

MAXIMIZING AFTER SCHOOL OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENGLISH LEARNERS



Alliance for a Better Community

After school programs are a critical resource for supporting English learners outside of the regular school classroom.



Through the generous support of the **David and Lucile Packard Foundation**, the **Alliance for a Better Community (ABC)** assessed the role of after school programs in supporting English learners in Los Angeles County and at the state-level. ABC's role and activities in the after school field is to partner with key stakeholders to advance collaboration networks that support quality after school programs, foster an advocacy arm for Los Angeles County, and ultimately create a statewide action plan for further policy and advocacy work that support the Latino community.

In 2008, ABC conducted focus groups, surveyed program staff, and interviewed key after school stakeholders. The focus groups and surveys with program staff working in state and federal funded after school programs in Los Angeles County and Ventura County respectively provided a micro perspective on how program staff understands the specific needs of English learners. The report recommendations were also informed through formal and informal interviews conducted with state wide after school program stakeholders (including but not limited to policy advocates, regional leads, and program directors) from diverse geographical areas (rural, suburban and urban). The information gathered from these activities formulated the findings and recommendations for this report.

After school programs are a critical resource for supporting English learners outside of the regular school classroom. As the California after school field moves forward in creating high quality programming, ABC encourages after school stakeholders to identify and implement promising practices that will support English learners in their programs.

INTRODUCTION

English learner academic achievement lags behind non-English learners in the academic subject areas of Language Arts and Mathematics¹ and can be seen in lower high school graduation rates, college enrollment, and standardized tests. After school programs afford the practice (speaking, writing, listening and reading) of the academic lessons promoted during the school day that is essential to overall language development. After school

programs have yet to maximize the potential for a high quality experience for English learners. To better understand and explore the challenges faced by English learners and the after school program staff that serve them in after school programs, the Alliance for a Better Community conducted interviews, focus groups, and administered surveys with key after school program stakeholders statewide.²

Our research identified three major challenges to providing a high quality experience for English learners: (1) After school programs are not designed in consideration of English learner's distinct learning needs (2) Identifying English learners and tracking English

learner outcomes and (3) Training and professional development opportunities specific to serving English learners is limited in the after school field. To address these challenges the recommendations include investment in training and professional development opportunities, sharing data resources, integrating well researched strategies that support English, and increased advocacy for state accountability to ensure that quality educational experiences for English learners are maximized in after school programs. The recommendations in this report require building sustainable relationships, sharing accountability, and supporting English learners through a mutual vision among all after school stakeholders.



English Learners and After School Programs

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Both California and Los Angeles County serve a particularly high proportion of students that are English learners. California's K-12 public school system educates 1.5 million English learners, averaging to one out of every four students.³ California has the highest school enrollment of English learners compared to any other state in the country.⁴ Los Angeles County serves a large concentration of English learners, for example, within the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) English learners comprise 35% of total enrollment, which translates to approximately 240,706 students.⁵

California serves approximately 404,847 elementary, middle school and high school students in state and federally funded after school programs.⁶ Compared to other states in the country, California spends the most on after school programs.

After school programs are primarily funded through

a combination of state, federal, and private grants. In California, Proposition 49 (a voter approved state initiative) resulted in the rapid expansion of state-wide after school programs.⁷ The Proposition facilitated a rapid increase in state funding from \$50 million (1999) to \$550 million (2007) in less than ten years.⁸

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Despite the large increase in funding for after school programs in California, many programs are still not able to serve all students that need and demand its services. The expansion of after school programs has particularly occurred in communities that have a large number of English learners. According to the *Master Plan for California After School Programs*: "After School Education and Safety (ASES) programs and 21st Century Community Learning Centers (CCLC), program grantees tend to be in larger schools with a high percentage of English learners".⁹

