to share best practices and develop common academic standards, assessment, and reclassification procedures for ELLs[4];

- Develop new and improved assessments to capture ELLs' native language abilities, English language development, and content knowledge[5];

- Recommend teacher education policy to ensure all current teachers and teacher candidates learn about second language and literacy acquisition, reading across the content areas, and sheltered instruction and ESL methods;

- Identify evidence-based exemplary ELL programs serving low-income students;

- Ensure transparency of outcomes for students in ELL classes;

- Recognize and share with colleagues that the majority of Hispanic children in ELL classes are U.S. citizens by birth;

- Advocate going beyond the traditional debates on language instruction and focus on programmatic outcomes of improving English language proficiency among ELLs; and

- Increase new Title III monies and earmark these funds to be allocated to the above activities.

At the **state and/or local level**, policymakers should consider implementing policies that:

- Coordinate in a comprehensive manner the policy and procedures in ELL placement, reclassification, and assessment;

- Require that all states assign unique identification numbers to each ELL student so that data-tracking is more effective and progress can be more easily measured;

- Call for transparency in ELL placement, assessment, reclassification, and aggregate public dissemination of the data;

- Increase effective teacher and staff professional development addressing the specific instructional needs/concerns of ELLs; and

- Require objective data on the effectiveness of different instructional programs.

Policy Recommendations for Addressing Middle School Preparation of Latino Youth

At the **federal level**, policymakers should consider implementing policies that:

Provide professional training for **all** middle school teachers (not just those assigned as English and reading teachers) in reading instruction, engagement and motivation;

- Simplify the process for receiving student services, call for evaluation

of programs that offer students academic and social/emotional support, and identify and recognize exemplary programs;

- Develop college awareness programs and encourage the local business community to create meaningful school partnerships;

- Educate parents about college requirements and funding options for post-secondary education; and

- Educate and prepare students for various workforce opportunities in addition to traditional college options.

At the **state and/or local level**, policymakers should consider implementing policies that:

- Recognize and reduce disparities across schools in the quality, experience, credentials, and professional training of teaching staff;

- Ensure that current academic and social/emotional support and enrichment programs are reaching the intended students;

- Strengthen college planning, information dissemination, and career development during middle school ('college knowledge');

- Introduce college awareness in middle school; and

- Promote the value of technical/vocation education as meaningful.

Conclusion

An educational reform agenda aimed at developing the potential academic capital in Hispanic communities is a complex and daunting task involving policymakers at all levels of government. In this policy brief, we focus on two major issues in Latino education—English language acquisition of ELLs and middle school preparation. Significant progress will be possible with a strategic multi-pronged approach as well as coordinated efforts in policy and practice across the country. If the nation is to respond to the economic and political challenges of the 21st century, confronting and resolving the issues of Hispanic underachievement will be an integral component for overall national educational success in the coming decades.

INTRODUCTION

Major demographic changes in our nation's schools, most notably the growth of the Hispanic population and English Language Learners (ELLs), require the attention of all education stakeholders. The majority (76%) of students classified as ELLs are native-born citizens—not foreign-born (Capps, Fix, Murray, Ost, Passel, & Herwantoro, 2005). Because education is fundamental to the well-being of our society, the government funds public education for all children. Yet academic outcomes are quite disparate among various segments of the population. Considerable attention has been called to the problem, but the enormous white and Latino achievement gap persists and does not appear to be narrowing.[6] Latino underachievement is not only a problem for the Latino community; it negatively affects the entire country. As increasing numbers of baby boomers begin to retire, a new generation of workers must replace them. Moreover, baby boomers are among the most highly educated generations. Unfortunately, if current demographic trends persist, newer generations of increasingly Latino workers may not be as qualified to replace the retiring baby boomers. A less-educated work force would have devastating effects on the economy. Workers earning less would mean erosion in tax revenue and a decline in rates of homeownership (Myers, 2008). As a nation, we must develop solutions to effectively deal with the underachievement of Latino students now. Our futures are bound together: it is in our mutual interest to improve the education outcomes for the coming American labor force (Myers, 2008).

With the Obama administration focused on educational reform, the time to bring about discussion and change in education policy is particularly favorable at both the federal and state levels. These changes are all the more critical given the demographic changes born of the growth of the Hispanic population. Nine of our nation's 10 largest urban school districts now have Hispanics as a majority or near majority of their first-grade student population (See Appendix, Table 1). These Latino first graders in the academic year 2009-2010 are by large majority native-born U.S. citizens. They will be the corresponding majority of graduating high school seniors in 2022 and our college graduates for the 2020-2030 decade.

– Nine of our nation's 10 largest urban school districts now have Hispanics as a majority or near majority of their first-grade student population

Table 1, Hispanic enrollment in selected school districts across the country

District	*Grade*	*Percentage*	*Enrollment*
Los Angeles Unified School District	1st	78.9%	39,544
Source: California Department of Education, 2009.	6th	73.9%	38,152
	12th	68.6%	26,211
Clark County School District (Las Vegas, NV)	1st	44.2%	11,079
Source: Clark County School District, 2009.	6th	40.4%	9,740
	12th	29.3%	4,597
Dallas Independent School District	1st	68.6%	10,039
Source: Texas Education Agency, 2009.	6th	65.3%	6,864
	12th	55.0%	3,952
Houston Independent School District	1st	63.1%	11,242
Source: Texas Education Agency, 2009.	6th	59.8%	7,749
	12th	52.1%	4,873
Little Rock School District	1st	10.5%	213
Source: Arkansas Department of Education, 2009.	6th	6.7%	121
	12th	4.5%	65
Chicago Public Schools	1st	45.1%	13,715
Source: Chicago Public Schools Office of Research, Evaluation and Accountability, 2009.	6th	41.1%	12,523
	12th	35.2%	7,563
Gilford County School District (Greensboro, NC)	1st	10.9%	675
Source: Gilford County Schools, 2009.	6th	7.5%	466
	12th	3.8%	237
New Jersey School District-Union County (Elizabeth City)	1st	34.0%	Not available
Source: New Jersey Department of Education, 2009.	6th	26.2%	Not available
	12th	22.2%	Not available
New Jersey School District—Essex County (Newark)	1st	20.8%	Not available
Source: New Jersey Department of Education, 2009.	6th	20.5%	Not available
	12th	16.8%	Not available
New Jersey School District-Passaic County (Paterson)	1st	46.7%	Not available
Source: New Jersey Department of Education, 2009.	6th	42.9%	Not available
	12th	35.0%	Not available
New York City Public Schools	1st	40.6%	27,591
Source: New York City Department of Education Research and Policy Support Group, 2009.	6th	39.3%	24,184
	12th	34.9%	18,818

NOTE: New Jersey School enrollment figures were not available by count.

