

The Education of English Learners in California Following the Passage of Proposition 227: A Case Study of an Urban School District

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the implementation of Proposition 227 and its impact on the education of English learners in California's K-12 public schools since its passage in 1998. The paper begins with an examination of the sociopolitical context surrounding the proposition and its implementation. The implementation of the new law is then discussed, including inconsistencies and challenges. Since Proposition 227 was approved and implemented during a period of extensive educational reform in California, its intersection with other state mandates is also discussed. A case study of a large urban school district is presented to illustrate the impact of implementation at the district level. The paper concludes with a discussion of educationally-responsive policies and practices for the education of English learners based on the current policy context.

More than a decade after the passage of Proposition 227, legislation that effectively eliminated bilingual education in California by severely limiting students' access to bilingual programs, educational policy and practice for urban English learners in California continues to transform. (The terms Limited English Proficient (LEP), English learner, and English language learner are used interchangeably in this article.) Proposition 227 stated that "all children in California public schools shall be taught English by being taught in English. In particular, this shall require that all children be placed in English language classrooms" (California Primary Election Voter Information Guide, 1998, para. 7). The 1998 voter approval of this legislation has resulted in the methodical decline of bilingual programs in California to the point of virtual nonexistence. The implementation of subsequent policies and practices at district, school, and classroom levels has been systematic, yet inconsistent as anti-immigrant sentiment and rhetoric have steadily risen in California and across the United States. One out of four

students attending California public schools is classified as an English learner (CDE, 2010b), so it is both practical and salient to understand the intersection of policy and practice and the resulting impact on English learners, many of whom are immigrants or from immigrant families.

There are approximately 1.5 million Limited English Proficient (LEP) students enrolled in California's public schools (CDE, 2010b). This student population represents roughly one quarter of California's entire K-12 student population and one-third of the nation's 4.4 million English language learners (Rumberger & Gándara, 2004). Upon entering their given academic environments, LEP students in K-12 schools are frequently expected to engage in academic learning in a culture, and often a language, that is new to them. These students, although often times highly motivated to learn, typically struggle academically and socially (Gándara & Contreras, 2009; Suárez-Orozco, Bang, & Onaga, 2010). They are additionally navigating a sociopolitical environment that can be perceived as anti-immigrant in schools

that provide a predominantly English-only learning environment.

Proposition 227, or the English for the Children initiative (Baker, 2011; Cadiero-Kaplan, 2004), has had a definitive impact on California's schools by severely limiting students' access to bilingual programs and effectively eliminating bilingual education programs in the state, thereby creating inhospitable learning environments that are culturally, educationally, and linguistically unresponsive (Crawford, 1997; Krashen, 1996). As Jim Cummins (1986) has argued, it takes five to seven years for English learners to attain the cognitive-academic language proficiency necessary to be sufficiently fluent in English to achieve success in the context-reduced, cognitively demanding activities of reading, writing, mathematics, science, and other academic subjects. Therefore, students cannot be expected to learn academic concepts in grade-level content classes if they are not proficient in the highly demanding language of the teacher or the even more complex language in content-area curricula and textbooks (Cummins, 1986; Olsen, 1997). This paper focuses on the implementation of Proposition 227 and its impact on the education of English learners, many of whom are immigrants or from immigrant families, in California's K-12 public schools. The next section of the paper examines the sociopolitical context surrounding the proposition and its implementation. The paper then proceeds to describe the implementation of the policy, including inconsistencies across the state. A case study of a large urban school district is presented to illustrate the impact of the policy implementation at the district level. The paper concludes with a discussion of educationally responsive policies and practices for the education of English learners, who tend to be concentrated in urban schools. Educational responsiveness is presented as a theoretical framework to

better understand and discuss the policy context and educational practices for English learners. Educational responsiveness has been defined as an approach to policies and practices that promote positive educational outcomes through the recognition, understanding, and utilization of students' cultural, linguistic, and psychological assets (Cadiero-Kaplan & Rodríguez, 2008).