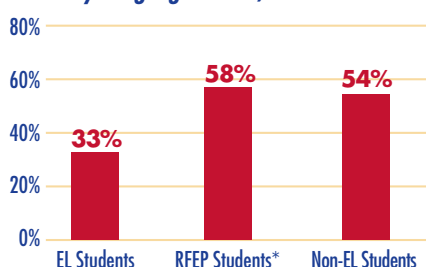


After School Programs Are a Key Resource for English Learners

The academic achievement of English learners lags behind non-English learners in the subject areas of Language Arts and Mathematics.¹⁰ Differences in achievement are also evidenced in high school graduation rates, college enrollment, and standardized tests. According to a recent study of first-time 9th graders expected to graduate in the spring of 2005, “only 33% of EL students graduated four years later compared to 58% of students who had been redesignated prior to entering high school, and compared to 54% of a larger sample of students who were limited in English proficiency in 9th grade”.¹¹ Moreover, schools serving high concentrations of English learners experienced lower graduation rates: “the odds of graduating from high school were 40% lower at schools with high concentrations of English learners compared to schools without high EL student enrollment”.¹²

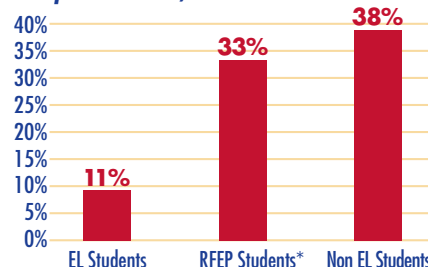
The difference in student achievement is most severe and apparent in standardized test results. English learners perform significantly lower than their non-English learner counterparts in California Standards Testing in Math throughout elementary school, middle school, continuing onto high school.

LAUSD On-Time High School Completion Rates by Language Status, 2005



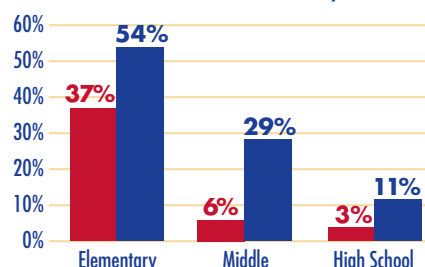
*Reclassified Fluent English Proficient (RFEF) Students
Source: Silver, Saunders, and Zarate. “What Factors Predict High School Graduation in the Los Angeles Unified School District” California Dropout Research Project 14. (2008): 9-10.

LAUSD A-G College Prep Completion Rates, 2002



*Reclassified Fluent English Proficient (RFEF) Students
Source: Silver, Saunders, and Zarate. “What Factors Predict High School Graduation in the Los Angeles Unified School District” California Dropout Research Project 14. (2008): 9-10.

LAUSD Proficient or Advanced on California Standards Test in Math, 2008



Source: 2007-2008 LAUSD School Report Card www.lausd.net/reportcard

The achievement gap for English learners can be attributed to a range of factors including school resources, socio-economic background, and family literacy levels among others.¹³ Researchers also attribute the achievement gap among English learners to not enough “instructional time” to allow students to acquire language and learn academic material.¹⁴ After school programs are of special interest because of the extended time students spend learning English. The extended hours outside of the classroom translate to an additional 15 hours per week and approximately 60 hours per month.

Preliminary research on English learner student performance in after school programs shows that such programs have a significant role in increasing language acquisition rates for English learners and decreasing the time it takes English learners to redesignate into mainstream English classrooms.¹⁵ For instance, English learners who participate in after school programs retain English fluency at a higher rate compared to English learners who do not participate in after school programs,

ENGLISH LEARNERS MAY NOT HAVE ENOUGH “INSTRUCTIONAL TIME” TO ACQUIRE LANGUAGE AND LEARN ACADEMIC MATERIAL. AFTER SCHOOL PROGRAMS EXTEND THE AMOUNT OF TIME STUDENTS SPEND LEARNING ENGLISH.

