

GAINING GROUND

ACHIEVING EXCELLENCE IN HIGH POVERTY SCHOOLS



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GAINING GROUND NEWSLETTER

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A LOOK AT THE NUMBERS: OVERLAPS AMONG TITLE I, LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENT AND SPECIAL EDUCATION STUDENTS

Under federal legislation, Title I, bilingual education and special education programs have been authorized and developed to serve a distinct set of educational needs. Title I aims to provide education opportunities that compensate for the effects of poverty on learning. Bilingual education offers native language instruction to provide meaningful educational opportunities to English Language Learners.

Special education provides a free and appropriate education to students with disabilities unable to excel without such assistance. According to the U.S. Department of Education, Title I students in targeted assistance and school-wide programs represent 24 percent of the school-age population, students with disabilities represent 11 percent, and students with limited English proficiency represent 8 percent (State Title I Participation Data, Office of Special Education Programs, and National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education data, 1996-97).

Considerable overlap, however, exists among students served by more than one of these categorical programs. According to the latest data available, 1,005,554 students were served in both Title I and special education programs during the 1996-97 school year (State Title I Participation Data, U.S. Department of Education, 1996-97). This number represents the 1 in 5 students in the national special education population and 1 in 11 students served by Title I who have a disability. These trends compare to 1 in 4 students being served by Title I nationally, and 1 in 9 students being eligible for special education under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).¹

Federal data also indicates that 1,914,410 students with limited English proficiency were served by school-wide and targeted assistance Title I programs

during the 1996-97 school year (State Title I Participation Data, U.S. Department of Education, 1996-97). These students represent more than half of all students in need of English as a Second Language services and 1 in 6 students eligible for Title I services who have limited English proficiency. These trends compare to 1 in 4 students being served by Title I nationally, and 1 in 12 students demonstrating limited English proficiency.²

Lastly, federal data projects that 174,500 English language learners received special education services during the 1996-97 school year (Office of Civil Rights Elementary and Secondary School Survey, U.S. Department of Education, 1997). These students represent approximately 6 percent of all students with limited English proficiency and a little more than 3 percent of all students in special education require English language learner services as well. As such, 1 in 15 students with limited English proficiency participate in special education and only 1 in 30 special education students is limited English proficient. These trends compare to 1 in 9 students being eligible for special education services under IDEA nationally, and 1 and 12 students demonstrating limited English proficiency.

Given these trends, it is likely that

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¹ There are 5.9 million students with disabilities in U.S. (states, D.C. and outlying areas). www.ideadata.org
11.1 million Title I students (USED state participation info)

² There are 3.4 million LEP students (states, D.C., and outlying areas for 1996-97). www.ncbe.gwu.edu

100,000 or more students in the U.S. demonstrate a trinity of educational challenges: the need for compensatory education, special education and some English second language services. No federal data sources to date, however, offer an estimate on the exact number of such students.

Putting the Data to Use

What consequences do these trends in "overlapping" students have for state educational agencies and local administrators? In terms of both low and high-stakes assessments, states and local districts must pay increasing attention to the needs of students served by more than one program. For example, how will states assess students with disabilities who are also learning to speak and read English? Similarly, which assessment will inform state accountability decisions in the case of Title I students who also have an identified disability, are learning English, or both? CCSSO's State Collaborative on Assessment and Student Standards (SCASS) is beginning to consider these questions in greater detail.

Second, to better serve all students, states must pay increasing attention to instructional approaches that promote high achievement among a cross-section of students. Inclusive educational approaches where general and special education teachers co-teach Title I and special education students in the same classroom serves as one effective strategy. Bilingual special education approaches may be most appropriate for serving students with disabilities and limited English proficiency. Relatedly, dual immersion bilingual education approaches, can enable high achievement among Title I and LEP students. In dual immersion classrooms, native and non-native English speakers simultaneously develop dual language proficiency. Research indicates that this approach has been particularly effective in the teaching of two languages and the development of academic excellence

(ERIC Clearinghouse on Languages and Linguistics, ED 379915).

For more information on inclusive educational approaches, visit the website of the National Institute for Urban School Improvement at www.edc.org/urban. For more information on dual immersion and other effective bilingual education approaches, visit the National Clearinghouse on Bilingual Education website at www.ncbe.gwu.edu.

