English Learner Issues Memo: Data, Accountability, and Local Control Accountability Plans

Background

Data, Accountability, and Local Control Accountability Plans (LCAPs) are three important issue areas that have been identified as priorities by the Consortium for English Learner Success for state and local advocacy. They are separate but interrelated issues that have a direct impact on English Learner students. California public schools are funded by the state through the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF), designed to send additional money to districts and students where the need is greatest. The LCFF distributes resources based on equity by prioritizing students who face the greatest barriers to academic success (EL students, Foster Youth students, and Low-Income students). It shifts resource allocation decisions to the local level, and engages parents, students and community members to hold school districts accountable through LCAPs. All school districts must develop an LCAP, a fiscal three-year plan that describes the goals, actions, services, and expenditures to support positive student outcomes that address state and local priority areas.¹

A component of LCFF, the California Accountability Model and School Dashboard (Dashboard) provides information about how well districts and schools are meeting the needs of their diverse student populations based on a set of local and state measures (known as indicators) drawn from the priority areas of the LCFF.² Districts are required to use data from the Dashboard to inform the development of the LCAP, including: the annual update (analysis); goals actions and services (identified need); and plan summary (greatest progress, greatest needs, performance gaps). Based on performance on Dashboard measures, districts may be identified to receive differentiated state and/or federal support and assistance through the California System of Support.³

This document provides an overview of key issues related to the equitable treatment of English Learner (EL) students around data, accountability, and Local Control Accountability Plans in California’s public education system. It provides an overview and summary of key conclusions of the research studies and offers policy recommendations. This memo is intended for the use of the Consortium’s Policy and Advocacy Work Group to identify state and local policy solutions and recommendations.

1. General Overview: Migration Policy Institute ELs in California Factsheet
2. Data/Accountability: Californians Together Masking the Focus on ELs

¹ Priority 1: Basic Services and Conditions at schools; Priority 2: Implementation of State Academic Standards; Priority 3: Parent Engagement; Priority 4: Student Achievement; Priority 5: Student Engagement; Priority 6: School Climate; Priority 7: Access to a Broad Course of Study; Priority 8: Outcomes in a Broad Course of Study; Priority 9: Expelled Pupils (County Offices of Education only); Priority 10: Foster Youth (County Offices of Education only).
² Broadly, the state-managed indicators on the Dashboard represent two things: current results (“status”) on student outcomes such as test scores; and progress or the lack of it (“change”). The California State Board of Education has established “cut points” for both status and change to define levels of performance.
³ Technical assistance is primarily provided by County Offices of Education and the California Collaborative for Educational Excellence, a statewide agency that works to strengthen California's public school system so that districts can build their capacity to improve student outcomes.
1. General Overview of EL Students in California (*Migration Policy Institute ELs in CA Factsheet*)

**Demographic overview of Foreign-born and EL populations in CA**

- **CA has a high population of individuals born outside of the U.S.** California is home to one quarter of the U.S. foreign-born population. Approximately 10,678,000 foreign-born individuals resided in California, accounting for 27 percent of the state’s own population.

- **A majority of children in CA schools have at least one parent who is foreign-born.** The share of school-age children with one or more foreign-born parents is larger in California (52 percent) than in the United States overall (26 percent).

- **More than a majority of low-income children in CA have at least one parent who is foreign-born.** In California, 60% of children in low-income families had one or more foreign-born parents, compared to 32 percent of children nationally.

- **A vast majority of LEP/EL students in CA were born in the United States.** In California, nearly 75% of school aged children who were reported as limited English proficient (LEP) in census data were born in the United States, with a larger share among elementary school children than older students. The rate of native-born LEP children in the United States overall was slightly lower, at 71 percent.

- **Southern CA has largest numbers of EL students.** Among California school districts with enrollment of more than 10,000 ELs, four of the five districts with the largest number of ELs in SY 2017–18 were located in Southern California (LAUSD, San Diego, Santa Ana, Garden Grove).