75% compared to 60%.¹⁶ A similar study revealed that after school programs “make a difference” for participating English learners. For example, 23% of English learners in an after school program were reclassified as fluent in English, compared to 7% for all counterparts that did not participate in an after school program.¹⁷

It is not surprising that after school programs have a positive effect on English language acquisition. English learners acquire language through four interrelated domains: listening, speaking, reading and writing.¹⁸ Although there is a clear distinction between learning social English and academic English, after school programs can provide complimentary support through a range of activities that promote the language and expose students to rich vocabulary in all subject areas regardless of context. Providing English learners with the space and time to practice speaking English can prove successful in acquiring English.¹⁹ As education stakeholders look to after school programs as a means to support English learners, it is important to consider how designing tailored programs for English learners driven by data can impact educational gaps that English learners experience.



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CHALLENGES

to Providing English Learners with Quality Educational Experiences in After School Programs

Educators and administrators may have uncertainties on the role that a traditional after school program can take part in as it pertains to supporting English learners, a multi-faceted sub-group of students with diverse learning needs and backgrounds.²⁰ After all, school administrators face numerous challenges to closing the achievement gap between EL students and their peers with shortages of certified teachers prepared to teach English learners in their classrooms, lack of supportive resources, and pressure to meet state accountability standards. The flexible nature of after school programs provide an opportunity to enhance existing programming in a safe learning environment that compliments rather than replicates the regular school day instruction.

Our research identified three major challenges to increasing the positive impact of after school programs for English learners:

1. After school programs are not designed in consideration of English learner's distinct needs.
2. English learners are not identified and tracked in after school programs .
3. Training and professional development opportunities specific to serving English learners is limited to after school program staff.

Addressing these challenges will lead to a higher quality educational experience for English learners participating in after school programs.

1 After school programs are designed without consideration of an English learner's distinct learning needs.

Lack of awareness about the distinctive experience of English learners and promising practices educating English learners results in lack of after school programs designed for English learners.

Generally after school programs can fall into three groups: academic, recreational and cultural.²¹ After school programs serve a diverse group of students and usually target constituent's needs by establishing program goals and measuring outcomes. The focus groups revealed two common reasons after school programs are not maximizing opportunities for

"SOME PARENTS APPROACH STAFF TO INFORM THEM THEIR CHILD IS NOT WELL-VERSED IN ENGLISH."

AFTER SCHOOL PROGRAM COACH
(LOS ANGELES COUNTY)

English learners in their programs: (1) lack of awareness and understanding about the distinct needs and experiences of English learners and (2) limited sharing of already existing researched based strategies in the education field that can be adapted to after school program settings.

A common misconception in the after school field is that recruiting and hiring bilingual program staff directly translates into providing adequate support to English learners in after school programs. While it is important to hire bilingual staff that reflects the language diversity and demographics of after school programs, all staff can benefit from learning how to interact and guide English learners. One



"A classmate may identify another classmate as needing help in class with English, which directly translates to needing more help after school."

*After School Program Coordinator
(Los Angeles County)*

significant challenge to supporting English learners is the recognition that English learners may need different approaches and or strategies to receive the educational benefits from participating in after school programs. Moreover, it is important for both English only speaking staff and bilingual staff to receive training to gain awareness of the distinct learning needs of all students. Programs will not compromise their content and outcome goals by establishing programs and implementing learning strategies that support English learners, because effective teaching strategies benefiting EL students support English acquisition among all students.

In the focus groups conducted in Los Angeles County, we found that in general after school programs did not implement specific strategies in their programs to specifically support English learners. Regardless of the promising research that shows "materials designed for non-English speakers" are essential to support English learners gain "English and academic proficiency,"

"WE IDENTIFY ENGLISH LEARNERS PRIMARILY BY THE LANGUAGE [SPANISH OR ENGLISH] THEY CHOOSE TO COMMUNICATE WITH STAFF."

AFTER SCHOOL PROGRAM COORDINATOR
(LOS ANGELES COUNTY)

many after school programs lack intentional program plans.²² There were missed opportunities to incorporate specific learning strategies in all three areas of

programming: academics, enrichment, and homework tutoring. The program staff shared that the "curriculum and activities implemented are designed to appeal to all students", but a clear set of "promising practices" related to implementing strategies to support English learners was not identified. The focus group revealed that the after school program staff provide support in translating homework assignments between two languages (usually English and Spanish) and correspond with

families, oftentimes becoming the liaisons between families and the regular school day. This is a positive indicator that after school programs already support and embrace multi-lingual families. Moving towards an intentional framework to support and outreach to English learners can be a natural extension to the current work.