Indicators of Underachievement

Hispanics, as a group, have largely underperformed on national standardized tests. According to the 2007 results of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 50% of fourth-grade Hispanics scored "below basic" in reading—the lowest possible—and 30% scored below basic in math. Students classified as ELLs have lagged even further behind.[7] Seventy percent (70%) of fourth-grade ELL students scored below basic in reading and nearly half (44%) scored below basic in math (See Appendix, Table 2).

Table 2, Percentage distribution of 4th-grade students across NAEP achievement levels

by race/ethnicity and ELL status, 2007

Reading

Race/Ethnicity	**Below Basic**	**Basic**	**Proficient**	**Advanced**
White	22%	35%	32%	11%
Black	54%	32%	12%	2%
Hispanic	**50%**	**33%**	**14%**	**3%**
Asian/Pacific Islander	23%	31%	31%	15%
American Indian	51%	31%	14%	4%
ELL	70%	22%	7%	1%
Not ELL	29%	36%	26%	9%

Math

Race/Ethnicity	**Below Basic**	**Basic**	**Proficient**	**Advanced**
White	9%	40%	43%	8%
Black	36%	49%	14%	1%
Hispanic	**30%**	**48%**	**21%**	**1%**
Asian/Pacific Islander	9%	33%	43%	15%
American Indian	30%	45%	23%	2%
ELL	44%	43%	12%	1%
Not ELL	15%	43%	36%	6%

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP), 2007 Reading and Math Assessments.

Low performance on the NAEP persists well into middle school, for Hispanics and ELL students. On the 2007 NAEP reading assessment, 42% of Hispanic eighth-grade students scored "below basic" in reading and only 15% scored "at or above proficient" whereas 40% of white and 41% of Asian/Pacific Islander eighth-grade students did. Hispanic eighth graders fared similarly on the 2007 NAEP math assessment: 45% scored below basic whereas only 15% scored at or above proficient compared with white (42%) and Asian/Pacific Islander eighth graders (50%).

Furthermore, ELL middle school students fared far worse: 70% of eighth-grade ELL students scored below basic on the reading assessment and scored similarly on math assessment (69%). (See Appendix, Table 3.)

Table 3, Percentage distribution of 8th-grade students across NAEP achievement levels

by race/ethnicity and ELL status, 2007

Reading				
Race/Ethnicity	**Below Basic**	**Basic**	**Proficient**	**Advanced**
White	16%	44%	36%	4%
Black	45%	42%	13%	#
Hispanic	**42%**	**43%**	**14%**	**1%**
Asian/Pacific Islander	20%	39%	36%	5%
American Indian	44%	36%	18%	2%
ELL	70%	30%	5%	#
Not ELL	24%	43%	30%	3%

Math				
Race/Ethnicity	**Below Basic**	**Basic**	**Proficient**	**Advanced**
White	18%	49%	33%	9%
Black	53%	36%	10%	1%
Hispanic	**45%**	**40%**	**13%**	**2%**
Asian/Pacific Islander	17%	33%	33%	17%
American Indian	47%	37%	14%	2%
ELL	69%	23%	7%	1%
Not ELL	25%	40%	27%	8%

NOTE: # indicates number rounds to zero.
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP), 2007 Reading and Math Assessments.

At the fourth- and eighth-grade levels—the only grades at which the NAEP assessments are given—Hispanic students lag significantly behind their white and Asian/Pacific Islander peers, and ELL students lag significantly behind their peers not classified as ELLs. (See Appendix, Table 4.) The NAEP data suggests that Latino and ELL students are not only entering middle school unprepared, but those that make it to high school before dropping out are coming to high school without basic skills. The vast under-achievement of our Latino youth (including those classified as ELL) must be addressed.

Why Focus on English Language Acquisition of ELLs and Latino Middle School Preparation?

English language acquisition for English language learners (ELLs) and middle school preparation of Latino youth are not mutually exclusive issues in education—

Table 4, Percentage distribution of English Language Learners (ELLs) 4th and 8th-grade students across NAEP achievement levels, 2007

4th Grade:				
Reading	**Below Basic**	**Basic**	**Proficient**	**Advanced**
ELL	70%	22%	7%	1%
Not ELL	29%	36%	26%	9%
Math	**Below Basic**	**Basic**	**Proficient**	**Advanced**
ELL	44%	43%	12%	1%
Not ELL	15%	43%	36%	6%
8th Grade:				
Reading	**Below Basic**	**Basic**	**Proficient**	**Advanced**
ELL	70%	30%	5%	#
Not ELL	24%	43%	30%	3%
Math	**Below Basic**	**Basic**	**Proficient**	**Advanced**
ELL	69%	23%	7%	1%
Not ELL	25%	40%	27%	8%

NOTE: # indicates number rounds to zero.
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP), 2007 Reading and Mathematics Assessments.

there is significant overlap. ELLs are not just a concern for educators in elementary schools: middle (and high) schools are also charged with serving ELL students. The history of persistent underachievement among Latino youth cannot be attributed to a lack of English proficiency alone because not all Latinos are ELL students. We also must be careful not to conflate Latino with ELL status.

– The history of persistent underachievement among Latino youth cannot be attributed to a lack of English proficiency alone because not all Latinos are ELL students

In this report we focus on English language acquisition (at all school levels) and middle school as a key transition time when Latino youth (including those classified as ELLs) tend to be underserved and underprepared for high school and beyond. Furthermore, we must recognize that while "ELL" is used to denote language proficiency, ELL status rarely occurs in isolation—it is intertwined with socio-economic status, cultural issues, and immigration history. Thus, discussing English language acquisition of ELLs specifically and middle school preparation of Latinos in a more general sense helps us move the discussion on the education of Hispanic youth forward. To facilitate the organization of this report, the authors have chosen to discuss the two topics separately, although readers should be aware that the issues can overlap.