- **EL students make up higher percentages of younger grade levels.** As grade level increases, the population and share of ELs in California K-12 schools decrease. Whereas 32 percent of early-elementary students were ELs in SY 2017–18, that number was 11 percent for grades 9 through 12.

**EL Student Outcomes in CA**

- California administers the Smarter Balanced Summative Assessment (SBSA) for accountability purposes. The SBSA for ELA and mathematics is given in grades 3–8 and in grade 11, and scores are reported at four performance levels.

- The tables below show considerable achievement gaps between the share of ELs and non-ELs who met or exceeded standards in English and Math with that gap growing larger at older grade levels (CDE 2018 data).

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4 Data is from 2016 U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey and California Department of Education
2. Data/Accountability: (Californians Together Masking the Focus on ELs report and Executive Summary)

Issue: The state accountability system mischaracterizes the needs of English Learner students, undermining the equity intent of California’s Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) law. A recent report by Californians Together concludes that combining two groups of EL students with dramatically diverse language and academic profiles obfuscates the academic progress of ELs. The report examined the connection between two accountability policy mechanisms (the California School Dashboard and LCAPs) and their treatment of EL students. Within the Dashboard, the English Learner academic indicators aggregate 4 years of reclassified student performance data with 2 years of current ELs. The aggregation of this data masks the needs of EL students because reclassified students significantly outperform current ELs (and English-only students in English language arts); combining them into the EL subgroup masks the needs of current ELs and might preclude districts from being identified to receive additional support to serve their ELs. This is problematic because this data is used to identify schools and districts in need of state and federal technical assistance and by districts when determining which student subgroups’ needs to be addressed in their LCAPs. In practice this means that many districts may not be using disaggregated EL data to allocate targeted resources and/or to identify programs and services for students in their LCAPs. They would not receive critical help for EL students from the state or federal government.

Policy Recommendation: Accountability measures related to EL students should separate current EL students from reclassified EL students at the state, county and local level. This

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5 Data: California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress 2018 California Statewide and Los Angeles County Results. Retrieved on March 28, 2019 from https://caaspp.cde.ca.gov/sb2018
will provide a clearer picture of academic performance according to EL typology and enable districts, counties, and the state to target supports and resources based on need. The state should give reclassified and current ELs their own color on the Dashboard and use the revised indicators in its System of Support to ensure that school districts receive the technical assistance needed to address academic and language challenges and gaps of ELs. County Offices of Education should have staff with EL expertise to review LCAPs and provide assistance to districts in analyzing current and reclassified student data. Moving forward, districts should create their LCAPs based on the new indicator so that the specific needs of reclassified and current ELs materialize into differentiated supports.

3. Data/LCAP: Getting Down to Facts II Research Brief: ELs Charting Their Experiences and Mapping their Futures in CA Schools

Issue (a): EL students are often treated as a monolithic and uniform group instead of students who have diverse, individual educational assets and needs, and outcomes. Interpreting EL outcomes from data can be complex, and at times misleading. EL students are a diverse group in terms of their needs, assets, experiences, and outcomes. Some EL students also have an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) and special education needs in addition to language needs. Some EL students are “newcomers” who have recently arrived to the U.S. from another country and may have acute needs related to trauma, as many arrive fleeing war, violence, and other hardships, and many experience trauma as they migrate. In addition, many of these students who enter U.S. schools for the first time in middle or high school struggle to complete graduation requirements before they age out of the K-12 school system. Furthermore, some EL students are “long term English learner students” who have not exited EL classification within a “typical” timeframe of six years and who have not made sufficient progress with regard to English proficiency. Unfortunately, state and federal policy tends to cluster all ELs together under an assumption that they all have similar educational needs and outcomes. When analyzing outcome data for California’s large, highly diverse EL population, however, it is important to understand that the population changes across grade levels. As students get older, most higher performing students are reclassified so lower performing students and newly-arrived students with lower English language fluency make up larger proportions of the EL population. Furthermore, secondary English Learners benefit academically when they have access to correct course placement in English Language Development courses PPIC Report: Academic Progress for English Learners.