2 English learners are not identified and tracked in after school programs. *Data on who is an English learner is generally not provided to after school program staff and as a result, English learner outcomes can not be monitored.*

Focus group participants revealed that data sources were not utilized to identify or monitor English learners. The after school program staff that had established positive channels of communication with parents and teachers were more likely to obtain student information, but not consistently for all participating students. In the programs without formal partnerships we found that program staff did not have the appropriate data sources to identify English learners, but rather relied on parents, students, and peers to identify English learners in their programs. The programs with formal partnerships with the school district or school administrators were more likely to obtain California English Language Development Test (CELDT) scores and other relevant academic or demographic information to support all participants.

Currently, after school programs are required to track students and collect demographic information describing their participants. The data includes the number of English learners that are served in the programs. Additional data resources that can provide a more complete representation of English learners participating in programs such as standardized test scores and report cards are not readily available to after school program staff. Unless after school programs have formal relationships and agreements with districts and or schools, after school



program staff is unable to assess such data sources. Inaccessibility of data prevents after school programs from obtaining disaggregated data that can inform staff on the language level proficiencies of the students, which is critical information to have when designing curriculum that is supportive of English learners. Moreover it also interferes with monitoring student outcomes, improving program design each year when new students enroll, and essentially with implementing high quality programs.

“IT WILL BE USEFUL TO LEARN STRATEGIES TO ENGAGE NEWCOMERS [IMMIGRANTS] IN AFTER SCHOOL PROGRAM ACTIVITIES.”

AFTER SCHOOL PROGRAM STAFF (LOS ANGELES)

In the focus groups conducted with Los Angeles County after school program staff, we found that program staff is aware that after school programs have a role in “Closing the Achievement Gap” and that English learners need additional support. At the same time, the programming was designed for “all students” and was not necessarily tailored to meet the specific needs of English learners. The common

assumption was that all students learn in similar academic and social levels. It was unusual for after school program staff to utilize data sources, such as standardized test scores or student report cards to monitor student progress or program outcomes.

3 Training and professional development opportunities specific to serving English learners is limited in the after school field. *While regular school day professional development supporting English learners exists, after school program staff has limited access to such opportunities.*

Among after school program line staff there is limited knowledge around the “how to” provide support and differentiated learning opportunities for English learners. The focus groups conducted in Los Angeles County revealed that line staff working directly with students had not received training on topics related to English learners. The “how to” was not addressed during professional development series or coaching sessions. Underlining this challenge is the lack of collaboration with a wide range of education stakeholders that can potentially share intellectual capital that is geared specifically for English learners.

“THERE ARE OPPORTUNITIES TO DISCUSS DIFFERENT ISSUES DURING STAFF DEVELOPMENT DAYS, BUT WE HAVE NEVER HAD A CONVERSATION AROUND E.L.L. BEST PRACTICES.”

AFTER SCHOOL PROGRAM STAFF (LOS ANGELES)

The after school field already has in place advisory committees, learning communities, conferences and technology available to exchange and disseminate information among after school providers at a statewide level. The issue is not necessarily the lack of professional development available to after school program staff, but more specifically the lack of conversation

“We have not received training specifically on supporting English learners in after school programs. Any form of training that informs staff on how to reach and support English learners is beneficial.”

After School Program Coordinator (Los Angeles County)

around supporting English learners specifically in the after school field. There are a significant number of professional development trainings on supporting children with behavioral problems, designing hidden learning math programs, promoting student leadership, among other topics. However, the challenge is that the majority of these trainings are designed for English fluent students and program staff may not be instructed on strategic delivery for English learners.

