COMMENTARY

All Teachers Need English Learner Training

AUTHOR

PACE | Policy Analysis for California Education

PUBLISHED: May 21, 2013

Approximately one in five students in the U.S. speak a language other than English at home, with the majority concentrated in early elementary grades and approximately 70% speaking Spanish as their native language. Despite the dramatic growth of Latino English language learners (ELLs) over the past several decades, these students continue to be taught disproportionately by less qualified teachers. To be in compliance with Titles I and III of the No Child Left Behind Act (2001), however, schools must use instruction that is supported empirically and demonstrate adequate yearly academic progress among English learners.

In many states, teachers who teach English learners are required to hold bilingual orEnglish as a Second Language (ESL) certification. Other states do not have this requirement, but instead require that *all* teachers have some training to work with English learners. Whereas states guide the kind of knowledge teachers must demonstrate prior to being deemed "high quality," there is little evidence on how these state requirements translate into achievement outcomes for English learners. To address this need, Francesca López (along with some of her colleagues) reported findings of an examination of the degree to which state requirements for teacher certification are related to 4th grade Latino English learners' reading outcomes on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in this study recently published by *Educational Policy Analysis Archives*.

The results support the recent decision of California's Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CTC) to require that intern teachers receive more training in how to teach English Learners. Specifically, López and her colleagues found that states requiring ESL or bilingual certification were associated with markedly higher achievement for Latino English learners. Although there was a negative relationship between requiring all teachers to have some training in the needs of English learners and achievement, this finding underscores that context is critical in interpreting the results. States that require all teachers to have training in meeting the needs of ELLs tend to be states that do not require teachers of English learners to hold specialist certification in ESL or bilingual education. Thus, the requirement is often an artifact of having to meet federal guidelines regarding the needs of English learners. Thus, the findings suggest that in comparison to states that require specialist certification, states that do not—and instead require all teachers to have some kind of training—are not setting the standards high enough to help ameliorate achievement disparities within this population.

In contrast to states that require all teachers to have some kind of training but do not require specialist certification or states that require specialist certification but not training for all teachers, states that have both requirements have markedly higher achievement. In part, requiring all teachers to have some level of training may be much more effective in terms of ensuring English learners' needs are met across their English acquisition trajectory (e.g., once ELLs are in mainstream English classrooms). Thus, there is evidence that all teachers should have at minimum one course covering essential knowledge to help them be successful with English learners considering that they are highly likely to have English learners (whether presently labeled or further along the English language development trajectory) in their classrooms. State policies, however, must be more stringent in

what they deem as "highly qualified" to teach English learners. One course simply is not sufficient to meet the needs of all ELLs.

The full study is in López, F., Scanlan, M., & Gundrum, B. (2012). Preparing teachers of English language learners: Empirical evidence and policy implications. Education Policy Analysis Archives 21

Suggested citation

Policy Analysis for California Education. (2013, May). *All teachers need English Learner training* [Commentary]. Policy Analysis for California Educaiton. https://edpolicyinca.org/newsroom/all-teachers-need-english-learner-training

PACE
Policy Analysis for California Education

Stanford Graduate School of Education
507 Lasuen Mall | Suite 205
Stanford, CA 94305
Phone: 650.576.8484

edpolicyinca.org