The Sociopolitical Context of Proposition 227

Proposition 227, which passed with 61% of the vote in 1998, was preceded by the passage of Proposition 187 in 1994, judicially overturned legislation that made providing healthcare, education, and other government services to undocumented immigrants illegal. However, unlike Proposition 187, Proposition 227 was positioned as a pro-immigrant initiative that would enhance the educational opportunities afforded to English learners. Patricia Gándara, professor of education and co-director of the Civil Rights Project at the University of California, Los Angeles, and her colleagues (2000) noted:

Proponents of Proposition 227 contended that bilingual education had failed as a pedagogical strategy and should be abandoned. Evidence for its failure was found in the continuing underachievement of English learners and the low rate that English learners were reclassified as Fluent English Proficient (FEP). Yet, the fact was, less than one-third of all English Learners were enrolled in bilingual programs prior to the passage of Proposition 227, so their poor academic achievement could not be attributed to these programs. (p.2)

Proposition 227 was written in a manner that would specifically impact language minority students in California's K-12 schools. The proposition mandated that students

were to receive instruction primarily and overwhelmingly in English by placing them in Structured English Immersion (SEI) classes, the goal being for them to gain academic language skills in English. According to the legislation, English language learners would be permitted to remain in SEI classes for a period not to exceed two years, and such classes would utilize curricula and strategies to support students as they acquired English. Gándara (2000) noted that SEI classrooms were legally defined as “multi-age classes with students at the same level of English proficiency in which the focus of instruction was to be the development of English skills” (p. 1). These classes were designed foremost to teach students English, with only a secondary focus on academic content (Baker, 2011; Brisk, 2005; Cadiero-Kaplan, 2004; Maxwell-Jolly, 2000).

Proposition 227 included the option of a waiver for parents who wanted their child to continue in a bilingual program. Parent waivers were considered according to the following three conditions: (a) the child already possessed strong English language skills, as measured by standardized tests of English vocabulary comprehension, reading, and writing in which the child scored at or above the state average for his or her grade-level or at or above the 5th grade average; (b) the child was over 10 years of age and school personnel determined that a bilingual approach would best serve this child; and (c) the child needed modifications due to a specific learning disability. Each school site was required to have a minimum of twenty students with completed waivers to create a bilingual class. Additionally, as Palmer and García (2000) explained, “the new law specified that children must be placed ‘for a period no less than 30 days during the school year in an English language classroom’ before a parent waiver would be able to move the child into an ‘alternative’ (i.e., bilingual) program” (p. 169). In other words,

the legislation required that all youth be immersed in an English-only environment for a period of time regardless of the desires or needs of the students and their parents or guardians. Lastly, Proposition 227 included “a provision allowing parents and others to assign personal legal liability to any teacher, school, or district that does not implement the English language program as designated in the initiative” (Maxwell-Jolly, 2000, p.38). The legal responsibility this proposition placed on school personnel had rarely, if ever, been implemented before in California’s state educational policy.

Although more than two-thirds of California’s English learners were not in bilingual programs prior to the passage of Proposition 227, the proposition still garnered the overwhelming support of voters who were informed by its proponents that bilingual education was a principle cause of the academic struggles of English learners (Cline, Necochea & Rios, 2004; Gándara, 2000; Gándara et al., 2000). Despite the positive intentions of voters who believed they were acting in the best interests of English learners, Proposition 227 was written and promoted by individuals and groups that had previously participated in anti-bilingual education and anti-immigrant movements. Previous propositions in California, both those that passed into state law and those overturned within the judicial system, serve as markers of this movement. For example, Proposition 63, approved in 1986, made speaking a language other than English when seeking state services illegal. Proposition 187, which denied health and education services to undocumented immigrants, followed in 1994. Two years later in 1996, Proposition 209 effectively eliminated affirmative action in housing, employment, and admission to institutions of higher education (Cline, Necochea, & Rios, 2004; Mora, 2002). These initiatives were instrumental in paving the way for

Proposition 227, as they set the stage for the push toward monolingual English education in California.