The limited opportunities can be reversed through awareness of the issue and consensus building to identify after school best practices for serving English learners in an after school setting. Another element that contributes to fewer professional development opportunities is the lack of resource training. Teachers and other educators such as literacy coaches attend professional development trainings that draw upon research based theories and practices that are designed to promote language acquisition, academic achievement and cross cultural skills. After school staff can benefit from such information as well and can apply it to the after school program setting.





RECOMMENDATIONS

High quality after school programs have the potential to provide a variety of learning experiences for all students and to galvanize a multiple range of education stakeholders to build innovative programs that support the diversity of students that participate in programs. Research on sustaining high quality after school programs reiterate the importance of tailoring programs to meet the needs of students through intentional programs that set clear goals and measure outcomes.²³ Moreover, identifying and selecting data sources are highlighted as a fundamental element of the strategic planning process for high quality programming and to measure outcomes.²⁴ In discussing the linkages between the regular school day and after school programs, we do not advocate for a replication of the school day, but rather hold a vision of after school programs that are build upon their assets of personalization, extra time, enrichment, flexibility and socialization to the diversity of students to inspire learning and academic achievement from all students.

To facilitate a high quality educational experience for English learners, we recommend the following:

1 Invest in providing after school program staff with professional development that supports positive goals and outcomes for English learners.

- Establish sustainable collaborative groups to develop consensus on after school program best practices.
- Draw upon the expertise of educators to develop professional development curriculums that are adoptable to after school programs.
- Encourage sharing and exchanging professional development resources between school districts and after school programs.
- Develop model programs emphasizing mentorship relationships between teachers, teacher assistants and after school program staff to promote English learner success in after school programs.
- Utilize existing professional development infrastructures to raise awareness and promote effective strategies.
- Engage community colleges and universities to provide professional development courses and to create extension programs that connect prospective educators to after school programs.

2 Encourage school districts and schools to share data with after school program staff through the adoption of a data source sharing policy.

- Analyze and compare disaggregated pre- and post-data sources to measure desired outcomes for English learners in after school programs.
- Develop data driven after school programming that aligns to school district goals and meets the needs of

participating students, using appropriate assessments to measure progress.

- Inform and train after school staff to utilize data sources to support English learners.

3 Integrate well researched strategies that support English learners in traditional aspects of after school programs: homework assistance, academics, and enrichment.

- Identify school day strategies in program models that are adoptable in after school programs.
- Utilize after school program flexibility to implement strategies that are relevant to English learners.

4 Advocate for federal and state accountability to ensure the educational experiences for English learners are maximized in after school programs.

- Identify after school programs as an equal state partner in closing the achievement gap.
- Ensure Requests for Proposals (RFPs) for state and federal funding reflect strategies and objectives that promote English learner success.
- Advocate for creating statewide models of after school programs that are tailored to English learners, especially in school districts that have dense populations of English learners.
- Encourage the transparent collection and use of state data relevant to English learner participation and assessment to better inform programs and funding.

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CONCLUSION

The after school field has grown significantly over the last few years, maturing to a level where discussions around quality and differentiation of programming and strategies can and must occur to realize the potential opportunities after school programs afford California's youth. Maximizing after school opportunities for English learners requires leveraging both fiscal and non-fiscal resources to implement high quality programs. The recommendations in this report require building

sustainable relationships, sharing accountability, and a mutual vision among all education stakeholders for supporting English learners. Our research only starts the conversation about how after school programs can support English learners. Moving forward with these recommendations will require building awareness and an understanding of English learners in the after school field. Our intention is to enhance the opportunities available in after school programs by revealing challenges, offering solutions and galvanizing stakeholders to positive action. As California continues its efforts to define quality after school programs, it is essential to build a relentless voice on behalf of all students the programs are intended to serve.



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Alliance for a Better Community (ABC) promotes an improved quality of life for Latinos in education, health, economic development and civic participation throughout the Los Angeles region. ABC advocates for policies that provide Latino students with outstanding educational experiences in and outside of the classroom from Pre-K through 12th grade in order to prepare them for college, careers, and life.