English Language Acquisition and Literacy: Foundations for High Academic Achievement

Gaining competency in oral and written academic English is absolutely essential for academic advancement and upwardly mobility. Without a high degree of English language proficiency, Latino students will find it difficult to access college preparatory courses in middle school and high school. Without access to rigorous academic content, Latino youth will be disadvantaged and ill-prepared to move on to college or into the nation's workforce. Seventy percent of those classified as English Language Learners (ELLs) in the United States are native-born Hispanics. The percentage of ELL students—also referred to as Limited English Proficient (LEP)—is also on the rise. (See Appendix Table 2). Serious analysis of English language acquisition among ELLs is vital. As a nation, we need a better understanding of the various components and issues within English language acquisition so that we can address the problem of underachievement among ELLs. Thus, English language acquisition is one of the most pressing issues in Hispanic education and will continue to be unless we develop effective and creative solutions to the problem.

– Seventy percent of those classified as English Language Learners (ELLs) in the United States are native-born Hispanics

ELLs in Puerto Rico

As a U.S. territory, Puerto Rico's residents are also U.S. citizens. As such, the U.S. funds the education of Puerto Rico's students. The total student enrollment in Puerto Rico is 544,138 and 99.7% of students attend Title I schools (National Center for Education Statistics, 2007). According to the National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition (2006), approximately 100% of students are identified as Limited English Proficient. The language of instruction is Spanish, however, Puerto Rico's schools 'do' offer two-way immersion (Spanish-English). According to Puerto Rico's Consolidated State Performance Report, 2008-2009, sheltered English instruction, and pullout ESL are also offered. Puerto Rico has participated in the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) since the 2003. However, Puerto Rico's students were assessed in Spanish and because of this, comparisons are difficult to make. As of the 2007-2008 academic year, Puerto Rico does not receive a Title III grant.

Table 5, Number and percentage of identified K–12 limited English proficient students by state 2005-2006

State	Number	Percentage
California	1,571,463	30.9%
Texas	640,749	12.6%
Florida	253, 165	4.9%
New York	234,578	4.6%
Illinois	204,803	4.0%
Arizona	152, 962	3.0%
Colorado	89,946	1.7%
North Carolina	83, 627	1.6%
Washington	78,236	1.5%
Nevada	74,305	1.5%
United States	***5,074,572***	***10.3%***

NOTE: State percentages are the proportion of LEP students in a state to total US LEP students. U.S. percentage of LEP students, 10.3%, represents the proportion of LEP students to the total U.S. public school enrollment.
SOURCE: The National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition (NCELA), The Biennial Report 2004-2006.

The Role of Middle School Preparation: Gateway to College and Beyond

A second key issue is preparing students for middle school. Unfortunately, middle school is often regarded as an educational "wasteland"[8] where learning is not the focus of school as students become overwhelmed by the social pressures associated with adolescence. Improving the quality of education, with a strong emphasis on college awareness, during the middle school years can have lasting and profound effects on the educational achievement and attainment of Latino students. Creating a culture of high expectations coupled with highly-trained staff that promotes both college and technical education options for all students will lead to better outcomes for Latino youth. Middle schools could be highly influential educational institutions for youth, helping steer them to better opportunities by providing academic and social support.

– Middle schools could be highly influential educational institutions for youth, helping steer them to better opportunities by providing academic and social support

Goals of the Report

The goal of this brief, prepared jointly by the National Hispanic Caucus of State Legislators (NHCSL) and the Tomás Rivera Policy Institute (TRPI), is to bring to policy saliency—at the national, state, and local levels—to the educational crisis caused by the under-achievement of Hispanic youth. Specifically, this report addresses two issues of particular relevance to the Hispanic community: English language acquisition and middle school preparation.

The targeted audience for this policy brief is stakeholders in the education of Latino youth, specifically policymakers in the Obama administration and legislators across the nation. The following section reviews the relevant research on the English language acquisition of ELLs and middle school preparation of Hispanic youth. Then, we recommend some key policy options for policymakers to consider. Although English language acquisition and middle school preparation are the key issues addressed in this policy brief, there are, of course, other issues—ranging from pre-K to graduate and professional education—that must be addressed in efforts to improve overall educational outcomes of Hispanic youth.[9]

Methodology

To gain a broad understanding of the issues in English language acquisition and middle school preparation, the authors conducted a review of the relevant research and literature in the field. Articles from top education peer-reviewed journals and reports issued by reputable research organizations across the country served as the body of evidence for this report.[10] The research cited herein, of course, is not an exhaustive account but rather an illustrative sample of oft-cited and respected research important to the discussion of the issues at hand.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

Given the documented low-achievement of ELLs as a group, a more close examination of English language acquisition among these students is in order. How can we ensure ELLs will acquire the high level of academic English necessary to access a quality education? Many issues deserve consideration in this multi-faceted problem. In the following sub-sections, we discuss some of the major issues in improving English language acquisition and academic outcomes for our ELLs. For one, there is a lack of interstate and intrastate uniformity in assessment, placement and reclassification. In addition, there is lack of coherent and coordinated instructional programming for ELLs, a problem exacerbated by an underprepared teaching force that lacks the adequate ELL training necessary to improve the educational outcomes for these students. Unfortunately, polarizing ideological debates about bilingual education often take precedence over focused discussion on pursuing evidence-based policy and practices that best support student learning and achievement.

Assessment, Placement, and Reclassification of ELLs

Assessing the English ability of ELL students is a hotly debated issue (Goldenberg, 2008). Abedi, Hoffstetter and Lord (2004) argue that decisions about which standards and accommodations to use for ELLs—such as for whom and under which conditions—are based on limited empirical evidence. Other scholars caution policymakers and educators against creating one-size-fits-all approaches for the test accommodations of ELLs since they are not a homogenous group. Abedi, Hoffstetter and Lord (2004) argue that there are four key issues in deciding among accommodation options—effectiveness, validity, differential impact, and feasibility. There are varying levels of language proficiency, and accommodations appropriate for some ELLs would not be appropriate for others. For example, extra time is a commonly used test accommodation for ELLs. However, for ELLs with low levels of English language proficiency the extra time would not necessarily be as helpful as it would be to ELLs with high levels of proficiency. In addition to issues with test accommodations themselves, Abedi and Gándara (2006) point out larger issues in the placement and reclassification of ELLs. They argue that there are performance and assessment issues

that must be considered when discussing performance gaps between subgroups like ELLs and mainstream students. Abedi and Gándara (2006) also argue that language factors impact the validity of assessment for ELL students. In other words, tests that do not take into account the language proficiency of a student will likely underestimate his/her score and the use of such test scores has huge consequences for that student, such as determining future course placement and tracking. While tests are designed to measure specific constructs such as content knowledge, sometimes assessments instead may be capturing a student's language proficiency.