The Response of Schools to the Challenges of Implementation

Proposition 227 was passed in June 1998 and mandated to be implemented the following school year, which led to a period of rapid response and transformation for many school districts in California. For many, this allowed as few as 60 days to prepare to implement the policy. At the same time, the state provided limited guidance regarding specific details of implementation, which led school districts to take action in highly variable ways (Gándara, 2000). Additional issues emerged during the initial implementation of this initiative, including: the imprecise wording of the proposition and lack of clarity for implementation at the school site level, the lack of teacher training to support the English learners now being taught solely in English, and the lack of appropriate instructional materials for SEI classes (Maxwell-Jolly, 2000). The curricular and programmatic changes required by Proposition 227 raised concerns also among teachers. Alamillo and Viramontes (2000) noted that bilingual educators faced challenges such as the ideological and pedagogical difficulties of a mandated switch from a bilingual model to an SEI model of instruction despite their extensive training and belief in primary language instruction.

Due to the scale of implementation in California and the notable size of the English learner student population, the law was implemented unevenly. While this provided scattered opportunities for pro-bilingual education advocates to resist and delay the dismantling of bilingual education programs, the law has taken effect statewide over. For example, Palmer and García (2000) observed, “the openness of the law for

interpretation has created a wide array of unintended consequences. A law which many feared would sound a death knell for bilingual programs statewide has, in many locations, gone virtually unnoticed” (p. 170). The ambiguity of the law even led some to willfully organize against it and to create additional programs for English learners (Palmer & García, 2000). Ultimately though, Palmer and García conceded that “in many places, [Proposition 227] has had the consequence intended by the authors, of inhibiting or dissolving primary language support and instruction for language minority students” (p.170).

As noted by Palmer and García (2000), the ambiguity in the proposition’s wording led to a variety of interpretations and implementations. In some instances this variation allowed school districts to maintain their bilingual programs, while other districts interpreted the new legislation as a mandated dismantling of their bilingual programs. Schirling, Contreras, and Ayala (2000) found that confusion arose in one San Francisco Bay Area school as a result of their efforts to interpret and implement the new law. This confusion resulted from the district’s interpretation of the mandate that instruction be conducted “overwhelmingly” in English to mean that all instruction, particularly during the 30-day English-only period, be implemented solely in English with the use of students’ native languages reserved only for previewing and reviewing content and to meet students’ emotional and physical needs as necessary (Schirling, Contreras, & Ayala, 2000). In addition to issues of ambiguity in the implementation, many teachers were concerned that they would misinterpret the law and face negative consequences if they engaged in primary language instruction (Stritikus & García, 2000).

In deciding how to address the directives

presented in Proposition 227, many districts initially adhered to their previous policies regarding bilingual education. District, community, and even teacher ideologies played a key role in either the preservation or the dissolution of bilingual programs within a given district (Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López, & Asato, 2000; Stritikus & García, 2000). As stated by García and Curry-Rodríguez (2000), “in general, districts complied with the legislation by fitting it into the programmatic plans that were already in place in their districts” (p. 29). In other words, for the most part, if a district had a strong bilingual program in place upon the passage of Proposition 227, they actively sought the parental waivers necessary to maintain their program, while those districts with a weaker and less developed bilingual program utilized this legislation to disband their bilingual classes. Parents and communities also played a role in school districts’ responses to Proposition 227. Communities that had historically strong advocacy groups in support of bilingual education were able to maintain their programs, while communities with parents who were more marginalized or felt powerless generally lost their bilingual programs, due to either a lack of information about the waiver process or an outright dissuasion to sign parental waivers (Maxwell-Jolly, 2000).