INCLUSION OF LEP STUDENTS IN STATE ASSESSMENT PROGRAMS

This article is a modified version of Chapter Four and Five of a summary report written by CCSSO staff on state assessment practices.³ The report focuses on the 1997-1998 academic year and describes the results of the annual survey of state student assessment programs (SSAP) conducted by the CCSSO State Education Assessment Center. The survey questionnaire contains an extensive set of questions regarding state assessment policies and practices. It is designed to provide answers to key policy questions raised at both state and local levels. Chapter Four of the summary report and a section of Chapter Five (Part II) address state assessment policies and practices for students with disabilities and English language learners. This article reports only the discussion related to limited English proficient students (LEP). Below are the responses to various questions regarding state assessment practices and LEP students:

Background

In the 1994 reauthorization of Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), Congress called upon states to hold *all* students to the

same high expectations and include them in standards-based reform efforts. Regarding the assessment provisions and English language learners (ELL) or limited English proficient (LEP) students, the law states that LEP students are to be included and assessed, "to the extent practicable in the language and form most likely to yield accurate and reliable information on what such students know and can do, to determine such students' mastery of skills in subjects other than English." The definition of "high expectations" and the design of the assessment system to determine whether or not students have achieved them are left to individual states. The implementation of these provisions constitutes a challenge to state and local districts and affects policy discussions regarding which students should be tested, how that testing should be conducted, and how assessment results should be reported and used.

States are likely to increase their focus in the coming years on issues of assessing English language learners (ELL) since Title I requires that final assessment systems be in place by the 2000-01 school year. The law calls for the inclusion of all students in state assessment systems and disaggregation of test scores. With legislation calling for the assessment of all students, states can no longer leave the decision about inclusion and accommodation to their local districts, and many have undertaken activities to implement policies and practices at the state level. Although states are making progress toward these objectives, there are many unanswered questions surrounding the issue of assessing the content knowledge of English language learners in statewide testing programs. Key among them are the following:

- What are the criteria for exempting English Language Learners, and who makes the exemption decisions?

1 Source: Annual Survey: State Student Assessment Programs Summary Report (Fall, 1999). In most instances, the language in the article has been directly taken from the report.

- What kinds of special testing conditions or accommodations are allowed to enable these students to participate?
- Are alternate assessments available?
- Are their scores included in public reports and accountability measures?

Participation of English Language Learners in Statewide Assessments

The survey collected a variety of data from the states on the participation of ELL students in state assessments. Information was summarized on exemption criteria and policies, changes in the exclusion of students, and participation of students in statewide assessments. States were asked to describe their exemption policy for English language learners. Based on their responses, the following points emerged:

- Decisions to include or exclude ELL students from a state assessment tend to be made at the local level.
- In most states, the decision to include an ELL is based on how long the student has been in the United States, the amount of time he/she has been in an English as Second Language (ESL) or bilingual program, and/or the score on a test of English proficiency.

Thirty-six (36) states allow exemptions for ELL students from all assessments, 11 states allow it for some assessments, and three states do not allow exemptions. The number of states allowing exemptions from all assessments has increased from the 29 reported in 1997.

States' Policies on Allowing Testing Accommodations for English Language Learners and Types of Testing Accommodations Allowed

Much variation exists in the states concerning accommodation policies for English language learners. In 1998, seven states included ELL

students in their assessments without accommodations, 16 allowed accommodations with some assessments, and 29 included ELL students in all assessments with accommodations. These numbers are fairly similar to those reported in the previous year.

In the 1998 SSAP survey, states were asked to check off what types of testing accommodations were permitted for English language learners in their statewide assessment components. Many different types of accommodations were listed, and states could check all that applied. As with the 1997 survey results, the allowable testing accommodations were divided into five categories:

- presentation format
- setting
- timing or scheduling
- response format
- other accommodations

In general, the 1998 data show significant increases from 1997 in the number of states that allow different types of accommodations for English language learners. These increases are present for each of the types of previously mentioned categories which are discussed below.

Presentation Format Accommodations

For English language learners, 38 states allowed accommodations on presentation format, up from 33 in the previous year. Common accommodations for ELLs include reading aloud, interpreting, and repeating directions. Twenty-one states allow the translation of test directions and ten states allow the translation of test items into the student's native language.