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Furthermore, Abedi and Gándara (2006) also point out these same language factors affect assessment outcomes that have direct consequences on the accountability system. Under the NCLB Title I accountability requirements, ELL students are tested with the same assessments developed and field-tested on mainly native English speakers. Unnecessarily complex linguistic structures in test items may unfairly disadvantage ELL students, underestimating performance outcomes (Abedi & Gándara, 2006). Large schools with diverse student populations have a more difficult time making Average Yearly Progress (AYP) because of the disaggregated requirement of NCLB (Linn, in press). These schools have more categories of subgroups of students (e.g. racial/ethnic, ELLs, low-SES, students with disabilities) and are required to make progress in all of the categories. According to Jepsen and de Alth (2005), the accountability standards in NCLB may create counterincentives when it comes to reclassifying ELLs. The standards mandate increases in reclassification rates while also holding ELL students to the same performance standards as English-speaking students on academic content tests (Jepsen & de Alth, 2005).

In addition to standardized state testing, various states have also introduced English proficiency tests, such as the California English Language Development Test (CELDT). In California, this test is used when deciding where to place ELL students. Because of the state's restrictive language policy, options for ELLs are few (e.g. structured English Immersion or SEI).[11] However, there is much discussion on the reliance on CELDT results to determine the readiness of ELLs to take on English-only curriculum that requires academic rather than conversational English.[12] In a recent study, Gándara and Rumberger (2006) found that 60% of California's tenth-grade ELLs in 2005 were able to pass the CELDT at a level of early advanced or advanced English

proficiency, but only 3% of these students could pass the state test of English Language Arts. These findings suggest that there are varying standards of language proficiency. A vague definition of what constitutes language proficiency, in addition to the lack of uniformity in assessment of language proficiency, further complicates the reclassification of ELLs (Goldenberg, 2008).

The Tomás Rivera Policy Institute (TRPI) recently published a study on the reclassification of ELLs in the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD)—the second largest public school district in the country which serves 20% of the nation's ELLs. Thirty-two percent of LAUSD students are classified as ELLs. The study found that earlier reclassification was related to higher student test scores on standardized state tests (Flores, Painter & Pachon, 2009). Furthermore, the majority of the students classified as ELL for more than five years were also U.S. native-born, not immigrants. This highlights the fact that the overwhelming majority (70%) of ELLs in LAUSD are students born and educated in the United States. The findings from this study strongly suggest that current ELL reclassification policies and practices merit a closer examination at all levels. While early reclassification and higher test scores are related, we do not fully understand how the reclassification process accounts for such scores. The results of such research should be interpreted with caution and should not be the basis for advocating for the hasty reclassification of students before they are sufficiently ready for English-only instruction. Reclassifying students before they are academically ready could have devastating effects on the students, including lowering academic motivation and increasing dropout rates. As a subgroup, ELLs are at a higher risk of failure than their native English-speaking peers (Abedi & Gándara, 2006). Conversely, remaining in ELL classes that are viewed by other students as being "slow" may also add to the students' negative self-perception, making them feel unable to compete academically.

Furthermore, Flores, Painter and Pachon (2009) found that nearly 30% of ELLs took longer than five years to reclassify, meaning that many of LAUSD's middle school students are not only Latino, but also ELLs. While younger students are learning to read, middle and high school students are expected to *read to learn*. In their report on adolescent literacy, Short and Fitzsimmons (2007) argue that ELLs must do 'double the work' when compared with their native English-speaking peers because ELLs are expected to develop English literacy while mastering core content as they read in English. There are some strategies that work for younger ELLs in elementary schools, but adolescents have different literacy needs that must be addressed (Short & Fitzsimmons, 2007). This has implications for middle school teachers, especially those who work with ELLs.

– While younger students are learning to read, middle and high school students are expected to read to learn

Instructional Programming of ELLs

Instructional programming for ELL students varies across the country—each state defining its own language policy—with a wide range of interpretations often reflecting disjointed district and school policy. There are several options for educating ELLs and many include bilingual education programs, which have been the target of intense scrutiny in some states (i.e. California, Arizona, and Massachusetts). There is controversy surrounding the issue of language policy and instructional language programming for ELLs, however the focus on improving academic achievement of these students should not be obscured by politics (Garcia, Moran, & Gándara, 2004; Goldenberg, 2008). While there may be much debate about the appropriateness and effectiveness of bilingual education, the most recent research syntheses provide converging evidence that primary language instruction does not impede but *facilitates* the learning of English among ELLs (Francis, Lesaux, & August, 2006; Goldenberg, 2008; Greene, 1997; Rolstad, Mahoney & Glass, 2005; Slavin & Cheung, 2005).

There is more to instructional programming than the language of instruction. Other features of such a program are also important to consider. Transitional bilingual education (TBE) models use the students' primary language as a bridge to help students acquire English. Some programs are maintenance programs where the primary language of the ELL students is maintained as they learn English. Dual language programs combine ELLs and native-English speakers together so that both groups of students receive instruction in two languages. In this model, each group receives primary language and second language instruction and has access to native-speaking peers to model appropriate language use. Another distinguishing feature of bilingual education models is the length of time in a program. Early-exit models are can range from one to three years whereas late-exit models retain students for four to six years. TBE programs tend to be early-exit models and maintenance, and dual-language programs tend to employ a late-exit model (Tong, Alecio-Lara, Irby, Mathes, & Kwok, 2008). Nevertheless, English language proficiency and the reclassification of ELLs is the goal of all bilingual education models.

Unfortunately, the debate over the *language* of instruction often supersedes a constructive discussion about the *quality* of instruction. Taking a prescriptive or "one-size-fits-all" approach to address the learning needs of a heterogeneous population is shortsighted as there are many ways to achieve similarly positive outcomes. Thus, in this policy brief we do not advocate for any one instructional model or program.[13] Research consistently shows that the quality of instruction—including teachers and their

pedagogical practices—matters a great deal (Slavin & Cheung, 2005; Rolstad, Mahoney, & Glass, 2005). In their study of effective reading programs for ELLs, Slavin and Cheung (2005) found evidence to support a wide range of programs—those that were most effective used cooperative learning, extensive vocabulary instruction, and rich literature. Among beginning reading models, the research findings supported structured, phonetic programs emphasizing language development in both primary language and English instruction (Slavin & Cheung, 2005).