Proposition 227 and Concurrent Educational Reform Mandates

The passage of Proposition 227 coincided with a period of significant educational reform in California. Notable reform measures at the time included class-size reduction in elementary school grades, the emergence of a standards and accountability movement, an emphasis on high-stakes standardized testing, and the “back-to-basics” reading instruction movement. Combined with Proposition 227, these reform measures had an unquestionably negative

effect on English learners in this state (Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López & Asato, 2000; Mora, 2002). These reforms made it common for teachers to rely on English as the primary language of instruction, due in part to the state requirement for students to be tested in English on the yearly standardized tests as well as the movement from many districts to adopt scripted English literacy programs for language arts classrooms. Additionally, the reduction of class-size in elementary grades compelled schools to hire teachers rapidly, thus many less qualified teachers entered the practice to fill the newly apportioned vacancies.

In her research analyzing the many reform measures that were implemented during this time, Mora (2002) discussed the lack of qualified teachers: “Proposition 227 in effect shifted the burden of responsibility for teaching language-minority students away from the most qualified teachers onto teachers who are not bilingual and may or may not be trained in effective teaching strategies for bilingual learners” (2002, p. 30). She went on to state that as a result of Proposition 227:

In many school districts, monolingual teachers with a minimum amount of training are expected to accomplish in 1 year what bilingual teachers with highly specialized training and skills in two languages were formerly expected to accomplish in 3 to 5 years of instruction. (Mora, 2002, p.30)

Gándara et al. (2000) agreed with Mora’s contention that the aforementioned educational reform measures combined with the passage of Proposition 227 had a negative impact on language learners in California:

A major theme in the implementation of Proposition 227 is the extent to which it has been affected by other school reform efforts. Proposition 227 was enacted in what has been the most

active period of education reform in recent times. (p.4)

Gándara et al. further argued, “The reforms have the potential for working at cross-purposes for children in general, but especially for English learners” (2000, p.4). The lack of pedagogical knowledge on the part of inexperienced teachers combined with new state standards and testing, as well as the inability for monolingual English teachers to effectively communicate with non-English speaking students and their parents and guardians, has created an environment in which English learners do not receive the same level of instruction bestowed upon their native English speaking counterparts.

Proposition 227 in a Large Urban School District: A Case Study

When examined within one of the twenty largest urban school districts in the nation (pseudonym of California School District), the impact of Proposition 227 becomes clear and pronounced. The case study provides a general snapshot of how the district’s programs for English learners have been transformed in the fourteen years following the passage of Proposition 227 in 1997. This case study does not comprehensively address the manner in which particular programs have been affected by the legislation, but rather it provides a macro-context for the study and discussion of the proposition’s impact on the education of English learners. The case

study begins with the demographics of the California School District to contextualize the data that are presented. As district demographic data for the 2010-11 school year are unavailable due to incomplete site reporting (California Department of Education [CDE], 2013), the demographics are presented from the year prior to the passage of Proposition 227 (1997-98) through the 2009-10 academic year. The student and teacher placement data from before the passage of Proposition 227 through to the 2010-11 school year are then presented to demonstrate the significant decline in primary language instruction within the California School District. Policies adopted by this district to alert parents and guardians to the waiver process are discussed in an effort to demonstrate the manner in which information about bilingual programs is disseminated to parents and guardians, who are ultimately responsible for applying for the waiver. The case study concludes with a discussion of the three types of language acquisition programs offered to students in this district.