Policy Recommendation (a): State, county, and local policy and practice should view and treat EL students as a diverse group in terms of their needs, assets, experiences, and outcomes. California is increasingly moving away from this simplistic notion of EL students being a uniform group by addressing both the needs of groups within the EL subgroup and inching toward providing more individualized services. The California EL Roadmap, for example, states: “Recognizing that there is no universal EL profile and no one-size-fits-all approach that works for all English learners, programs, curriculum, and instruction must be responsive to different EL student characteristics and experiences.” Services and programs targeted to EL students should take into account different barriers that EL students face depending on their needs. For example, EL students with disabilities may require language
supports that take their disability into account; newcomer students may require more social-emotional services targeting trauma experienced before and while migrating; and Long-Term English Learner students may require more access and tutoring in core academic content. Furthermore, in evaluating outcomes and achievement gaps, state and local policy and practice should disaggregate the EL group performance by their specific needs (i.e. LTEL, newcomers, etc).

**Issue (b): Mechanisms are weak for ensuring that funds targeted for English learners are reaching them and being used in effective ways.** The LCFF is the state’s system for distributing funding to school districts, and it allows for substantial local control over how funds are distributed and used. Funding levels for EL students are determined through base, supplemental, and concentration grant calculations. Under the LCFF, school district LCAPs must identify educational goals for the EL subgroup, actions to accomplish those goals, and targeted expenditures. Despite these measures, accountability for EL education spending under the LCFF is considered weaker than measures in most other states. Specifically, because funds are received as a lump sum at the district level and are not tied to specific expenditures, it has not been clear whether funds from supplemental and concentration grants must be spent on English learners and other targeted groups.

**Policy Recommendation (b): Create stronger accountability mechanisms and greater transparency to ensure that funds targeted for EL students reach them and are used effectively.** Many of the research-based services, resources, and supports that benefit EL outcomes—such as bilingual teacher preparation programs and providing sufficient instructional time for ELs to receive both English language instruction and content instruction—require funding. California’s LCFF reform has resulted in some additional funding for districts that serve English learners, and the monitoring of local expenditures should reveal the extent to which services for ELs are improving.

4. **Local Control Accountability Plans:** *Getting Down to Facts II research brief, Education Equity in California*

**Issue: California’s lack of enforcement of equity goals and adequate guidance for equity-driven community engagement.** The state’s withdrawal from any role in accountability is an inadequate strategy to prioritize equity and improve schools systemwide. The state has no clear goals, expectations, or consequences for student outcomes or for equity. This leaves districts without adequate guidance to understand if an improvement strategy is working, what adequate progress looks like across subgroups and among targeted student populations, or what resources and strategies might be needed to address the root cause of inequities. This hands-off approach also applies to the stakeholder engagement mandate around LCAPs, which has largely become compliance-based. Districts that prioritized deep engagement with their communities made explicit equity investment choices in their LCAPs. However, without guidance from the state for districts to build capacity to meaningfully engage the most underserved communities, EL students will most certainly continue to be underrepresented in LCAPs. In fact, most districts studied did not offer basic strategies tailored to English learners (or foster and low-income) and
did not differentiate the range of needs within the EL subgroup (e.g. an EL from a high-income versus low-income family).

**Policy Recommendation:** Develop an EL student-specific standard measurement system for whether an improvement strategy is working, what it means to be on track, and guidance to understand EL student data/typologies and corresponding research-based interventions. Many superintendents interviewed in the GDTF II report said they welcomed more guidance in serving EL students but noted that their systems of support lacked capacity and expertise on EL students. The state should provide this much-needed guidance to districts to accurately identify gaps in meeting the needs of EL students. Moreover, districts should engage for equity with their stakeholders. The engagement strategies that led to equity-based investments prioritized the participation of historically underserved families and developed participants’ capacity for two-way dialogue around racial bias, and policy and budget topics. The state and districts should increase their role in accountability for improving outcomes for EL students.