Teachers of ELLs

While primary language support can serve to enhance the academic achievement of ELLs, the quality of an instructional program—most notably the teachers—is extremely important. According to Rumberger and Gándara (2004), ELLs are more likely to be taught by teachers without appropriate teaching credentials and with little classroom experience. Teachers of ELLs often feel underprepared to address the unique issues these students face (Gándara, Rumberger, Maxwell-Jolly, & Callahan, 2003; Goldenberg, 2008). Without a highly trained staff to implement instructional programming and offer academic support, ELLs student are being shortchanged. Rumberger and Gándara (2004) found that ELLs were more likely to be taught by teachers without appropriate teaching credentials and with little classroom experience. This is an enormous problem, especially in urban and rural areas affected by rapidly changing student demographics (Donnelly Hill & Flynn, 2004). In a review of key factors affecting the education of ELLs, Verdugo and Flores (2007) point out that teacher preparation is quite complex, and generally echo Rumberger and Gándara (2004) in that teachers are not necessarily credentialed with the appropriate training. Furthermore Verdugo and Flores (2007) raise the issue of language, noting that the majority of teachers either in mainstream or bilingual education are native-English speakers. This may pose significant communication challenges with ELLs and their parents. In addition to language, knowing and understanding a student's culture and background are important sociocultural factors that may influence teaching and student learning (Verdugo & Flores, 2007). Unfortunately, many non-minority teachers implicitly operate on a student 'deficit model' and sometimes fail to see and incorporate the vast "funds of knowledge" and experiences that ELL have to offer and bring to school (Moll, Diaz, Estrada, & Lopes, 1981).

– While primary language support can serve to enhance the academic achievement of ELLs, the quality of an instructional program — most notably the teachers — is extremely important

Surely teachers face extraordinary pressure to improve the academic outcomes of all students, but face especially difficult challenges in meeting the needs of their ELL students. According to Short and Fitzsimmons (2007), teachers, especially middle school teachers, could benefit from effective professional development training to help them improve in their ability to work with ELLs. Currently there is no national policy that requires teachers serving ELLs to have specialized training, yet demographic trends clearly indicate that ELLs are the fastest-growing student population in the nation's public schools. In other words, the nation's public schools are increasingly ELL, but the nation's teachers are not necessarily trained to effectively address their academic needs and improve student outcomes.

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To summarize, improving the language proficiency of Latino ELLs proves to be a difficult challenge. Because it is a complex issue, solutions cannot be singularly prescriptive. Above, we outlined some major obstacles impeding progress in this area: the lack of uniformity in assessment, placement and reclassification; the lack of coherent and coordinated instructional programming for ELLs; the lack of adequate ELL training for the vast underprepared teaching force; and the politics of bilingual education. Although much of the research and literature on ELLs focus on elementary school students, fortunately some researchers are expanding their efforts to examine adolescents as well (Callahan, 2005; Short & Fitzsimmons, 2007).

As discussed in the above sections, not all ELL students are reclassified as English proficient before moving onto middle school. So even as we turn our attention to focus on the middle school preparation of Latinos, we must be mindful of how these issues affect those students who are also ELLs. The transition to middle school marks a pivotal time for all students. However, as evidenced by scores on the NAEP achievement tests, Hispanics and ELLs lag behind other students, with academic problems persisting well into middle school. Thus, the transition from elementary school to middle school is even more critical for struggling students.

MIDDLE SCHOOL PREPARATION

Middle schools are not effectively preparing Latino students for high school and college. Generally, the main problem in middle school seems to be low achievement, especially for Latinos. Low achievement at the middle school level is the result of a combination of factors working in tandem. Unfortunately, poor achievement early in middle school leads students to drop out. According to Balfanz, Herzog & Mac Iver (2007), there are four predictors of dropping out of middle school: poor attendance, misbehavior (suspension), failing sixth-grade math courses; and failing sixth-grade English courses. Unfortunately, these issues are more pronounced among students attending urban schools, heavily populated by low-SES and Latino families. While Latino high school dropout rates have steadily declined from 35% in 1980 to just over 21% in 2007, the Latino dropout rate is four times the dropout rate of whites at 5.3%.[14] In this section, we address some major factors that have led to unsatisfactory results, including sub-optimal learning environments, a lack of reading engagement and motivation, a lack of academic and social support, and a lack of college awareness.

– Low achievement at the middle school level is the result of a combination of factors working in tandem

Learning Environments

According to Silberman (1970), "the junior high school, by almost unanimous agreement, is the wasteland … of American education" (p. 324). These are strong words indeed. The middle school years mark the beginning of a "downward spiral" in school-related behaviors and motivation that often lead to academic failure and dropping out of school (Eccles, Wigfield, Midgley, Reuman, McIver & Feldlaufer, 1993). In a key study on the negative effects of traditional middle school on students' motivation, the researchers found that there is often a mismatch between characteristics of the classroom environment in traditional middle grade schools and early adolescents' developmental level (Eccles, Wigfield, Midgley, Reuman, McIver & Feldlaufer, 1993). According to Eccles et al. (1993), classroom environmental factors such as teacher discipline and management practices, teacher-student relationships, opportunities for student decision-making, teachers' self-efficacy, and classroom-ability

grouping affect student motivation. Furthermore, they note that pubertal changes in early adolescence coupled with major changes in schooling from the elementary school conspire to create negative effects on student motivation (Eccles, Wigfield, Midgley, Reuman, McIver & Feldlaufer, 1993).

Eccles et al. (1993) point out that middle school students experience less freedom in the classroom due to teacher control, less choice and decision-making opportunities, and that these students do not benefit—as they might have previously in elementary school—from a close student-teacher relationship. Middle schools are typically larger and less personal than elementary schools. Middle school teachers are subject-matter specialists teaching a larger number of students whereas elementary-school teachers work in self-contained classrooms. This makes it less likely that students and teachers will know each other well (Eccles, Wigfield, Midgley, Reuman, McIver & Feldlaufer, 1993). Such changes are difficult and make the middle school environment less conducive for learning.