Table 1^a
English Language Learners by primary language

School Year	Spanish	Vietnamese	Filipino	Other ^b
1997-98	28,273 (73.4%)	2,483 (6.4%)	1,589 (4.1%)	6,197 (16.1%)
1998-99	29,235 (75.4%)	2,292 (5.9%)	1,494 (3.9%)	5,747 (14.8%)
1999-00	30,446 (77.1%)	2,062 (5.2%)	1,378 (3.5%)	5,605 (14.2%)
2000-01	30,787 (79.2%)	1,870 (4.8%)	1,280 (3.3%)	4,925 (12.7%)
2001-02	32,031 (79.7%)	1,884 (4.7%)	1,369 (3.4%)	4,887 (12.2%)
2002-03	32,468 (80.5%)	1,875 (4.6%)	1,427 (3.5%)	4,581 (11.4%)
2003-04	31,407 (81.0%)	1,806 (4.7%)	1,414 (3.6%)	4,163 (10.7%)
2004-05	29,771 (80.3%)	1,799 (4.9%)	1,287 (3.5%)	4,219 (11.4%)
2005-06	28,964 (80.3%)	1,800 (5.0%)	1,329 (3.7%)	3,989 (11.0%)
2006-07	29,455 (79.0%)	1,865 (5.0%)	1,364 (3.7%)	4,580 (12.3%)
2007-08	30,253 (77.9%)	2,005 (5.2%)	1,499 (3.9%)	5,062 (13.0%)
2008-09	29,957 (77.3%)	2,035 (5.3%)	1,585 (4.1%)	5,166 (13.3%)
2009-10	28,602 (76.1%)	2,896 (7.7%)	1,449 (3.9%)	4,654 (12.3%)

Note. Source: California Department of Education, 2013

^a Primary language data is incomplete following the 2009-10 academic year.

^b A combination of smaller language populations.

District Demographics

The California School District is one of the twenty largest urban school districts in the United States (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2008) and one of the largest in California. During the 2009-10 school year the California School District reported an enrollment of 131,417 students attending 218 schools (CDE, 2013). Of their total enrollment, 37,160 (28.3%) students were designated English language learners, while 27,182 (20.7%) students were classified as Fluent English Proficient (FEP). During the 2009-10 school year, 3,919 (10.1%) of English language learners were additionally reclassified as Fluent English Proficient. The district employed 6,819 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) teachers during the 2009-10 school year, creating a student-teacher ratio of approximately 19.3:1. Finally, the district reported that 84,865 (64.6%) students were eligible for the state’s free or reduced price meals program.

During the thirteen years prior to the implementation of Proposition 227, student enrollment in the California School District declined slightly from 136,283 in 1997-98, to the aforementioned 131,417 in 2009-10 (CDE, 2013). Despite the decline in enrollment, there were few changes in the district’s demographics between the 1997-98 and 2009-10 school years, particularly in terms of the percentage of identified English language. Table 1 illustrates the number of students classified within the three most predominant language backgrounds during the time

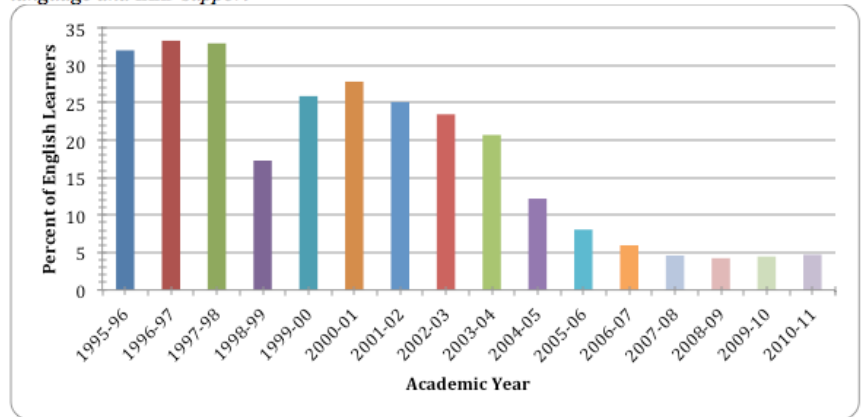
Table 2
District-level English Learners receiving academic instruction through their primary language and ELD support

School Year	Total # of English Learners	# of English Learners Receiving Primary Language Instruction	% of English Learners Receiving Primary Language Instruction
1995-96	36,054	11,546	32.03%
1996-97	37,413	12,462	33.31%
1997-98	38,542	12,704	32.96%
1998-99 ^a	38,768	6,703	17.29%
1999-00	39,491	10,231	25.91%
2000-01	38,862	10,820	27.84%
2001-02	40,171	10,091	25.12%
2002-03	40,351	9,473	23.48%
2003-04	38,790	8,037	20.72%
2004-05	37,076	4,527	12.21%
2005-06	36,082	2,915	8.08%
2006-07	37,264	2,230	5.98%
2007-08	38,819	1,791	4.61%
2008-09	38,743	1,652	4.26%
2009-10	37,601	1,686	4.48%
2010-11	37,160	1,759	4.73%

Note. Source: California Department of Education, 2013

^aFirst academic year after the passage and mandated implementation of Proposition 227.