Setting Accommodations

Thirty-seven (37) states allow setting accommodations for English language learners. This is an increase in the number of states since 1997, when 31 states allowed setting accommodations.

Timing/Scheduling Accommodations

Changes in the timing or scheduling of assessments are allowed for English

language learners in 39 states. The number of states allowing timing/scheduling accommodations for ELLs increased significantly from the previous year, when only 28 states allowed them.

Response Format Accommodations

For ELL students, response accommodations were allowed in just 16 states in 1998, which was an increase from only 10 states in 1997. ELL students may also respond in their native language, although this is allowed in only a few states.

Other Accommodations

In 1998, twenty-four states permitted other types of accommodations for ELL students, such as use of word lists, dictionaries, or glossaries during the assessment. More states allowed these types of accommodations in 1998 than in 1997.

As noted throughout this section, the number of states reporting that they allow different types of testing accommodations has increased substantially from the previous year's survey. This reflects the growing emphasis on including ELL students as much as possible in statewide assessment programs.

Alternate Assessments

There are some students for whom the regular assessment, even with accommodations, is not appropriate. These students may be unable to participate meaningfully in the regular assessment because their level of English proficiency may not be high enough. In the past, these students have generally been excluded from most state assessments. However, recent federal legislation, such as the 1994 reauthorized Title I, requires that English language learners participate in state assessment programs, or that alternate assessments be provided for students for whom the regular assessment is inappropriate. According to the 1998 SSAP survey, only 13 states reported that an alternate assessment was available for ELL students for any of the assessment components in their state

assessment program. The vast majority of states (33) reported that no alternate assessments were available for any of their statewide assessment components for ELL students. The number of states reporting that alternate assessments are available for this student population has increased slightly from the previous year's survey. However, this might change significantly in the near future, since many states are currently grappling with this issue and will bring alternate assessments online in the future.

Public Reporting of Special Populations and Use of Assessment Results

Another important issue with the inclusion of ELLs in statewide assessment programs is whether their scores are included in state, district, and school reports. Several factors are pertinent to state policies and practice in this area. States may decide not to include ELL students in public reports because of concerns about the impact of accommodations on test validity. Others may have specific legislation or policies regarding students who took the regular assessment with accommodations or who took an alternate assessment, and these policies address how the scores will be reported. Finally, some may choose not to include data in public reports from special population students who received accommodations or took an alternate assessment if the use of student achievement results will be for high-stakes decisions such as school accountability, accreditation, or funding.

In 1998, states were asked to respond to two new questions concerning the reporting of scores for students who took either the regular assessment with accommodations or an alternate assessment. For ELL students, many more states are reporting data for students taking the regular assessment with accommodations than for the

students taking an alternate assessment. Nine states did not report ELL data in their public summary reports when the students took the regular assessments with accommodations.

It is important to note that many states do not publicly report alternate assessment scores of students from special populations, with 28 states not reporting for ELLs. Also, very few states report these scores in their summary reports, either aggregated or disaggregated. Finally, we must note that many states did not provide a response to these survey questions.

Final Thoughts on Assessing English Language Learners

Although much activity is taking place in researching and refining accommodations for students with disabilities, much less action is occurring related to the assessment of ELLs (limited English proficient students). In recent years, many states have reported permitting blanket exclusions of ELLs from large-scale assessment requirements. As noted earlier, the number of states that allow some types of accommodations for ELLs has increased in recent years, although fewer accommodations are provided for ELLs who are included in the assessment than for students with disabilities. Finally, few states offer alternate assessments at this time.

Clearly, this is an area in need of policy and technical development among the states. The LEP SCASS, a project of CASSO, has been working for several years to provide information and support to states on the development of appropriate assessments and accommodations for these students. A variety of useful resource materials, including assessment handbooks, guides, and tools, have been prepared for use by states wishing to implement assessments that allow and enable the participation of ELLs in statewide assessments. It is expected that increased attention will be directed toward issues and approaches for assessing ELLs in the upcoming years. Most states are realizing the importance of providing an inclusive assessment system for all students, especially with

so much focus being given to the need for accountability. In addition, the ever-growing population of ELLs in many states will likely prompt pressure and emphasize the need for their inclusion in statewide assessments.