Joftus (2002) argues that while much is being done to focus on early childhood education, the real and growing problem is what to do about middle schools, pointing out that less than 75% of all eighth graders graduate from high school in five years, and in urban schools graduation rates dip well below 50%. He points out that as middle school students continue to fail they feel less cared about and disengage from school, and that upwards of 40% of students think school is boring (Joftus, 2002). These findings are consistent with those of Eccles et al. (1993) in that disengagement from school begins between the seventh and ninth grades, when the middle school environments do not suit the developmental needs of adolescents. Further adding to a poor learning environment is that students with low literacy tend to be taught by the most inexperienced teachers, a problem exacerbated in poor, urban schools (Joftus, 2002).

Student Engagement and Reading Motivation

Academic failure is mainly a result of low literacy: a significant number of students are poor readers. Struggling students have less academic motivation and are less engaged because their history of low achievement. Students that cannot read well, read less, leading to less interest in school (Guthrie & Davis, 2003). Guthrie and Davis (2003) do not argue that student motivation in the middle school years is inevitable, but rather that low motivation, especially for reading, is a response to the shifting contexts of middle school. According to Guthrie and Davis (2003), many abrupt changes in students' reading experiences are

– Academic failure is mainly a result of low literacy: a significant number of students are poor readers

responsible for lower reading engagement and motivation, including: detachment of reading instruction from content (middle school teachers are subject matter specialists and assume students are proficient readers, tending not to feel responsible for reading instruction); dense texts and textbook structures; formal non-personal response expectations (answering questions at the end of chapter rather than sharing personal reactions to text); diminished student choice; isolation of students from teachers (elementary school classrooms are structured for collaboration while middle school classroom are structured for competition); and minimal linkage of real-world interaction with reading (reading as an exercise for school but not experienced as meaningful). Guthrie and Davis (2003) found that students are too often removed from social support of teachers, which is necessary for struggling readers to improve.

Reading problems are more widespread among poor students of color, including ELLs. According to Balfanz, McPartland and Shaw (2002), the average minority or low-income ninth grader performs at only the fifth- or sixth-grade level in reading. Low literacy affects more than achievement in reading and English language arts—it affects the ability of students to master content in other subject areas as well (Joftus, 2002; Short & Fitzsimmons, 2007). As Guthrie and Davis (2003) point out, dense textbooks are structurally complex, making it difficult for struggling readers to learn in text-heavy courses such as mathematics, science, and history. Reading engagement and motivation are important issues to address since they affect literacy and literacy either impedes or enhances a student's ability to learn at the middle school level and beyond.

– Reading problems are more widespread among poor students of color, including ELLs

Academic and Social Support

Due to the nature and structure of middle school as discussed above, students may not have close relationships with their teachers. Research consistently finds that a positive student-teacher relationship enhances students' motivation and engagement in school (Brewster & Bowden, 2004; Patrick, Anderman, Ryan, Edelin & Midgely, 2001; Ryan & Patrick, 2001; Skinner & Belmont, 1993; Wentzel, 1998).

Teachers, as the adults who students have the most contact with in schools, provide most of the academic and social support a student will receive. Teacher support, the degree to which teachers listen to, encourage, and respect students (Skinner & Belmont, 1993), is vastly important to the success of Latino students (Ginorio & Huston, 2001). According to Stanton-Salazar (1997), academic and social support of

teachers and other adults at school is especially important for ethnic minority students, because such support is considered more difficult to obtain. One of the reasons for this is the lack of higher education among Hispanic parents, who, while having high aspirations for their children, often lack formal knowledge of the American educational system (Tornatzsky et al. 2001). Some researchers also argue that another reason may be that there are fewer ethnic minority teachers or adults in schools, and Latino students may need adults who better understand their culture and can respond to their concerns (Ginorio & Huston, 2001). Furthermore, teacher support may be more important in middle school because high school students tend to rely more heavily on their peers for support (Wentzel, 1998). This is consistent with the research of Eccles et al. (1993) that showed within middle school settings, the student-teacher and student-student relationships do not develop as strongly as in a self-contained elementary school classroom.

According Brewster and Bowen (2001), teacher support is an important factor in effective and behavioral aspects of school engagement. In their study on teacher support and middle school engagement of Latino middle and high school students at risk of failure, Brewster and Bowen (2001) found that as students' perceptions of teacher support increased, the level of problem behavior decreased significantly. Students also perceived school as more meaningful when their perceptions of teacher support increased (Brewster & Bowen, 2001). These findings are consistent with research conducted on the classroom social environment and changes in adolescent behavior and engagement in middle school (Ryan & Patrick, 2001). Ryan and Patrick (2001) also found that students' perceptions of teacher support, along with the teacher promoting interaction and mutual respect, were related to positive changes in engagement and motivation. Effective teachers who foster positive relationships with their students are perceived to offer more support to students and are more likely to motivate and engage their students. In addition to teacher support, counseling may help students make the transition to middle school (Wigfield, Lutz & Wagner, 2005). Furthermore, there is evidence that peer support may be an effective intervention that can help as well (Ellis, Marsh, & Craven, 2009).

College Awareness

Latino youth tend to have lower or less clear education aspirations than their white and Asian peers. Researchers have found that Hispanic youth have less stable educational aspirations in part because of their socio-economic status (SES) (Kao & Tienda, 1998; Tornatsky, Cutler & Lee, 2002). Students from low-SES backgrounds have less concrete educational aspirations, and in addition, Kao and

– Academic failure is mainly a result of low literacy: a significant number of students are poor readers

Tienda (1998) found that Hispanic youth, compared with their white and Asian peers, are relatively uninformed about college which further diminishes their odds of reaching their educational goals. Helping Latino youth reach for higher educational goals means that efforts must be taken to educate and engage their parents about the pathways to college (Auerbach, 2004; Cooper, Chavira & Mena, 2005; Tornatzky, Cutler & Lee, 2002). Without positive learning environments, high academic motivation and reading engagement, strong academic and social support, and college awareness, Latino students will have a difficult time making it through middle school, much less to high school and beyond.

In short, students experience drastic changes in transitioning from elementary to middle school. During elementary grades students are assigned to self-contained classrooms with one teacher and a group of same-age peers, whereas as already discussed above, middle school is a time during which students take subject matter courses taught by different teachers and may have different groups of peers for each class. For already struggling Latino and/or ELL students, the lack of stability created by several changes at once contributes to the problem of underachievement among these groups. Thus, the combination of suboptimal learning environments, a lack of student engagement and reading motivation, a lack of academic and social support, and the lack of college awareness contributes to the low academic achievement among our students.