Graph 1
Percent of district-level English Learners receiving academic instruction through their primary language and ELD support



Note. Source: California Department of Education, 2013

period under study as well as a grouping of the less common languages, grouped together as “Other.”

Primary Language Instruction in the Wake of Proposition 227

For the three school years prior to the passage of Proposition 227, the California School District provided primary language classes with English Language Development (ELD) support to over 30% of the English learners in the district (CDE, 2013). These classes varied in terms of the manner in which they delivered primary language

instruction, but each utilized a portion of the school day to instruct students in core subjects in their primary language, while additionally employing ELD strategies to teach students reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills in English. Immediately after the implementation of Proposition 227, the percentage of English language learners who received instruction in their primary language with ELD support dropped to 17.29% of the total number of English language learners in the district (CDE, 2013). The percentage of English language learners receiving primary language instruction during the 1999-00 school year increased to 25.91%. This increase, which lasted two years, was likely due to a greater awareness of the parental waiver process within the district. In the subsequent six years (00-01 through 05-06), the number of students receiving these services declined steadily, reaching an all-time low in the 2008-09 school year, when only 4.26% of English language learners received primary language instruction (CDE, 2013). Table 2 and Graph 1 illustrate the total number of English language learners in the district and the number of students receiving primary language instruction with ELD support for each year from 1995-96 through 2010-11.

The Effect of Proposition 227 on Teaching Assignments

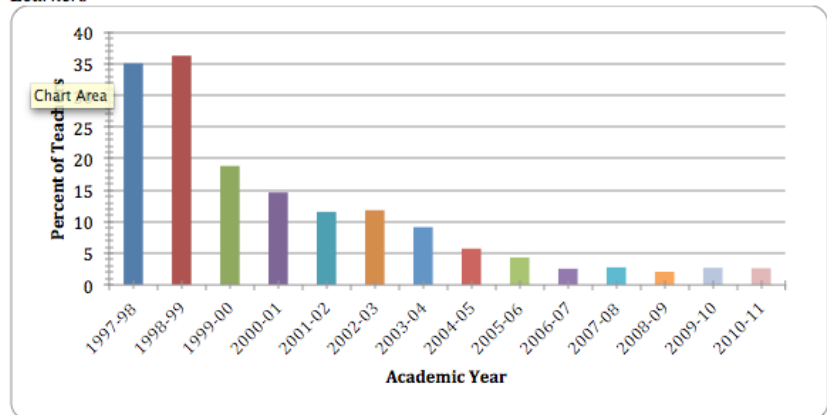
Data illustrating the number of teachers assigned to classrooms in which instruction was provided to English learners in their primary language is only available from 1997-98 (the year prior to the passage of Proposition 227) through 2010-11. As is

Table 3
District-level teachers providing academic instruction through students' primary language and ELD support

School Year	Total # of Teachers Providing Specialized EL Instruction	# of Teachers Providing Primary Language Instruction	% of Teachers Providing Primary Language Instruction
1997-98	3,069	1,076	35.08%
1998-99 ^a	3,333	1,210	36.30%
1999-00	3,463	652	18.83%
2000-01	3,865	566	14.64%
2001-02	4,308	498	11.56%
2002-03	4,305	509	11.82%
2003-04	4,727	432	9.14%
2004-05	4,696	269	5.73%
2005-06	4,455	193	4.33%
2006-07	4,479	114	2.55%
2007-08	4,679	130	2.77%
2008-09	4,982	103	2.06%
2009-10	4,724	128	2.70%
2010-11	4,627	122	2.63%

Note. Source: California Department of Education, 2013
^aFirst academic year after the passage and mandated implementation of Proposition 227.