HEALTH INSURANCE FOR POOR KIDS: AN UPDATE

In the August 1999 issue of *Gaining Ground*, we provided some initial information on the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP). With SCHIP now two years old, many children who lacked health insurance now have it. However, there are still many who do not.

Unfortunately, research shows that overall the percentage of low-income children who have health insurance has not changed over the last few years, despite SCHIP. Researchers have found that there has been a shift from private coverage to public coverage. Some of this may be due to employers ceasing to offer coverage to low-wage workers and some of this may be due to low-wage parents declining coverage as private insurance premiums increase.¹ Whatever the cause, there are still too many children going without needed health care because of lack of insurance coverage.

How can school personnel make a difference?

One way is to help connect families to information about the health insurance opportunities in their state. The following section provides some contacts you may want to use.

1 Cunningham, Peter J. and Park, Michael H., *Recent Trends in Children's Health Insurance Coverage: No Gains for Low-Income Children*, Issue Brief, #29, April 2000 Center for Studying Health System Change.

Federal and State Information

www.insurekidsnow.gov

or toll free at

1-877-KIDS-NOW

(1-877-543-7669)

This site contains information on programs in the states and extra-state jurisdictions. It also contains links to those states that have web access to their programs. The toll free number rings in the program office of the jurisdiction from which the call is made.

Using the School Meals Program to Increase Access

fns1.usda.gov:80/fns/menu/whatsnew/chip/chip.htm

This site contains everything you need to know to adapt your school meals application provide information on SCHIP, while maintaining family confidentiality

Other Resources

Many national and community-based organizations are involved in supporting the effort to reach families with this important information.

These include:

The Children's Defense Fund
www.childrensdefense.org/signup/

Southern Institute on Children and Families
www.kidsouth.org/

Start Healthy, Stay Healthy, the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities
www.cbpp.org/shsh/

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ANNOUNCEMENTS

Safe Schools Guide Released

In an effort to help ensure the safety and well-being of our nation's children, a collaborative consisting of government agencies and other organizations released a report entitled *Safeguarding Our Children: An Action Guide*. This publication, developed as part of a joint effort between the U.S. Department of Education, the Center for Effective Collaboration and Practice (CECP) of the American Institutes for Research, and the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP), is a companion piece to a publication released in 1998 entitled *Early Warning Timely Response: A Guide to Safe Schools*.

The *Action Guide* includes examples of programs that illustrate how to build a school-wide foundation to prevent violence; respond to children at risk who may be exhibiting early warning signs; provide intensive interventions for troubled children; and create and implement a comprehensive plan. The *Action Guide*, like the *Early Warning Guide* will be mailed to every school and school district in the country. It will also be available at no cost on NASP's website at www.naspweb.org/center or at the CECP website: www.air-dc.org/cecp.

Visit the EMSTAC and NIUSI Websites

Want more information on best practices for serving learners with special needs? Visit the web-sites of two of our Long Beach meeting presenters – the Elementary and Middle Schools Technical Assistance Center (EMSTAC) at www.emstac.org and the National Institute for Urban School Improvement (NIUSI) at www.edc.org/urban.

Both sites offer a wealth of information on what approaches enable improved achievement among students with disabilities. In particular, NIUSI has several free on-line publications regarding inclusive schools, collaboration among teachers, professional development and the effects on inclusion on "other" kids ... all excellent resources. EMSTAC also invites school-based professionals to join its team of linking agents to serve as local catalysts for school improvement. CCSSO has partnered with EMSTAC to recruit linking agents in the Mountain Plains region, but this opportunity is available to practitioners in other jurisdictions as well. Check out their website for additional information, or contact Darren Woodruff of the American Institutes for Research at 202-944-5378.

SPREAD THE WORD!!!

If you have colleagues who you feel may be interested in receiving *Gaining Ground*, please forward the following information to Kimberly Campbell at kimc@ccsso.org.

- name and title of individual(s)
- name of organization
- telephone number
- e-mail address

In addition, we appreciate your feedback and encourage you to contact us if you have questions regarding the ongoing activities of the High Poverty Schools Project.