Now that we have taken a closer look at both English language acquisition and middle school preparation, we move toward discussing possible solutions aimed at addressing the problems.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICYMAKERS

As outlined above, English language acquisition and middle school preparation are major challenges in Latino education. In efforts to improve academic outcomes for all students, we must look for practical and effective solutions to address the various issues that impede our ability to provide a high-quality education to our youth. The following are key recommendations—based on the findings from the research reviewed in this report—that address issues related to English language acquisition and middle school preparation.

While the recommendations are organized by topic and are separated out by the federal and state/local level, readers should bear in mind that some solutions may address both focus areas of this report and/or be relevant at multiple levels (government, school districts, schools, classrooms, etc).

Policy Recommendations for Addressing English Language Acquisition among ELLs

At the **federal level**, policymakers should consider implementing policies that:

- Clearly define Limited English Proficient (LEP) and former LEP students in Title III of the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) to ensure that states use identical criteria to designate LEP students and to determine which students are to be considered Fluent English Proficient (FEP)[15];

- Create a 50-state consortium to share best practices and develop common academic standards, assessment, and reclassification procedures for ELLs[16];

- Develop new and improved assessments to capture ELLs' native language abilities, English language development, and content knowledge[17];

- Recommend teacher education policy to ensure all current teachers and teacher candidates learn about second language and literacy acquisition, reading across the content areas, and sheltered instruction and ESL methods;

- Identify evidence-based exemplary ELL programs serving low-income students;

- Ensure transparency of outcomes for students in ELL classes;

- Recognize and share with colleagues that the majority of Hispanic children in ELL classes are U.S. citizens by birth;

- Advocate going beyond the traditional debates on language instruction and focus on programmatic outcomes of improving English language proficiency among ELLs; and

- Increase new Title III monies and earmark these funds to be allocated to the above activities.

At the **state and/or local level**, policymakers should consider implementing policies that:

- Coordinate in a comprehensive manner the policy and procedures in ELL placement, reclassification, and assessment;

- Require that all states assign unique identification numbers to each ELL student so that data-tracking is more effective and progress can be more easily measured;

- Call for transparency in ELL placement, assessment, reclassification, and aggregate public dissemination of the data;

- Increase effective teacher and staff professional development addressing the specific instructional needs/concerns of ELLs; and

- Require objective data on the effectiveness of different instructional programs.

Policy Recommendations for Addressing Middle School Preparation of Latino Youth

At the **federal level**, policymakers should consider implementing policies that:

- Provide professional training for **all** middle school teachers (not just those assigned as English and reading teachers) in reading instruction, engagement and motivation;

- Simplify the process for receiving student services, call for evaluation of programs that offer students academic and social/emotional support, and identify and recognize exemplary programs;

- Develop college awareness programs and encourage the local business community to create meaningful school partnerships;

- Educate parents about college requirements and funding options for post-secondary education; and

- Educate and prepare students for various workforce opportunities in addition to traditional college options.

At the **state and/or local level**, policymakers should consider implementing policies that:

- Recognize and reduce disparities across schools in the quality, experience, credentials, and professional training of teaching staff;

- Ensure that current academic and social/emotional support and enrichment programs are reaching the intended students;

- Strengthen college planning, information dissemination, and career development during middle school ('college knowledge');

- Introduce college awareness in middle school; and

- Promote the value of technical/vocation education as meaningful.

The recommendations provided above are not an exhaustive list of suggestions for policymakers and educators. Furthermore, none would suffice as singular prescriptions for remedying the lack of English language acquisition among ELLs or improving outcomes at the middle school level for Latinos (including ELL students). Rather, providing the broad set of recommendations above serves as a focal point of what needs to be an ongoing dialogue among all stakeholders.

CONCLUSION

An educational reform agenda aimed at developing the potential academic capital in Hispanic communities is a complex and daunting task involving policy makers at all levels of government. In this report we focused on two major issues in Latino education—English language acquisition of ELLs and middle school preparation. Much progress is possible through a strategic multi-pronged approach and coordinated efforts in policy and practice across the country.

Although the majority of Latinos are not classified as ELLs, they constitute a large portion of students and are the fastest-growing student population in our nation's public schools. Without effectively addressing the needs of our ELLs, we cannot advance the educational attainment and outcomes for our Hispanic youth. English language acquisition and literacy are enormously important—without high levels of literacy, advancing in school and post-secondary education is extremely difficult, if not nearly impossible. Middle school preparation is an equally critical issue to address because Latino students, as a group, are underachieving when compared with their white and Asian peers. Improving literacy continues to be a difficult challenge in middle school for Latino youth, while ELLs continue struggling with English language acquisition and reclassification. Middle school does not have to be a "wasteland" in the education system; it can be a place where teachers can redirect and reenergize young adolescents to learn and focus on school.

Through the discussion of the major issues within English language acquisition and middle school preparation, some key points are worth reiterating:

- The primary language of an ELL does not impede but *facilitates* English language acquisition. Therefore, researcher indicators need to be assessed so that a wide range of options take into account the learning needs of the students (i.e. promoting models/programs that make effective use of primary language support).

- Better ELL assessment is necessary, including appropriate use of testing accommodations for placement as well as reclassification.

- To improve teacher quality, we must increase professional development for all teachers, especially those teaching ELLs and in middle schools. Teachers need adequate training that will help them improve academic outcomes for Latino youth.

- Students need to be better equipped for school transitions (elementary to middle school and to high school) so academic achievement is not interrupted.

- We need to invest in data systems so that we can track student performance over time and understand teacher practices.

- Better data will facilitate the ability to conduct high quality empirical research, which is desperately needed on students, effective teachers, and best practices and proven programs for ELLs and middle school youth.

The policy recommendations offered in this report aim to address basic issues including clearly defining student classification terms, such as Limited English Proficient (LEP), but other recommendations are aimed at fostering collaboration among all states and coordination at many levels within school systems to improve the quality of education students receive. Teachers are at the core of education and are charged with improving academic outcomes for all students. Teachers of ELLs, as well as all middle school teachers, could benefit from specialized professional development and training that will help them meet the challenges of educating our youth now in the future generations to come. Furthermore, we must identify successful programs and recognize excellent schools so that we may learn from them, and replicate and implement what works well. If the nation is to respond to the economic and political challenges of the 21st century, confronting and solving the issues of Hispanic undereducation will be an integral component for overall national educational success in the coming decades.