Graph 2
Percent of district-level teachers providing primary language instruction to English Language Learners



Note. Source: California Department of Education, 2013

seen in Table 3 and Graph 2, during this time period there was a marked decline in the percentage of educators employed to teach in primary language classes at the district level. This decline represents a dramatic reduction in the availability of primary language classes to English learners in the California School District. Immediately after the implementation of Proposition 227, 36.3% of teachers in the district who specialized in teaching English language learners were assigned to provide primary language instruction to their students (CDE, 2013). During this year, the remaining 63.7% of English language teachers taught in English-only classrooms utilizing either Specially Designed Academic Instruction in English (SDAIE), ELD strategies, or both, to

teach literacy and content-area curriculum. Over a 14-year period, the percentage of instructors educating students in a primary language setting declined consistently, and by 2010-11 only 2.63% of these teachers were assigned to primary language classes, while the remaining 97.37% taught in English-only classrooms (CDE, 2013). Table 3 reports the number of teachers assigned to teach using students' primary language and ELD support, as well as the total number of teachers providing SDAIE, ELD, or primary language instruction in the district for each year from 1998-99 through 2010-11.

Discussion

In the case study discussed above, the considerable reduction in the number of primary language classes offered in the California School District coupled with the increase of students enrolled in classes where primary language instruction is limited is a direct outcome of the passage of Proposition 227. This example clearly demonstrates how English language learners in this large, urban school district have been significantly impacted by the legislation. Moreover, there has been a substantial increase in the number of "sheltered English" classes, which are English-only courses that utilize both ELD and SDAIE strategies to assist students in accessing grade-level content in English. Though sheltered English courses have greatly increased due to the proposition, such courses ultimately deny students access to grade-level content in the more comprehensible manner of utilizing students' primary language as a vehicle for instruction. In sum, while the number of English learners has remained stable over the ten-year period, the number of teachers providing primary language instruction has significantly decreased, resulting in a significant increase of English learners receiving instruction primarily in English.

While this trend is beyond the scope of this paper, it has potential impacts on the educational attainment of English learners. In the post Proposition 227 era, the California School District and schools across the state have regularly placed English learners in mainstream English-only classes without the language support necessary to access and understand the concepts being taught (Baker, 2011; Cadiero-Kaplan, 2004). In considering this inequity, it is important to note that bilingual programs offer students the opportunity to maintain and strengthen their academic skills in their primary language, while concurrently learning English vocabulary and literacy concepts. Students acquire knowledge through comprehensible input, by understanding the concepts being taught, and thus when they are instructed in their primary language, English language learners have the opportunity to attain the skills and strategies necessary to learn the subject matter being taught (Krashen, 1996). Students can then transfer their knowledge of the subject matter to those same courses when taught in English, thus acquiring academic English while maintaining and developing skills and strategies in their primary languages (Krashen, 1996). Due to this transference of skills, English language learners who possess strong academic skills in reading, writing, and mathematics in their native languages as well as those who acquire these skills through a strong bilingual program often outperform their U.S.-born peers (Valenzuela, 1999). Students enrolled in such a program have the additional benefit of being immersed in a bicultural, bilingual environment that values their home language and often their home culture as opposed to English-only models, which tend to focus on full assimilation rather than multiculturalism and multilingualism (Valenzuela, 1999). The passage of Proposition 227 and the subsequent decline in the number of primary language classes offered at many districts

in California have denied students access to classes that would provide them the background knowledge and comprehensible input necessary to attain the academic skills that are crucial in achieving success in school (Baker, 2011; Brisk, 2005; Crawford, 1999; Krashen, 1996).