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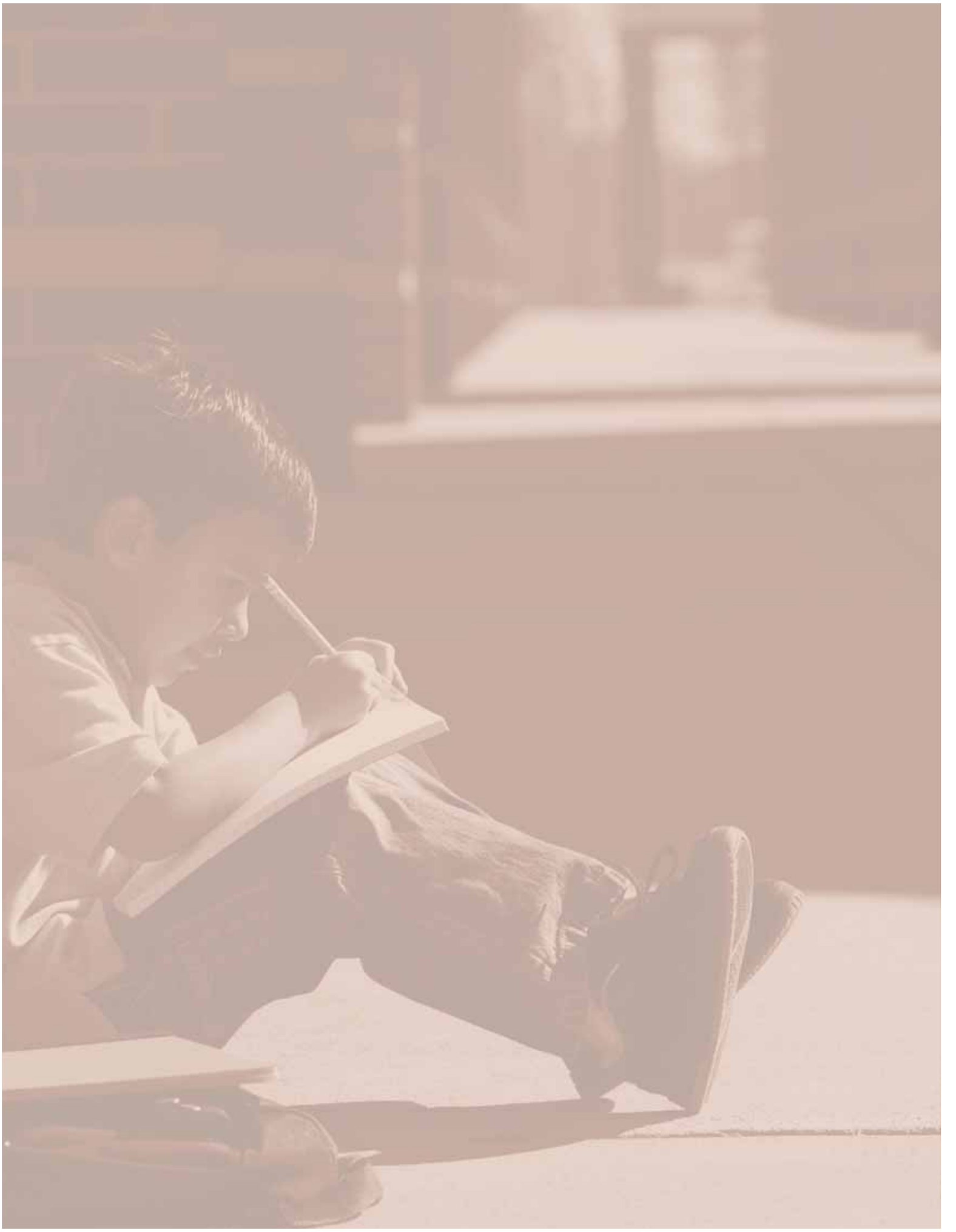

Appendix

[1] Latino and Hispanic are terms used interchangeably here to denote individuals who can trace their heritage back to Spanish-speaking countries in the Western Hemisphere.

[2] National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition (NCELA), *The Growing Number of Limited English Proficient Students*, 2006. See website at http://www.ncela.gwu.edu/files/uploads/4/GrowingLEP_0506.pdf

[3] This policy option was recommended in Short and Fitzsimmons's (2007) report, *Double the Work*. We agree that it is an important step in the right direction.

[4] See reference note above.

[5] See footnote 8.

[6] Using trends on the National Educational Assessment Progress (NAEP) achievement tests in reading and mathematics to measure the achievement gap, it is still quite wide.

[7] Unfortunately, the NAEP data does not disaggregate results of the ELL category by race/ethnicity. Thus, not all the ELLs tested were Hispanic. However, from current demographic trends we know that Hispanics make up the majority of students classified as ELLs.

[8] The reference to middle schools as an educational "wasteland" is first noted in Silberman (1970).

[9] For a review of other important education issues relevant to the Hispanic community, please see the 2003 jointly produced report by TRPI and NHCSL, *Closing Achievement Gaps: Improving Educational Outcomes for Hispanic Children*. For full citation, see reference section of this brief.

[10] Queries using key phrases such as "English language learners," "language proficiency," and "middle school and Latinos" were entered into a variety of search engines such as ERIC, ProQuest, PsychInfo, PsycARTICLES, JSTOR, ISI Web of Knowledge, and Google Scholar.

[11] Proposition 227, which passed in 1998 in a voter referendum, effectively eliminated bilingual education in California. The exception is a very limited waiver program, which allows one year of primary language instruction for ELLs.

[12]Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (BICS) refers to conversational/social English whereas Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) refers to academic English necessary for academic proficiency. See Cummins, 1981.

[13] A comprehensive evaluation of instructional models is beyond the scope of this policy brief. However, Goldenberg (2008) provides more discussion on the matter. See reference section for full citation.

[14] U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2009). *The Condition of Education 2009* (NCES 2009-081), Indicator 20.

[15] This policy option was recommended in Short and Fitzsimmons's (2007) report, *Double the Work*. We agree that it is an important step in the right direction.

[16] See reference note above.

[17] See footnote 8.

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