Additionally, many secondary level students who are placed in English as a Secondary Language (ESL) classes often remain in that track through their middle and even high school years (Baker, 2011; Brisk, 2005; Crawford, 1999). It is not uncommon for students who enter schools in the United States during their middle school years to become ESL “lifers,” being placed solely in ESL and “accessible” subjects, such as cooking, art, and physical education (Valdés, 2001). This placement track, while arguably preferable to fully immersing students in English-only classes with no support, immediately limits students’ opportunities upon graduation because they are prevented from enrolling in the college preparatory courses necessary to enter the two public university systems in the state, the University of California and the California State University. Moreover, these students do not receive the subject matter in a language that would permit them to learn the content quickly and efficiently while concurrently learning English, and thus many find themselves behind their native English-speaking peers, particularly in content area classes.

Furthermore, school districts in California that are willing and able to maintain primary language classes through the waiver process are increasingly turning to English-only instruction for students at an earlier age due to the expansion of English language testing now required through the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation (Au, 2009). NCLB and the increased testing

it requires, coupled with the challenges districts face to maintain primary language classes in the wake of Proposition 227, have put pressure on many schools to dispense with their effective bilingual programs in favor of early-exit bilingual programs that transition students to English-only classes earlier in elementary schools. These students are not given the time necessary to attain sufficient skills in their primary language before shifting to English-only curricula, thus reducing the effectiveness of their primary language classes. The passage of Proposition 227 coupled with the expansion of English language testing has reduced the number and availability of primary language classes available to English language learners, effectively crippling bilingual programs.

Implications and Recommendations: Educational Responsiveness for English Learners

Educational Responsiveness serves as a conceptual lens to discuss the intersection of various educational policies and the implementation of practices for the education of English learners in urban school settings. This lens can be utilized for various aspects of the educational process, ranging from policy development and implementation to best practices, curricula, teacher professional development, and parental involvement. The Educational Responsiveness lens has been previously applied to the retention, preparation, and professional development of teachers to work effectively with English learners (Cadiero-Kaplan & Rodríguez, 2008; Gonzales & Rodriguez, 2007) and to school finance in regards to the allocation of fiscal and human resources in schools serving English learners (Jiménez-Castellanos & Rodríguez, 2009). The availability of highly-qualified teachers prepared to work with English learners and the necessary curricular and fiscal resources are essential

if urban schools are to be effective in their Educational Responsiveness to cultural and linguistic assets and needs.

Given the negative implications of discontinuing primary language classes and ultimately bilingual programs (Baker, 2011; Brisk, 2005; Crawford, 1999; Krashen, 1996), it is crucial that educators and academics educate the general public about the need for primary language classes that are responsive to students' linguistic needs and abilities. The public should be made aware of the educational benefits students receiving from attending well-coordinated bilingual programs. To do so, bilingual education advocates should utilize state assessment scores and other empirical data to demonstrate that students attending these programs perform as well as, if not better than, those who do not attend primary language classes. Additionally, students become literate in at least two languages.

At the school site level, Educational Responsiveness would dictate that parents be made aware of their option to waive their children into bilingual programs. Many schools and districts are grossly out of compliance in informing parents of their rights, yet it appears that the state rarely addresses this lack of compliance. Furthermore, as parents are informed of the waiver option, schools must also provide an overview of how this type of program can effectively support their child, as well as a comparison of state test scores outlining the performance of English language learners attending bilingual programs versus those who are mainstreamed into English-only classes. This will allow parents to make an informed decision about which program will best suit their child.

Educators must partner with parents, students, and community advocates to

advocate for educational reform, policy, and practice that are educationally responsive. Through partnerships among various stakeholders, effective language policy and practice can be implemented. As a result, English language learners – and indeed all students – will better understand the value of being multilingual and multiliterate in an increasingly diverse and urbanized society. Furthermore, such a shift in policy and aligned practices is more likely to result in desired levels of achievement within more equitable learning environments that embrace the cultural and linguistic assets of all students.

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